

Watch Out! Danger Ahead

Chapter 21

The people who took part in the trial were no doubt more seasoned than those in the first trial. Number four, the woman with the red whip, looked at the gunman's mischievous smile with a trace of anger in her eyes.

The fact that Song Qingxiao had entered the trial once again showed that she was not an idiot. The red whip lady understood the intention of the gunman's actions and also knew that she had exposed her secret weapon.

Song Qingxiao and the others in the space remained silent. The large chap's actions to uncover the secrets of the others were advantageous to them as well. The red whip lady had developed the intent to kill the large chap, but the trial had not started.

Everyone was vigilant towards each other. Song Qingxiao was extra fearful of the gun in the large chap's hands because she worried that someone else would take advantage of the situation if they got injured fighting each other.

With the scenario the way it was, the red whip lady suppressed the rage inside her and glared menacingly at the large chap. She stared at the others intently and found a seat across the other two.

The gunman wore a crafty expression. It was as though he had expected that outcome. Before long, someone else appeared in the space. The large chap raised his gun once again. The rest of them stayed silent. Even the red whip lady who had been disadvantaged earlier looked on eagerly, anticipating the show.

"Welco—"

Before the large chap had completed his greeting, the new person began to plead for his life.

"Please don't kill me!"

The new person was a middle-aged man who looked around forty years old. He had a head of shiny, black hair that was combed back, which exposed his forehead. He wore a brand-new suit which looked at odds with his character. He broke out in copious amounts of sweat as soon as the large chap aimed the gun at him. Everyone could see the sweat pouring out of him from his forehead and nose.

The large chap with the gun did not expect the new person to react in that manner. He looked astonished. However, to avoid the situation where he was overpowered by number five, who was merely pretending to be weak, he kept his gun raised.

The gunman pointed his gun at number five's forehead and pressed forward aggressively, forcing number five to take a few steps back. The situation made everyone else in the space frown deeply.

Song Qingxiao pondered internally. 'Could it be that number five was a complete newbie?'

However, she quickly rejected that idea. Number five's expression did not look like one of complete surprise from having suddenly appeared in the space. Apart from fear, he also looked a little helpless and resigned to his fate.

"Don't kill me."

He had first raised his hands to plead for mercy, but it looked like he was on the verge of a mental breakdown. He held his head as he sobbed and cursed, "This f*cking trial! I just want to go home! I don't want to die..."

Everyone watched the scene before them in silence. After a while, the large chap's face betrayed an expression of disgust and scorn. He kicked number five in the shoulder, causing him to collapse to the ground.

"Get out of my face, you piece of trash!"

Number five lay motionless on the ground for a long time before he crawled up, looking absolutely dejected. He did not dare to crawl towards Song Qingxiao or the bespectacled guy. He also seemed to be afraid of the red whip lady and the large chap, so he ended up sitting in a spot quite a distance away from everyone else.

"I don't want to die. I've just redeemed some money. I've only been able to enjoy myself for a few days..." He mumbled non-stop, and it was hard to tell who he tried to speak to.

Song Qingxiao glanced at him. He cradled his head with both hands and was gripping at his hair. It looked like he was experiencing a nervous breakdown. His hair that was neatly combed back had become disheveled. It hung over his forehead, looking greasy and disgusting.

Based on number five's words, she discovered that he had used his credits to redeem money to live in pleasure. No one paid any attention to him once they had confirmed that he was a piece of trash like the gunman had said.

Number five continued to mumble to himself. It was not long before another person appeared in the space. The large chap with the gun once again raised his gun at the new person.

However, before he managed to open his mouth, the new person had already caught hold of his hand that held the gun. With a kick of their right leg and a twist of their upper body, the gunman came crashing down to the ground over his shoulder.

Number six achieved their goal in one slick move. The large chap did not expect to end up in that situation. His body crashed to the ground with a loud thud. At the same time, the gun he held tightly in his hand clattered to the floor as well.

As soon as Song Qingxiao saw that, she instinctively thought about getting to her feet. The bespectacled guy also had his hands on the ground. The red whip lady seemed to be gripping her whip in preparation to act.

Everyone wanted to take the opportunity to snatch the gun from the large chap's hands. However, newcomer number six reacted faster than everyone else. In the instant that the burly chap fell to the ground, number six had stepped forward and bent down to snatch it.

No one expected that even after he had fallen, the large chap with the gun was still gripping onto the gun tightly. He continued clutching onto the gun even though it had brought trouble upon him and still did not fire the pistol.

As soon as number six rushed forward, he endured the pain and raised his gun to aim at number six. He warned, "Step away from me. I'm serious here."

When he spoke, number six straightened up and grunted coldly as they took a couple of steps back. The large chap took the chance to slowly get to his feet. He looked wary.

Everyone's plans had fallen through. Number four, the woman with the red whip looked a little disappointed as she kept her whip. She returned to her original seat and cast an assessing look on the new person.

Newcomer number six was a beautiful and young girl. Two short braids hung from her head down to both sides of her shoulders. She had a headscarf that was tied into a butterfly knot on her head. She was dressed in a blue vest top matched with a low-waisted, short skirt of a similar color. It showed off her long legs and slender waist.

However, thanks to her previous stunt of knocking the large chap down, no one dared to underestimate her ability.

Up until then, a total of six people had entered the test space. Even though Song Qingxiao did not like the large chap with the gun. She had to admit that thanks to his actions, she had managed to glean a lot of helpful information in a short amount of time.

The people who had entered the space earlier had the upper hand compared to those who entered later. The people who possessed the most complete information out of the six were the ones who had entered much earlier.

