

## Iyashikei 361

### Chapter 361

#### 361 Paper Doll Procession

“The lyrics of the song have to do with soul summoning and the dirge has to do with that as well. They both ring out on the Night of Resurrection, is that a coincidence?” Han Fei shivered when he considered the fact that his enemy might have foreseen this. How was he going to fight someone who could predict the future?

The dirge came closer to him in the stairwell. He resisted the fear and poked his head out the banister and looked up. On the 10th floor, there was a trail of white lanterns swaying. Intensely white pairs of hands settled on the rusted banister. They looked like the hands of paper dolls.

‘A paper doll funeral procession?’ The dirge was still a distance away from the 4th floor. Han Fei decided to rush to the 6th floor before the dirge arrived. It would be best if he could get into Room 4064 before then. Han Fei made his move immediately with no hesitation. ‘Since I can’t log out from the game for most of the night, I’ll have to be extra careful.’

The dirge got louder. Most residents were hiding inside their room but Han Fei ran towards the dirge, heading to the 6th floor. When Han Fei covered the last few steps, the dirge was already right about him, they were extremely close to each other.

‘Quick!’ He pulled on the safety door but before he entered the corridor, he looked up. Colorful paper faces looked out from above at Han Fei. The painted faces lit up due to the light from the lanterns. They were paper dolls but they looked so alive. Han Fei shivered being stared at by the dolls. He didn’t stay to make more observations and rushed into the 6th floor corridor.

‘Paper dolls! They are all paper dolls! They are similar to the paper doll boss at Yi Ming Convenience Store but they are also much larger than it was!’ The dirge was very close to him. Han Fei didn’t dare to turn back as he raced down the 6th floor corridor. But as he ran down the corridor, he noticed the corridor was not less creepy than the paper doll procession.

### Chapter 362

#### 362 What is Death?

Seeing as the boy put his guard down, Han Fei sighed in relief. Then he had the time to look around. The wall of Room 4064 was painted white. It was a unique kind of paint because as the light shone on it, it did not reflect the warmth of the light, but instead made the room cooler. The room had a lot of furniture and they were placed haphazardly. Other than that, there were plenty of mirrors. Just in the living room alone, Han Fei spotted 4 mirrors. They were placed near the living room door, behind the television, beside the dining table and behind the sofa.

“Did daddy send you?” The boy noticed how Han Fei kept looking around the house and as the temporary master of the house, the boy summoned his courage to talk to Han Fei. When he asked that question, the boy’s eyes shone with anticipation.

“No, I’m here to look for someone. Did someone who looks just like me enter the room earlier?” Han Fei knelt down before the boy. He tried to make the boy feel as comfortable as possible. Hearing Han Fei’s answer, the boy was quite disappointed. He shook his head, “I’ve been staying in the living room, I didn’t see anyone come in but you.”

“You sure?” Han Fei looked at the other closed doors inside the room. “Can I look into the other rooms?”

“Mommy is sleeping, you’ll wake her up.” The boy opened his small arms to block before Han Fei. He looked very cute, being mommy’s bodyguard.

“Your mother is at home too?” Han Fei knew that this was a room with two 4’s in its room number. The scariest ghost hadn’t shown itself yet, he believed that might be the boy’s mother.

“Mommy said tonight is the night of resurrection and daddy will return after midnight. She told me to go to bed because he would only come see me after I’m asleep.” The boy said innocently, he believed everything his mother told him.

“Then how come you didn’t follow your mother’s order and go to sleep? Instead you’re here, hiding in the living room.” Han Fei found the boy to be quite interesting. After he got the Pied Piper skill, Han Fei realized he hoped to interact more with children. He found children to be cute and innocent, and that childlike innocence was a slight reprieve in the cryptic world.

"I..." The boy stammered, "I don't want to go to sleep, I can't use words after I'm asleep, I still have many things to tell daddy."

"Hmm? Like what?"

"In the past, no matter how busy he was, he would wake me up every morning. But now he only comes back once a year, I don't want him to be that busy anymore." The boy, in his stained pants, said his simple wish.

"He comes back only once per year? Is that what your mother told you?"

"Yes."

"Then did she tell you what is the night of resurrection?" While Han Fei held the conversation, he pushed open the door to one of the bedrooms, this should be the bedroom previously used by the boy's parents. The double-bed had a new mattress, it had no wrinkle. Someone cleaned this room daily but no one slept in here anymore.

Creak... When Han Fei pushed open the bedroom door, something crawled past the dresser next to the bed. It sounded like a rat or some kind of bug. Han Fei knew the dressers at this place were not simple. Before the boy could get too close, he pulled the black dresser open. At the top layer of the dresser, there was a death portrait of a young man. The portrait was placed there so the boy couldn't reach it. Next to the portrait was a bowl of white rice. Half a piece of yellow paper was buried in the rice, it had a name on it—Lai Sheng. It also had the various steps necessary for the soul summoning ritual.

"Lai Sheng?" The name immediately got Han Fei's attention.

"This is daddy's picture. Mommy stored it inside the dresser because she said she'd get sad whenever she sees it. But after she put it away, she would sneakily take it out to look at the picture." The boy didn't understand his mother's action, he was still too young. "The neighbor's aunties and uncles told me that my father is dead. I asked them what they meant by that and they told me dying means going to a faraway place to work so he can only come back here once a year. I don't get it, why would daddy get a job like that?"

The boy looked at his father's picture inside the dresser. He was too small to get the picture himself so he hoped Han Fei could get it for him. After getting his father's picture, the boy stared at his black and white father. Suddenly he lifted his head and the pair of clear eyes stared at Han Fei. "You said adults won't lie to kids, but I felt like they were lying to me. Do you know what death really is?"

"Death?" Han Fei was not expecting such a question from a young boy. Han Fei didn't brush him off with a common lie but instead thought seriously about it before answering, "I hear people say death is like water dissolving into water."

"What do you mean?"

"It's like they've really gone home, not this home but a home that belongs to all of us. We came from that home and eventually we will all go back to that home." Han Fei had no idea why he was explaining these things to a child, perhaps it was because he never treated the citizens of the cryptic world as NPC but people just like him.

"Death is going home? Then why are so many people afraid of death? Why would mommy cry about it?" As if he finally found a person he could talk to, the boy desperately wanted to get the answers.

"Because after we leave home, we will pick a path, a path that you can't even turn your head around. The end of this path will be our home. This is the only way to go home but along the way, we would encounter many different scenarios and lights. We would warm others and be warmed by others. We are like little lights, brightening the night sky as we make our way home."

"Little lights?" The boy's brows frowned. He gave it some thought before he pointed at the white ceremonial candle beside him. "I get it now, we are like candles. We start as wax, and then we burn with light before we end up as wax again. But our body is no longer the same, turning from a straight candle into a pool of wax."

Han Fei was surprised by the boy's comprehension. The boy was young but he was very clever.

"The analogy of candle is not that suitable." This was also the first time Han Fei gave it such a thorough thought. "We were led out from home by our parents, but we are not candles, we are simply who we are."

“Then how can a person give out light?”

“A person cannot, but each one of us will be given a torch handed down by our forbearer. This torch, that can chase away the darkness of the night, is called life. We feed the torch with our experience and memory. Life will then burst in flames. We will raise the torch high and carve our way through the dark.” Han Fei looked at the boy who was deep in thought. He smiled and ruffled his hair. “When you’re almost home, you will hand your torch to another person, that way, we will always keep the night bright.”

The boy looked up, his eyes filled with confusion, “But daddy didn’t give me any torch, only toy models.”

“Perhaps he has given it to your mommy and when you grow older, she will give the torch to you, so that your life can glow bright and warm.” Han Fei pulled his hand back. Perhaps it was an illusion, he felt some warmth from the boy. But even more surprising was the notification from the system. “Notification for Player 0000! Friendliness level with the owner of Room 4064 increases by 10! Your personal charm has won their approval!”

Turning around, Han Fei noticed the bedroom door, that the boy refused to let him enter, had opened a gap. Two pale faces were staring quietly at him. Han Fei took an involuntary step back. His body knocked into the bookshelf. A coloring book that belonged to Lai Sheng fell to the ground. The book fell open to a painting where there was the father and mother but the boy was conspicuously missing.

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### 363 Jin Sheng, Lai Sheng, Wang Sheng

The coloring book fell open, the simple color paintings described the boy’s pure thoughts and wishes. The boy painted many things about family like his parents cooking, gardening, and cleaning the house together. The lines were simple and the paintings were cute, there was warmth from them... or at least they did look that way at first glance.

