

Iyashikei 211

Chapter 211:

Knowing that the Butterfly might do something to him at the living compound, Han Fei was still not that nervous. He had already contacted Li Xue before he arrived and the police was notified of his movement. Han Fei was no longer the innocent extra thanks to the Iyashikei game. He could easily meld into the crowd and no one would have known he was a martial arts expert just from his appearance alone. These were all skills Han Fei had mastered from the cryptic world. The man who had been investigating the Butterfly had some of the supercriminal's property rubbed off on him.

However, the scariest thing was the speed by which Han Fei had grown. The Butterfly had lost the perfect window to murder the man. The Butterfly no longer had a superb advantage. A fight between Han Fei and the Butterfly now would be a level playing field.

Closing the book he was holding, Han Fei was about to check the other places inside the study when his phone vibrated. It was Director Zhang calling everyone to gather downstairs. After leaving Room 401, as Han Fei walked down the stairs, he could hear the sound of windchimes being carried on the wind. The sun started to set and night arrived. The crew was still setting up the place. Director Zhang and the other actors walked into the factory living compound. During this period Han Fei had sought out Director Zhang to remind him of the danger of the Butterfly and to request for additional security. However, Han Fei's warning appeared to fall on deaf ears. Even a supercriminal was not going to stop him from completing this film.

Director Zhang poured a lot of heart into this project, he was not going to let anything stand in his way. He spent the whole afternoon going over the script with the actors, helping them analyse the individual persona of the Spider. To reconstruct the truth as much as possible, Director Zhang even found the psychiatrist who had once treated Spider and brought him to the set. Now, other than Han Fei, all the other actors had a deeper understanding of their character. Everyone knew that it would be beneficial for everyone for the movie to get popular so they paid full attention during the lessons.

"Come on, let's get into the set and begin the rehearsal." Director Zhang and 2 other workers led all the actors into the living compound. They headed straight for the 4th floor. This particular floor had been cleared so it was quiet. "You should have read the scripts already, right? The Spider did not originally stay at this place. All the personas had gathered to decide the location to make their new home. Based on the plot from the House of the Butcher, they needed their new home to be somewhere special. In the end, as we know now, the Spider chose Fu Gui Meat Factory Living Compound. After they moved in here, strange events kept happening and the personas got mysteriously murdered one after another." Pushing open the door to Room 404, Director Zhang walked in. "To prevent the shooting from damaging

Spider's actual house, we have duplicated his house in Room 404. You don't need to worry about damaging anything here, everything here has spares in the warehouse."

The 9 actors filtered into the room. Based on the script, they moved to sit at different locations inside the room. "I've given everyone one whole afternoon to study their characters, I will leave the stage to you now. Hopefully everyone will get into the state as soon as possible and embody the characters." Director Zhang wanted to see the chemistry between the different actors and at the same time, work out any kinks that needed adjusting. The 8 other characters had a fixed personality, Han Fei's character was an exception. When Director Zhang left the room, he even levelled an encouraging gaze at Han Fei.

The door closed and Director Zhang left with the crew. Room 404 which was a remodel of Spider's Room now only had the 9 actors inside it. Scanning all of the other actors, Han Fei put down the script and went through everyone's info in his mind.

Han Fei: The first persona, aka the author. The character's age is 31, entangled in a deep web of self-conflict and separation. Personality unknown, requires a good actor to bring him to life.

Zhang Lie (C List Actor, known for his antagonist roles): Second sub persona, 32 years old, aka the brute. Easily angered, brash and has an explosive temper. Good at fighting and has a martial arts background.

Bai Xian (B List Actor, nominated twice for Best Actor of the Year): Third sub persona, 40 years old, aka the doctor. Mature, rationality, careful, but sometimes paranoiac, the glue that holds the other personas together. He fixes the problems between the different personas and hopes that everyone can coexist in peace.

Xiao Tong (A former singer turned actor, has a huge fanbase): Fourth sub persona, 21 years old, aka the university student. Happy-go-lucky, optimistic, hardworking, a complete opposite from the Spider. The type of person whom the Spider is the most envious of.

Lee Ran (New B List Actor): Fifth sub persona, 27 years old, aka the teacher. Pretty, kind, gentle, responsible for education and conflict negotiation.

Lee Huaiming (A list Actor): Sixth sub persona, 64 years old, aka Uncle Lee. Extremely cunning, will do anything for his own survival. Appears harmless on the surface but is actually extremely psychopathic, has a serious antisocial tendency.

Candy (Famous child actor): Seventh sub persona, 11 years old, aka the Dreamer. Young, innocent and naïve, has a stutter, is an accidental witness to many things. She loves to paint.

He Wanqiu (Former A List Actor, now a special lecturer at Xin Lu Film and Television Academy): Eighth sub persona, 49 years old, aka the chef. The second most complicated character after the author. Before the first murder, he has serious cleanliness issues. He is extremely kind and is responsible for all the cleaning around the home; But after the first kill, his personality shifted greatly, turning from the chef to the butcher.

Fu Sisi (C List Actor, a well-loved romance novel writer): Ninth sub persona, aka the reader. Loves to communicate with the author, rarely appears at the House of the Butcher. Most of the time, she communicates with the author via letter correspondence. There are some arguments regarding her existence, some believed she is the first sub persona while others did not think she existed at all.

The 9 individuals were all good actors. Based on the internet actor ranking, actors between rank 50 to 200 would be B list actors, while actors between rank 201 to 500 would be C list actors. Someone like Han Fei who was ranked several thousand plus was nothing compared to the others. He was chosen by Director Zhang because of his stellar performance in Twin Flower. However, different from Ah Cheng, none of the other actors underestimated Han Fei. They all knew that there had to be something about Han Fei to make Director Zhang leave such an important role to him.

After a temporary silence as the door closed, the middle-aged man with the feminine good looks put down the script, "Let's skip the pleasantries, we are all public figures so there is no need for self-introduction. Let's get into character and try to act out the first scene where the Spider first got his idea to kill." He referred to the scene where the 9 personas had gathered together for the first time. "It happened inside Spider's room, Director Zhang has done everything to remodel a similar setting for us so we should try our best to restore the Spider's original frame of thought." The middle-aged man was Bai Xian. He was a famous actor but he had no arrogant air. Everything he said and did was for the sake of the movie.

Bai Xian glanced at the clock. "We'll start at 8 pm sharp. Since this is a rehearsal, there might be some halts here and there. Do not be worried about them, just keep on going. The purpose of this exercise is for us to get used to each other's acting habits and to understand each other's styles. We'll stop and have a revision session once the dry run is over. After all, this is also a rare chance for us to learn from each other." There was still some time until 8 pm. The actors used their own method to get into character while Han Fei silently looked out the window at the night outside.

'The old man on the 5th floor has warned repeatedly to not discuss anything related to the Spider after dark, it'll lead to tragedies if you do. It is as if... an invisible ghost lives at this place.' Han Fei had reminded Director Zhang and the other crew members about it but no one seemed to mind it that much. In other words, no matter what Han Fei said or did, the show must go on.

At that moment, all Han Fei could do was to do his best to look after the others, to prevent them from falling victim to the Butterfly. Han Fei was suddenly hit by an inspiration when he studied the 8 other people in the room. 'The Spider has experienced something like this before. It was why he had decided to use murder to reach salvation, or to use salvation to achieve murder...'

The clues about the Spider floated up in his mind and intertwined together. Han Fei allowed his own memory and emotion to submerge. At that moment, he was the Spider. He was envisioning the capture of the Butterfly through the mindset of the Spider.

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The dim light fell on the different human faces and the ticking of the clock ensured that everyone was privy to the passing of time. When the two needle hands met, times appeared to roll back to more than a decade ago. The dead had returned with their memories and pain, once again kick starting their journey which was already predestined. "Every single butterfly is the soul of a once brilliant flower, coming back to search for itself." The reader closed the book. She leaned against the sofa and scanned the people around her weakly. She rarely attended parties like this, the only reason she came today was because her favorite author had invited her. Her eyes quietly travelled to the author who was sitting at the corner. Like usual, the man was silent and quiet.

"I don't understand it. We're here simply because of a letter?" The student crossed his arms. He pulled out the earphone from his ear. "I couldn't care less about whether there are ghosts in this world or not. If you guys want to prove that, go ahead. I'm leaving."

"There are definitely no ghosts in the world, but there are people who like to go around scaring others like ghosts." The brute stood at the door. His wiry body leaned firmly against it. "Before that person is captured, no one is leaving this building."

"The person's target is me, so why are you guys panicking?" The doctor pinched off his cigarette. His eyes darkened with annoyance and caution. "I don't know whether there are ghosts in this world or not but assuming if there aren't, then the person who wants to kill me is currently standing inside this room."

“But why would someone want to kill you?” Uncle Lee asked without raising his head. His eyes stayed on the medicine bottle he was holding, “Did you do something behind our backs recently?”

“I did what I did to help cure all of us.” The doctor stared at Uncle Lee as if scanning whether he was the killer or not.

“In any case, we better stay put. This building is too unsafe for us to wander about.” The teacher said gently but her gentleness was underpinned by traces of anxiety and well-hidden fear. “I’ve asked around, the neighbours all said that this place is haunted. There have been many inexplicable deaths. Non-local tenants also like to come to this place to commit suicide. They say this building is like a blackhole that only attracts those in despair.” She tried her best to persuade everyone to stay in the room, essentially away from danger. “I believe those deaths are more than mere accidents. I’ve heard many scary stories about this place, stories about monsters with a pig’s face, a stench in the corridor that wouldn’t go away no matter how hard you scrub, suicide victims who continue to crawl towards the rooftop despite their broken bodies and so on. In any case, we need to be extra careful.”

