

Watch Out! Danger Ahead

Chapter 6

From the moment she received the prompt and entered the space, Song Qingxiao still had no idea what the 'Trial of God' would be like. After all, the clues that they had up to then were limited.

After they had split off into groups to explore the space, they received instructions about a task, and nine cards appeared in her mind. She did not know if the cards had anything to do with the nine people in the space. Until she was clear about the situation, the presence of the dagger made Song Qingxiao feel safer.

"When I entered this place, I was on the way home from work and met with an accident..."

Song Qingxiao did not mention the incident where she encountered an assailant on her way home. The middle-aged man did not appear to suspect her of lying. After all, based on his and the girl's situation, the things that were in their hands right now had something to do with what they were holding when they accepted the 'Trial of God'.

However, neither the girl's phone nor the computer mouse that he had tossed aside were of any use in a place like that. The short and fat man felt that it was quite normal that Song Qingxiao was not holding anything when she entered the space. Even if she had something, the item she would have gotten was likely not to be of much use.

Despite that, the man looked at Song Qingxiao and thought she looked a little embarrassed.

After Song Qingxiao had entered the space, her hair and clothes were still drenched from the rain even though the wound on her neck disappeared. Her hair was soaked in muddy water, and it was plastered to her face. Her thick bangs stuck to her face after being drenched by the rain. The sharp contrast between her black hair and the paleness of her skin made it more evident that her skin was deathly white. It appeared devoid of blood.

She must have been startled by the weird space because she had not stopped shivering since she entered. The middle-aged man looked at her in disgust and immediately turned his head away. In contrast, the timid girl looked more pleasant to the eye next to her.

“Did you guys receive any instructions?”

The fog around them had mostly cleared. As far as they could see, it seemed as though there was nothing dangerous around them at the moment. That made the middle-aged man feel more settled. He raised his head and appeared to imitate the doctor’s manner of speech from before. He put on a tone of being in control and directed that question to the two ladies before him.

Song Qingxiao did not speak. The girl appeared more naive, so she answered the middle-aged man truthfully.

“Yes, I did. When we first entered this place, I received a picture.”

She appeared to have seen nine cards in her mind with mysterious patterns just like Song Qingxiao. She did not seem to know what the point of the cards were. However, the weird pattern on the backs of the cards made her uneasy.

“What about you guys?”

Since they were in that situation, Song Qingxiao guessed that all the mysterious instructions had been received by all nine people who had entered the space. The key to getting out was probably laid within those instructions.

Since everyone received the same instructions, it was not necessary for her to hide it. Hence, she nodded in response to the girl’s question to indicate that she had also received the same instructions. The middle-aged man seemed to be deep in thought. It appeared as though he had still not figured out the purpose of those cards, which was why he admitted that he had also received the exact instructions.

“I think that we should return to where we came from and wait for the others before we discuss this.”

As soon as he said that, the girl looked like she welcomed that idea. Song Qingxiao stayed silent for a moment before saying in a quiet voice, “The space has disappeared.”

As soon as she spoke, the middle-aged man and the girl seemed to have noticed the problem as well. They turned their heads around and looked in all directions. The fog surrounding them had dissipated, but it had not disappeared completely. The light and visibility was only slightly better than before.

The place where they stood was an empty space. The area far away was still enveloped in thick, gray fog, and there were a couple of dark shadows over there that looked like strange beasts who devoured humans.

It was true that the space where all of them were before had disappeared. They could not tell which direction they had come from or even where they were. The middle-aged man immediately looked a little downcast.

“Sh*t!” He cursed. “What kind of f*cking place is this?”

The girl started to tremble. Song Qingxiao was also a little afraid. She once again stroked the dagger that was concealed in her sleeve. The sharp edge of the dagger gave her a sense of security in her circumstances. She rallied herself to be brave and looked cautiously around her. She tried to find something memorable to act as a landmark to prevent them from getting lost.

The group of nine people that had entered the space had split up into four groups. The group that Song Qingxiao was in was the weakest among the four. The girl was weak, timid, and young. In that situation, she would not be of much help to the group. In fact, it would be good enough if she did not drag the group down or cause them trouble.

The middle-aged man should have a wealth of experience based on his age. However, he had a crafty, mean look in his eyes. He seemed like an unreliable person with a mean heart based on how he reacted by almost hitting the girl because she shrieked.

As for herself, Song Qingxiao was not the bravest person around. However, she was not going to trust people easily in a place like that. She could only rely on herself.

While the girl and the middle-aged man were in a daze, Song Qingxiao took a deep breath.

“We need to find a place and make sure we’re heading in the right direction. If we want to leave this place, we need to meet up with the others before we find a way out.”

Since there was no other option available, the middle-aged man and the girl quickly agreed with Song Qingxiao’s suggestion.

Once the decision was made, the middle-aged man quickly tried to assert himself as the team leader over the two ladies. He reached out his hand toward the girl and said, “We don’t know how dangerous this place is. Hence, it’s best if we don’t get separated. I’m going to hold your hand...”

He puffed out his chest as he gave the orders. When he saw Song Qingxiao’s dirty appearance, he ordered the girl with a disgusted look in his eyes.

“You hold her hand.”

It was evident that he did not remember Song Qingxiao’s name. She did not mind it. After all, she was used to being overlooked and ignored by people. In addition, she also had a feeling that not being very noticeable or memorable when she met a group of strangers would be favorable for her in a mysterious place like where she was.