“Is your name Lai Sheng?” Han Fei picked up the coloring book. He tried to make himself as calm as possible, ignoring the gaze coming from behind him. Han Fei had no idea how long the boy’s parents had been watching. Han Fei was thankful that he watched his words and didn’t do anything to harm the boy.

“That was my nickname but after daddy left, mommy rarely calls me by my nickname anymore.” The boy said in a tone that tried to make him sound older than he was. But the fact that he had just peed his pants just made the whole attempt too cute.

“So Lai Sheng is really your name...” Han Fei picked up the coloring book and then glanced at the black and white portrait which he had placed back on the top shelf of the dresser. The portrait and rice bowl were placed at a location where the boy couldn’t reach. So with the boy’s height, he could only see his father’s picture but couldn’t see what was inside the bowl.

Han Fei picked up the death portrait as an idea popped up in his mind. He turned the portrait around and realized there was a colored picture on the back of the black and white portrait. In the picture, the boy was smiling happily as he sat on the swing. Perhaps it was the wind or there was someone outside the frame, the swing swung high into the sky.

“I knew it.” Han Fei finally understood why the mother put the death portrait at a location where the boy couldn’t reach. The target of the soul summoning ritual was not the father but this boy. The boy’s picture was hidden behind the father’s portrait and the paper with the boy’s name was buried inside the rice bowl. The situation at Room 4064 was similar to Zhuang Ren’s family in Room 4144, it was the dead summoning the living. However, because the boy didn’t have the protective device for his memory like Zhuang Ren did, he was successfully summoned to the Ziggurat.

Perhaps for the boy’s parents, the boy was a ghost but in reality, the boy was a living human who was summoned to the cryptic world. His body probably still existed in real life, only his soul was pulled here. If the boy’s soul was stuck here for a prolonged period of time, then basically the boy’s dead parents would have inadvertently killed him.

“Can you still remember the last time you played the swing with your family?” Han Fei placed the death portrait back. He didn’t tell the boy the cruel truth.

“I believe it was when daddy was still alive. Mommy and daddy took me to the park. Daddy was very strong, he pushed the swing from right behind me and made me soar into the sky. Mommy was worried that I’d fall, she even scolded daddy for it.” The boy’s face turned up with a smile when he spoke of this, clearly these memories were deeply treasured.

Han Fei felt sad hearing the boy’s words. He probably dreamt this whole episode up, because in that colored picture, only the boy was featured. His father was definitely not standing behind him as he claimed. His accompaniment was the wind and the birds on the trees.

'The Butterfly used Zhuang Ren's family to drag him into the cryptic world because Fu Sheng's memory can be found in Zhuang Ren's mind, but why would the Butterfly drag Lai Sheng here?' Butterfly might be mad but its action was never random. It would never waste time on meaningless things.

Han Fei studied the boy's name written on the coloring book. Then he was reminded of Jin Sheng from Yi Ming Private Academy as well as Wang Sheng who had already morphed into Rest in Peace at Cattle Alley.

Lai Sheng, Jin Sheng, Wang Sheng, their appearance at the cryptic world were all related to the Butterfly and in Chinese, their names could also be translated as next life, current life, past life.

Jin Sheng was the most powerful and was sealed at Yi Ming Private Academy which was far from the Ziggurat. Wang Sheng's family was obliterated, appeared at Spider's domain and eventually became a knife that could slash through the Butterfly. Lai Sheng appeared the weakest, but he was summoned to Ziggurat so that the Butterfly could keep a close eye on him.

'Could these 3 boys symbolize something for the Butterfly?' Han Fei took out Rest in Peace. Wang Sheng became Han Fei's blade, Jin Sheng used his blood to rewrite Han Fei's future and now he ran into Lai Sheng. 'Is Lai Sheng another back-up plan the Butterfly had prepared for itself? Would the Butterfly take over Lai Sheng's body in real life and thus get its chance at rebirth? In that case, should I use Rest in Peace to kill Lai Sheng? To cut off an option for the Butterfly?'

When Han Fei took out Rest in Peace, the chilling presence behind him intensified. And this was when he didn't show an active malice towards Lai Sheng, if he did, Han Fei probably would be deleted immediately. At a mere level 13, a Grade E Hidden Map was quite a challenge for him.

"Please don't misunderstand, this is just a hilt, it can't do any damage." Han Fei explained to the boy but actually he was telling his parents inside the bedroom that he meant no harm.

"So this is called a hilt?" The boy didn't even know what Han Fei was holding. He was about to say something more when the sound of mattress turning came from the other bedroom. The boy immediately held his hands over his mouth. He glanced towards his mother's bedroom. The previously open door was now closed.

Seeing the door was closed, the boy sighed in relief and continued, "It's the Night of Resurrection tonight, mommy said daddy will only come home if we're all asleep. If she finds out that I'm still awake, she'll scold me. She's scary when she's angry even my daddy is afraid of her when she's mad."

"Then why don't you listen to her and go to bed?" When Han Fei found out the truth about the boy, he paid a lot more attention to him.

"Even though mommy has a bad temper, I know she loves me and daddy dearly. She just has trouble saying it. So I want to see daddy in person and tell him everything. I want to beg him to stay, and don't go to such a faraway place anymore." Han Fei already tried his best to explain death to the boy in the gentlest way but the boy still didn't quite understand it.

"If your mother knows that is the reason why you're still awake, I'm sure she will not be mad at you." Han Fei had already made his decision. Be it for the mission or for personal reasons, he had to protect this boy and send him back to real life before dawn.

"Lai Sheng, has your mommy told you that if the soul who is summoned refuses to leave after a long time, then they will be forever trapped inside this world?" Han Fei's voice was just loud enough to be heard by Lai Sheng's parents. Han Fei knew that the couple loved Lai Sheng a lot so he wanted to get their help to send Lai Sheng's soul back to the real world.

Han Fei believed Lai Sheng's parents should be able to understand him, after all, sometimes, separation is also a type of blessing and love.

## Chapter 364

### 364 A Man in Red

Walking out from the bedroom with the death portrait, Han Fei still had some questions but he believed those questions would be answered when he met with the child's real parents. Han Fei believed Lai Sheng's parents were still inside Room 4064. Han Fei returned to the living room and saw his reflections in the many mirrors. He walked towards the mother's bedroom.

"Please don't wake mommy." The boy jogged towards Han Fei and stopped his path again. This boy was young but extremely stubborn. That stubbornness might be buried within him since he was young, if he was not given correct guidance and protection, the seed might grow into something scary.



“Actually I came to your home to look for something I have lost. Don’t worry, I absolutely mean no harm, I promise to not wake up your mother.” Han Fei knelt down and said in a persuasive voice. “I will only push the door a gap to look. If the person I’m looking for is not here, I will leave immediately.” The boy didn’t budge and Han Fei’s smile picked up a trace of sadness. His acting was perfect, it was not overly saccharine but it was not fake either, it was just enough for the boy to sense the pain behind the smile, “You’ve been waiting for your father and I’ve been waiting for my child. You should be able to understand the pain of that waiting, right?”

Hearing Han Fei’s words, the boy’s outstretched arms slowly lowered, “Your child has gone somewhere faraway as well?” Taking in a soft breath, Han Fei still had a gentle smile on his face but anyone would be able to see the tortured soul behind that smile.

“As you said, tonight is the Night of Resurrection. My child is back too but I realize he has gone missing.” Han Fei was an adult but an adult’s helplessness would be able to touch a child’s heart even more.

The boy’s lips stretched into a thin line and in the end, he stepped away. “You have to promise me not to make any noise to wake up mommy. She has prepared a whole year for this day. If daddy fails to come home because of us, she will be very sad and angry.” The boy had something that was extremely rare at Ziggurat, kindness.

As if he was still worried about Han Fei, the boy sneaked to his mother’s bedroom door. He grabbed the door handle and eased it open with the lightest touch. Han Fei’s heart rose to his throat too. He was finally going to meet the real owner of Room 4064. He hoped that the increased 10 points in friendliness would come in useful. Lai Sheng and Han Fei stared transfixed at the door handle. Just as the door was about to open, knocking suddenly came from the living room door!

The sound frightened Han Fei. The boy quickly let go. His pale face colored with excitement, he cheered softly, “Is that daddy?!”

He abandoned the bedroom door, and pulled Han Fei back to the living room. The knocking wasn’t that loud, it echoed clearly mainly because the room was too silent.

A few seconds later, Han Fei noticed something unique about the rhythm of the knocking. The person first knocked using their fingers and then slammed with their palms. There was a squishing sound when

they slammed against the door like their hands were wet with something. “Does that sound like your father knocking?”