At that moment, Song Qingxiao could see that apart from herself, the bespectacled guy did not seem to possess any special abilities. So he was not worth a mention during then. After she entered the space, she was followed closely by number four.

Number four had exposed herself as soon as she entered the space. She had a long, red whip. The whip had managed to leave a mark on the large chap's gun. Hence, it was clear that it was not an ordinary object. It was highly likely that it was a weapon that she had exchanged using credits from the space.

Apart from that, the whip had managed to leave an imprint on the gun, showing that the whip was no ordinary object. Also, number four possessed incredible arm strength. It was highly probable that she had upgraded her bloodline or her physical attributes.

Based on these observations, for the red whip woman to make preparations in two aspects, it proved that she had quite a significant amount of credits. The credits were a reward for completing the trial. Song Qingxiao had not worked out the reward components and was unsure if it had anything to do with killing people.

Regardless of that, since the red whip woman possessed enough credits, there were only two possibilities. She had either participated in numerous trials or performed exceptionally well in her first trial to have received so many credits.

In either case, it was enough to prove that the red whip woman was an extraordinarily ruthless character deserving of Song Qingxiao's attention. Number five did not deserve mention at the moment. Based on his appearance, he was the weakest one in the trial.

As for number six, as soon as she entered, she reacted quickly and managed to cause the large chap to topple onto the ground. Even though she had not exposed whether she had any weapons or trump cards, one could easily see that her reaction speed was excellent. She also possessed stellar combat skills, which was how she managed to make the large chap bite the dust.

Song Qingxiao's advantage was that she did not reveal her trump cards when threatened by the large chap with the gun. Compared to dangerous characters such as the gunman, the lady with the whip, and number six, she must seem unthreatening in the eyes of the other participants.

The atmosphere in the space seemed to change subtly. Apart from number five, who was sitting alone far away in the corner, Song Qingxiao and the bespectacled guy sat quite closely together. The other three people each occupied their own space.

The large chap got up and paused for a moment. No one new seemed to enter the space. Song Qingxiao had just begun to wonder if there would only be six people in the trial when instructions regarding the game appeared in her consciousness.

'Protect the people. Obliterate failure.'

Song Qingxiao's expression changed into one of surprise. She looked up and saw that everyone else in the space also wore astonished faces. It was clear that everyone had each received the instructions regarding the task.

Chapter 22

‘Protect the people. Death awaits those who fail!’

Not only were the instructions for the trial given much sooner, but the instructions were also much more transparent and direct. It spared them from having to go through the uncertainty of guessing what needed to be done. They knew right away what the task for the trial was.

The thing that made Song Qingxiao uneasy was not because the instructions contained details about the task. Instead, it was the fact that the prize for completing this task was displayed with the instructions.

‘Upon completing the task, you will obtain a reward of 1000 credits.’

The reward was an incredibly huge sum of credits!

When she compared it to her last trial, Song Qingxiao narrowly escaped death and had to kill two people, only to get 200 credits in the end. The clues regarding the second trial were clear, yet the reward was so generous. Song Qingxiao had a bad feeling about it.

It was as though the 100 credits were bait meant to lure them into a trap. After she saw the credits offered as a reward, her enthusiasm began to cool. Things that were out of the ordinary were never a good thing. She frowned deeply and decided against acting rashly.

Song Qingxiao lifted her head and looked at the others. The other five people in the room all looked astonished at first. However, they very quickly returned to normal and did not betray how they felt.

The large chap sat on the floor, and his fingers never moved from his gun. The red whip lady looked disdainful. The bespectacled guy hung his head low. Number five clutched his head and wore a pitiful expression. Number six crossed her arms around her chest and spoke up first.

“It looks like everyone has received the instructions of the task.”

Number six’s words broke the eerie silence. However, no one said a word, and not one person responded. The task was so fraught with risk that a tiny

mistake could lead to their deaths. Everyone was in this moment distrustful of everyone else. They each hoped to glean information from the other to increase the chances of their own survival.

“It’s true, I’ve received the instructions regarding the mission.”

The red whip lady who was number four admitted to it first. Perhaps it was because she was very confident in her own abilities. Her gaze went a full circle around the space before it landed on number five.

He looked like the weakest one there. Through his earlier mumbling, everyone knew the most about his situation. Even number six who arrived after him knew that he had used the credits that he got from the previous trial to redeem cash so that he could enjoy himself.

In the trial, he went into a full mental breakdown after being held at gunpoint by the large chap. He pleaded desperately for his life on the spot and did not seem to have any intention of fighting back. A person like him might not be able to survive a vicious and cruel trial.

The way number four looked at him was as though she were looking at a dead person. She got up and pointed at him while she asked, “Number five. What instructions did you get regarding the task?”

As soon as he was called, number five trembled like a leaf. Number four’s forceful and assertive interrogation about the prompt was observed quietly by everyone else. In a world where only the fittest survived, no one was willing to speak up for him. No one was willing to offend a powerful opponent like number four.

“I...”

Number four bent his knees and buried his face into them. Even though they could not see his expression, everyone could hear the terror in his quavering voice.

“I...”

He could barely speak coherently. Number four seemed to lose her patience. She took out the long whip around her wrist and swung it forcefully. The whip snapped loudly in the air before it landed heavily on the ground with a loud

clap. The noise made everyone tense up and caused goosebumps to appear on their skin.

The whip cracked without making any contact with anyone there. Song Qingxiao could only imagine how painful it would be if someone bore the brunt of that blow.

“I don’t know. Please... please don’t kill me!”

Number five was a complete nervous wreck. He suddenly burst out into tears, sobbing loudly. He flipped over quickly to avoid number four’s whip as he crawled and rolled towards the heavy fog to try and evade her.