The girl obediently let herself be dragged away by the middle-aged man while she used her other hand to hold onto Song Qingxiao. She must have been terrified to be trapped between the middle-aged man and Song Qingxiao. Even though Song Qingxiao’s hand was not clean, she still gripped onto it tightly and did not let go.

Song Qingxiao could sense that the girl came from a good family. Her parents must have cared for her very well. Her hands were smooth and soft to the touch. As soon as Song Qingxiao held her hand, she could tell that the girl had never done any house chores. That was the only way her hands would feel like that.

“Do you want your mouse?” asked Song Qingxiao softly when she saw the computer mouse strewn on the floor just as they were about to leave.

She felt like she had very few things on her. She did not know what could happen in the future, but she felt as though carrying something with her, even if it may not be super helpful, would give her a sense of security.

The middle-aged man had complained before that the mouse would serve no purpose. However, when he saw that Song Qingxiao wanted it, he refused to be at a loss, so he replied to her question by saying, "Of course I'd want it."

While he spoke, he bent down to pick up the mouse.

The three of them walked hand-in-hand in a direction that they had picked. After they had walked for nearly ten minutes, they had still not encountered any other people. The ground was overgrown with a massive amount of weeds. The further they walked in a direction, the denser the weed overgrowth became until it completely swallowed up their ankles.

They did not know how long or how far they had walked since none of their watches nor phones worked in the space. The middle-aged man slowly became more impatient. Before they left that place, they noticed that the dark shadow drew closer and closer towards them. It made them all break out in large amounts of cold sweat.

The middle-aged man could no longer take it. He stopped in his tracks and yelled loudly. His voice sounded a little hysterical.

"Hello? Is there anyone there? Doctor? Zhou Jing?"

The two ladies did not dare to make a sound. After he had finished yelling, a faint echo could be heard a little while later.

"Hello... Is... there... anyone... there...? Zhou... Jing... Jing... Jing..."

The last word 'Jing' seemed to echo many times. The shrill echo frightened them terribly. The middle-aged man went weak in the knees and nearly collapsed to the ground.

Song Qingxiao licked her dry lips and flexed her arms so that she could feel the presence of the dagger. That calmed her heart down for a few moments before it started to beat rapidly once more.

After experiencing this echo, the middle-aged man no longer dared to scream and shout casually. The sound of his voice before was pretty loud. If Zhou Jing, the doctor, or anyone else from the group of people from that empty space were around, they would surely have responded.

Since there was no response, it was proof that they were no longer in the same space. It also proved that the other three teams were not close by and might even be somewhere quite a distance away from them.

If that were so, it was quite problematic for them. Since everyone was so far from each other, if there was any danger, they could not help nor save each other.

Song Qingxiao could sense that the middle-aged man was starting to become more and more uneasy. She was extremely sensitive to threats around her due to her upbringing and the encounter that night that nearly caused her to lose her life. She felt like she needed to be more careful around the man.

The nine cards in her mind remained unchanged, and she could not tell if that was a good thing or not.

After another unknown period of walking, the middle-aged man finally could no longer take it. He forcefully kicked the thick growth of grass before him. He was about to yell out curses, but when his foot landed, it came into contact with nothing.

The middle-aged man did not manage to catch himself in time. In the end, he fell to the ground, dragging the girl and Song Qingxiao down with him!

Chapter 7

The girl screamed loudly. Her voice sounded particularly shrill in the current environment. Song Qingxiao felt a constant ringing in her ear.

The middle-aged man was already in a bad mood because they could not find the way out despite searching for a long time. In addition to that, he was tired and hungry. Not to mention that he had slipped and fallen, nearly scaring the life out of him.

The girl's scream was the final straw; the spark that caused his emotions to blow up. As soon as he came back to his senses, he raised his arm without any hesitation to aim a heavy blow towards the girl's face!

Smack!

A loud sound rang out. The blow caused the girl's head to swing to one side. He had used so much force that Song Qingxiao was thrown back to the ground after she had just managed to get up with much difficulty!

After all, the girl was still holding on to her hand tightly.

"If you f*cking dare to scream one more time, I will kill you!"

The girl stopped screaming. Once everything calmed down, it became apparent that an eerie stillness seemed to pervade their surroundings. It was as if they were in a dead city, and there was no one around except for the three of them.

The middle-aged man was on the verge of an emotional breakdown. Since he threw a blow, it was like he had found an outlet for all his emotions, such as fear, unrest, and tiredness.

His eyes were bloodshot, and he wore a ferocious expression. It seemed like hitting the girl once was not enough to quell the rage he felt. He raised his fist once more and aimed it towards the girl.

The girl was stunned by the beating. She let go of Song Qingxiao's hand subconsciously to shield her face and began to sob pitifully. The previous blow had caused the girl's lip to split open, and some blood trickled down her lip. The second punch from the middle-aged man landed on her head and made her vision go white.

If it continued, Song Qingxiao feared that her life might be in danger, so she moved to block him without thinking. She had grown up in the West District of Imperial City, where violent things happened frequently. That area was where the slums were, and it was also called the 'rough street'. She had grown up watching many fights, and she was familiar with the feeling of being scared.

Song Qingxiao understood the girl's fear. In that environment, even the movement of the grass caused by a gentle breeze would be enough to make them jump. She did her best to keep a lid over her own fears. She was worried about what dangers she would attract.

However, the girl was easily frightened and timid. She was terrified when the middle-aged man dragged her down as he fell. After that fright, the man had hit her because she screamed. If the middle-aged man lost all sense of

rationality and continued to beat her up, there was a chance that he could severely harm her.