“No, father rarely knocks, he often walks in directly, exclaiming he’s home.”

“Then this might not be your father. The ritual might have summoned something else.”

“Someone like you?”

“No, I’m not here due to the ritual, I already work at this building.” Han Fei had the boy hide behind him as he approached the living room door. “If we allow the person to keep on knocking, they’ll attract the attention of other tenants.” Han Fei leaned against the door and looked out through the peephole. There was a man who stood outside. He kept his head lowered and he wore all red!

‘A Soul Chaser?’ Han Fei had seen many strange people in red clothes when he played the Ziggurat game, he even took the same elevator booth with them.

“Let me see.” The boy requested with anticipation. Han Fei hugged the boy up to reach the peephole. Lai Sheng looked for a long time and the anticipation on his face turned into fear, “That’s not daddy!”

“Are you sure? His head is lowered, so we can’t really see his face.”

“I’m sure.” The boy nodded firmly.

“Then we shouldn’t open the door for him. We should hide in the living room for now.” Han Fei suggested when the knocking suddenly stopped.

“Has the man left?”

“Let me see.” The knocking had stopped but instead it was replaced by a softer yet more sinister sound. Han Fei looked through the peephole. The man in red had indeed disappeared, but Han Fei could see

another clear set of footprints in the ash on the ground. The bowl of white rice had been messed with. The rice was dyed red like it had been mixed with blood or red paint.

“He seems to have left.” Han Fei sighed in relief. He was very averse to Soul Chasers. These people appeared to have been drained of all their humanity, they were completely dominated by the Ziggurat. Turning around, Han Fei was about to lead the boy back to the living room when he saw the boy was looking above him with his neck tilted up at an impossible angle.

‘Why is he looking up? The soul ladder!’ Han Fei instantly knew the problem. He looked above him and a man covered in blood was crawling through the window above the door. He was stuck to the ceiling like a giant lizard!

The face covered with Death Curse glared at Han Fei and Lai Sheng. His jaws unhinged and a bloody tongue lashed towards Lai Sheng’s neck!

“Go to your mom’s bedroom!” Han Fei pushed the boy away and cut at the tongue with Rest in Peace! The shining blade slashed through the man’s tongue easily. The whole process lasted not longer than the blink of an eye. The cut off tongue wiggled on the ground like an eel. The red clothed man’s face slowly turned around to look at Han Fei. He didn’t expect his tongue would be so easily disposed of by a blade. The wound that was made by Rest in Peace couldn’t be healed by the Death Curse either. While the red-clothed man was startled, Han Fei picked up the boy and ran to the living room.

“Go tell your mommy, the ritual has summoned something else! A ghost has entered your home!”

The boy was hoping to see his father but instead of his father, he saw a red-clothed monster. The boy rushed to his mother’s bedroom but no matter how hard he twisted the door handle, the door refused to open.

To buy more time for the boy, Han Fei stood between the boy and the red-clothed man. The ghost tattoo on his body radiated with yin energy and a giant cat monster with 9 lives surfaced on his back.

Chapter 365

365 Fight!

“Still can’t get the bedroom door open?” They were inside Room 4064, the room owner wouldn’t sit and watch their own child get injured. Han Fei was powerful enough to delay the man in red but not powerful enough to kill him. Normally, the first thing he’d do when he met a Soul Chaser at the Ziggurat was to run. Han Fei glanced beside him from the corner of his eye, the mother’s bedroom door was firmly shut like it was locked from inside. No matter how hard the boy pushed, it wouldn’t open. ‘Is there something inside the bedroom that Lai Sheng can’t see? What are his parents hiding?’

The man in red didn’t give Han Fei much time to think. The Death Curse crawled on his face like bugs, they obscured the man’s face. Even his pupils were covered in black words. The remaining tongue lolled about in the man’s open mouth. Red blood leaked out from the monster’s mouth. The blood morphed into black decaying matter as it fell to the ground.

The monster’s target wasn’t Han Fei. Each Soul Chaser had their own prey and this man’s target was Lai Sheng. The Death Curse pulled at the skin and the monster’s face was forcibly yanked into two. The left face stuck to the man’s head while the right face evolved into a giant snake made of flesh. It lunged towards Lai Sheng.

This was the first time Lai Sheng encountered something so dangerous. Out of instinct, Lai Sheng called out his mother’s name. But he immediately closed his hand over his mouth, as if afraid that his mother would be harmed by the scary monster too. He wiggled the door handle repeatedly. With tears in his eyes, the boy wanted to get into the bedroom to warn his mother so that she could leave while she could. He had already lost his father, he didn’t want to lose his mother, at least that was what he thought.

“Nine Lives!” The ghost tattoo was branded into Han Fei’s skin. The cat-like monster trapped inside the tattoo growled. Its howl pierced through the ghost tattoo’s binding and echoed inside the room. Han Fei still couldn’t utilize Nine Lives’ power fully. All he could do now was have Nine Lives’ yin energy envelope his body. While he could raise his defense this way, it would mean that his body would also be constantly polluted by yin energy.

Han Fei’s body was already wounded so he couldn’t stay in this state for too long. If the owner of Room 4064 really refused to help, then Han Fei would try to bring Lai Sheng away from the room with him. Han Fei tossed the red paper doll at Lai Sheng. While the paper doll dealt with the snake-like creature, Han Fei turned back to deal with the Soul Chaser. ‘Ziggurat is a Grade E Map, it is for players around Level 35. Can I really fight the monsters here?’ Han Fei was uncertain but that uncertainty was soon replaced by other emotions.

Other games would provide the option for players to flee safely from a battle, but that was not possible in Perfect Life. It didn't give the player the chance to start over either. There was no fight or flight, but fight or die. Save reloading? That was not a feature available either.

The Soul Chaser's snake creature tussled with the paper doll. The other half of his face turned to stare at Han Fei. It was his first time encountering such a strange soul. Han Fei didn't act like a ghost but not like a human either. He could see him but he was not afraid of him.

The man in red trembled as his spine creaked and cracked. Bones protruded out of the man's flesh like needles. The red shirt was torn open, exposing his body covered in Death Curse.

'Just how many transformations can this thing manage?' Every Soul Chaser appeared to have a different ability. Han Fei didn't waste time. Before the thing on the man's back could grow into giant spikes, Han Fei charged forward with his knife. Han Fei knew it was not the time for him to be cautious, especially when he had Rest in Peace with him. The blade was extremely sharp because every 'person' that followed Han Fei believed that the blade could cut through sin and injustice. Han Fei had the sharpest weapon, in other words, he lacked everything but attack damage.

The man in red just had his tongue cut off so he knew that Han Fei's knife could harm him. He shrunk away from Han Fei!

The Death Curse injected into the man's fingers, changing them into claws. They looked sharp. 'The power of this man is different from the other Soul Chaser that I've met. The madman who chased after me only needed to touch me to haul away my soul, but this man in red appears to need to rely on the Death Curse to activate his abilities.' All these pointed towards the fact that Han Fei did have the chance to win this battle.

"Wang Sheng!" Han Fei suddenly picked up speed. The brilliance of humanity lit up the entire Room 4064!

At that moment, the boy appeared to see the life torch that Han Fei told him about. Han Fei was using his own experience, memory and life to fuel that torch. Han Fei rapidly closed the distance between him and the man in red. Each cut was targeted at the Soul Chaser's vitals.

The man stared closely at Han Fei, evading his attacks with ease. Its power allowed him to morph any part of his body as he wished. He grew out several more arms and slithered all over the ceiling. The white ceiling started to surface with red handprints. The meat spikes launched themselves at Han Fei; tentacles whipped towards Han Fei's neck as well.

Han Fei was already very fast but he was not faster than the monster. He barely avoided the meat spikes and tentacles. Han Fei hadn't even crawled up from the ground when the man's head suddenly turned 180 degrees and his neck elongated. The head shot at the back of Han Fei's heart like a bullet. The Death Curse tore open the man's mouth and his teeth sharpened into jaws.

The creature was too close for Han Fei to avoid the attack. In his desperation, Han Fei took out the can of wishes he obtained at Yi Ming Private Academy. The broken tongue shot into the can. The paper notes with the student wishes fell out from the can. The wishes all disappeared as they were replaced by the word, Death. The can which helped Han Fei block the attack instantly cracked. A harrowing scream echoed inside the can as well. The ghost hidden inside the can was already injured. It was plotting revenge on Han Fei after it recovered, it didn't expect to be wounded again so soon.

The can trapped the broken tongue. The man in red couldn't shatter the can so easily but then again his target was never Han Fei to begin with. Every Soul Chaser had their own prey and the man in red was tasked to bring Lai Sheng away that night!