“Those have to be just rumours. After all, there are other tenants living just fine at this place, aren’t there?” The student walked to the door but the brute refused to move. The student was not afraid of ghosts, but he was afraid of the brute. With regards to the question whether ghosts existed in the world or not, the people inside the room each held their own opinion. Neither of them was able to convince the other. After a long fruitless argument, the doctor suddenly turned to the quiet author. “Author, you’re the one who first saw the letter and it was you who accepted the invitation. Do you think it was a ghost or a person who wrote to you?”

The doctor was a very clever person, his every question was laced with traps and hidden meaning. Even though he did not point it out directly, everyone present heard something from the doctor’s words, the doctor appeared to be suspecting the author. The lights in the room suddenly flickered as the electrical power fluctuated. Everyone turned to the author. Compared to everyone else, the author carried himself differently. There was something about him that was hard to describe with words. It was as if there was a noose made from rationality and madness strung around his neck. The noose dropped straight down from heaven. As it closed around the man’s neck, he was also getting closer to the ultimate truth.

Lifting his eyes, the author glanced at the doctor. The latter found himself unable to hold eye contact.

“If I intend to kill you, the 8 of us would be standing around a body discussing why you’ve committed suicide instead.” The implication was powerful and strong. It brooked no argument. “The reason I accepted the invitation was because it will help me complete the ending of my book.”

The lights in the room started to flicker again. As the author spoke, footsteps came from the outside corridor and a light stench wafted into the room. It was as if the moment the author spoke, something about the building had changed. The doctor stared at the author for a long time. His facial expression shifted a few times before it returned to normal again. Then pretending he had not challenged the author, he changed the subject, “I wish to share my experience as a warning for everyone, the killer knows how to make use of the scary rumours to kill people. After you leave this place, it’s best if you stay quietly inside your room, do not leave it until the sun rises...” Before the doctor finished, a strange sound came from the living room door. It sounded like someone scratching their nails against it. Then everyone heard the tingle of wind chime. The sound appeared to come from Room 401.

Following the wind chime came a horrid smell that oozed out from every room corner. No one knew where the smell originated from, it was as if they were standing inside a decomposing body. The student started to dry heave. The teacher and the reader frowned. The dreamer closed her mouth. Only the doctor, the author and Uncle Lee remained unfazed.

The discussion about ghost and killer reached no end, but the discomfort on their bodies continued to heighten. The student looked around trying to find the source of the smell. The Dreamer put down her pen and her face was red from holding her breath. Finally unable to stand it anymore, the student shoved the brute to the side, “Do anything you want but leave me out of it. I’m going back to my room.”

The student placed his hand on the door but when he tried to open the door, another hand fell on it to stop him. The student looked up the arm and saw the author who had magically materialized beside him. He was about to push the author away but when his hand was about to reach the author’s shoulder, he stopped. He saw the author’s face. Deep inside the serene eyes, there was a world disconnected from reality. A place where illusions, paranoia and dreams ran rampant. These were the most common symptoms in a schizophrenic patient. The author had already gotten used to them, they blurred his vision of the real world. “If you leave, you might die.”

Turning around to take in the faces of all the 8 living humans in the room, the author lightly pressed against his temples as different voices travelled into his ears. He tried his best to control himself, he worked his best to suppress the desire to howl, the ram against the door, to tear apart everything. However, each of his words made the room feel a bit more oppressive, his emotions appeared to have the ability to influence all of his sub personas.

The author reached his hands towards the student. According to the script, he was supposed to grab the student, to stop him from leaving. But reality was different from the script. The student subconsciously evaded the author's grasp, pushed open the door and ran out! This was his body instinct kicking in. He had chosen flight between fight and flight. The lines tumbled out of the student's mind, all he wanted to do then was to escape from the author's penetrating gaze.

"Come back!" The moment the door was open, the stench dissipated a lot. The oppressive tension relieved as well. The other actors looked at Han Fei and some sighed in relief. Han Fei's author was a side character but he was able to influence everyone's emotion just like the actual main persona. His amazing ability to control the set and his aura impressed Bai Xian who played the doctor, "The young actors nowadays have surprisingly good acting skill."

"It's more than that." Lee Huaiming who was unaffected by the stench and other strange events pulled out a medicine bottle from his shirt pocket. He tossed out two pills to swallow them. "His acting is like a sharp knife that can cut through superficiality and stab right into the audience's heart. He can easily influence other people's emotions and he has great mastery over his own. But I fear that he might submerge too deep into his current character, after all, the character that he plays is quite a dangerous person in real life." Both senior actors approved of Han Fei greatly. While they stood up and planned to have a further chat with Han Fei, a shrill scream came from the corridor.

This was not something that was written in the script. It yanked all the actors back into reality. All of them ran out from Room 404. They saw Xiao Tong, who played the Student, splayed out on the stairs. The steps were scattered with avian dead bodies. Some of them were dead so long ago that their feathers and blood were matted together.

"What's going on?" Hearing the scream, the doors on the 3rd floor flew open. Director Zhang and the crew rushed over. When they saw the dead bodies, Director Zhang screamed, "Who did this? Prop manager? Prop manager!"

"Director Zhang, this is not the doing of our team!" The Prop Manager hurried over to explain. "Didn't you order all of us to leave the 4th floor for the actors to rehearse?"

"It's not your team's doing?" Director Zhang had the people clear away the dead bodies and then hurried to the 4th floor. "Is everyone alright?"

"We're fine." The actors were confused, "Wait, so no one has been on the 4th floor?"

“Yes! We’ve been watching the rehearsal through the livefeed on the 3rd floor. That scene earlier was amazing.”

“Then what about the stench and the nail scratching sound?” Bai Xian was startled, he thought that was arranged by the director.

“The stench?” Director Zhang sniffed about, there was no particular stench around him. But he did not correct Bai Xian. “It was probably the doing of some of the existing tenants. We’ve given them plenty of money as compensation to borrow this building for the shoot but there is still a small number of people who refused to the arrangement.”

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“You mean the stench and the bird bodies were the doing of the tenants?” Be it Bai Xian or Director Zhang, they were experienced in this industry and had come across many different kinds of people. A movie shoot being interrupted by the locals was not that uncommon. Therefore, the explanation given by Director Zhang was saddening but acceptable. Of everyone present, only Han Fei had a dark expression. He seemed to be still stuck in his character. The scene that they just rehearsed was a plot lifted right out from the House of the Butcher, it recorded the very last time where the 9 different personas had gathered together at the same spot. This was the final dinner because soon after this dinner, the student who represented the future, happiness and anticipation would be found murdered and sent the whole building into chaos. The House of the Butcher was a play on words. In this house, everyone was a butcher, and everyone was on the chopping block.

‘The Butterfly should be familiar with this scene as well, I wonder when they will make their move.’

“Han Fei, stop standing there. I’ve prepared waiting rooms for all the actors on the 3rd floor. What do you prefer, coffee or fruit juice?” After the staircase was cleaned, Director Zhang summoned all the actors to the 3rd floor. Through a monitor, their performance earlier could be seen clearly. Director Zhang communicated with each actor, pointing out their weaknesses and strengths. For young actors, it was a valuable experience to work with Director Zhang. Eventually, Director Zhang turned to Han Fei. To be honest, he was very satisfied with Han Fei’s performance. He could not find anyone more suitable for this role than Han Fei.

“Director Zhang, is there anything I can improve on?”

“When you played the character, you stunned even Spider’s former psychiatrist. He said he could see the shadow of Spider on you, he even suspected that you might share the same illness as the Spider.” Director Zhang said with a smile. Even though his wording was less than optimum, that was meant as a praise.

“Speaking of which, can you introduce me to Spider’s psychiatrist? Perhaps I can portray this character more accurately after having a chat with him.” That was the excuse Han Fei used. His real goal though was to get to know the real Spider in preparation for his gaming sessions.

“It is really unrealistic that someone as hardworking and as talented as you haven’t caught his big break yet.” Director Zhang told Han Fei that the psychiatrist was resting in the room next door as he turned to Bai Xian and Xiao Tong. Bai Xian’s acting was flawless, he managed to evoke the internal manifestation of the character’s emotions perfectly but Director Zhang felt that as the main male character, his tempo was being led too far away by Han Fei, who was the side character. Xiao Tong though had a bigger problem. He was a good actor, but when compared to 8 other actors more experienced than he was, the lack in his skill showed conspicuously. Han Fei did not stay to listen to the lecture. He entered the designated room, and when he saw the psychiatrist, his eyes narrowed.

“Doctor Hu Wei?” Han Fei had met this male psychiatrist before. He was the doctor who was responsible for Ming Mei’s family’s mental evaluation.

“Han Fei, we meet again.” Hu Wei extended his hand to Han Fei passionately. “Do you mind giving me your autograph?” Han Fei accepted the pen and paper handed to him by the doctor but he did not sign them. Instead he asked, “Director Zhang said that you were Spider’s former doctor.”

“Not really, I was merely his pharmacist. Spider’s real psychiatrist was my mentor, at the time, I was interning with my mentor but because Spider was such a unique patient, I have a deep impression of him.”

“And your mentor is...”

“Oh, he died in an accident not too long after Spider’s death. He spent the last months of his life locked up in his home, I heard that he suffered from some psychological illnesses near the end of his life. Sigh, it’s a tragedy really. The hardest patient for a psychiatrist to treat is most often themselves, especially for someone like my mentor, who threw himself fully into his patients and work.”