It was hard enough for them to travel together with the three of them. If anything happened to the girl, they would be left with the two of them having to drag her with them. It would be hard to drag her while finding the other six people in the group, let alone carrying her to find a way out of the space!

Of course, the most important reason was not because Song Qingxiao felt sorry for the girl, but because she was worried. She was worried that if the middle-aged man injured the girl badly, he would destroy the balance of the team.

There would only be two people left in the three-person team. If she was left alone with the middle-aged man, it would increase the threat of danger to her. He had a history of violence, so it was highly possible that he might act up again on their journey to get out of the space. When that happened, she would be in a very unfavorable position!

When she thought about it, Song Qingxiao used her hand to stroke the dagger hidden in her sleeve if he caused any sudden trouble. At the same time, she used all the strength in her body to crash into the middle-aged man with her shoulder while she screamed.

“Stop hitting her!”

When she said that, her voice sounded a little hoarse. All Song Qingxiao could hear was the sound of her blood rushing through her veins and her heart thumping rapidly. Thankfully the man was short and fat, and he was not as strong as he looked. Perhaps he had lost his nerves over the course of the journey, including being tired and hungry.

As soon as Song Qingxiao crashed into him, the middle-aged man let go of the girl and fell to the ground.

In his rage, he was about to get up and continue to beat her up. Song Qingxiao endured the bitter pain and numb sensation in her shoulder as she used the rest of her strength to drag the limp and unmoving body of the girl on the ground away. She tried to put some distance between them and the middle-aged man. At the same time, she shouted angrily, “Are you trying to beat her to death!?”

She had intervened promptly and had managed to stop the man's actions. Even though the space seemed separate from reality, obeying the law was still a deeply-rooted principle for many of the Empire's citizens. It appeared that his morality was not wholly corrupt. Song Qingxiao's intervention seemed to have caused the middle-aged man to calm down. He relaxed his tightly-clenched fists.

The girl's body shook like a leaf. Red, swollen finger marks quickly appeared on her cheeks. She was so afraid of the middle-aged man, and she was so frail that even after she was beaten, she did not dare to scream nor cry. She curled up into a ball and hid behind Song Qingxiao.

Song Qingxiao thought about what she wanted to say. She was afraid that she might provoke the middle-aged man again and cause another episode. She grasped her arm tightly and pressed against the hilt of the dagger in her sleeve with the palm of her hand.

"Even though we have no idea how to escape from this place, it's a hard enough task for three people. If anything happened to one of us, that would mean that we've lost a portion of our strength. This is not beneficial to us at all."

Song Qingxiao was not a talkative person, but once she spoke, she made an impact. The middle-aged man seemed to calm down, and his features began to relax. Song Qingxiao let out a sigh of relief.

"We've still not found Zhou Jing and the others, but when we do, we'll be able to find our way out of here," she continued, "When we meet up with the others, and they find out that you've hurt someone, there might be trouble."

She brought up that point because she thought it would give the middle-aged man a little hope and that it might be a warning to him to watch his behavior. Her words seemed to have their intended effect. The middle-aged man seemed to be trying to control his rage. He dusted the grass off him and got up with a grunt.

He was the person who had fallen first. Since he was also much larger than the girls, he took a harsher fall. When he got up, he let out a gasp and found that his right leg seemed to be injured. He hobbled as he walked and found that walking was much more difficult than before.

Once things had calmed down, Song Qingxiao assessed the place around them. It was a little lower than the place that they had fallen from. From the feeling she got when she trod on the ground, some steps were beneath their feet. It seemed like over a long period of time, the weeds had overgrown and completely covered the steps. In addition, the visibility in the environment was terrible, so it was easy for one to miss the steps and slip.

After they had figured it out, the three of them continued down the steps carefully as they began to explore the new area. They had no idea how long they had walked for when the dark shadow that had been hidden in the thick fog began to draw close to them. It turned out to be a building—possibly a factory shed. The three people let out a sigh of relief. However, a moment later, they all frowned.

It was strange that there was a building in that odd place. They walked in cautiously as they could not tell if there was danger ahead. It was much darker inside, and it seemed like it was an abandoned factory. The factory was shockingly huge inside. However, there was nothing else there apart from several dozen large water tanks.

The tanks were sealed with heavy lids, and they could not tell what was inside them. They did not dare to open the lids because they were completely unsure about the situation. Besides that, they were also weak from tiredness and hunger. After a brief discussion, they decided to explore the area before they attempted anything.

After all, they were in a building. Perhaps there was another exit. If they found the exit and managed to leave that darn place, it would be a huge relief.

The middle-aged man seemed to struggle as they walked around the factory. Song Qingxiao silently made a note of the places that she had walked past. After an unknown period of time, the three of them were exhausted and completely out of energy.

The excitement in the middle-aged man's eyes when they first discovered the factory had slowly disappeared. His expression became more somber as time went on. He did not speak, and the aura he gave off seemed to become more and more dangerous.

After a while, all their stomachs began to grumble, and they found that they could no longer take another step. Hence they all found a place to stop and sit.

“Have you got anything to eat?”

The middle-aged man looked at Song Qingxiao as he stretched out his hand towards her. Song Qingxiao did not have a good impression of him by this point. Her hand was gripped tightly by the girl the entire time, while her other hand was dragged by the middle-aged man.