“Don’t kill me! Don’t kill me!”

No one expected the situation to turn out that way. Even number four herself did not expect number five to be so fragile and startled from a tiny scare tactic. She was stunned. She came back to her senses and noticed number five running away. She then raised her whip and said, “Don’t let him get away!”

Everyone around her reacted quickly and prepared to block number five from escaping. Number five had initially sat alone in a spot situated quite far from the others. No one thought too much about it. They had dismissed him as a threat due to his helpless appearance. Everyone assumed that once the trial started, it would be dead easy to kill him even if he was seated far away from them.

It was too late for them to chase after him since he escaped. Number five had disappeared into the thick fog. His pleading and crying could no longer be heard. Number four looked furious, and she snapped her whip in the air angrily.

Before she had the chance to stow her whip away, the voice of the prompt sounded in her consciousness.

‘Welcome to the Trial of God.’

It seemed like the game had officially started. The space disappeared in a flash, and all the people around her disappeared as well. All Song Qingxiao could do was close her eyes as she heard a loud ticking noise in her ears. It sounded like one of those old grandfather clocks. She opened her eyes in shock and ‘saw’ a countdown in front of her eyes.

119: 59: 59.

The inexplicable change made her feel uneasy. She blinked, but the numbers were still there. It proved that it was not her imagination acting up. The last number in the sequence changed along with the rhythm of the ticking sound in her ear.

119: 59: 54.

119: 59: 51.

Song Qingxiao took a deep breath. She touched the dagger hidden in her sleeve and forced herself to calm down. She tried to stop herself from being affected by the endless ticking noise and the countdown. She noticed that a new choice had appeared behind the task instructions in her consciousness.

‘Will you enter the scene? 10, 9, 8, 7...’

The ongoing countdown made Song Qingxiao feel frantic. She did not know the ‘scene’ it referred to. The countdown before her eyes made her feel extremely uneasy.

She was unclear what the scene referred to by the instruction was like. She could not know for sure if there would be danger awaiting her after she entered the scene. She had not worked out what the ticking noise ringing out in her ears nor what the numbers before her eyes represented. However, she also did not know what would happen if she did not enter the scene...

At that point in time, Song Qingxiao hated the rules of the game with all her heart. It was always confusing, yet at the same time, she was helpless. She had to be extremely careful with each choice she made because she feared that the wrong choice would lead to her death.

As she wrestled with her thoughts for a couple of seconds, the countdown to enter the scene in her consciousness had reached the number 3. She did not have any time to waste hesitating. Song Qingxiao took a deep breath and gritted her teeth tightly. She strengthened her resolve and chose to enter the scene in the end.

As soon as she made her choice, she reached out to touch the dagger hidden around her arm. She gripped the dagger and stood in a defensive stance. The voice of the prompt in her mind had stopped. None of the dangers she feared

had happened. Instead, the prompt once again asked her to make another decision.

‘Medical staff or patient?’

Song Qingxiao was still recovering from her shock when the new choice caused her nerves to tense up even more. Cold sweat broke out on her back and started to drip down non-stop. Another countdown began for her to make a decision. She could not stop herself from cursing inside. In the end, she picked ‘medical staff’ before the countdown ended.

In the instant that she made her decision, Song Qingxiao saw her environment change once more. The thick fog around her dissipated.

She stood in a brightly lit office. A man in a white coat stared at her wordlessly. She bit down her lip hard to stifle the cry that was about to escape from her mouth.

Chapter 23

A coldness rose from Song Qingxiao’s feet, and it spread quickly to her limbs. Her heart pumped blood rapidly through her body, spurred on by her extreme anxiety. Her scalp tingled. She clutched her body with one arm and held onto her dagger in the other. Her entire body trembled.

The doctor who stared at her from behind his desk was clearly the doctor she killed in the first trial!

She wondered if she only imagined it because of how terrified she was. She shut her eyes tightly. However, when she opened them, the doctor still sat there in his white coat. His expression was so peaceful that it appeared almost indifferent. There was a nametag on his white coat which displayed the word, ‘Liu Yixun’.

The doctor rested his arms on the table as he held a form in one hand. His sleeves had crept up slightly, exposing part of his wrist and his wristwatch. The same watch that he had shown to everyone in the first trial. He indicated that the watch hands went wild because of the disruption of a magnetic field.

The table was neat and orderly. There was a computer on it. An uncapped fountain pen lay on top of a patient's chart. Song Qingxiao was extremely well-acquainted with that pen. Her cheek tingled slightly. The wound on her cheek where the doctor had scratched her with his pen had healed entirely a while ago. However, she felt a slight pain there at that moment.

What was going on?

Song Qingxiao was speechless. She wanted to take a few steps back away from the doctor, but she was frozen on the spot. Her body no longer responded to her orders and stood there unmovingly.

The environment around her was peaceful yet strange. The ticking noise could still be heard in her ears. It was like she had a bomb strapped to her, giving her a sense of urgency as though an explosion could destroy her at any moment.

The doctor's face looked a little pale. In Song Qingxiao's line of vision, the odd numbers were displayed on the top of his forehead, still in their countdown.

119: 58: 46.

"Are you alright?"

The doctor's gaze landed on Song Qingxiao. He frowned, and his voice sounded a little odd. It was monotonous and flat, devoid of emotion. It seemed stiff and unnatural, like a robot's voice.

Song Qingxiao still remembered their last fight. The pain of being suffocated came back to her mind, and her throat seemed to still be strangled tightly by the doctor with the mouse cord.