Han Fei was surprised to meet Hu Wei here. The psychiatrist was perfectly under Han Fei's radar but his sudden appearance here had raised Han Fei's alarm. The questions that Han Fei originally had, he kept to himself, instead he talked about random and harmless topics with Hu Wei. The psychiatrist was perfectly at ease. If Hu Wei was acting, then his acting skill could rival the award-winning actors next door. Taking a gander at the time, Han Fei did not stay for long because he still needed to enter the game at night. After notifying Director Zhang, he left.

"Han Fei, are you getting back on your own? Do you want me to give you a lift?" Bai Xian drove his car over. "This place is quite secluded from any residential area."

"Thank you but my ride is already here." A black cruiser rolled in from the street. The officers inside it were armed with guns and bulletproof vests. That had Bai Xian drop his jaw to the floor.

"See you tomorrow, Brother Bai." After Han Fei got into the cruiser and as the car drove away, Han Fei started to report everything he had heard and seen inside the building to the officers. With his photographic memory, he memorized everyone's appearance and personality. He told the police about the freak incidents that had happened at the living compound that day. He did not hide anything. The police were Han Fei's support. He needed the law enforcement on his side to take down the Butterfly.

Han Fei reached his own home at around 10.30 pm. Lying in bed, his mind was still focused on the scene between the 9 actors. It was nigh impossible to fracture out 9 different personas in a normal person's mind. Just as Han Fei was at a loss on how to understand the Spider better and put himself in the mind of a schizophrenic patient, Director Zhang found 8 professional actors to help reconstruct Spider's past. Even though they were just re-enacting the scene, it had helped Han Fei tremendously. Initially he could not even imagine how it would be to have 9 different personas stuck in one mind but with the other actors' help, he slowly got into the groove. Schizophrenic personas were like shadows that the patient could not shake, they would be with you forever. They weaved and bound closer and closer until the patient suffocated under their collective weight.

After a quick shower, Han Fei was about to rest with a book when he received a call from Huang Yin. With the police's help, Huang Yin had returned to a normal life, at least that was the case on the surface. After thanking Han Fei again, Huang Yin got to the purpose of his call, he hoped that Han Fei could bring him into the cryptic world again that night. Hearing that voluntary request from Huang Yin suggested that he had truly walked out from that trauma. Han Fei was happy for his friend. He was afraid that Huang Yin's visits to the cryptic world would leave a permanent mental scar on him, Han Fei did not wish for his only friend to turn mad.

At midnight, Han Fei connected all the wires and put on the gaming helmet. Blood curdled and Han Fei's consciousness got sucked into the cryptic world. Opening his eyes, staring at the absolutely realistic world, Han Fei sometimes wondered if the cryptic world existed somewhere in the real world, not a virtual reality but a space occupying the same dimension as reality.

The cold wind touched his cheeks. Han Fei realized he was still at Yi Ming Private Academy. He hurried towards the field. 'According to Jin Sheng, someone at the Ziggurat has left a curse on me. I have 7 days to 1 month to live. There's no time to waste.' Han Fei planned to leave Yi Ming Private Academy and head to Cattle Alley that night. However, before he departed for the dangerous zone, he needed to complete his promise with Huang Yin. Opening the menu, Han Fei whispered the term Spirit Farer. The dark winds gathered. Blood crawled all over the menu and it split to the sides.

Ghostly visages floated among the sea of blood. Han Fei grabbed an empty one and wrote down Huang Yin's name. According to the system, there was a chance for Spirit Farer to fail or to summon something else, but for some inexplicable reason, Han Fei would always be successful when he wanted to summon Huang Yin. Han Fei did not understand it, he chalked it up to Huang Yin's hidden talent.

Blood flashed and a human figure appeared less than 10 meters away from Han Fei. He dropped clumsily to the ground and instantly curled his body together. Only his eyes were left peeking around. Han Fei thought Huang Yin had already gotten used to the cryptic world but when he saw his friend in person, he realized they still had a long way to go.

"This is just a school, there is nothing to be afraid of here." Han Fei sighed and shook his head. Han Fei used to think that these supernatural experiences were just difficult, but not that scary. However, after witnessing Huang Yin's various reactions, Han Fei realized that he was perhaps slightly different from others. At least his psychological constitution was more unshakeable than most.

Hearing Han Fei's voice, Huang Yin jumped up from the ground and rocketed to Han Fei's side. "That, that guard is not with you, right?"

"You mean Ol' Lee?" Han Fei did not expect that the person Huang Yin was most afraid of would be the honest and kind Ol' Lee. "I think there's some misunderstandings. After you get to know him, you'll see that Ol' Lee is a good person."

"No thanks, not with the mountain of ghosts on him!" Huang Yin pulled on Han Fei's sleeve. "Let's find a more secluded spot first. I've brought many things with me!"

The commotion caused by Spirit Farer had already attracted the attention of many ghosts at the school. Zhang Guanxing and Xu Qin's pet were the first to run over. Huang Yin was fine when he saw Zhang Guanxing but his legs almost buckled when he saw Xu Qin's pet. "What kind of anaconda is that?!"

The giant snake slithered over and made to climb up Han Fei's body. This further shocked Huang Yin's system.

"Don't mind it, it's perfectly harmless. What did you bring?" Han Fei led Huang Yin and Zhang Guanxing into an empty classroom.

"Yes, I've thought long and hard about this." Huang Yin opened his inventory. "The 6th CB for Perfect Life will end in a few more days, then all the beta testers' accounts will reset. All the progress we made will be lost but the photon computer does not appear to have its influence extended to the cryptic world. If it did, the cryptic world would be wiped out of existence by now. Therefore, I believe that if I bring over the stuff from the surface world and store them at this place, it means that we can safely preserve them through the version update,"

Huang Yin signalled for Han Fei to come closer and then pulled out the stuff from his inventory.

"Considering the situation of this world, I've expanded my inventory size to the maximum and stocked up on these things for you. Come and take a gander at these. I have holy water, talismans, buddha statues. Do you think they'll work? I even managed to purchase powerful artifacts like this scroll of holiness mantra, actual copy of Dao De Jing and so on from the black market."

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Seeing the talismans, vermillion dust, religious scriptures that scattered the ground, Han Fei honestly was quite touched. Of course, if Huang Yin had brought things that were more useful, he'd be more touched. "Brother Huang, you shouldn't have brought so many things with you, it makes me quite embarrassed. How about I give you some items from the cryptic world to bring back to the surface world?" Han Fei opened his inventory and realized he could have any pick he liked. There was nothing in there that did not possess some negative energy.

"That's fine, but quick, we need to see if these are effective or not!" Huang Yin picked up the bottle of holy water and shoved it to Han Fei. "To prepare these things, I've liquidated most of my assets. Some of these things are collector's items and antiques, they're quite expensive!"

“Really?” Han Fei twisted open the cap of the holy water and splashed some on Zhang Guanxing. Then both Huang Yin and Han Fei turned to look at the young man. “Well, do you feel anything?” Zhang Guanxing tried to think about it and then shook his head. “No, it felt like normal water.”

“Perhaps you used it the wrong way.” Huang Yin took the bottle back and pulled out a bamboo shoot from his inventory. He soaked the bamboo leaves in the holy water and read the instruction manuals. When he was ready, he flicked the wet bamboo stalk at Zhang Guanxing, “Reveal yourself!” With the water droplets splashing on him, Zhang Guanxing looked at Huang Yin with confusion before turning to level Han Fei a gaze which said, ‘Is something mentally wrong with your friend?’

“I bought this holy water at the auction house! I placed huge hope in it!” Huang Yin put down the holy water and then moved over the box of talismans. “I get it now. We’re in the east so the western method can’t work. We should try these then.” Playing along, Han Fei pasted the talismans all over Zhang Guanxing and Xu Qin’s pet. They were not effective at all.

“Brother Huang, I hate to say it but I think you were scammed. Even if there are actual warding relics in the world, they should be extremely rare and can’t be bought with money.” Han Fei knew that there were indeed items in the cryptic world that could ward against spirits like the talisman given to him by Meng Si and the 3 cigarettes left behind by the former manager. But how they worked was different from how Huang Yin would imagine it. They used a deeper hatred and despair to stun the offending spirits.

“Was I scammed? But these things all said that they could ward against evil spirits on their item descriptions!” Huang Yin still couldn’t accept it.

“Brother Huang, even though you still possess human emotions and consciousness as well as have living human temperature but in actuality, you’re a wandering soul. If an item in your inventory makes you feel uncomfortable, then perhaps those do work.” Han Fei did have some anticipation at the beginning but he realized such items were not so easy to come back.

“Wait, what do you mean by that? Am I dead?”

“If you stay away from your real body for too long or get stuck here, then you’ll really die.” Han Fei explained patiently, “You might not be able to return to your real body anymore.”

“You have to be kidding me.” Huang Yin surrounded himself with the items he bought. Even though they were not effective, they provided some psychological comfort for Huang Yin.

“In any case, you have a good idea and I was touched by it. Perhaps we can still make use of this loophole somehow.” Han Fei noticed that there was a backpack Huang Yin was carrying. It was bulging with stuff. “Brother Huang, what is inside that backpack?”

“Oh, these are gifts for the doctors and nurses to help raise their affection level. They are all stuff that I know they will like.” Huang Yin explained seriously, “During beta, everything about the game is sped up but it is still pretty much impossible to farm friendliness level. Therefore, I carried these things with me into this world. If the main plot hasn’t changed too much after the version update, I can use these items to brush up on their friendliness level as fast as possible.”