After the middle-aged man had beat her, the girl did not dare to be anywhere close to him. The girl seemed to treat Song Qingxiao like her savior and clung to Song Qingxiao tightly, refusing to let go of her. It stopped Song Qingxiao from reaching for her dagger as she pleased, causing her to feel a little anxious.

“No, I don’t.”

She let go of the middle-aged man’s hand and pretended to massage her arms when she actually reached to grip the handle of her dagger. The middle-aged man noticed her action. Since she had done it quite a few times on the road and now, everyone was on edge, he asked her in a dark tone, “Why do you keep touching your arms?”

He had put his guard up. Song Qingxiao forced out a smile and put on a calm tone.

“When we fell earlier, I hurt my arm. I think I grazed myself there, and it bled a little.”

The middle-aged man stopped being suspicious of her after she said that. When they fell down the steps earlier, the man got pretty injured as well. His right leg still ached at that point.

His gaze moved from Song Qingxiao to the girl. The girl was trying her best to stay as far away from him as she could. His eyes darkened and flashed with anger.

“Have you got anything to eat?”

As soon as he spoke, the girl started to tremble. When he had asked his question, the girl quickly shook her head and said, “No.”

She was worried that the middle-aged man would not believe her, so she even turned out her pockets and took off her jacket to show him that she was not lying.

Song Qingxiao studied the cards in her mind intently. After a long time had passed, the cards had not changed one bit. However, as soon as the girl took off her jacket, alarm bells started to ring in Song Qingxiao's mind!

In that situation, the girl's action was extremely dangerous! It was unfortunate that she did not realize the danger of it. Perhaps, she was too young.

There was a glint in the middle-aged man's eyes. There seemed to be a change in his breathing. Song Qingxiao tugged her hand out of the girl's grip and lowered her voice to reprimand her.

"Everyone can see that you don't have any food!"

Song Qingxiao gave the girl a little shove and sneakily pulled her clothes tighter around her as she spoke.

The middle-aged man smiled as he said, "Number one. Come over here."

He beckoned for the girl to come closer as he licked his lips.

Chapter 8

The middle-aged man and Song Qingxiao had been wary of each other from the start. The girl was the only naive and trusting one in the group.

Since the middle-aged man had beaten her earlier, he was worried that the girl might seek revenge if they managed to escape the space. Hence, everyone had decided not to use their real names. Instead, they would refer to each other by the order in which they had entered the space.

The girl was number one, and since Song Qingxiao was the last one to enter, she was number nine.

Even though the girl was a little slow-witted, she could tell that something was not quite right when the middle-aged man called her over. Since he had beaten her earlier, her memory of his ferocious expression was clear as day, and she was still extremely terrified of him.

Since he shouted for her, she shrank into a ball and ran to hide behind Song Qingxiao as she cried uncontrollably.

“I said, come over here!”

The middle-aged man’s face fell when he saw her ignoring his orders. He immediately puffed up his chest. When the girl saw his stance, she became even more frightened. She used both her hands to grip Song Qingxiao tightly, refusing to let her go. She truly considered Song Qingxiao as her lifesaver.

Song Qingxiao’s heart sank. In that situation, they had no water, no food, and had no way of contacting the others, plus they had not found the way out of the space! All of that combined was enough to make anyone go crazy.

The man seemed to have reached the point of breakdown and had hatched an evil plan. It was as if a beast had been released from its cage.

“Number six...”

Even though Song Qingxiao was older than the girl, she was skinny and small in size. The middle-aged man may not be very strong himself, but there was a clear difference in strength between male and female bodies. If he really did attack, she would be in a perilous position.

Thankfully, she still had a trump card—her dagger. As long as the existence of her dagger was not exposed, it might save her life at the eleventh hour. However, she would lose any hope of beating him if her weapon was discovered.

As Song Qingxiao thought up to that point, she struggled to breathe. She had managed to escape death earlier, so she felt as though her life was extremely precious and was extremely attached to her life. She had planned to say something to calm the middle-aged man down. However, it seemed that the words that she planned to speak would not be much help.

The man had run out of patience after searching for such a long time with no results. They had no water, no food, and had not managed to find the rest of their group nor the way out. Since the girl ignored his words and continued to hide behind Song Qingxiao while refusing to show her face, that was the last straw for him. He got up and rushed toward the two women.

“Shut your face right now!”

He looked at Song Qingxiao, and an evil glint appeared in his eyes. He said calmly, "There's no way out."

The grease and sweat in his hair stuck it into clumps, and he had tousled his hair, so it looked very messy. The middle-aged man's eyes were bloodshot, and the veins in his temple bulged out. His appearance and eerily calm tone made Song Qingxiao feel a sense of danger.

"This is the devil's space. He has trapped us here, so we will not be able to escape. Do you understand?"

He raised his chin like a mad man and continued to speak.

"There's nothing to eat, nothing to drink. We won't be able to last a few days like this."

"Please calm down..."

The girl was so frightened that she burst into tears. However, she did not dare to make a sound because she remembered the beating she had received. She was worried that the sound of her crying might draw the man's attention and bring harm to herself.

"Sure, tell me where the exit is! Tell me, where can we get food and water!? I'll calm down right away then!" roared the man. He suddenly calmed down mysteriously and even chuckled out loud.

"After all, if I'm doomed to die. I might as well enjoy myself before the end of my life," mumbled the man to himself.

"Number one, this is the last time that I'm going to say it. Come here!"

Their environment and the reality that they were in had finally torn down the last shred of civility and morality in that middle-aged man. The thing that Song Qingxiao feared had finally happened.