She did not need to look in a mirror to know that her complexion was ashen and unsightly. All the odd occurrences that came in quick succession wrought Song Qingxiao's nerves to their limits. Thankfully, the doctor did not pounce to attack Song Qingxiao as soon as she appeared. If that happened, she would have definitely broken down a long time ago.

The sound of her heart pounding rapidly in her chest and the ticking noise in her mind nearly drowned out the doctor's words. Song Qingxiao forced herself to keep a lid over her terror and once again calm herself down.

She had entered the test space. Everything that happened here would be beyond her understanding. Furthermore, the doctor was not that scary. Since she had managed to kill him once, she would definitely be able to kill him again.

She touched her arm. The feeling of the dagger there soothed the erratic pounding of her heart.

“Are you alright?”

The doctor repeated his question. His gaze landed on the arm that she was holding. Song Qingxiao’s body stiffened. She swallowed her spit a couple of times and used her unyielding willpower to resist her instinct. She let go of the arm where the dagger was hidden and slowly nodded her head.

Her actions seemed to have used up all of the energy in her body. A frown appeared on the doctor’s face. It appeared that he was suspicious of her answer and whether she was really ‘alright’. However, he did not question her further. Instead, he moved his stiff lips to put on an awkward smile.

“It’s good that you’re alright. I’ve read your resume. Even though you lack experience, the hospital is understaffed right now.”

He put down the file in his hand and stood up. “Song Qingxiao, welcome to our hospital. We’re colleagues now.”

His smile did not reach his eyes. Not only did it not make her feel more relaxed, but his face also caused Song Qingxiao to recall the picture on the card when it flipped, causing her to feel more terrified.

“Now, I’m going to get Nurse Zhang to bring you around the hospital to familiarize yourself with the environment and job role. You should also get changed.”

So many things had happened in rapid succession over a short period of time. Song Qingxiao had become numb to all of it. She watched as the doctor called out loudly. The door opened, and someone walked in.

She thought that she would be unfazed even if the person that Liu Yixun called into the room was someone familiar. However, it did not happen as Song Qingxiao had imagined. The person who walked in was a young woman who looked about twenty-five years old. She wore a nurse’s uniform, and her

hair was neatly tucked under her nurse's cap. She had a hand on the door as she said, "Doctor Liu, did you call for me?"

Her voice was clear, and it seemed to breathe a little life into the eerily quiet office. The woman smiled brightly. Her lips were curved into a lovely smile as they revealed her prominent and adorable canines. Her smile was undoubtedly more genuine than Liu Yixun's smile that was so stiff it made her skin crawl. It allowed Song Qingxiao, who was in a state of extreme tension and anxiety, to relax slightly.

"Yes, I did."

The doctor nodded his head and introduced Song Qingxiao to her. He gave her instructions regarding the duties that he had assigned her. Nurse Zhang nodded her head in response.

When Song Qingxiao stepped out of the doctor's office, she was covered in cold sweat. She looked as drenched as if she had been fished out of water. She kept wiping her forehead with her hand.

Her legs were clenched tightly due to her nerves, and they felt uncomfortable since she had stopped clenching. Each step she took made her foot break out in pins and needles. It felt as if she walked on a path covered in thorns.

The ticking noise continued to ring out in her mind. The countdown continued as the numbers decreased rapidly.

"Our hospital is a psychiatric hospital for severe cases and is under a fully-closed management style," explained Nurse Zhang as she led Song Qingxiao down a long corridor, giving her an introduction to the hospital.

At that moment, Song Qingxiao noticed another problematic issue. The ticking noise in her mind was constant. She needed to pay utmost attention to hear what Nurse Zhang said. Otherwise, it would be easy for her to miss Nurse Zhang's words.

The environment in the trial was different from the previous one. The situation seemed to be more complicated than the one before. At that moment, Song Qingxiao understood very little about the situation, and she had many questions in her head. There were things that she would need to investigate. If she let the ticking sound in her head affect her, she might miss out on important clues.

In that situation, it would be advantageous for her to gather as much information as she could. She ignored the shock she felt when she saw the doctor, the ticking noise, and the countdown. From Nurse Zhang, she learned that she was in a psychiatric hospital that was managed as a fully-closed system. That meant that she would not be in contact with any outsiders.

Song Qingxiao forced herself to ignore the strange noise. However, her expression led Nurse Zhang to misunderstand her. She smiled and said, "We have special supplies delivered every five days."

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

The noise continued to disturb her. Song Qingxiao heard it, and her sharp senses picked up on the information and tried to find a connection. She thought that she was onto something, but the distracting messages in her head, the countdown, and the change in environment, not to mention the strange appearance of the doctor, messed with her thoughts. The clues seemed to dangle right before her. She was close, but she just could not get to it.

Song Qingxiao started to feel a little frustrated and uneasy in that situation. Nurse Zhang turned over to look at her, "There are a total of 27 patients in our hospital. There are 6 doctors and 11 nurses. However, now that you've joined, we have 12."

As soon as Nurse Zhang finished speaking, she paused and noticed that Song Qingxiao was extremely pale. She had been mopping the sweat off her forehead non-stop. Her figure was skinny and weak. After she had left Doctor Liu's office, she had not spoken. Nurse Zhang had been the only one who spoke the whole way.

She quickly stopped walking and asked apologetically, "Have I been speaking too much?"

"Not at all." Song Qingxiao quickly shook her head. In her mind, Song Qingxiao thought that she had shaken her head forcefully. However, it appeared to Nurse Zhang as though she had merely lightly swayed her head twice.