The attacks fulfilled their purpose which was to force Han Fei back. The man in red crawled rapidly on the ceiling towards the boy!

It moved so fast that even though Han Fei already charged as fast as he did towards the door, he was still too late. The claws covered in Death Curse were already above the boy's head!

"Get out of the way!" As he shouted, Han Fei tossed out Rest in Peace. The blade dimmed after it left Han Fei's grasp but before the light fully faded, the blade pierced into the man's palm and pinned it into the wall. The Death Curse on the man's face boiled. The pain enraged him and it yanked off the pinned arm. He raised his other arm. Death Curse curled around his fingers. The boy was shocked into place. No matter how mature a boy was, he would be frightened when he saw something like this.

The sharp nail came at the boy. Just as the claw was about to pierce into the boy's eye, the man in red suddenly crawled backwards. The boy who had his eyes closed didn't feel the pain, so he opened his eyes again. The scene that he saw would stay with him forever. Han Fei was pulling on a red chain stuck

with animal fur. The chain was tightly wound around the man in red's neck. Han Fei was yanking on the chain as hard as he could. A living human was stopping the Soul Chaser with pure force!

"Don't just stand there! Go and hide!" Even after giving everything he had, Han Fei's strength was lesser than the man in red. The fact that he struggled until this stage was already a miracle. A spike grew from the man's back and pierced through Han Fei's arm. Another limb extended out from the man's monster. It grabbed Han Fei and threw him against the bedroom door.

Han Fei's arm was heavily injured, but he still tried his best to stand up. He used his arm to reach towards Rest in Peace. Voices of humanity came from the hilt as if responding to Han Fei's summon. The dim blade shimmered again but Han Fei was too far away from the man in red.

The claws reached towards Lai Sheng's head again. Just as the fingers were about to touch Lai Sheng, the bedroom door suddenly opened and an arm similarly covered in Death Curse reached out to grab the man in red by his wrists!

The hand pinched and the man's wrist was shattered. As the man screamed, an extremely oppressive presence floated out from the bedroom.

Turning back to look, Lai Sheng realized there was a large figure standing behind him. His entire body was written with the Death Curse. He too was dressed in red. At that moment, only one of his eyes was sentient. Staring at the monster that just walked out from the bedroom, Lai Sheng's focus eventually landed on that one eye. Then the word basically tumbled out from his mouth.

"Daddy!"

## Chapter 366

### 366 Passing the Torch

The door that Lai Sheng couldn't open finally did when the boy was in mortal danger. It was his father who walked out the door. Technically it was Lai Sheng's father who had completely transformed into a monster. The man didn't want Lai Sheng to see him like this so he had been hiding. It was not until the claws almost reached his son that he put down his reservation. Even if he might be feared by his son, he had to do something.

The single eye colored with pain. He knew how helpless he was, he couldn't even leave behind a wonderful impression for his son. But to his surprise, Lai Shang managed to recognize him immediately despite his current appearance. The boy showed no fear, no matter how much his father had changed, he was still his father.

His mouth was sewn together by the Death Curse. The man tried to speak but he only made the Death Curse on his face spread further. There was like an invisible wall between the father and son. Both parties tried their best to shatter the wall, but it was fruitless.

"You're really home, mommy wasn't lying! She said if I don't go to sleep, I won't be able to see you..." The boy claimed as his eyes reddened. Only before his father could he put down his guard. In that moment, all the suppressed fear exploded and the boy cried. For a boy, the cryptic world was too scary. Lai Sheng wanted to get closer to his father but the father who had already morphed into a monster didn't dare to let Lai Sheng touch him. His Death Curse rushed out from the bedroom like a shadow, a black mist billowed around him.

The man in red didn't expect there was another Soul Chaser hiding inside the bedroom but even more surprising was the fact that this Soul Chaser appeared to have abandoned his job of chasing after souls, but instead showed up here to stop him from doing his job. The pupils with black characters turned with confusion, and then a fist covered in Death Curse landed heavily on his face!

The head caved in. Blood mixed with the Death Curse and sunk into the skull. Lai Sheng's father was like a thick tree, his roots had spread through Room 4064, his small movement could shift the shadow inside the room. The lights flickered. When the lights went off, the man already appeared behind the man in red. His hand reached for the man's head, lifted him up and then slammed the head heavily on the ground. Picking up the man by his wrist, the father twisted the man's elbows and then dragged the defenseless Soul Chaser out of the room. The father had decided to kill. The Death Curse around his body pierced into his skin, this appeared to be a warning for the Soul Chasers when they strayed from their job. Pain and torment didn't change the man at all. Death Curse poured out of his one eye while his other eye reflected the image of Lai Sheng.

The boy stood where he was. He had no idea that he was his father's only hope in the cryptic world. The front door closed and the sound of slamming and tearing came from the corridor. It sounded like a gunny sack filled with treasures was being slowly torn apart. Several minutes later, when the dirge reappeared on the 6th floor, the father returned to Room 4064.



Anger, hatred and Death Curse, they circulated around the monster but his left eye was a pool of gentleness. His mouth was zipped and his ears were stuffed with Death Curse. He couldn't communicate with his son, he couldn't even hear his son clearly but he could sense what Lai Sheng was feeling at that moment. Blood leaked out from his lips, the man tried his best to open his mouth. The black threads made from the Death Curse were torn apart. The father tried to call his son's name but he couldn't even do that. The lights inside the room dimmed. The father's power appeared to be related to shadow, wherever he was, the light would be consumed.

The father and son met at the Ziggurat. The ghost who did the soul summoning finally met the son he couldn't forget. Lai Sheng reached out towards the man. Seeing how desperate Lai Sheng was, even Han Fei wanted to give him a hug, much less his father. The man's arms slowly lifted but as Lai Sheng was about to touch him, he put his arms down and took a step back. He didn't want his child to see him in this ugly state. If possible, he wished for his son to remember him for who he was and not what he was now.

"Aiz." The bedroom door slowly opened. A woman covered in layers appeared at the door. She looked at the father and son in the living room and her eyes filled with sadness and gentleness, "Lai Sheng, you mustn't get too close to your father." However, the boy didn't listen to his mother, he insisted on moving forward. "Lai Sheng! Stop!" The woman's voice became sterner but she too didn't dare to come close to Lai Sheng.

Seeing the woman's arms which were hidden inside her sleeves, Han Fei appeared to understand something. He walked to Lai Sheng's side and gently stopped Lai Sheng. "I think it's better if you tell the child the truth, even if tonight might just end up being a dream for him."

Lai Sheng struggled in Han Fei's grasp. Before his parents, he finally acted like a normal child. The woman inside the bedroom and the man who had turned into a monster looked at Han Fei. They stared at him for a long time before the mother said, "I know where your lost soul is hiding. I can hand him to you but I hope you can do us a favor."

"What favor?"

"Bring Lai Sheng away from here."

Lai Sheng's young face filled with disbelief when he heard that. How could his beloved mother say something like that?! The small boy froze in the living room. Lai Sheng wiped away the tears on his face. His plain helplessness was pitiable.

“Lai Sheng, mommy has been lying to you.” She addressed the tearful Lai Sheng and her face was set in pain, “Your daddy left your world a long time ago. I thought I could take care of you alone and give you double the love, to make you the happiest child in the world. That is where your memory stops. You forgot about what happened later. I fell ill. You leaned against my bedside and accompanied me but in the end, I left.”

“I...”

“As your parents, we couldn’t let you go and that memory of ours was taken advantage of by someone nefarious. It is why you are here. All the soul-summoning rituals are meant for you.” The woman said as she pulled up her sleeves. Death Curse crawled on her arms like vines. “We were told that as long as we were willing to transform into monsters, we would be reunited with you. But when you were really here, we realized the truth. The thing’s target was you all along.”

“Was the thing that took advantage of you the manager here? What kind of person is this that he’d target even a child?” Han Fei hoped to get the help from his couple so he was already laying the foundation for that.

“It is not a human, not even an animal. It is the real devil, representing pure evil.” The woman was slowly changing into a monster but she was not worried about herself, all she cared about was Lai Sheng, “Our deaths were not an accident. All the coincidences were its way to kill us, and it did all that to draw Lai Sheng into the Ziggurat.”

“You still did the ritual knowing that it would harm Lai Sheng?” Han Fei probed.

The woman smiled sadly, “The child’s father has been turned into a monster and my memory has been touched. I once thought this place was real life and we were still alive. It was not until the ritual succeeded and I personally summoned my child to this dirty and scary world that the memory which was tempered with was returned to normal.” Her knuckles were white. “It did it on purpose, it wanted me to know without suspicion that I was the person who murdered my own son.” Leaning against the door, the woman lost all energy. Just the thought of what she had done drained her. She had personally killed the son she cherished and missed the most. That was going to be her lasting torment.