The girl curled up even more tightly behind Song Qingxiao. The middle-aged man reached out his hand to grab her, and she let out an ear-piercing scream. In the face of danger, she suddenly mustered a burst of energy and reached out to wrap her arms around Song Qingxiao tightly.

When the middle-aged man placed his arms around her, the girl tightened her hold, making Song Qingxiao feel as though she could not breathe.

“Help! Somebody save me!”

The middle-aged man tugged at her hand with all his might. However, Song Qingxiao could not help because the girl grabbed her so tightly that she could barely breathe.

The man struggled for a while until he began panting in tiredness. He was frustrated that his plan was going awry, so he could not stop himself from raising his fist towards the girl’s face. He punched her twice in the head before the girl loosened her grip around Song Qingxiao’s neck. Song Qingxiao pushed against her forcefully to escape from her grasp.

“Help!!!”

The girl still screamed and kicked her legs around wildly. Song Qingxiao took a moment to catch her breath before she tried to push the middle-aged man aside. If she did not join forces with the girl against the middle-aged man, it would be even more challenging for her to face him if something happened to the girl.

The middle-aged man merely held out one hand and was able to push Song Qingxiao away. However, his action allowed the girl to free one of her hands, and she instantly lashed out with her fingers to scratch the man’s face. Her long fingernails created a gash on the middle-aged man’s face, starting from his left eyebrow slanting down to his right cheek. His eye was not spared from the attack.

Her retaliation angered the middle-aged man. He seemed to change his mind and took out the computer mouse that he obtained earlier in the space. He clutched the mouse tightly as he aimed it at the girl’s head with much force. At the same time, he pulled the girl’s hair and quickly wrapped the cord around the girl’s neck.

Ahh!!”

The girl choked as she struggled against the cord around her neck with both of her hands. At the same time, she frantically scratched the back of the man’s hands. His expression was fierce and terrifying.

“You b*tch! How dare you hit me?! I’m going to kill you!”

The girl’s eyes and face began to fill with blood, turning into a deep shade of red. Her limbs flailed wildly as she gasped for air. Song Qingxiao wobbled as she got to her feet. By then, the girl’s eyes had rolled back in her head.

Her legs were still kicking wildly, and two long skid marks appeared on the grass underneath her feet. Her face was ashen and dropped to one side weakly. Her bloodshot eyes slowly lost their sparkle.

An actual scene of violent murder played out right before her eyes. Song Qingxiao felt a chill in her heart. For the middle-aged man to decide to kill the girl right then and there, it meant that he had decided that Song Qingxiao was not a threat. Hence, he did not feel the need to keep his guard up against the skinny and weak woman.

Furthermore, he guessed that Song Qingxiao would not draw harm to herself willingly, especially with the threat of death that could befall her, which was happening right before her eyes. He was sure that anyone of sound mind would not provoke him than to bring trouble upon themselves.

In that ghastly place, it was extremely hard for the three of them to survive. If something happened to him, he would make sure that Song Qingxiao did not survive either. Due to that thought, the middle-aged man did not pay any attention to Song Qingxiao while he was in the midst of strangling the girl.

Song Qingxiao had a chilling light in her eyes. She had analyzed the situation, and it was clear that since the man had acted to kill the girl, it was nearly impossible that he would stop before the deed was done.

It was a good opportunity. She knew what she had to do, but first she had to overcome the mental barrier holding her back.

The memory of the moment when she almost lost her life in the small alley flashed in her mind. However, her strong desire to live won over the burden of killing someone. She took hold of the dagger hidden in her sleeve and leaped towards the man’s back. She jumped onto his back and stabbed the blade into his throat.

She had made up her mind to settle this matter with a single strike. If she failed, Song Qingxiao would not be able to bear the outcome of her failure. She pulled the middle-aged man and fell backward with her legs wrapped

tightly around his shoulders, locking him tightly. She put an arm firmly around his face in a chokehold.

The middle-aged man spluttered angrily as Song Qingxiao pushed the dagger deeper into his throat. She copied the actions of her killer from her memory and twisted the dagger forcefully, making the wound larger.

Hot blood gushed out from the wound. The middle-aged man slumped against her chest, and his writhing right before he died nearly crushed her until she could not breathe.

The middle-aged man tried to retaliate multiple times. He swung his hands in an attempt to hit her and tried to stomp her with his feet. He even tried to stand up, but Song Qingxiao did not loosen her grip or let him go. Blood continued to gush out of his wound, making her entire palm wet and slippery. It felt extremely sticky and revolting.

She was so scared that the middle-aged man would not die. She tried to keep a lid on the terror she felt and reached out her hand to grab his wound. The blood gushing out flowed down the man's neck and dripped onto her chin. Some even landed on the corner of her lip. With every breath that she took, it seemed like the blood was flowing into her mouth. The smell of it made her want to throw up.

The middle-aged man made a gurgling sound as he gasped. With each breath that he took, it sounded like he was choking on his own blood. It reminded Song Qingxiao of the scene in the alley, and she applied more force.

The strength of his struggles began to weaken. He continued to struggle a while longer until his hand finally slumped weakly. The only movements that his body continued to make were involuntary twitches.

If the middle-aged man was not dead, he was not far from it. Once she was sure that she had ended the man's life, Song Qingxiao let out a sigh of relief and started to tremble uncontrollably.

She felt like she could not control her legs since she had released them from the man's shoulders. Perhaps because she had overworked them.