When Nurse Zhang saw her expression and heard her words, she assumed that her new colleague was just extremely introverted. She smiled again and said, "Are you a little nervous because you're starting a new job?"

After all, it was a psychiatric hospital, one that treated severe cases. The patients were mainly aggressive with violent tendencies. It was normal for new starters to be a little scared.

Song Qingxiao focused all attention on her words, worried that she would miss a single one. When she heard Nurse Zhang's words, she nodded in agreement and said, "Yes."

She was indeed highly nervous. It was not because she had entered a psychiatric hospital, but Nurse Zhang had helped her think of a reasonable excuse. Naturally, Song Qingxiao would go along and admit to that. As soon as she responded, Nurse Zhang spoke to reassure her just as Song Qingxiao had expected she would.

She smiled. "Truthfully, there is no need to be nervous. When we all arrived, we were all terrified. However, as time went by, everyone got used to it. They are all patients, so we shouldn't take things to heart."

Sunlight beamed into the corridor through the windows. Nurse Zhang's face looked warm and gentle under the sunlight at that moment. "Take it slow, and you'll be alright."

Tick, tock, tick, tock, tick...

Song Qingxiao turned to look at her. The numbers above her cheeks had dropped.

119: 51: 23.

She blinked her eyes.

119: 51: 18.

Nurse Zhang continued to smile. Song Qingxiao could not help but think about her mission.

'Protect the people.'

She learned from Nurse Zhang that it was a mental hospital that treated severe cases. The patients might attack. Did the people in the task instructions refer to the doctors? Did she need to protect the doctors from being killed by the aggressive psychiatric patients?

She wanted to lift her hand to rub her aching head. However, she tried a few times but found that she could not move on her own volition. The day had been extremely traumatizing. She had not fully relaxed and recovered.

Nurse Zhang noticed her actions and reached out to take her hand. Her fingertips had barely brushed against Song Qingxiao's palm when Song Qingxiao felt an electric jolt. She subconsciously wanted to push her aside.

"Oh, your hands are so cold!"

Nurse Zhang held Song Qingxiao's hand tightly. She did not seem to mind her little struggle. In fact, she even smiled when she saw Song Qingxiao's defensive reaction and said, "Your expression now looks pretty similar to some of our patients."

She spoke casually, but it sounded like a warning bell to Song Qingxiao, making her hang her head. Nurse Zhang finished speaking and continued to tug Song Qingxiao along with her.

"Our work schedule is a five-day shift pattern. When we're on shift, we need to stay in the hospital. We eat and sleep here. Since you're new, you might not be used to it. Why don't you share a dorm with me?" She paused momentarily, then continued, "Come on. I'll show you to the dorms first and get you changed."

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

The ticking continued. The numbers in her head had dropped.

119: 46: 57.

Five days!

Song Qingxiao noticed that Nurse Zhang had already mentioned it twice. The deliveries happened every five days. The nurses change shifts every five days. She realized that the time was a key to the task. However, the irritating noise in her mind and the numbers before her eyes constantly distracted her. She could not ponder in peace. She felt a little restless and uneasy. What was the significance of those five days?

Nurse Zhang still spoke as she pointed out places in the building to Song Qingxiao. She nodded her head perfunctorily, slowing her breathing over and over again as she tried to not get overwhelmed by her emotions.

Five days. The sound of the grandfather clock ticking in her mind. The countdown before her eyes. The mission to protect the people.

When she put all the clues together, they formed a coherent pattern. Song Qingxiao figured out the key. It was time!

The period of five days and the ticking noise both pointed at time. The mission to protect the people might have a time limit. As for the odd numbers that appeared before her eyes, the number had dropped to 119: 44: 27. However, she clearly remembered that the initial number that first appeared was 119: 59: 59.

She was shocked by the unexpected situation when the prompt in her consciousness gave her a choice, leaving her no time to think. After she entered the scene and was confronted by the doctor she had killed, she ignored the number.

However, after careful consideration, the figures seemed to be a countdown for precisely five days! It meant that the row of numbers was likely to represent the amount of time she had left for the task. Her task was to protect the people in these five days!

As soon as she thought about it, Song Qingxiao did not know if she should let out a breath of relief because she had figured out the clues or if she should feel more anxious because of the time limit on her task...

Chapter 24

After she had chosen her identity, Song Qingxiao had entered the trial as a nurse. According to the nurse, the place was managed as a fully-closed system. The doctors and nurses would change shifts every five days. The five-day period matched the numbers counting down in her mind perfectly.

However, the trial did not prepare a place for her to go to after she got off work. In other words, it meant that the trial mission would last for five days. If

she could not complete her task within those five days, she would be at the end of the road.

She took another look at the instructions in her consciousness. 'Protect the people. Obliterate failure. Upon completion of task: 1000 credits.'

Song Qingxiao took a deep breath and let it out slowly. The numbers before her eyes had become 119: 41: 18.

Tick, tock, tick, tock.

The sound of the clock ticked away. It sounded like a death sentence that hung over her head. The scene was brightly lit by the sun. The environment was calm and peaceful, but Song Qingxiao felt inexplicably uneasy.

Since she was there, she had no other choice. There was no use in panicking, so she needed to calm down and try to make sense of everything. The sooner she figured out the whole story about the trial, the sooner she could leave.

"Look here, Xiao Yu planted these plants last year. They're growing pretty well."

Nurse Zhang was still giving Song Qingxiao a tour of the area enthusiastically. Song Qingxiao calmed her nerves and tried to ignore the noise in her mind and the numbers before her eyes that disrupted her focus. She was worried that she would miss even a single word that Nurse Zhang spoke.