“The manager here hates everything good about humanity, it likes to torment people to prove the fragility of humanity. But this also exposes its weakness because it has never tasted any love and care

from others.” Han Fei knew the things Butterfly had done. Since it didn’t believe in the good of humanity, it would show the ugliness of humanity to others as well. Misery loves company.

When Han Fei conversed with the woman, the boy struggled endlessly. Finally their whole family had reunited, he couldn’t understand why everyone was so sad. Seeing the Death Curse appear on his mother’s face, Lai Sheng was desperate. He pleaded for Han Fei to let go and begged his parents to not leave, but no one was there to answer his begging and pleas.

“Why are you doing this? Didn’t you say adults won’t lie to children? I am not afraid even if you have turned into monsters, I am not afraid of turning into a monster too as long as we can stay together.” Even if this was a nightmare, as long as his family could be together then he would be willing to keep on living in this nightmare. The soul who was summoned would forget that they were souls. They would live in the bubble of their memory and habit.

“Lai Sheng, mommy and daddy can’t hug you anymore but we will always be with you. We’ll be the wind, the rain, the bird in the sky and the squirrels on the trees. We will always be there for you.”

“You lie, you are lying to me again!”

“There are only 3 hours left until 4.44 am. Lai Sheng, you should go. We are already very lucky to be able to see you on this last day.” The woman didn’t waste any more time, she signaled for Han Fei to let go. The moment Han Fei did, the boy charged towards his mother. He ran very fast like if he was any slower, his mother would dissolve into bubbles and disappear. The small boy charged at his mother but he couldn’t close the distance between them.

When the boy passed the mirror beside the sofa, the silent father took out the colored photograph from his death portrait. He looked at his own laughing son and then shredded the photograph. The pieces of photography fluttered to the ground and shadow surged out from the mirrors in the living room. Then the entire Room 4064 changed.

Mold and dust covered all the furniture. The ceiling cracked bit by bit. Yin energy coalesced. Paper money appeared on the ground. There were white candles everywhere. This was what Room 4064 was supposed to look like. The shadow covered the room and then surged towards Lai Sheng. As the candles were blown off one after another, Lai Sheng’s consciousness wavered as well. After the shadow retreated, a boy was lying on the sofa. He was enveloped in a soft shell of Yin energy, softly asleep.

“There’s no more time, you have to bring him and go.” Death Curse appeared on the woman’s neck but she didn’t care, her eyes lingered on the child. “If you can’t leave before 4.44 am tonight, then you’ll be trapped here forever.” Before he lost his soul, Han Fei couldn’t see the Soul Chasers. However, both Lai Sheng and him saw the couple clearly, so it meant that Lai Sheng was in the same living undead state as he was. They were both halfway into the coffin.

“Will the manager’s soul return at 4.44 am?” Han Fei knew the significance of timing, perhaps he might see the real Butterfly tonight.

“Yes, so you have to figure out a way to leave before it returns. After it returns, all of our eyes will be its eyes, our ears will be its ears. Our love for Lai Sheng will be the blade that kills him.” The woman’s face was darkening.

“We didn’t dare to have Lai Sheng leave before this because he would die without our protection. It made use of that to keep our family together. But we are lucky to have run into you. I will return your soul to you and hopefully you’ll keep up your end of the bargain and bring Lai Sheng back to his real home.

“I like what you said, it is time for me to hand over the torch of life to Lai Sheng. Leaving him will be our last love for him.” After she said that, she walked to the sofa. Her face was now dominated by the Death Curse. She leaned down to kiss the boy on his cheek. “Mommy and daddy didn’t lie to you, we really do love you.”

Death Curse crawled over her lips. The woman stopped resisting. The Death Curse went fully out of control and obscured her face. The blood leaked out from her skin and dyed her clothes red. She used her last shred of rationality to say, “Your soul with your childhood memory ran into Lai Sheng’s consciousness. We were unable to stop it. Actually the Lai Sheng earlier was not fully Lai Sheng, he has a part of your personality.”

“My soul has gotten into Lai Sheng’s consciousness?” This was something Han Fei didn’t expect.

“Your missing souls contain the memories from your past. They should have been sucked into different people’s memories. I have no idea whether this is something the manager planned or it is something unique to your soul.” The woman’s voice came intermittently, her body was slowly evolving into the Soul Chaser.

“To locate your souls, you need to find living humans compatible with them and bring them away from this place.” The woman’s head slowly fell. The blood capillaries on her skin bulged. When she lifted her head again, her pretty face was already gone. Before Han Fei could speak, the woman already lost her mind. Her sharp nails pierced towards Han Fei’s heart.

Just as Han Fei was about to be impaled, the shadow in the room protected him.

The father with just one sentient eye blocked before Han Fei. He moved to hug his wife who had joined the ranks of Soul Chaser silently.

## Chapter 367

### 367 The Comedy Actor

Death Curse swallowed the young couple. The man used the shadow inside the room to shield his wife. He didn’t get close to Lai Sheng but merely looked at the sleeping boy from afar. The single eye was heavy with regret but he had no other choice. The father in the red clothes slowly bowed at Han Fei. When Han Fei picked up Lai Sheng from the sofa, the father’s single eye flashed with appreciation.

The men didn’t say much as one picked up his wife and dragged all the shadow inside the room towards the mirror while the other picked up Lai Sheng and headed out the room. The separation came earlier than expected.

As the front door closed, Han Fei could feel the boy in his embrace tremble. He lowered his head and realized the boy’s face was wet with tears. Perhaps he had dreamt of the separation or he had not fully fallen asleep.

“I will bring you back to real life and I will also save your parents so you’ll have the chance to reunite again. Of course, the premise is that I can become the new manager of this place.” Tears slid down the boy’s face. His small fists tightened.

The door to Room 4064 closed. Han Fei didn’t stay for long. He had to find all of his lost souls before 4.44 am. ‘I remember all 3 of my souls have escaped upstairs, I’ll have to start the search on the 7th floor.’

There were many rooms at Ziggurat, searching through every single one of them on the Night of Resurrection was no different from committing suicide. 'Or should I go to Room 4144 first? Since the Butterfly is still not here, I should have Zhuang Ren meet his family. After I get his family to help me, I'll use Resurrection to send Zhuang Ren back.'

Spirit Farer was Han Fei's trump card and Resurrection was his biggest secret, it was these 2 talents that made it possible to summon Zhuang Ren to the cryptic world. Han Fei meant to hit 2 birds with one stone, it would satisfy Zhuang Ren's lifelong dream and he would get necessary aid at Ziggurat. However, when he really thought about it, Han Fei hesitated. With Butterfly's cunning nature, it would have done something to Room 4144. Perhaps Zhuang Ren's family had already been turned into monsters. After seeing the tragedy with Lai Sheng's mother, Han Fei had the feeling the moment Zhuang Ren saw his family, it would be the moment his family turned into monsters. Every tenant at the Ziggurat had a Death Curse planted on them. Before finding out about the Death Curse on Zhuang Ren's family, Han Fei decided not to take things too rashly.

Walking through the safety door, Han Fei left the 6th floor. As he stepped on the stairs to the 7th floor, the boy's eyelids flickered like he was waking up. Seeing this, Han Fei started to understand Lai Sheng's father's silent love. With the father's power, he could have put Lai Sheng fully to sleep but he didn't. He trusted his child so he only put a temporary spell on Lai Sheng so he could hear or feel everything around him. He didn't want his son to run away from the truth forever and wallow in sadness. He hoped that his son could learn to overcome the pain, or at least face it.

"Actually I quite envy you. Your mother is so gentle and has planned everything. Even though your father isn't much of a talker, he is silently protecting you." Lai Sheng's father didn't follow after them but Han Fei had a feeling that if they ran into mortal danger, the father would appear. Perhaps he was in the shadows watching over them at this moment.

"My childhood is happy too, I think..."

Han Fei scanned the ashes of paper money on the ground as he entered the 7th floor. If a soul had been called into one of the rooms, then their footprints would be left among the ashes. The dirge was like a constant threat. If Han Fei stayed at a spot for too long, it would head his way. To prevent himself from being ambushed by the paper doll procession, Han Fei moved very quickly. He glanced around cursorily. If none of the rooms had footprints, then he would figure out another way.

7th floor, 8th floor... When Han Fei came to the 9th floor, he noticed this floor was different from the others. Since he was too busy running for his life earlier, he didn't have the time to observe the corridor.