Not to mention her blood-drenched hands.

The short tussle had caused her body to become drenched in sweat. The middle-aged man's corpse pinned her to the ground, and it felt like she was lying under a heavy mountain.

She opened her mouth in a soundless gasp for air. Her chest began to burn with fiery pain as she tried to breathe in. She lay on the ground for a moment to catch her breath. Once a little strength returned to her limbs and she felt like she could control them, she pushed the middle-aged man's motionless body off her.

His corpse rolled once more before it came to a halt since his body was short and fat. His face lay to one side, covered in blood and dirt. It was an extremely frightful sight.

Chapter 9

There were originally three rows of cards with three cards in each row. Suddenly, two of the cards in the top left corner had flipped over. The picture of the middle-aged man and the girl appeared on the cards in that instance. Song Qingxiao felt like she could not breathe when she saw that.

The first card showed the middle-aged man dressed in a black suit with a slight smile on his face. The words 'Zhao Rongqiang' were written on the bottom of the card. If Song Qingxiao was not mistaken, that should be his name.

The cards had appeared once the people in the space had split into groups and walked into the thick fog. Nothing happened to the cards throughout their entire journey. However, as soon as number one and number six died, two of the cards had flipped over. Did that mean that someone's death was the price to pay before any of those cards would flip over?

If Song Qingxiao's deduction was correct, what would happen after those cards had been flipped over? When she recalled how number one, number six, and herself had searched for the way out from the space, she realized that they had approached it the wrong way. The real clue to getting out of there was very likely hidden within those cards.

An idea popped into Song Qingxiao's mind. She had a vague feeling that she was heading in the right direction. After thinking it over, she recalled that the

words in her head when she entered the space were 'Will you enter the Trial of God?'

Once she entered the space, there were a total of nine people inside, including herself. The cards were lined up in three rows, with three cards in each row. Since two people had died, the two cards in the top left corner had turned over.

If she had to conclude from all the information that she had, there could only be one reason that there was an odd number of people in the test space. It was very likely that it meant that only one person could survive in the end and leave the space.

As Song Qingxiao arrived at that thought, her body shivered involuntarily. It was a blessing in disguise. She discovered a clue regarding the task through killing a person in self-defense. However, her situation was not ideal.

Since the instructions given to all nine of the people in the space were identical, everyone would have noticed the change, except for number one and number six. She was the only one with an advantage because she knew that those cards flipped because of the deaths of number one and number six.

However, she was sure that after some time passed, the others in the group would figure it out. Once they figured it out, her advantage would become her weakness. After all, she had been in the same group as number one and number six. Both of them had died when they were with her. The rest would definitely be on their guard against her.

The task required her to be the last person alive before she would be able to leave the space. In all honesty, things would be more challenging and more dangerous for the women compared to the men.

If Song Qingxiao wanted to live, she had to get rid of the other six people. Even before she considered whether the others would be suspicious of her, she had to consider her opponents' powers and abilities.

Among the men, Zhou Jing was number three, and there was not much to say about him at that moment. The doctor was number four. He had a wealth of experience, a cautious personality, and he was used to witnessing death due to his job. Once the game started for real, he could overcome the psychological barrier much faster than ordinary people and become an incredibly tricky opponent.

At the same time, number seven was the burly chap with a muscular physique. His physical attributes seemed to be the best among all of them. Hence, he would not be easy to deal with either.

Even though the odds seemed stacked against her, Song Qingxiao did not feel content sitting around to await her death. She had escaped death with much difficulty, so she was unwilling to die without putting up a fight in the trial.

She gripped the dagger in her hand tightly. Thankfully, she still had her trump card on hand. In her fight with the middle-aged man, she managed to subdue him unexpectedly. Her dagger would likely be her savior in the trial later on.

Song Qingxiao would have never been able to guess that the thing that nearly took her life would become something she placed her hopes on to stay alive. It was as if life played a huge joke on her.

Once she had calmed down, Song Qingxiao hid her dagger carefully once again. She could still taste the pungent, sickly sweet scent of blood in her mouth. She dry heaved a couple of times before turning to glance at the corpse of the middle-aged man that was number six.

He remained in the position he was in right before he died, struggling against her in his last moments. His appearance was completely different from how he looked in the photo. The stark difference made Song Qingxiao's hairs stand on its end.

Since the other two people in her team were dead, her surroundings seemed more terrifying. However, since the task on hand was urgent, Song Qingxiao had no time to think or worry about it.

The girl's dead body lay to one side. She died under the hands of the man, and the cord was still wrapped around her neck. Her clothes were ripped open, and she did not look too bad. The middle-aged man's corpse was a different story.

His neck had a visible stab wound. If his body was not dealt with and discovered by some of the others, Song Qingxiao's secret weapon would be exposed. She would be in grave danger. She needed to hide that middle-aged man's body!

Where could she hide his body? The space was surrounded by grassy plains. There was an abandoned factory in the distance, but no place to hide a corpse...

Song Qingxiao recalled all the places they had explored and suddenly remembered the large tanks in the factory. Each tank was at least as tall as her waist, and they were each sealed with a thick, heavy lid.

When they passed by those tanks earlier, they did not dare to open the tanks because they had no idea what was hidden inside them and whether it might be dangerous. After thinking about it, those large tanks were the perfect place to hide a corpse!

The factory was not too far away from her location. Thanks to her cautious nature, she had pretty much memorized the entire route there, and it would not be hard to trace her way back to the factory. All she needed to do was dispose of number six's body and go into hiding before the others arrived. It would increase the chance of her survival.