The quarantined psychiatric hospital was not very large. It could be divided into two zones. The first was a five-storied building, and the second was a leisure center. The building was split into two sections; the medical staff's offices and dormitories were partitioned off, while the other half consisted of the patient wards and the treatment rooms.

There was no one in the leisure room downstairs. According to Nurse Zhang, there were 27 patients in the hospital, all in the same building. Despite that, Song Qingxiao felt as though her surroundings were very quiet.

Through the transparent full-length windows, she could see the tall walls around the leisure center. It nearly blocked off all of her line of sight to the outdoors, making the hospital seem like its own space.

“This place is straightforward to remember. The time here is also very regulated.”

Nurse Zhang seemed to take Doctor Liu’s words to heart and was focused on showing Song Qingxiao the ropes conscientiously. “The lights are switched on in the patient wards at six in the morning. The patients get up and wash up, brush their teeth, then we help them trim their nails and hair.”

She explained the duties of a nurse and mentioned that the daily work schedule was split into two shifts—morning and night respectively.

“The morning shift starts at 8am to 6pm in the evening. The nurses may have to work the night shift because of staff shortages and the heavy workload. Hence, it can be quite tough.”

As soon as Nurse Zhang said that, a complicated look flashed across her eyes. She looked a little guilt-ridden. Song Qingxiao did not come here to work for real. Her mission only lasted five days. If she could not complete the task within five days, she would not keep her life. With that on her mind, she did not have the headspace to worry about the job being tough.

In fact, she hoped that she would be able to master the job within the shortest time possible and figure out the details of the mission tasks.

Song Qingxiao did her best to ignore the disturbance of the ticking noise in her mind. She pursed her lips and put on a tiny smile. “It’s okay. I’m hoping that I can learn my role well and familiarize myself with the job as soon as possible. If it’s possible, put me on the next available night shift.”

Her initiative to ask for the shift impressed Nurse Zhang. In an instance, Song Qingxiao could visibly sense that Nurse Zhang was looking at her more warmly. In a mysterious, blood-thirsty space like that where she could lose her life at any time, Song Qingxiao was stunned to have met someone like Nurse Zhang, who was such a kind and gentle soul.

Nurse Zhang took her hand and broke her out of her trance, forcing her to suppress her feelings of awkwardness.

“Qingxiao, you’re the best. However, you’ve just arrived today. There’s no rush. Why don’t you join me this afternoon to familiarize yourself with the job duties? Get some good rest tonight, and we’ll talk about you doing a night shift tomorrow.”

The staff dormitories were not far from here. Two people shared a bunk bed in a room. Nurse Zhang led Song Qingxiao to collect her personal items before bringing her back to the dormitories.

The lower bunk belonged to Nurse Zhang, but since Song Qingxiao had arrived, the kind lady collected her stuff and moved it to the upper bunk without saying a word. Perhaps it was because she had been won over by Song Qingxiao earlier when she offered to take an extra shift.

Nurse Zhang considerately gave Song Qingxiao space to change. That brief moment was an opportunity for Song Qingxiao to be alone. The instructions in her consciousness had not changed. Since she had grown used to the ticking noise of the clock hands, she gradually learned to control her mind so that she could still function.

However, even though she had not figured out why the doctor was there, Song Qingxiao had a feeling that it was not a coincidence. She wondered where the people who entered the test space with her ended up since the trial had started. She wondered what roles they played.

She suppressed the thought in her mind and walked out of the room once she was done changing. Nurse Zhang waited outside. When she saw Song Qingxiao, she smiled as she handed her a lanyard.

“While you were changing, I went to grab your lanyard for you.”

As Nurse Zhang spoke, Song Qingxiao noticed the name tag on her chest. The tag had Nurse Zhang’s name on it.

‘Zhang Xiaoyu’.

The lanyard in her hand had Song Qingxiao’s name on it. Nurse Zhang explained, “You’ve just started, so we’ve not made your work pass yet. After a few days, you won’t need to wear this anymore once your work pass is made. It’ll be much more convenient then.”

Song Qingxiao nodded her head and placed the lanyard around her neck. She walked with Nurse Zhang into the patient ward area.

“The hospital originally had two grades of care units—level one and level two.”

As they walked towards the patient area, Nurse Zhang lowered her voice as though she was worried about startling something. The environment here was extremely quiet. She wore shoes with soft soles, so she made no sound when she walked, just like a ghost.

“However, we don’t have many patients in this hospital. All of their conditions are quite severe, so we no longer have any divisions.”

She could see the door leading into the patient area in the distance. A huge metal gate divided the patient area into two. There were three stages of security fences to get through. Through the slits of the security fence, the long corridor appeared deeply terrifying. It looked as though it was the throat of a huge beast that gaped wide open, preparing to swallow a person whole.

Nurse Zhang put the key into the keyhole. The door opened with a click. As she pushed the door open, an ear-piercing screech rang out. Song Qingxiao frowned in reaction.

A chilling breeze blew past. Song Qingxiao seemed to hear someone crying faintly. It was frigid and cold. She glanced at Nurse Zhang, but Nurse Zhang’s expression did not change. She did not know if Nurse Zhang had not heard it or if she had grown accustomed to it.

Goosebumps appeared on her arms. Once the third security fence was opened, Song Qingxiao seemed to have entered a new scene. Even though they were still in the same building, the medical staff’s offices and dormitories had been newly painted in a fresher white coat of paint. The glass windows let in a lot of light, and the facilities were not worn out.

The patient area was mainly painted in a light blue color. The windows were made out of a special material, and there was a corridor in the middle. The patient rooms were on one side of the corridor, while the on-duty doctor’s office and other treatment rooms were on the other side. The nurses’ station was next to the elevator in the middle. There were some windows at the end of the windows, but they had been sealed shut by metal bars. It felt as though even sunlight would not be able to stream through those bars.