Even though each family also had the red couplets, firepots and paper money, the corridor was extremely clean. The burnt ashes were inside the firepot, and the floor was spotless. It was like someone cleaned this place daily. 'I doubt Ziggurat has a cleaner, but it would have a group of people who are professional at hiding traces of gore.'

Other than these, Han Fei spotted many hand-painted drawings on the wall. There were green trees, sun, playing children and smiling adults. There were also slogans to stop theft and fire prevention. These were a stark contrast to the eerie atmosphere of Ziggurat. Even for Han Fei, he'd feel more comfortable if the drawings were all painted red.

'Vandalizing the Ziggurat's walls with drawings? Who would be so daring?' The dirge sounded in Han Fei's ears again. This time it came from downstairs. He didn't hesitate and moved immediately.

When Han Fei passed by room 4094, he noticed there was no firepot before this room. It looked perfectly normal. That was why it was so abnormal. Every tenant was in the middle of the ritual so why not this tenant?

The dirge was getting louder, the paper doll procession was heading upstairs. Han Fei decided to take a gamble and knocked on the door of Room 4094. "Is anyone home?" He knocked a few more times. On the 8th time, the door suddenly opened. A young man in pajamas opened the door. "Who is it?" The young man was about Han Fei's height and size. He was quite handsome but his hair needed some cutting. He had heavy dark circles and his pajamas were not even buttoned up fully.

Han Fei scrutinized the man before him, trying to find something strange about him like a lack of shadow, a knife hidden in his pocket, blood stains on his clothes. However, Han Fei realized with a shock that this person really did appear to be a normal person.

"You look familiar, are you one of my neighbours? Why are you carrying a child in the middle of the night, is he sick? I get it now, you're here to borrow my car, isn't it? The boy needs to go to the hospital?" Before Han Fei said anything, the man already provided the explanation for himself. "Wait a minute, I'll go change now!"

The young man didn't even close the door as he turned to run into the living room to grab a jacket, shouldered it on and prepared to leave.

“The boy is not sick but I have something to discuss with you.” The dirge was coming closer. Han Fei carried Lai Sheng and entered the room. “Let’s go in and talk.” Han Fei had a sense of familiarity with the young man, it was like their souls were attracting each other. When the young man recovered, Han Fei was already inside his room and he even closed the door for him.

If a strange man barged into one’s room with a child at midnight, it was something worth worrying about, but perhaps it was Han Fei looked too harmless or Lai Sheng looked too pitiable, the young man in Room 4094 didn’t chase them away but showed concern for them. The young man was so kind that Han Fei was unsettled by it. Han Fei was prepared to face all kinds of strange monsters at Ziggurat but he was not prepared for a completely ‘normal’ person. In real life, this young man would definitely be seen as a Good Samaritan but Good Samaritans wouldn’t last long at Ziggurat. Kindness often could be a beautiful shell to hide a rotting heart. Han Fei shielded Lai Sheng and carefully watched the young man and his room.

The layout of Room 4094 was different from Room 4064. The living room was large and it had a big television. Under the screen was a black cabinet, where a collection of movie literature and cds was stored.

The wall facing the tv had posters of many comedy movies. Under the posters was a large sofa. Currently a blanket and remote control were placed on it. The young man probably fell asleep watching the movie. “You seem to like watching comedy movies?” Suddenly it hit Han Fei. ‘Wasn’t this exactly how I dreamed my life would be when I was just starting out in the acting business?’ A large television to play his own movies, a soft sofa to plant himself in and a large living room for him to exercise. So many things had happened since then that Han Fei had already forgotten about this former dream of his.

“I don’t like movies.” To Han Fei’s surprise, the young man shook his head.

“Then why are there so many comedy posters on your wall?” Han Fei never heard these movies before but the style of the posters showed that they were all comedies.

The young man ruffled his messy hair shyly. “Actually I’m a comedy actor, these are my works.” The young man was extremely shy, especially after he mentioned his career. Like he was afraid that he was unable to live up to his on screen persona.



“Please take a seat.” The young man didn’t have many guests. He tossed the blanket and some clothes to the side. When the blanket was moved, several bottles of medicine hidden underneath it rolled to the ground, there were sleeping pills, anti-depressants and so on.

The flustered young man picked up the bottles and apologized profusely. He hauled up all the bottles and moved them to the bedroom.

“How is your child faring?” The young man awkwardly tried to change the subject. Rummaging sound came from the bedroom like he was looking for something. When the young man was cleaning up the bedroom, Han Fei saw the screen of the phone the young man left on the coffee table light up. The screen wasn’t locked, he was probably using it earlier.

With curiosity, Han Fei leaned towards the screen. The search column had this written on it—how to leave this world painless...

The question was not finished as the therapy intervention and emergency number appeared below the search column. Following the number was the statement—Honey, you are not alone, because we will always be with you.

## Chapter 368

### 368 Firefly

Han Fei found himself unable to move his eyes away from the phone screen. He couldn’t understand why this comedy actor would search for things like that. From his perspective, the man already possessed everything Han Fei once wanted, to become a good comedy actor, have many famous works, live in a big house and have a luxurious life. The man in Room 4094 was Han Fei’s former ideal self, but when Han Fei met the person, he realized the man was not only not happy, he was extremely unhappy.

‘Why is that?’ After their brief interaction, Han Fei could see that the comedy actor was a kind and gentle person. When Han Fei approached him in the middle of the night with a child, the man didn’t react with caution and alertness but instead assumed the child was sick and needed help. ‘He shouldn’t end up like this, a man like him shouldn’t end up like this!’ Han Fei saw himself in the comedy actor. He repeated this statement, perhaps convincing himself.

The phone suddenly vibrated, and a new message came in. Han Fei touched the screen subconsciously, it was a private message.

Meat Hodgepodge, "Can you contact Yan Zu? I've sent him many messages and made many calls, but there is no reply."

Meat Hodgepodge, "He has deleted everything on his profile page. I clicked into it and it was empty."

Meat Hodgepodge, "Are you there? Firefly? You've been showing up less and less lately too, please don't scare me!"

The person called Meat Hodgepodge sent many messages. The comedy actor who was busy inside the bedroom quickly rushed over when he heard the endless vibration of his phone. He picked up the phone and scanned through the messages. Then he called a number but it was not picked up. He called several times and the call didn't go through, it was like his calls had gone into a dark hole. "Why aren't you picking up your phone? Haven't we already made the promise?"

The calmness on the young man's face completely disappeared. Han Fei had no idea what was the relationship between the young man and the person he was calling but he could feel the anxiety from the young man.

The young man opened a group chat and private-messaged many people. He got their replies one by one. As he read through the replies, he stood in the living room. He was unmoving, his eyes glued to the screen. After a long time, when Han Fei came over to look at the phone, the young man finally reacted. The young man forced a habitual smile. He didn't hide the content on his phone, instead he said with forced levity, "A friend of mine has left."

"Left?"

The young man turned to look at the night sky out the window, "He has returned to the sky." Those two sentences appeared to exhaust the young man. He slumped to the sofa like a broken doll. He picked up the blanket as if looking for his pills, forgetting that he had already moved them to his bedroom.

The black phone vibrated again. The messages kept coming in. The young man checked them before Han Fei. The young man was different from before, he answered the replies seriously. Then he clicked on a group chat called Happiness Neighbourhood. He looked at one of the profiles which was forever greyed out. He wanted to say something but he didn't know what.

Meat Hodgepodge, "@everyone, it has been confirmed that the youngest of our group left 3 hours ago. His account data will be handed over to Firefly as per our custom."

Laughing all Day, "Yan Zu is gone? Are you sure? You've gone to the hospital to check? He is the most optimistic among us. Even the doctor said that he was recovering well! We have already made a date to go online and beat up some foreigners!"

Fish and Water, "2 days ago, the kid showed me his homework. He said he was preparing to go back to school. How can this happen?"

Reading the messages, the young man finally keyed in a few words. Firefly, "It's true, I've contacted his stepfather. Unfortunately, until the end, I was unable to persuade him to mend the bridge with his stepfather, I'm sorry."

Meat Hodgepodge, "Why are you apologizing? You don't owe anyone an apology!"

Fish and Water, "This is hard on all of us but do not let the emotions beat you. Everyone, please remember to take your medication on time. If Yan Zu's stepfather is not willing to take over his account, then we will follow the set rules and leave it with Firefly."

Laughing all Day, "Firefly, thank you."