As she thought up to that point, Song Qingxiao used her hands to help her stand to her feet. She still felt a little shaken. Due to the adrenaline rush, she did not notice it when she killed him. However, she finally sensed the panic bubbling inside her. She felt dizzy, and it seemed like the world was spinning before her eyes.

However, it was not the time for her body to give up on her. She gritted her teeth and shook her head a few times to clear her mind. Once she had confirmed her bearings, she started to head off in the direction of the factory guided by her memory.

She silently kept track of the time in her head while simultaneously paying close attention to the cards in her mind. After about a minute, she had finally confirmed the location of the factory. Before she managed to return to where she was, something strange happened again to the cards in her mind.

The third card in the top right corner had been flipped over. It was a photo of the woman in the red dress smiling into the camera.

It was number eight!

She was in the same group as the burly chap, who was number seven. Since the card had been flipped over, it meant that number seven must have killed her!

It was like a signal. Since everyone began to act, more people would die after it. Once they killed off their teammates, the survivor of the group would become hunters and roam around looking for their prey. It left Song Qingxiao with little time to act.

She returned her focus to her surroundings and went to search through the girl's bag. She retrieved some spare change and a handphone from it. There was no use for money in a place like that. Hence, she only took the girl's handphone and the mouse that was wrapped around her neck. She held the mouse tightly in her hand and thought that an extra object would always be welcome at a time like that.

Once she had finished rummaging through the girl's belongings, she ignored the terror and disgust building up inside her and reached out her hand to drag the corpse of number six with her.

Since he was dead, his corpse seemed to weigh a ton. His body slowly grew cold. As she carried him along on her back, his flabby flesh seemed to press into Song Qingxiao and nearly crushed her to the ground.

The wound on the man's neck had not stopped bleeding, so drops of blood dripped over Song Qingxiao's shoulders and arms. It seeped into her clothes, making them wet and sticky. The arm of his corpse hung beside her body, swaying as she walked. It put a massive burden on her heart, especially since she killed the man.

It was not an easy journey. When she finally arrived back at the factory, Song Qingxiao felt like she had exhausted all the energy reserves in her body. She threw the middle-aged man's body to one side and pushed open the lips of one of those tanks with much difficulty. She held her breath in anticipation that something might leap out of the tank at her! However, once the lid was off, she quickly let out a sigh of relief.

The tank was half-filled with some sort of liquid that looked like sewage. Under the dim lighting, it looked extremely muddy. Song Qingxiao spent a tremendous amount of energy before she was able to push the short and fat corpse of that middle-aged man into the tank. All she could hear was the loud

splash when he landed inside before she closed the lid. She was ready to conceal the traces of her journey to the factory.

In areas where there were traces of blood, she scrubbed the area hard with her foot to cover the evidence with their footsteps. She could not hide some things, so she could only hope that what she had done would be enough to temporarily confuse the others. However, it was still clear to see that it was the area where she had moved around the most.

Despite that, there was nothing else that Song Qingxiao could do. She could not run away. In that situation, it was highly likely that she might bump into one of the others if she tried to run away like a headless chicken. Once that happened, she would be out of energy. Even with her dagger, the chances of her surviving the encounter were low.

On the other hand, it might be better for her to stay put and wait for the others to come to her. There were several dozen tanks. Each of them had their own lids, and they were extremely heavy. She had inspected the liquid inside the tanks, and it was probably sewage.

Unless they were fortunate, it would take the others a bit of time to find her there. It would be sufficient for her to get some rest. Apart from that, she had the element of surprise and could attack when they opened the tank.

She headed to the large tank beside the one where she had put number six's body and removed its cover. She climbed in and replaced the cover. The lid gradually blocked the dim light.

For some strange reason, the prickling sensation of the icy water around the lower half of her body seemed like a warning that if she failed, it would be her burial ground.

After she hid in the tank, once she was sure that none of her clothes or hair were visible from the outside, Song Qingxiao began to concentrate on the instructions in her mind. As soon as she started, she noticed that most of the cards in her consciousness had been flipped out!

The girl, who was number one.

The middle-aged man, who was number six.

The woman in the red dress, who was number eight.

The youth, who was number five.

Even Zhou Jing, who was number three.

All of their cards had flipped over!

Chapter 10

Song Qingxiao was not surprised that the woman in the same group as number seven—the burly chap—had died. After all, once the burly chap discovered the rules, he would undoubtedly kill the woman to stay alive and find the exit. It was only a question of when he would act.

His physique was strong and muscular, so it would not be hard for him to kill the lady in the red dress. The irony was that the lady in the red dress was so pleased to be in the same group as the burly chap. She felt that the tall, muscular body of number seven would give her a sense of security in the strange space. However, she could never have guessed that her safety talisman would become the cause of her death.

The death of the youth who was number five was also something that Song Qingxiao had predicted. He was quite young, and her impression of him was that he was pretty simple-minded. It was unsurprising for him to have met his end in the hands of someone like Zhou Jing, who had such rich life experiences and seemed mean and scheming.

However, what caught Song Qingxiao off-guard was Zhou Jing's death and that the office woman in the same group as the doctor was still alive. The office woman was number two.

As she crouched inside the large tank while hugging her knees tightly, Song Qingxiao tried to calm her mind and focus on the clues in her mind more clearly. She was outnumbered. Apart from that, she was the person with the smallest build among all the ones who were still alive. Hence, she was the one in the most dangerous position. Even the slightest mistake could lead to her death.