Someone could be heard sobbing here. Nurse Zhang seemed to have heard it as she turned to Song Qingxiao and asked her, “Are you scared?”

Song Qingxiao shook her head. In her field of vision, she could see that the numbers counting down had become 119: 21: 36. At that moment, there was nothing else scarier than that.

She forced herself to ignore the existence of those numbers. She looked through the windows to see inside the patient rooms. The patient room to her left had two beds. There were two blank-looking patients seated on each bed. They fixed their eyes on Song Qingxiao, staring at her intently with unblinking eyes. Their movements were stiff, and their expressions were frozen.

Their faces were unfamiliar to Song Qingxiao. She returned her gaze and was about to speak when she felt someone approach her from behind. A huge force pushed against her. Someone caught the blue lanyard that she had just hung around her neck and pulled her backward with it, strangling her in an instant.

The force was so strong that her body began to move backward with it. In a moment of carelessness, Song Qingxiao's knees buckled, and she fell to the floor with a loud crash.

However, the person who dragged her did not let go. In fact, they continued to pull her backward. In the blink of an eye, they had managed to drag her more than a meter away from Nurse Zhang.

It seemed like Song Qingxiao could not escape her fate. She somehow always ended up with her neck being strangled!

Song Qingxiao repeatedly coughed as she struggled to breathe. Somehow, she ended up with someone strangling her neck in the trial when she had also been strangled by the doctor with the mouse cord in the previous trial.

Chapter 25

The person who strangled Song Qingxiao had terrifying strength. Just a single tug of their arm made her feel as though the thin strap of her lanyard was about to slice into her neck. It stung fiercely as it dug into her flesh.

Her throat was forced shut, causing her to be unable to breathe in any fresh air. Song Qingxiao lifted her head, and her face was bright red. She instinctively reached out for the dagger hidden in her arm, hoping to get out of

the terrible situation. However, as soon as she raised her hand, her logic suppressed the instinct of her body.

Perhaps it was because she had previous experience of being strangled, but Song Qingxiao calmed down quickly as she considered the pros and cons of her actions. The place was a hospital, and there was someone before her. The dagger was her trump card. It would not do her any good if it was revealed at such an early stage.

Besides that, Nurse Zhang was still there. Even though Song Qingxiao was being strangled, she would not die. She had to endure the suffering for a bit longer. If she revealed her trump card, it was like losing a leg to stand on.

As soon as she thought about it, Song Qingxiao changed the direction of her hand and reached toward the person who had ambushed her from behind. All of it happened in the blink of an eye. Song Qingxiao was dragged nearly two meters away before Nurse Zhang seemed to come back to her senses.

“Qingxiao!” she screamed.

Just as Song Qingxiao predicted, Nurse Zhang quickly ran to help her get out of the situation. At the same time, she yelled out for help from their colleagues. The sound of running footsteps could be heard from the treatment rooms. Some people also came running from the nurses’ station. The door of the patient room was opened, and a group of patients came running out. They wore cold expressions.

It only took a few seconds, but it felt like an eternity to Song Qingxiao. Nurse Zhang ran up to help, and it seemed like the person strangling her had tripped and fallen to the floor. However, it did not solve Song Qingxiao’s crisis.

The person who tugged on her lanyard did not loosen their grip. In fact, they seemed to pull on the string even harder. In the confusion, Song Qingxiao could feel a pair of feet stepping onto her shoulders to increase the force around her neck!

The situation was more dangerous than before. Song Qingxiao struggled, but she could not get herself out of the threatening situation. Thankfully, the people in the treatment room and the nurses’ station hurried over. With their combined efforts, they were able to subdue the person strangling Song Qingxiao.

The incident had caused Song Qingxiao to experience much suffering. In the end, Nurse Zhang found a pair of scissors and cut open the lanyard that was wrapped around Song Qingxiao's neck. Only then did Song Qingxiao feel truly out of danger.

"Are you alright?"

Nurse Zhang handed the scissors to a colleague. She knelt down in concern and was about to help Song Qingxiao get to her feet. Song Qingxiao had regained the ability to breathe. She took a deep breath of the air around her that smelt faintly of medication.

Her throat still felt odd after her windpipe had been crushed, causing her to cough violently. She blinked a few times forcefully to squeeze out the tears in her eyes from being strangled. She rested her hand on Nurse Zhang's arm, too weak to say a word, and shook her head with much difficulty in response to her question.

Nurse Zhang looked like a mess herself. The nurse's cap on her head was off-center. There were a few scratch marks on her chin that had started to bleed and swell up. Song Qingxiao stood up with the support of Nurse Zhang. She turned her head to see the person that had been restrained on the ground. When she saw the patient, Song Qingxiao stopped coughing and reached for her neck. Her pupils narrowed, and a flash of killing intent swept past her eyes.

Number six, who had two braids in her hair, laid on the ground wearing a blue-striped hospital gown as she was pinned down by two strongly-built nurses. As soon as Song Qingxiao met her eyes, her lips curved into a sinister smile. Number six still had the lanyard that had been wrapped tightly around Song Qingxiao's throat in her hands.

Cough, cough, cough.

Song Qingxiao coughed a couple of times. Nurse Zhang still looked a little worried as she patted Song Qingxiao on the back.

"Are you alright?" Nurse Zhang asked.

Number six was quickly taken away by the others in the direction of the elevator.

"I'm alright." Song Qingxiao forced herself to answer. As soon as Nurse Zhang saw that she could still speak, she let out a sigh of relief.