An account detail and password were sent to the young man's phone. He looked at the account for a long time before he opened his computer and used the kid's account profile to log into a virtual game on a social platform. This was a management style game. The kid's avatar was tall, muscular and handsome. His IGN was Xin Lu Yan Zu, but in real life, the kid was small and thin, he was often bullied and slandered. He was not good at interacting with people. His farm was left unattended for a long time already, he last logged in half a year ago.

The game was tied to the social platform so it was bound to a person's social account. It recorded the person's history on the internet. The game had a memory theatre, book of joy, negative emotions management centre and so on.

The young man controlled Yan Zu's avatar and walked into the house. The only thing purchased using real money in the small house was a large and rare photo frame. A group picture was placed inside the frame. There were more than 10 people and everyone was in their avatars but part of the avatars had been greyed out. Looking at the group picture, the young man lowered his head slowly before finally moving his eyes away.

Walking to the young man's side, Han Fei patted the man on his back.

The man kept his head lowered and his hands pressed against the table. He suppressed the choking in his voice and said in a voice as steady as possible, "I knew this kid from an Iyashikei game. The people in that Happiness Neighbourhood are all people with illness, we have gathered together due to certain reasons. We are each other's support group but as time passes on, more and more profiles become greyed out."

"Did you set up the group yourself?"

"It was an old man who gave it to me, I am the group's only manager now." The young man was a good actor so emotional control was basic for him. When he lifted his face again, most of the pain was gone. He tried to present himself as optimistically as possible no matter how wounded he was feeling.

From a locked drawer, he took out a diary. The young man flipped through it slowly, every page recorded a different account detail and password. He turned through them slowly, like each page was extremely heavy. When he reached a blank page, the man carefully jotted down the kid's account details and password. He triple-checked the details. After ensuring there was no mistake, he placed the diary back into the drawer.

"I really didn't expect the kid will leave before us." The young man stared dumbly at the boy's avatar. The boy's virtual account, all of his memories were left in cyberspace, these were all that remained of a living person. "He was the most optimistic and happy person in the group, he encouraged everyone daily and kept us updated on his daily improvement..."

“But no matter how good one is at acting out optimism, one will never find true happiness.” Han Fei had no idea why he said that, he couldn’t even tell whom it was meant for. Perhaps it was for the dead boy, the young comedy actor or even himself.

## Chapter 369

### 369 A Talk

No matter how good one’s acting was, there was someone whom he could never fool and that was himself. After one got used to play-acting at happiness, the optimism would become like a set of clothes, only by putting it on that one would have the courage to leave the house. The young man was surprised by what Han Fei said, it resonated deeply with him.

As a rather famous comedy actor, he had to act happy always before the public but no one knew that while he had managed to make everyone laugh, he was unable to make himself smile. “Have you seen the messages inside my phone?”

Han Fei knew what the man was talking about so he nodded. Noting the admittance by Han Fei, the young man sighed in relief. It was as if he could finally shed the disguise. It was getting too tiring for him too. “A comedy actor who brings the world happiness thinks about ending himself every night, it is quite ironic.”

The young man looked at the few medicine bottles that were left on the coffee table. He didn’t want to hide anything before Han Fei anymore. It was a strange feeling. It felt as if this stranger had a similar experience as he did and they were kindred spirits.

Neither of the men said anything until the dirge sounded outside the room. The chilly wind blew into the room through the half open window. The young man shivered but he didn’t move to close the window. Instead he looked out at the night sky as if the boy was there winking at him.

“I have a question, I hope you don’t mind me asking.” Han Fei looked at the comedy actor who was way too similar to him.

“Go on.”

“You have already gained everything you ever dreamt of and fulfilled all of your dreams so why can’t you smile?” Han Fei was really curious. The comedy actor in Room 4064 was like another version of himself, the version who had not encountered Perfect Life and had succeeded in life based on hard work.

“I lost my smile when I was young so I believe smiles are the most important thing in the world. It was why I wanted to make the world smile, seeing their smiling faces, perhaps I too can regain my lost smile, or at least that was what I thought at the start.” The young man adjusted his emotions. “But that was unfortunately not the case. I was an extra for a very long time. I have no outstanding appearance or hefty connections so to shine among the many competitions, I have to work harder. I tried many jokes and comedies but people refused to laugh, it was like they could see through me and know that I am a boring person inside.”

“Then how did you catch your big break?”

“It was a complete accident when I was in a play. The prop team made some mistakes and built the stage smaller than it was written on the script. No one told me about the change and I acted according to the script. I was moving backwards and before I knew it, I slipped off the edge. The stage was 7 metres off the ground but thankfully I was wearing a safety harness so the injury wasn’t serious. However, the audience found it quite dramatic that a serious actor suddenly disappeared from the stage. I was strung in the air like a tortoise and that was the first time someone laughed watching my performance.” Looking at the movie posters on the wall, the smile on the young man’s face froze.

“I knew the audience didn’t mean any malice at the time, so I thought it was not bad being a weeping clown. That was what I told myself, but it only got me even more anxious. Every night I stayed up late thinking about new ways to make people laugh. Gradually it affected my sleep. It was like someone had flipped a switch in my mind. Starting from that night, the world was shrouded in a grey mist.” The young man was used to maintaining a smile before another person. His facial muscles had remembered that feeling so even if he was not happy, he was smiling.

“Perhaps you should consider becoming a horror actor.” Han Fei suggested sincerely but the young man shook his head. In a way, he was as stubborn as Han Fei. “I didn’t become a comedy actor because I like to act. It is because I like to see people smile that I train so hard to be a comedy actor.”

While they conversed, the young man’s phone kept vibrating. The members from the Happiness Neighbourhood group didn’t chat in the group, they didn’t want the chat group to be leaden with negative emotions. Instead they pm-ed the young man to ask about him.

The light from the screen lit up the young man's face as he patiently replied to the people one by one. Han Fei stood beside the young man and observed him. It felt like he was looking into a mirror. With the guidance from the previous manager, Han Fei became the building manager for Happiness Neighbourhood Building 1. Even though his life was constantly at risk, he tried his best to save the tenants at Happiness Neighbourhood. The cryptic world was forever engulfed in darkness. In the endless darkness, Han Fei was like a barely noticeable firefly.

"I'm sorry, there are too many things to deal with today." The young man apologized to Han Fei before he returned to his phone. Perhaps people would think that he was doing something that was totally meaningless. But at the same time, it was because there were people who were insistent on doing these meaningless things that those who were close to choosing to leave the world would have second thoughts. This was not an issue of right or wrong. They merely understood something that most could not because they had been touched by the same problem.

Certain people, you were meeting them for the last time, you merely didn't realize that.

The young man used 20 minutes to reply to all the messages. He was sincere with everyone inside the group. He didn't show any sign of impatience, it was like the words that he saved in real life, he poured all of them into the chats with the people in the group. "The members of the Happiness Neighbourhood chat group are mostly patients. They are hiding in this corner of the world and lean on each other for warmth to survive the chill in their hearts. The only thing I can do for them is to help them secure this little piece of the world."

"Is that the reason you used to convince yourself to keep on living?" Han Fei's words were not gentle. Actually this was the first time he used this tone to talk to a 'ghost' inside the cryptic world.

"The reason to keep on living?" The young man shook his head. "I am not afraid of death and I do not need a reason to keep on living."

"Death is not scary, the scary thing is not living. The saddest thing in the world is seeing someone already preparing to die before he even has the chance to really live. Opportunities in life do not come that often, once you miss them, they will never return. You won't even have the time to feel regret." Han Fei looked at the man. He was persuading the comedy actor but it also felt like he was conversing with himself from the past. He never had a chance like this before, a chance for him to face his own soul, the chance to have a heart-to-heart with his own self.

With regards to whether Perfect Life was really an Iyashikei game, Han Fei thought he had already decided on an answer but now his mind started to change again.

## Chapter 370

### 370 Ziggurat's Tenancy Right and Tenant Support Group (2in1)

"When you're still alive, why think about death?" A horror movie actor stood face to face with a comedy actor and saw themselves in each other's eyes. Their futures were drastically different but the path they had chosen was so eerily similar. One became the manager in the cryptic world as a living person; the other became the pillar for patients with a sickened body and mind. Both of them stood in their version of darkness and became a fleck of light in their night sky.

"I will keep on living." The young man said with a smile on his face. "I am a very good actor if I do say so myself, you're the first person to know my secret." He controlled the avatar left behind by Yan Zu and looked through the messages and pictures which remained of the boy. These were all evidence of his former presence.

"You must have many similar accounts. Don't you ever feel tired guarding over them? One day, you might collapse." Han Fei pulled over a chair and sat down beside the young man. He could sense the bad state the young man was in. The man had no channel to vent the pain in his heart so whenever there was a new source of pain, he would suppress it deeper into his heart.