She was busy trying to hide the corpse and tidy up the murder scene, all while she was looking out for a sneak attack by the others. Hence, she did not

notice the sequence of Zhou Jing and the youth's deaths at the time it occurred. She could only guess what had caused Zhou Jing's death.

There could be two reasons for Zhou Jing's death. The first was that both of them had discovered the change in the cards in their consciousness and realized what they had to do to escape the space. They each began to hatch a plan to kill each other. However, their intentions were exposed, leading to a bitter fight between them. It ultimately resulted in both their deaths.

The likelihood of that being the reason was not high. Even though the trial provided each participant with an item they held before entering the space, not everyone would be as lucky as Song Qingxiao to get a weapon like a dagger.

Without a weapon in hand, it was improbable for the two men to lose their lives fighting with their bare fists. However, there was another possibility.

It was possible that the winner of the two—either Zhou Jing or the youth—had been ambushed by one of the other teams when they were weak.

As soon as she reached that conclusion, Song Qingxiao shivered involuntarily. The water in the tank began to splash around. She did not know if it was because the environment around her was too quiet or if it was because she was too nervous, but she could hear the sound caused by the water splashing against the side of the tank clearly.

It was unacceptable! She instantly went into high alert and hugged her legs even tighter. It was not easy, but she wanted to stop her body from trembling. She tried to exert utmost control over her body. She was even careful when she breathed in and out.

If the survivor in Zhou Jing's team had died because of an ambush by another team, it proved that the space was connected, and the others would discover her sooner or later. The person who killed the survivor of Zhou Jing's group could be the doctor, the office lady who was number two, or the burly chap.

Song Qingxiao held her breath and closed her eyes. In the beginning, she guessed that the doctor was an intelligent, cautious person with strong observational abilities. Once he figured out that the game worked by killing one another, the office woman should be in a perilous position.

Yet, five people had died out of the nine, and three out of four teams had encountered trouble. In one of the teams, all of the members had been completely wiped out! Despite that, the office lady was still alive? It was highly suspicious.

Was it possible that after the doctor had figured out the game, he continued to maintain a high moral code and noble conduct?

No! That was impossible!

Song Qingxiao rejected that idea as soon as it popped up in her mind. She did not know the doctor well, and her only impression of him was from the short period of time when they were in the space together.

However, from that brief moment, she could see that when Zhou Jing tried to assert himself and establish his authority as the group leader, the doctor did not challenge him head-on. Instead, he subtly gained control of the situation. The doctor calmly took out his phone and wristwatch, exposing the problems he noticed. In that manner, he won over the group.

When everyone in the group panicked, the doctor managed to establish his position, and after that, everyone listened and followed his suggestions. In that aspect, the doctor was much more brilliant compared to Zhou Jing.

Any person would know that the person who had authority as the leader in a strange place like that would be in an advantageous position. Everything that the doctor did so far showed that he was not an intelligent man devoid of selfish desires.

Instead, he was a man who had the intelligence, the resourcefulness and the desire to succeed. The fact that he had not disposed of the office lady meant that he might have some use for her for the time being.

If the office lady—who was number two—realized how dangerous the doctor was and tried to escape, she might probably find a place to hide just like Song Qingxiao. However, in that environment, every place was dangerous. It was especially true when one was the prey, and everyone else were the hunters. A single woman being on her own was an extremely dangerous situation.

As soon as Song Qingxiao thought up to that point, the cards in her mind began to change once again. The card in the bottommost left corner had been flipped over. The burly chap's smiling face appeared on the card!

Song Qingxiao found that extremely puzzling. How could the person that she thought would be the trickiest to deal with, the most dangerous person in the group, be dead!?

She bit her lower lip hard. There were only three people left alive, including herself. Since she was in hiding, it meant that the burly chap had died in the hands of the other two.

Based on outward appearances such as height and strength, the burly chap seemed to be far superior compared to the doctor and the office lady. If those two had faced the burly chap alone, it would still be challenging to kill him.

However, if they had joined forces against him, there was a chance of victory.

It looked like what she had guessed was correct. The doctor did not kill the office lady because he had formed an alliance with her, and that was how they had managed to eliminate the burly chap who was number seven.

Since number seven was dead, the only other survivor left was her.

If the doctor wanted to leave the space, he would have to find her sooner or later. The place where she hid was not completely concealed. Even though no one had responded when the girl screamed while she was alive earlier, Song Qingxiao still kept her guard up.

When Song Qingxiao thought about that, her entire body tensed up. The dagger in her sleeve pierced through her clothes and pierced her flesh. The pain seemed to focus her mind, but her heart began to pump faster.

She had no idea how much time had passed. Perhaps it was because she was tightly wound up, but Song Qingxiao could faintly hear the sound of movement over the grass outside. The sound of the breeze over the grass outside sent her into high alert.

Her entire body was covered in large amounts of cold sweat. Her legs curled up involuntarily, and she bit down hard on her lower lip in an attempt to stay quiet. All she could hear was the sound of her shallow and anxious breaths inside the tank, along with the rapid thumping of her heart.

She gripped the phone tightly in one hand and the mouse in the other. The icy-cold water in the tank made her shiver. Right at that moment, the sound of footsteps seemed to become louder. It was not her imagination!

The voice of number two—the office lady—rang out.

“Number nine?”

At that moment, the voice sounded like the devil calling out to her from hell.