"That was one of the new patients that arrived today." Perhaps she was trying to reassure Song Qingxiao because she quickly explained, "She must have suddenly rushed out to hurt people while she was being examined by the doctor."

She pointed towards the examination room behind Song Qingxiao. The door was opened, and Song Qingxiao followed her line of sight to look over. She then nodded her head. Her throat still burned, and the skin of her neck must have been torn open. Nurse Zhang took a look and said, "Thankfully, the wound isn't too deep. However, we should still put some antiseptic over it."

She narrowed her eyes and sighed. "To avoid another situation like this, it looks like you won't be allowed to wear a lanyard."

She looked a little regretful, but she quickly put on a smile. Pointing at the nametag on her chest, she said, "However, a name tag like this will be done in a few days. By then, you can be like me and not have to wear it."

Song Qingxiao twitched the corner of her lips. It could be considered a response, but she made no sound. The patients around her started to increase in number. Soon, there were a lot of people in the corridor. Each person looked dazed and blank, looking like their souls had wandered off.

Nurse Zhang looked a little anxious when she saw the situation. She did not bother to explain and rushed to get a colleague to help Song Qingxiao apply some medication to her wound. She then rushed off to escort the patients back into their rooms.

Nurse Zhang tidied her hair and put on her nurse's cap once again. Song Qingxiao looked at the wound on her chin and said, "Nurse Zhang, the wound on your chin..."

Nurse Zhang paused. However, she quickly smiled. "It's alright. They're patients, so I can't take it to heart."

Her tone was gentle and full of patience. The jagged wound on her chin did not seem to trigger a hint of anger from her. Song Qingxiao's eyes flashed.

Another nurse piped up to say, “Nurse Zhang is the sweetest person here in our hospital.”

Song Qingxiao turned and saw that the name tag on the nurse’s chest read ‘Wang Xiaoli’. Nurse Zhang ushered the patients back into their rooms.

“This is not activity time. Patients are not allowed to wander around freely.”

As Wang Xiaoli continued to speak, Song Qingxiao was still immersed in her memory of how she had bumped into number six and was nearly killed by her.

The incident that had happened earlier filled Song Qingxiao with doubt. Number five had panicked after being frightened by number four. After that, the trial started, and everyone had no time to react.

That included Song Qingxiao. She had no chance to learn about the task of the other participants in the trial before she was forced to enter the scene. After a series of selections, she entered the scene. She had barely figured out the time limit for the mission, but she still did not understand the clues when she bumped into number six and nearly lost her life!

The numbers in her vision had dropped to 119:17:51. Song Qingxiao frowned deeply because of the pressures of time and the fact that she had encountered number six. Based on what she saw, her identity was in opposition to number six’s in the mission setting. One of them was a medical staff, and the other was a patient.

The instructions in her consciousness had not changed. It still showed, ‘Protect the people. Obliterate failure. Completion of task: 1000 credits.’ It proved that their earlier tussle had not affected the task. It was highly likely that the trial would be just like the previous trial.

The prompt would only be triggered to change after the participants had started to kill one another. Once someone had died, a change would occur, and the surviving participants would receive more information.

According to that logic, it made perfect sense that number six had attacked her as soon as she saw her. However, Song Qingxiao thought about the fleeting moment when number six had appeared in the space.

When she entered the test space, the large chap had pointed his gun at her. Number six had reacted quickly, and her reactions were agile. She turned the

dangerous situation around quickly. Not only did she manage to flip the large chap to the ground, but she also nearly snatched his gun from him. It was enough to see that she had a high combat ability.

She was an extremely dangerous character.

Even though number six had entered the scene with a patient's identity, Song Qingxiao was clear that it was only an adaptation of the game's rules. Number six was not actually a patient.

If a person like that really wanted to kill Song Qingxiao, it was impossible that she would fail. She could not stop herself from touching her throat. It still stung painfully. Number six must have known that she wore a nurse's uniform and was surrounded by other people in the hospital. The participants were all in competitive and even hostile relationships with each other.

Yet, she had acted in such a situation. Even if she ambushed Song Qingxiao, she would not have succeeded, so what was the purpose of her actions? Song Qingxiao could not figure out the answer to that question in her mind.

Wang Xiaoli saw Song Qingxiao reaching for her neck and asked, "Are you feeling a little scared?"

Song Qingxiao endured her discomfort and swallowed her spit. She dropped her hand as though nothing was wrong. Before she spoke, Wang Xiaoli did not seem to need an answer. She smiled and said, "What if more terrifying things happen after this?"

Nurse Zhang had finished ushering all the patients in the corridor back to their rooms. She walked towards Wang Xiaoli and Song Qingxiao. Next to the nurses' station stood an equipment console. Nurse Zhang headed there to retrieve a cotton swab with alcohol and disinfected the wound on her chin. She waved Song Qingxiao over.

The equipment console was situated across a patient room. Since she was just ambushed, Song Qingxiao was extremely wary. Before she walked over, she instinctively turned her head to look around her to confirm that there was no one behind her.

At that moment when she turned her head around, her eyes glanced past the window of a patient room. She saw number five dressed in a blue-striped

hospital gown curled up on the bed. He trembled as he sat on the bed and raised his head as though he felt Song Qingxiao's eyes on him.

As soon as that cowardly man with greasy hair saw her, his eyes went wide, and a terrified expression appeared on his face. He looked close to tears and quickly lowered his head. After she had just been reacquainted with number six, she once again encountered someone familiar in the scene. Song Qingxiao bit her lower lip and narrowed her eyes to hide the expression in her eyes.