“You’re a genius to have figured that out but why didn’t you use that advantage on raising your level or professional skills?” Han Fei did not know what to say, “After OB, Perfect Life will definitely launch some huge event. If you can rush up the ranking speedily, then the system might award you with marvellous rewards.”

“Brother, that is where you are wrong. Perfect Life’s focus is different from the other conventional online games. Based on my insider information, the first large event won’t be about the player’s level or money but it would be related to player happiness and satisfaction.”

“Happiness and satisfaction?” Perfect Life was an Iyashikei game, Han Fei had completely forgotten about that.

“The first big event might require the players to look for their true happiness and inner satisfaction. The ranking will be set according to the rise in the player’s happiness level.” Huang Yin added, “These are all insider info, so don’t tell anyone else.”

“The rise in one’s happiness level?” Han Fei’s brain spun quickly. He glanced at Huang Yin and then scanned Yi Ming Private Academy which was shrouded in thick darkness. “Brother Huang, do you think it’s possible for this happiness value to drop below zero?”

A bad feeling rose in Huang Yin’s heart. “It should be able to. What do you have in mind?”

“Well, this is my idea.” Han Fei patted Huang Yin’s shoulder. “When the OB starts, while you make your character, I will try to drag you into the cryptic world. I will drop you into a place filled with monsters and ghosts, that way your initial happiness value will be extremely low.”

“???”

“When your happiness value cannot be lowered anymore, I’ll send you back to the surface world. I can’t help you increase your maximum limit but I can help you lower your minimum limit!” Huang Yin was speechless hearing how natural Han Fei was as he suggested this preposterous idea. Today, he finally knew what a demon looked like. “That, that does not sound like a good idea.”

“There’s no great reward without taking great risk!” Han Fei did not think there was anything wrong with his proposition, after all, he had personally done the same thing. “Brother Huang, no matter how Perfect Life will turn out to be in the future, our lives have already been changed. We need a powerful ally in the surface world and that ally can only be you.” Seeing the hesitation on Huang Yin’s face, Han Fei added in a devil’s whisper, “Don’t you want to experience how it feels like to be the man at the top in this national-scale video game?”

“After you get the event rewards, your character will become more perfect. I hear that in Perfect Life, there are many event rewards that are unique and cannot be purchased with money. Brother Huang, many people would die for a chance proffered to you!

“You only need to suffer a little bit and then you’ll have the leverage that will be the envy of all the other players.”

After taking in all Han Fei had to say, Huang Yin started to get persuaded. “You... do have a point.”

Chapter 215:

“Fate is in your hand, do you want to be a coward for life or to fight for this chance to be a hero?” After giving it some thought, Huang Yin chose the latter. He was persuaded by Han Fei. He only needed to survive for a short period of pain to yield bountiful reward. It was the same thing he did when he sat for his university exam. He studied hard and only did that for a long time and eventually he was rewarded with the success. He inherited his father’s hospital and became Xin Lu’s youngest vice hospital director.

“Hard work might not guarantee success but a lack of it ensures that you will have no chance of reaching success.”

“Han Fei, are you sure this is safe?”

“Don’t worry, all my friends are very kind... despite their looks.” Han Fei walked into the pile of stuff. “Brother Huang, as you’ve said, the levelling speed will be much slower at the surface world after the game enters OB, so you should send key mission items and skill books that can help you level up over here. That way, you’ll be able to level up faster than the rest.”

“Okay.”

“Your idea of farming friendliness level is not bad but I don’t think you should limit your target to your colleagues, you should go bigger than that.” Han Fei plucked off the talisman from Xu Qin’s pet and said calmly. “Perfect Life is a virtual metropolis built for and by humans, a place for players to fulfil their dreams. This virtual city will have many NPCs and some of them will have the power to release missions, yes? NPCs such as the mayor and the like?”

“You want me to befriend the important NPCs?” Huang Yin was once again surprised by Han Fei’s brazen thought.

“Furthermore, since the game will be fully handled by the photon computer after OB, these crucial NPCs will only be given more power. You should try to befriend all of them, it will help you greatly in the future.”

“You have a point there! Okay, I’ll go investigate the information on these NPCs and hoard their favorite items. Then I will send them here. After OB starts, I’ll shower them with these items to gain their friendliness level.” Huang Yin was excited. “But some NPCs have unique personalities. Once the player reaches maximum friendliness level with them, they will no longer befriend other players. In other words, they will only be loyal to that one player who gets into their inner circle first.”

“Interesting. In any case, that’s not all. Since the news is already out that all the account info will be wiped following the OB, no matter how valuable the items the other players currently have, they won’t care so much about them. You can thus make use of this opportunity to purchase these valuables from

them at a very low price.” Han Fei only provided Huang Yin with a general idea. Huang Yin would have to come up with the details himself, after all, Han Fei had not even played the normal version of Perfect Life even once.

“I’ll go do that now. Summon me back here in another hour!” Huang Yin kicked himself for not thinking about that sooner, he had already wasted a lot of precious time.

“Do you think I’m some kind of teleporter? I can send you here and there whenever I wish?” Han Fei chuckled sadly. “I can only do that once every night and your every single journey here is tremendously treacherous. If there’s any accident, you might end up trapped here for life.”

Hearing that, Huang Yin slowly calmed down. He looked around and curled back behind Han Fei. “Brother, you’re right. Caution is a virtue.”

After discussing all the details, Han Fei used Resurrection to send Huang Yin back. Sitting amidst the pile of talismans, Han Fei took a quick rest before he departed with Zhang Guanxing. ‘The missions at Yi Ming Private Academy have all been cleared. It’s meaningless to stay here any longer.’ He summoned Weep, Drake, and Lee Zai. With Zhang Guanxing and Xu Qin’s pet, they gathered at the front gates. The gates which were covered in dried blood appeared to be accessible to Jin Sheng and Han Fei only.

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve successfully left the hidden map!” Hearing the system notification, Han Fei heightened his alarm. For him, the highly dangerous hidden map was the safer location. Once he left the school, he would have to contend with all the unknown terrors again.

‘I haven’t been home for a long time already.’ After having all the spirits squeeze inside Weep’s urn for the moment, Han Fei hugged the urn and raced across the street. He entered the back alley of Yi Ming Convenience Store. The human shadows floated out from the wall. They had no malice towards Han Fei, they only came to greet their new boss.

Han Fei hurried back to the Happiness Neighbourhood. Han Fei ran to greet his neighbour before he returned to his home. He sat down and shared his experience with Wei Youfu who was watching the television. Han Fei had a lot of things to share. Wei Youfu had been incredibly worried about Han Fei. After seeing Han Fei back in one piece, his concern finally eased. With a smile on his face, he listened to Han Fei’s story patiently.

The last time they lost contact, Han Fei reappeared carrying the coffin of the convenience store's boss. This time though, Han Fei returned as the new Patrolling Teacher at Yi Ming Private Academy. He had gotten the ghosts at the school to agree to help the residents at Happiness Neighbourhood. From Wei Youfu's point of view, Han Fei was like a legend. He kept coming up with miracles that surprised even the dead.

"I believe I've heard the name Jin Sheng from the previous manager before. He is the actual manager of Yi Ming Private Academy." Wei Youfu tried hard to think. "The 8 of us inside Room 1044 have to combine together to have a chance of fighting him."

"Is he a Top Lingering Spirit as well?"

"I'm not sure about that, but I do know that he is different from a normal Lingering Spirit." Wei Youfu treated Han Fei as family and Han Fei felt comfortable around Wei Youfu. This was a feeling of company he never experienced in real life. "What do you plan to do next?"

"I plan to head to Cattle Alley, something is waiting for me there."

"Cattle Alley?" Something came to Wei Youfu then. "The woman on the 5th floor should be very familiar with that place, she sources a lot of her ingredients there."

"You mean Xu Qin? She's back?" Han Fei bounced up with a light in his eyes.

"No, she has been gone for quite a while already. But don't you worry about her, she's a curse amalgamation, she has many ways to look after herself." Wei Youfu comforted, "There have been instances in the past where she has been gone for a long period of time as well."

"I hope she's fine and can return home safely soon." Han Fei sat back down and his shoulders slumped with disappointment.

"This is the first time I've seen a living person so worried about a curse." Wei Youfu raised his brow at Han Fei, "Do I sense some love in the air?"

“What are you talking about? Love, admiration, affection, these are concepts that are too far away for me to grasp.” Han Fei ended the subject. Bringing along all the ghosts who were willing to follow him, he left Happiness Neighbourhood again. Pulling up the location of the Cattle Alley in his mind, Han Fei started to chart his journey. To get to Cattle Alley, he had to cross the junction and walk past another 2 blocks. If he was alone, he couldn't have crossed this distance. Thankfully he had many friends in the cryptic world. Hugging the urn tightly, Han Fei started his first actual excursion. He wanted to take a look at the scenery on the other side of the junction.

...

Lee Ruonan hadn't seen her boyfriend for a long time already. She lamented her destiny for always running into horrible partners. At the start of their relationships, they would promise to love her forever but eventually they would all silently slip away and disappear from her life. The only people who hadn't left were her parents.

“Ruonan! Go and throw out the trash! Your room is stinking up! You're already an adult, you have to know to watch these things!” The bedroom door was pushed open. Her nagging mother had no idea what privacy was. “How do you plan to find a man to marry if you keep living like this? Or you plan to live off of us forever?” Lee Ruonan very unwillingly dragged herself out from bed. She took out several large black bags from her cupboard and hauled them with difficulty out the front door. The corridor was devoid of any lights. The steps of the stairs were slightly slippery. Lee Ruonan hated this place but she had nowhere else to go.