"That is the positive part about my illness. I won't be able to feel any emotions that normal people would. Things like happiness and despair are the same to me. My heart is like an isolated city, nothing can come in but nothing can go out either." The young man didn't lift his head as he continued to scroll through the boy's life, "I never talked about these thoughts of mine with others but for some reason, I feel open around you, like... you can understand what I'm feeling."

"A 52 Hertz Whale meeting another 52 Hertz Whale?" Han Fei knew the truth, he was conversing with his own soul. In a way, this was quite a saddening truth.

"Yes, even though this is our first meeting, I feel like I have been waiting for you. It's like the reason I've lived for so long is for this day to arrive, for us to meet." The man looked through the boy's memory. After a long time, he said, "Can you help me with a small favor?"



“Help you keep your secret?”

“No.” The man’s hollow gaze gathered with light again. “I will try my best to make sure my profile is the last to blink out in the group chat but like you said, if one night I suddenly topple over...” The young man’s heart was extremely barren, he had created so many laughs and smiles for his audience but he took in all the pain for himself. During the process of conversation with Han Fei, his speech started to become more intermittent and his fingers started to shake like he was very cold. “I hope you can inherit the account of Firefly from me. Help me preserve the trace of their existence and guide the newcomers to the group.”

“Is that what the old man told you when he handed you the managerial position of the group?”

“Yes, for us, the night is endless. Even if the world disappears, the night will still be there. Compared to the endless night, we are like easily extinguishable fireflies. We can’t rival the night sky and we can’t bring light to anyone. But we can choose the way we would like to live so that we wouldn’t be consumed by the darkness.” The correct thing to do, the knowledge of the world, the young man knew everything but understanding and treating the problem were two different issues, the comedy actor had already tried the best he could. Compared to the other patients in the group, the young man was lucky to have run into Han Fei on that night, a person who could completely empathize with him and even resonated with his soul.

After saying all that, the young man moved his gaze away from the computer screen. He looked at Han Fei seriously, waiting for his answer.

The ghost in Room 4094 had not appeared. Han Fei didn’t even know if there was a soul-summoning ritual in this room. All he did after entering the room was to converse with his own soul and now he was reaching the turning point of the conversation. Han Fei needed to make his choice and his choice would affect the subsequent choice of the owner of Room 4094.

“I can, I will help you record your account and your past but I hope that day will never come.” After Han Fei gave his promise, the young man’s expression softened. For the man who could never feel any emotions, he had never felt so relieved in his life.

“Can you give me your contact number? So that we can contact each other more easily.” The young man took out his phone. His black phone was still pinging with new messages from the chat group. The chat group was the only thing that was meaningful in his life.

Han Fei listed out the number that he had used for years. At first, the young man didn't react that much to it but as he was about to key in the last number, his finger froze over the phone. "This number..." The young man lifted his head with disbelief and looked at Han Fei with confusion, "How do you know my phone number?" The blood from his heart rushed to his brain. The man's skin paled. The soul who was summoned would live according to their fixed memory, trapped in their own bubble. When they realized the problem, they would slowly awaken to the fact that they were already dead.

"Not only do I know the phone number that you've used for 7 years, I also know that you've always kept this axiom on your phone—the best actor is yourself going about life." Han Fei looked at the transformation of the young man. The temperature of Room 4094 also started to drop.

"How did you know that? I have not told anyone about that before!"

"Because you are me. There is no 2nd 52-Hertz Whale in the world, but there are 2 souls who are willing to become fireflies in the dark." Han Fei flashed a smile similar to the one on the young man's face. It was a kind and gentle smile, the smile that could bring people around him comfort. But only the two knew that there was a soul that couldn't smile behind that gentle smile. "I will help you fulfill your final wish and become the new manager and protect all the patients even if my profile is the only one that remains lit inside the chat group." Han Fei laid his hands on the young man's shoulder. "Your goal is something that I've been doing. We have never given up, haven't we?"

The temperature from Han Fei's palms gave the young man some warmth. The shock on his face slowly turned into serenity and acceptance. His skin was losing all color. A deep strangulation mark appeared around his neck. The man had no make-up on his face but a scratch mark surfaced at the corner of his eye, giving him the appearance of a weeping clown. As more things entered his mind, the growl of a stranger erupted from the young man's throat. His rationality was being consumed. Blood vessels bulged on his face. The young man's appearance was starting to differ from Han Fei as his body started to shrink like he was being sucked dry.

Room 4094 morphed alongside the young man. The luxurious furniture was replaced by old and simple ones. Cracks appeared on the wall, the ceiling sunk as if it was about to crush the young man and Han Fei standing in the middle of the room. Everything only stopped when the light from the sinking ceiling almost reached the young man's head. Room 4094 became dilapidated. The young man before Han Fei turned muddled, the glow in his eyes was gone.

The sound of cracking startled Han Fei. He whipped out his knife and turned around. He only then noticed the door of the bedroom had been pushed open and a student about 10 plus stood at the door. There was a white can placed beside his feet. The can contained white rice and yellowed paper. The yellow talisman had the name Firefly on it.

'This student is the owner of Room 4094?' Han Fei guarded the young man behind him and regarded the student with alertness. The boy's head slowly lifted. He was hugging a book and a picture frame in his arms. Different from the other soul-summoning ritual, the boy didn't use a death portrait for his ritual, instead the frame contained the picture of a gaming avatar, it was probably Firefly's avatar.

"It was you who summoned Firefly to this place? You don't even know his real name and appearance, why would you do this to him?" The soul who was summoned to Ziggurat was mostly living humans. In other words, the person who had the avatar of Firefly was half-dead in the real world.

"I wouldn't be able to complete the ritual on my own." When the boy spoke, several human faces appeared in his mouth. The faces gushed forward like waves. The torrent also caused Han Fei to fall. If they didn't purposely avoid the young man behind Han Fei, Han Fei would be sent out the window already.

"I've not seen Firefly, I don't even know his real name but he is someone very important to me and to us." The student spoke. Han Fei saw the dead bodies in his mouth. They hid inside the darkness of the body, surrounded by shadows. Flesh and skin, they were a layer used by these people to avoid interaction with the outside world.

"Us? Are you the users from the Happiness Neighbourhood chat group?" Han Fei's brain spun quickly, "Are you Yan Zu?"

"The group is not called Happiness Neighbourhood, there was a problem with the ritual. One of your souls has mixed into Firefly's memory. Two memories mixed together and thus the worldview changed with it." The student's voice was cold like a dead body but Han Fei was thankful that the boy didn't show direct hostility.

"You've seen what happened earlier. Firefly is still doing his best to fulfill his promise. My soul is someone like Firefly, we will protect this precious treasure as best as possible." Han Fei's soul of kindness and understanding entered Firefly's consciousness. As Firefly's own consciousness was about to collapse from the pressure of the ritual, it was Han Fei's soul which saved him. Firefly was ready to

accept death but Han Fei who had been in the cryptic world for so long was different. His survival spirit was strong as iron and came as a timely support for Firefly.

“If you still care about Firefly, then let me leave with him. Firefly has been searching for death but his experience here might change his perspective on things. He has been guarding the traces of your existence, so I hope you will give him the second chance to approach life.” He had to bring Firefly away to save everyone inside the building.

“We never wanted to hurt Firefly. We didn’t expect the ritual to work. Each of us has tried summoning him for the past 14 years but it never worked. But today it did. He has held onto the promise for 14 years. And today he has arrived because of you.” The boy appeared to misunderstand something. The ritual succeeded tonight because of the Butterfly and not Han Fei.

“Really?” Han Fei said to himself, “He told me something curious earlier, he hoped that I would become the new manager.” The term manager had a unique meaning in the cryptic world. When Han Fei said that, the boy’s brows twitched. But interestingly enough, the boy didn’t correct Han Fei and he didn’t continue this conversation. Instead he had Han Fei pick up Firefly’s phone. After the transformation began inside Room 4094, Firefly’s phone changed too. It became old and the broken screen was stuck on the chat group’s page. The name of the chat group was no longer Happiness Neighbourhood but a row of ‘Death’.

“This is the thing Firefly has been protecting. A whole group of us who have already been greyed out...” The boy lowered his head. Before he could finish, Firefly’s phone vibrated. The boy then saw the name of the chat group had been changed. The row of ‘Death’ had been edited to—Ziggurat’s Tenancy Right and Tenant Support Group.

When he saw the change to the name of the group, Han Fei was surprised. He looked shyly at the boy. “I was just giving it a try, I didn’t realize that the manager can edit the name directly.”