Walking out from the corridor, she turned to look down the other side of the junction. The convenience store that she never visited appeared to be full that night. “Is there a sale going on? I heard dad say that the store has just got a new boss.” Lee Ruonan pouted. Ignoring the surroundings, she dumped the black bags inside the dumpster. “Goodbye, my love.” Perhaps she used too much force because one of the bags got torn and a heavy stench leaked out. “Sheesh, the trouble I have to go through.”

Lee Ruonan squatted before the dumpster. Just as she was wondering how to close up the hole, she heard a footstep coming from behind her. “Do you need some help?”

The magnetic male voice sent a tremor down her spine. The half-squatting Lee Ruonan turned around and her heart started to beat. An incredibly handsome face stared back at him. He was much more handsome than any of her previous boyfriends.

“No, no...” Lee Ruonan flustered as she was reminded of the fact that she was out there beside a dumpster without make-up.

“Be careful, don’t stay out here for too long. You need to take care of yourself.” After the man said that, he hugged the urn and turned to the wall beside them. The wall was covered with listing advertisements, the man appeared to be looking for a place to stay.

“Are you looking for a place to rent?” Lee Ruonan closed the lid of the dumpster and quickly straightened herself. “I know a fairly cheap and comfortable room! Please wait for me here. I’ll go ask my family about it.”

Lee Ruonan rushed back up the stairs to the 2nd floor. The man was confused. As he stood there, the door of the barbershop situated at the next building eased open. A middle-aged man poked his head out. “Hey! An advice for you, do not stay at that building no matter what. A family of 3 has died there. There was a horrible gas leakage. None of them survived.”

The man was about to say something else when he heard the returning footsteps. With a shiver, he shrunk back into his shop.

“Who were you talking to?” Lee Ruonan asked while catching her catch. “Come on, my dad has cleared a room for you.”

“You’re inviting me to stay with you? Won’t that be a trouble for your family?” The young man was shy. Hugging the urn, he looked gentle and perfectly harmless.

Chapter 216:

“Of course you won’t be any bother! I’ve already told my parents about you, they are so eager to meet you.” Lee Ruonan grabbed the man by his arm. The long-missed human warmth made the smile on her face grow brighter. She could not hide it even if she tried. She half-dragged, half-persuaded the young man to follow her to the second floor. She opened the door and the girl’s parents were already sitting behind the dining table. “Mom, dad, this here is our new tenant.”

The yellow, dim lights lit up the cozy small room. The father lifted his head to glance at the young man. He pushed on the glasses and signaled for the young man to sit. "Make yourself at home."

"Uncle, auntie, nice to meet you." The young man was very polite and appeared the perfect gentleman. Hugging the urn, he took a seat by the dining table.

"Why are you wandering around all alone at night? Do you not have anywhere else to go?" Lee Ruonan's mother had her hair up in a ponytail. She asked kindly.

"I intend to reach the end of the street. However, I heard that the road might get a bit dangerous at night so I wish to find some places where I can be safe. That way if I run into any danger, I can return to those places to hide temporarily."

"You're heading to the end of the street?" The father frowned. "I'd advise you to not go there. You should stay here for now." The father said with finality. As the man of the family, he was used to meting out orders.

"But I don't want to trouble and infringe on your kindness. I don't have much money on me and I won't be able to afford the rent."

"The rent doesn't matter, we only need you to promise us one thing." The mother stood up and moved to the young man's side. At the same time, the chain of the front door jangled. Lee Ruonan had locked the anti-theft door. "We can protect, feed you and give you a place to live. But from today onwards, you are barred from leaving this room."

"I can't leave?" The young man hesitated. "I'm fine with it but I have to ask my friends for their opinions first." The lights in the room started to flicker. When the lights were on, the family of three looked normal but when the lights were off, their eyes were all white and their expressions were twisted with malice. "Since you're already here, then you should just stay." The father's voice dipped with threat. He lifted up the lids that covered the food on the dining table. "Anyway, why don't you join us for dinner? I guarantee you'll get used to living here soon enough."

The young man turned to look at the table. The plates were filled with bugs and rotten meat.

“Come on, don’t be shy! There are plenty more in the kitchen!” The mother picked up a piece of meat and placed it in the young man’s bowl. “Give it a taste. It’s very delicious!”

“Auntie, I really don’t want to take advantage of your kindness. I think I’ll leave.” The young man made to stand up but the lights inside the room went off completely. A strange sound came out from the dark...

Lee Ruonan dragged a chain out from her bedroom. She had put on a new dress and the smile on her face was maniacally happy. “This time, I will make sure that you will never disappear from my sight again.”

“A chain can’t keep a man’s heart. As long as he still has his limbs, he will still escape.” The mother ruffled Lee Ruonan’s hair lovingly. She took out a knife from the kitchen. Their faces were drained of blood and their rationality was being slowly consumed. “Stay, we will keep you so well fed.” Lee Ruonan said towards the empty space beside the young man, she seemed to be talking to herself. “Don’t worry about that, I can help spoon feed you from now on.”

Seeing the knife, the young man knew that it was pointless to argue anymore. “Are you sure that we can stay here? For as long as we want?”

“Yes, you can stay! And you will stay here forever!” The skin on the family of 3 started to decompose. When they surrounded the young man, the young man suddenly calmed down. “This is the first time I’ve heard such a strange request.” He opened the urn and said, “Come on out! The owner has given us the permission to stay here forever, this place will be our home in the future.” The last shaft of light was distorted and the temperature dropped to zero.

“Who are you talking to?” The father was the first to sense the problem. Just as he uttered that question, the sound of a child’s crying echoed inside the house. Then pairs of arms reached out from inside the urn!

The Lingering Spirits expanded to their full size and the heady smell of blood overwhelmed the stench of decomposition. The group of Lingering Spirits instantly crowded the living room. The young man placed the chopsticks down. He leaned against the back of his chair as his eyes scanned the family of 3 serenely. The same kind and friendly smile hung on his face. “Auntie, we’ll be a real family from now on.”

Being surrounded by so many Lingering Spirits, the family of 3 almost cracked. "Since we're family now, please don't just stand there, sit, sit." The family of 3 were pressed back down into their seats. They did not know how to face the young man. After a long time, the bespectacled father coughed awkwardly and said, "I'm sorry but I think my place is a bit too small to fit so many..."

"It's fine, we don't mind it." Han Fei drummed his fingers on the table as if thinking of something. Since he did not say anything, the family did not dare to raise any objection. But the father and mother were furiously exchanging looks with their eyes. Then both of them stared daggers at Lee Ruonan. It was one thing to stay single after marriageable age but to bring a life-ending threat back home?!

"To be honest, I came in peace. Even though you meant to hurt me, I am a forgiving person." The young man's words gave the family hope. "Let's see. First, you threatened to kill me, but I'll overlook that. Now, I am more than capable of wiping out your existence but I won't do that. Doesn't that mean that I've essentially saved your life? Doesn't that you mean that all three of you owe me a life each?" The young man spoke quickly and convinced the family with his 'logic'. "Like what I said earlier, my goal is to reach the other end of the street. I need a few locations to turn into my safehouses. If you are willing to help, then we will be friends and family in the future. But if you don't, then you leave me with no choice..."

"Of course, of course we are willing to help! Please come back any time, we will provide the safest place for you and your friends to rest!" Lee Ruonan's father reacted quickly.

"You will eventually realize how correct your choice was." The young man took out a blood red paper doll from his pocket. He tore out a small piece of the blood-soaked paper and fed it to the father. At the same time, the robotic voice announced, "Notification for Player 0000! You've completed Grade G Hidden Mission, the Inescapable Home. Mission completion rate is less than 90 percent, obtained 1 free skill point, friendliness with Lee Ruonan's family of 3 increases by 10. You've identified 1 extra building on the map! Identify 10 buildings and you'll get the beginner's reward from map exploration!"

The young man was none other than Han Fei. He knew that his way of tackling the mission would lead to a low completion rate but he did not have the time to explore the mission slowly anymore. Furthermore, he was already level 10. Grade G Missions would not give him anymore valuable rewards. Han Fei now was aiming for Grade F Missions only. Walking to the window, Han Fei glanced out. Lee Ruonan's building was on the street opposite from the junction. The location was strategic. 'This is the first building I've taken down at this side of the street. I'll slowly clean up this place and make more friends.'

Since Han Fei had completed a mission, he could be more brazen. He could leave the game at any time. After having all the ghosts return back to the urn, Han Fei left the small home. He was not someone who killed for no reason. As long as the other party could be reasoned with, Han Fei would try to befriend them. If they were unwilling, then he would only have the ghosts to come do the persuasion for him.

Han Fei had formulated a mature identification system. He would use himself as a bait to test out the level of rationality in the 'people' he came across. Actually, before he ran into Lee Ruonan, Han Fei had already encountered several Animated Regrets and 1 Lingering Spirit, but they were now all inside Weep, Drake and the rest's stomach. After following Han Fei around for the better of the night, Weep and Drake had improved greatly. Drake's wounds had fully healed, the presence he gave off was stronger than before. His single eye appeared to gain new power as well.

Weep's status though was more unique. This tortured boy was different from the normal lingering spirit. Normally the stronger the ghost, the bigger they would be. Weep was the complete opposite. He folded all the pain and hatred within him. He kept them suppressed. In terms of appearance, he looked even more fragile than Han Fei first met him but his cries were much more harrowing than before.

"Come, let's go find these new buildings. I'll identify 10 buildings tonight itself." Most of the ghosts in the cryptic world would stay at one location, and had their presence slowly pervade their haunt of choice. The best example was the tenants at Happiness Neighbourhood. But now that Han Fei had arrived, he couldn't care less about the established rules. In his eyes, there were only friends or foes. To survive, he could be an angel or a demon. After all the spirits crawled back into the urn, Han Fei returned to assuming the identity of a polite and harmless young man.

He was about to leave when the door to the barbershop next door opened again. The middle-aged man poked his head out carefully. "You managed to survive the encounter with the family?"

Hearing the man, Han Fei reacted with shock and panic. With great gasping breaths, he hurried to the barbershop. "That whole family is crazy, they wanted to kill me. I only managed to escape because they were not paying me too much attention!"

"Then they will definitely chase after you. How about you come in to hide from them?" A trace of malice and greed crossed the middle-aged man's eyes and his face was decorated with an excited grin.

Chapter 217:

'Nocturnal Barbershop? That's a curious name for a business.' Seeing as shredded hair scattered every inch of the ground, Han Fei did not know where to plant his feet. This was definitely the dirtiest barbershop he had ever visited. After Han Fei entered the shop, the man turned around to close the front door. They were the only 2 people left inside the room. The cracked mirrors reflected Han Fei's face, the fear in his eyes was almost pouring out. The atmosphere in the room turned increasingly oppressive. The middle-aged man revealed his malice, he took out a pair of scissors from the counter.

"Young man, it's easy to run into ghosts wandering around alone at night." The sharp blade snipped noisily. Earlier Han Fei did not notice that the middle-aged man's fingers had all been snipped away. They were then individually sewn back together with stitches. They looked horrifying.

"Thank you for saving my life. That family is crazy. They plan to chop off my limbs so that I will stay with them forever." Han Fei's voice was filled with appreciation. He did not seem to realize the true problem yet. For all intent and purpose, he looked like he was still reeling from the earlier scare.

"They are indeed a family of crazies, but..." The man's head slowly turned around, "If you've stayed with them, you'll at least be kept alive but now you've lost that chance." With a strange cackle coming out from his mouth, the man's eyes were filled with joy and excitement. He could not believe his luck. "This shop's original owner has gone to the Cattle Alley so he needed someone to look over the shop for him. Therefore, he turned me into a living doll. Look at the stitches on my arm, the cuts on my legs and finally, take a gander at my face!"

While still holding the scissors, the man started to display the scars on his body to Han Fei. Tight stitches patched his body together, the middle-aged man was like a ragdoll that was sewn out of human skin. The middle-aged man was made crazy by the constant sting of pain. He needed desperately to vent. To do that, he intended to replicate that pain on Han Fei.

"I will turn you into my resemblance so that you can take my place to look over this shop. But don't worry, I am not as cruel as the owner, I will only slice through your chest and neck." The man said as he trundled towards Han Fei.

"Wait, so you're not the owner of this place?" The fear on Han Fei's face slowly faded away. "I do wish to meet him in person, he must be quite impressive to be able to start a business here. Furthermore, barbershop is quite a unique choice of business."

"Acting dumb won't work on me. Do you have any last words?" The threads on the man's face were unravelling. His body was stuffed with bloody hair.

“Now that I have a closer look, the boss did have quite a good hand with needlework.” Han Fei made himself look harmless to prevent being ambushed by Top Linger Spirit. After all, there was danger at every corner in the cryptic world and the role of prey and predator could be switched at any moment. Now that he was certain the barbershop’s real boss was not around, he did not need to continue acting anymore. Opening the urn, Han Fei allowed Weep and Drake to go ham. The two lingering spirits easily took down the middle-aged man. “The boss of Nocturnal Barbershop has gone to the Cattle alley, I might run into him there. Leave the human skin doll behind, we might still have use for it.”

Han Fei picked up the man from the ground. The man’s Yin energy had been consumed by Weep, he now was a tattered skein of skin. Activating Soul-depth touch, Han Fei could feel deep fear and anxiety from the middle-aged man, the fear was inspired by someone deep inside his heart. Ever since he levelled up Soul-depth Touch, Han Fei could feel more palpable emotions. He could even reconstruct the ghost’s fragmented memory from reaching into their hearts. ‘From the man’s impression, the barbershop’s boss is extremely powerful, he is more powerful than a normal Linger Spirit!’

With his neighbours’ help, Han Fei could deal with a normal Linger Spirit easily. A medium Linger Spirit was slightly tougher but with good coordination, they could still take them down. But if they ran into a Top Linger Spirit like Little Eight and Jin Sheng, they should consider themselves lucky if they managed to escape alive.

After folding the man’s skin into a travel size package, Han Fei stuffed it into the urn. Then he had Drake inspect the stuff inside the shop. Drake had worked for a long time at the convenience store, so he had a discerning eye for valuable stuff. He could often spy treasures that normal ghosts would miss. “Boss, the wigs inside this shop contain heavy negative energy.” Drake led Han Fei deeper into the shop. There was a bedroom behind there. When they pulled back the bedsheet, everyone was shocked. A normal barbershop would help their customer trim and model their hair but this shop shaved their customers’ heads. The boss captured his customers off the street, shaved off their heads and then used their bodies as nutrients to cultivate and nurture the hair. These hairs were suffused with deep Yin energy, they were as tight and as sturdy as ropes.

“Are the Yin energy on these hairs usable to you?”

“Yes.”

“Then what are you waiting for? Drain them all and then we need to leave! If the boss returns now and finds us in here, we won’t be able to explain our way out of it.” Instead of mannequin heads, the

barbershop used actual human heads as décor. The human heads had fear frozen on their faces, Han Fei was helping them seek salvation. Han Fei did not expect a small barbershop to be filled with so many dead bodies and Yin energy. The barbershop boss appeared to be planning something big.

After absorbing the last trace of Yin energy, Weep's body started to change. A child's crying echoed around them. All the Lingering Spirits within 10 metres radius were affected. Sadness, pain, despair gushed out from their hearts and slammed against their rationality like waves. The air dampened with negative energy. All the happiness and joy in the world had been sucked out of existence. It was as if God had turned the switch on human emotions and humans as well as ghosts were no longer able to taste joy.

With blood tears oozing out from his eyes, Weep reached out his small hands to pick up the ceremonial urn. He sought out a wrinkled picture from the bottom of the urn. The picture captured a shy young boy. An adult which had their face rubbed off stood next to the boy. The negative energy was palpable as the pair of bloody eyes stared at the picture. Weep had attempted to destroy this very picture that reminded himself of his horrible life in the past but he failed to do so. Even now, he could not bring himself to do it.

The picture seemed to represent something important in Weep's memory. He thought after he became stronger, he could destroy that thing but reality proved that he was still too powerless to do it. His nails scratched through his skin. Despair and pain pulled his nerves taut. Thorns started to pierce through his thin body, they twirled around his body like briar.

The thorns which were sharper than knives were morphed from pain and despair. Weep who had consumed a large amount of Yin energy appeared to have gained a new power. He could not only affect other people's emotion but he could now manifest his sadness and pain in another form.

'The stronger the Lingering Spirit, the deeper the pain and despair in their hearts will become?' Han Fei was familiar with Weep's past. Reaching out to touch the arm covered with thorns, Han Fei squatted down beside Weep. "Don't worry, I'm sure one day you'll accomplish the goal you set out to do. And we will be there with you all along the way."

Chapter 218:

Han Fei could plainly see Weep's desire to grow stronger. He was willing to leave Happiness Neighbour, to follow Han Fei into dangerous situations, to pay heavy prices to achieve that goal. But the reality was even after he had gotten stronger, Weep was still unable to face that particular memory from his past.

He suppressed all the despair deep inside him, compressing his soul as much as he could. However, the sadness would not go away, instead it materialized into thorns and pierced through his skin, turning him into a literal unapproachable monster.

Han Fei's hands were cut from the thorns but he did not mind it. Compared to Weep's pain, that was nothing. He did not say anything more, company was the best comfort. Weep was lucky to have run into Han Fei or else he'd eventually turn into a brutal monster. Unable to face his own memory, he would evolve into something that even he himself would not recognize to run away from his own past. The thorns on his body slowly subsided. Weep did not want to injure Han Fei and because of that, he started to learn how to control the retractable thorns. Weep slowly calmed down. The haze of sadness dissipated and Weep returned back to normal.

"He has gained a breakthrough?" Drake was shocked. The tiny Weep gave off a presence that was much stronger than his size suggested. "He looks so weak but he's much scarier than a medium Lingered Spirit."

"What do you mean by a medium Lingered Spirit? Can you give me some specifics?" Han Fei was curious about Weep's current power level as well.

"Well, I am myself a medium Lingered Spirit, I look about the same size of a normal person. Bigger than me will be the Large Lingered Spirits, examples include the bride and the female teacher from Yi Ming Private Academy. Even if they keep their presence fully enclosed, they will be much larger than a normal person. Beyond that will be a Top Lingered Spirit, they are just one step away from evolving into pure hatreds, they can only be described as walking horrors." Drake was extremely loyal to Han Fei. He would try his best to answer any question Han Fei had. "But at this city, body size is just a reference to determine one's power level. There are many other spirits who are deceptively strong despite their appearance, take for example, the former convenience store boss. It could fight with a Large Lingered Spirit with no problem, it might even win. If it was not tripped up by the tenants at the Ziggurat that day, you would not have any chance of taking it down."

"Understood, I need to treat everything with caution." Han Fei had the spirits return to the urn. After he cleaned up everything inside the barbershop, he left. Following the map left behind by the previous manager, Han Fei hugged the urn, and continued his way down the street. The city shrouded in darkness emitted a strange presence. Most of the shops which lined the street were closed. There were not many business owners who dared to open for business at this place. After Han Fei crossed the apartment, the barbershop and a few empty stores, he stopped. Drake and Weep inside the urn kept sending him warning, to tell him to avoid the building which was coming up. This was the first time this had happened.

'Yi Ming Pet Clinic? Is that a pet store?' The storefront was warmly decorated. The sign was pink and the glass door was filled with pictures of many cats and dogs. It looked cute. 'At this place, the more unassuming something is, the more dangerous they normally are.'

Han Fei's main goal was to get his profession. Since both Drake and Weep warned him to stay away, then he would heed their advice. However, that did not mean that Han Fei would forget about it. Han Fei's plan was to go for the weaker ones first. After he had cleaned up the weaker spirits around the area, he would return to this place. Han Fei was tackling the situation like a business management game. He would consolidate his influence around the nearby businesses first before coming back to conscript this pet shop into his empire. Throughout this process, he would also help his neighbours, employees and family get over their pain and despair, this was truly an Iyashikei game. Holding his breath, Han Fei hurried away from the pet store. He walked for another 10 minutes before Drake gave another warning.

The street where Yi Ming Convenience Store and Happiness Neighbourhood was located was appropriately called Yi Ming Street. By now, Han Fei had almost reached the end of the street. At the intersection where Yi Ming Street crossed with another street sat an old-fashioned cinema. The cinema had a strange name, it was called Heaven. Han Fei felt the name sounded familiar. He opened his inventory and found the work id for Heaven Cinema and a group photo.

When Han Fei just started the game, there were still non-locals at Happiness Neighbourhood Block 1. Han Fei acquired these things from one of the non-locals. It was worth noting that Han Fei was required to visit Cinema Heaven to trigger missions related to the profession of actor but for now, Han Fei did not wish to explore a location where he had no information about at all. Furthermore, compared to an actor, Han Fei was still more attracted by the profession of Midnight Butcher.

Marking down the location of Heaven Cinema, Han Fei moved away from it and turned into the other street. The city appeared to stretch into the darkness indefinitely.

This new street had bad urban planning. Many of the buildings were squeezed together and strange noises kept coming out from them. The warnings from Weep and Drake came more frequently and it caused Han Fei's heart to quiver even more. 'According to the previous manager's map, we should be there soon!'

The buildings which lined the streets became older and more dilapidated. The surroundings became quieter. Bloody red eyes appeared to open in the dark. Things moved in the seemingly empty alleys. After trekking for about 5 minutes, Han Fei reached the back of an old building. The map marked this

place out as Cattle Alley but strangely enough, there was no alley, only a dumpling store that enjoyed quite good business.

Fresh Meat was written on the bright red sign. The delicious smell of meat wafted out from inside the eatery. 'The Cattle Alley is behind this shop? Or I've already arrived at Cattle Alley? Why didn't the system give me any notification?' All the buildings Han Fei had come across so far radiated an extremely dangerous presence but this dumpling store was different. It was business as usual here. There were customers milling about.

'Drake did not give me any warning so this place should be safe.' Han Fei slowly walked out from the shadows. He entered the dumpling shop. He was immediately engulfed by the delectable smell of meat. The smell activated and stimulated Han Fei's taste buds. He was gripped by a sensation that he honestly had not felt since he started this game... hunger. And the sensation was getting stronger by the seconds.

After checking up on the spirits inside the urn, Han Fei discovered something even more surprising. The spirits were affected by it as well and they were influenced by the hunger more acutely than Han Fei was.

Chapter 219:

Lanterns with the chinese character for Meat hung from the ceiling. The simple wooden tables were painted dark red. Unrecognizable bugs crawled between the cracks in the ground. The smell of meat assaulted one's senses. Han Fei stood at the door and his instinct told him that the shop was not safe.

From the outside, the dumpling shop looked unassuming but once Han Fei stepped through the door, he realized the interior was much larger than he anticipated. The haphazardly arranged tables still had food residue and oil stains visible on them. The empty tables looked like they had just been vacated and the servers still hadn't had the chance to clean them. Han Fei looked around and took in the other customers. The other customers though did not show much interest in Han Fei. Their focus was fully on the food. They shovelled the food into their gullets like they had been starving for days.

"This way please." Standing at the door, Han Fei who hesitated about his next step, suddenly was greeted by a man's voice. Han Fei turned to the voice and saw a man wearing a pig's mask walk out from the curtain that supposedly led to the kitchen. He was carrying a large tray that had 3 lidded bowls. The delicious smell wafted out from underneath the bowls. "Please take a seat. What would you like to eat?"

The man served the 3 bowls to a table occupied by a single customer. The customer directly pulled the lids off and used his bare hands to grab at the food inside the bowls. He engorged himself on the food. Based on the large stomach that looked like it was about to burst and the towers of empty bowls on the table, the customer appeared to be here for a long time already.

"I'm sorry but do you mind if I ask you a question?" Han Fei halted at the front door. His heart shivered, staring at the man in the pig's mask. While Weep and Drake did not give off any alarm, it did not mean that there wasn't any danger, it might simply mean that their senses were disrupted by some other influences.

"There's always time for questions after you have some food in you. I'm sure you must be hungry already!" The man pulled out an oily rag to clean the table. Han Fei took a seat that was close to the front door. Han Fei couldn't help but perceive a more sinister meaning behind the man's words. The man in the pig's mask sounded welcoming and kind but he gave off the presence of an executioner. A butcher would carry the smell of blood and fat around them after working in a slaughterhouse for a long time; it was the same thing with an executioner. The only difference was the former worked with animals while the latter with humans.

"The menu is on the wall. Do have a look." The man stood beside Han Fei. Being scrutinized by the strange face, Han Fei was discomforted. He felt like it was not a pair of human eyes that stared at him from behind the mask.

"Then, I'll have a bowl of fresh meat dumplings." Han Fei pointed at the recommended item.

"Just 1 bowl?" The man did not leave. His eyes wandered to the urn Han Fei was holding, "1 bowl might not be enough."

"We'll just try 1 bowl for now. We'll order more if we like the taste." Han Fei answered without a shift to his expression even though his heart was shaking. The man managed to identify the spirits inside the urn.

"Alright then." The man nodded agreeably. He gave the table another wipe with the rag. "One moment." He placed a thermos before Han Fei. "You can find an assortment of tea leaves at the front counter. But I'm afraid you'll have to prepare them yourself." Then he turned to shout at the direction of the kitchen, "One bowl of fresh meat dumplings please!"

After the man in the mask left, Han Fei hurriedly opened the urn to communicate with Drake. But when he saw what was happening inside the urn, Han Fei noticed how awful the situation was. Han Fei merely felt pangs of hunger but the spirits inside the urn had taken bites out of their own bodies. Their last shred of rationality was grinded down by the torment of hunger. Their eyes were mad with gluttonous desire.

‘This shop is cursed!’ Tearing at their own bodies, the spirits desperately needed to eat. They had to consume to remain sane. Their current state reminded Han Fei of Xu Qin at the verge of madness. Last time when Xu Qin exhausted all of her power, and the curses exploded all over her body, she had to consume all the food inside her home before she returned to normal. ‘If I stay here any longer, I’m afraid they will start to go after one another.’

Lingering Spirits were made from pain and despair, it was already hard for them to remain sane. This situation was basically driving them to go mad. Hunger was the element that could most easily evoke malice and madness. When one was extremely hungry, one could do anything. Han Fei stood up and prepared to leave when the front door was shoved open.

A chill wind dispersed the smell of meat inside the shop. A middle-aged man with pale face and long hair stepped into the store. He wore a pure black shirt, the shirt appeared to be weaved out of hair. The shirt carried strange patterns which upon closer inspection would reveal themselves as human faces.

‘Things can’t be that coincidental, right?’ The middle-aged man was carrying a blood-stained wooden case. He had a horrid stench about him. The smell was a mixture of perfume and decomposition. After he entered the shop, the man found a random table to sit. Then he opened the wooden case. Instantly the smell of meat was overwhelmed by the smell of blood. The customer close to him even stopped to glance dumbly at the middle-aged man. The latter did not seem to mind all the attention. When the worker in the pig’s mask came out from the back kitchen, the middle-aged man reached into the case and took out a human head.

“Is this him?” The worker studied the head. His pig’s mask was morphing with minute expression, it looked like he was smiling. “Close but no cigar.”

Hearing that answer, the middle-aged man tossed the head harshly back into the case. “Who the hell is the butcher? This was already the 4th one. To get this, I was even targeted by that mad woman.”

“She’s still not dead?”

“No, but she’ll be soon.” The middle-aged man said darkly. With hatred in his eyes, he took out a table knife from the wooden case. “I’ve swiped one of her knives from her. Her curse is not complete anymore.” The pale finger was nicked by the blade and blood leaked out. However, the middle-aged man did not let go, if anything, he gripped the knife tighter. “There is nothing more that I hate more than curses!”

“Don’t be mad, how about you eat something to calm down?” The worker suggested kindly.

“You’re not going to get me that easily. Your meat here...” The middle-aged man halted when he saw the dangerous glint in the worker’s eyes. Instead, he closed the wooden case and headed towards the door. The worker did not stop him and returned to the kitchen. “Such a difficult customer.”

The middle-aged man escaped from the dumpling shop. Han Fei followed closely behind him. To be honest, the middle-aged man already noticed Han Fei when he first stepped into the shop. The young man made him feel uncomfortable but he could not place his finger on the reason why. Turning into a smaller alley, the middle-aged man stopped when he realized Han Fei was still trailing behind him.

“This should be the first time we’ve met, yes?” The middle-aged man turned to stare at Han Fei. His voice was cutting and cold.

“Uncle, I have some questions for you.” Han Fei’s eyes fixated on the wooden case. “Where did you get the table knife that you took out in the shop earlier?”

“I pulled it out from a dead person.” The middle-aged man sensed a few more presences in the alley with them and he was not delighted by it.

“My friends are at the brink of insanity, I can’t promise what they might do next, so I’d advise you to answer my questions honestly while we can still communicate reasonably. Let’s not do anything that any of us might regret.” Han Fei stared at the man’s face. His face was scarily devoid of expression.

“Move away, I’m going home.” The man with long hair gripped the wooden case tighter. He did not look like he was going to cooperate. He glared back at Han Fei.

“Sorry, can’t do that. If you don’t give us a satisfactory explanation, the only place you’re going tonight is inside this small container.” The giant black anaconda slithered into the ghost tattoo as Han Fei took out the red paper doll from his inventory.

Chapter 220:

The red paper doll swayed as it stood up from the ground. It radiated an aura of misfortune. The long-haired middle-aged man considered just bulldozing his way through Han Fei, that was until he saw the paper doll’s face. The face of the doll exuded a heart-wrenching beauty, how could a doll be so beautiful?

Chill jolted through his body, this face couldn’t have been more familiar to the middle-aged man. The unique beauty represented extreme cruelty and danger, he refused to even bring up that name in his mind.

“What is your relationship with her?” After the paper doll’s appearance, even the middle-aged man’s voice had changed, he was preparing for the worst.

“To put it simply, we’re just simply neighbours.”

“Neighbours?” A trace of confusion crossed the middle-aged man’s eyes. There were different kinds of bonds in the cryptic world, but they were mostly secured by curses. Even a biological relationship couldn’t be fully trusted in this world but now Han Fei was threatening his life for the sake of a neighbour? The middle-aged man refused to believe that. He was confident that Han Fei was merely using that as an excuse to attack him. He couldn’t fathom the idea that Han Fei truly cared about the woman. Furthermore, the long-haired man couldn’t believe that someone in this world would ever show concern towards that crazy, gluttonous woman.

The shirt made from hair emitted a strong smell of decomposition. The human face patterns started to grimace in pain. Every single hair the man was wearing came from a dead spirit, they were rife with resentment.

“Looks like you really do not wish to answer.” The black anaconda which had consumed a large amount of Yin energy had fully coiled inside the ghost tattoo. The surface of Han Fei’s skin chilled so much that it started to form ice crystals. This was extremely painful for a living human but Han Fei’s face showed not

even a trace of discomfort, instead it was colored by concern and madness. "Never mind, I shall make you speak."

Even if he was alone, Han Fei would do everything within his power to stop the man, much less when he had his friends' support. Han Fei sometimes operated on a simple philosophy, if you had once helped me, then I would repay the favor when you were in trouble. When Han Fei first arrived at Happiness Neighbourhood, Xu Qin had helped him more than once. Han Fei did not forget about them. Later, Xu Qin even helped him master the control of the red paper doll. Han Fei remembered the scene as fresh as it had just happened yesterday. Xu Qin used the table knife to pierce through her palm and the paper doll so that her blood would soak the doll completely. It was all thanks to Xu Qin that Han Fei who was just level 10 could control the Grade F Cursed Object.

"Attack!" Without any warning, several chilling presences charged at the long-haired man. The attacks came from all directions and there were so many of them. When Han Fei followed the man out from the dumpling shop, he already decided to make this move. He released the ghosts out from the urn and had them hide around the alley. Han Fei was no longer the innocent new player. He knew the rules of this city. To know the truth, the best method was to ensure that the other party wouldn't dare to lie to you. From the start, he never thought to settle this peacefully because this involved Xu Qin. He didn't dare to be too careless. The negotiation earlier was just a ploy for his neighbours to get into place.

The sound of crying entered his ears, the man could not tell where it came from. The enemy could have appeared from anywhere. His senses were muddled by the constant crying. Slowly, all the man could hear was the weeping, the sound that was driving him mad.

"You..." The long-haired man did not expect Han Fei to launch a sudden ambush while in the middle of conversation. He had lost the first strike and was cornered into the defensive. The long-haired man was already weakened after a trip from the Cattle Alley. Now he was surrounded, the situation was very bad for him.

To capture the ringleader to capture all his followers, instead of engaging in the brawl, the long-haired man decided to mark out a singular target. The chilling gaze shot at Han Fei. The man's clothes morphed into curtains of hair. The man rapidly aged as he injected his energy into the black hair. Seeing the middle-aged man charge at him, Han Fei did not panic. After all, he had fought the berserk Zhang Guanxing at close quarter before. With that experience, he became more confident in battle.

In the cryptic world, Han Fei was a unique existence. He was the weakest person but also the most fearless, someone who would confuse most citizens of the cryptic world. Without evading, Han Fei assumed the standard fighting posture. The ghost tattoo shrunk into his skin but the man showed no

sign of pain. When the middle-aged man was 2 meters within him, Han Fei's muscles exploded with energy.

A side whip kick landed on the middle-aged man's waist. A large chunk of his body which was shielded by the hair sunk into the body. With bulging eyes, the man stared at his own body with disbelief. He could not understand how something which was so freshly alive managed to damage his body that was made from hatred and pain. He felt something uncovering the secrets within his heart. The young man's attack appeared to possess the ability to slip through his best defence and unlock the deepest secret within his heart...

The black hair curled around Han Fei's leg but to his further surprise, the young man appeared to have lost his mind. Ignoring his own safety, he grabbed the hair and attempted to use a grappling skill on a ghost!

To be fair, Han Fei could leave the game at any time. He could evade the fatal attack before it was delivered. Fear the man who had nothing to lose. If Han Fei encountered the long-haired man alone, he might not have chosen this tactic but with his neighbour's help, what Han Fei needed to do was to buy time for his neighbours to surround the enemy. Crying continued to muddle the middle-aged man's mind. Before the middle-aged man could find the chance to kill Han Fei, a paper face materialized before him. Lowering his head to look, the bloody paper doll had crawled onto his chest. The paper doll looked just like the scariest woman inside Cattle Alley. His personal nightmare was brought back to life. The arresting beauty represented tragedy and misfortune.

"Why is the doll suffused with the same curse?" The woman herself was a curse amalgamation, to the long-haired man's surprise, the curse on the paper doll was not weaker than that of the woman's. "What is going on? Why are there suddenly so many ghosts and curses coming out to help that woman?!" This was unimaginable in the cryptic world. The long-haired man was confused. 'Have all these ghosts lost their mind? Why would they cooperate to help a cruel and crazy curse amalgamation?'

At this place, selfishness was the natural way of things. He could not believe that different ghosts would gather together to help a singular individual. The clothes made from hair were pierced through. His consciousness continued to waver due to the crying. When he planned to use his own power, something slammed into his back. A rotund monster rammed into his back. The part which was touched by the monster started to corrode. The corroding soul morphed into wiggling black worms the size of a human thumb. These things were called Tragedy Worms, they were extremely sensitive to imminent tragedy. They were the opportunistic scavengers of the cryptic world.

If he did not launch a counter now, he wouldn't have any chance in the future. The long-haired man opened the wooden case. The human heads rolled to the ground and he allowed them to scatter everywhere. Instead he picked out a rusted scissors from inside the blood-soaked case. The scissors looked rusted, too dull to even cut through paper but when the blades slashed Lee Zai and Lee Huo's body, their souls were cut. 'The scissors appear to be the hairdresser's actual essence!'

There were more than one pair of scissors kept inside the wooden case. Normally they were soaked in blood and sealed inside the case. When the man's hands closed around the scissors, his mind instantly went unhinged and his eyes turned red. He munched hungrily at his own hair and started to ramble people's names.

"Notification for Player 0000! You've triggered a Unique Grade G Hidden Mission—the Hairdresser.

"The Hairdresser (Lingering Spirit): The hardworking man opened a barbershop at the corner of the street. He loved his job because he harboured a little-known secret, he has serious hair fetish.

"Touching, sniffing and licking hair would bring him immense joy. Eventually dealing with hair during his work couldn't satisfy him anymore. He needed to gain access to more hair from different people. He wanted to use these hairs to weave out a cocoon and wrap himself inside it.

"Mission requirement: Kill the hairdresser and destroy his scissors. Help release the souls trapped inside the scissors; help the hairdresser to complete his lifelong dream. Help him collect hair to make a hair cocoon."

Without hesitation, Han Fei chose the former. 'When you're dead, there's no need to worry about the fetish anymore.'

Being surrounded by several Lingering Spirits, including Weep who just got his breakthrough, it was already impressive for the hairdresser to survive until now. His body was infiltrated by the paper doll. The smile on the doll's face was constant and alluring. It tried to crawl into his wounds. The hairdresser defended for as long as he could before an opening was given to the doll. The shredded paper crawled into his flesh and squeezed into his soul. The consciousness which was tormented by crying, now suffered a new kind of pain. It felt like his eyes were stuffed with paper shreds. He wanted to gauge the paper out but even if he stuck his hands into his wounds, he could not reach the paper which had travelled into his soul.

It was the hairdresser's misfortune to have run into this group of people. He lamented his fate. He had not done anything wrong, he merely entered a dumpling shop and opened his wooden case. 'Are they really doing this for that woman? Because they are neighbours? What kind of crazy neighbourhood do they come from?!