

Iyashikei 51

Chapter 51:

Han Fei had thought deep and hard before making the decision to enter Room 1052. He had stayed in the game for 3 hours already and had completed the hidden quest so he could log out anytime he wanted.

Despite the ghoulish expression on the woman's face and her strange definition for the word 'pet', Han Fei still believed she could end up being a good neighbour. His reasoning was simple, she had saved his life by killing the faceless ghost who attempted to kill him earlier.

Blood. Blood on her clothes, the knife, the decapitated head, the lips, that was the first impression Han Fei had of the woman.

As the door to Room 1052 opened, a hard-to-describe fragrance drifted out. Room 1052 was connected to Room 1051, but the smell that emitted from them was like heaven and hell. The dim lighting captured the woman's arresting, if sickly beauty. Her blood red jacket shone like a ruby. After Han Fei entered the room, she closed the door. As the door clicked shut, Han Fei's heart raced. He looked around and the room was more bizarre than he anticipated. A large dining table was placed in the middle of the living room. Exquisite china sat on top of it. Delicious 'dishes' were served on every single plate. If that was all, Han Fei would not be so afraid but the problem was, none of the 'dishes' which gave off the delectable fragrance would be considered normal human food.

'Mannequins? Pictures? Hair?' Different kinds of 'food' comprised the feast. Just looking at them, Han Fei was discomfited. His body took an involuntary step back and he brushed against a gripping chill. When he turned back, a pale hand landed on his shoulder. The fingers devoid of temperature caressed his neck softly.

"What is your favorite food?" The woman whispered into Han Fei's ears. Somehow, her words took on a strange scent, a perfume that triggered the horror within Han Fei.

"I don't have a favorite food. I came from a poor family so I'm already very appreciative that you're giving me a free meal." Han Fei was cautious with his answer. He was afraid that if he said meat, the woman would turn him into a fresh ingredient.

“Good, I love a child who is not choosy with his food. They’re the easiest to breed.” The woman’s icy fingers left Han Fei’s neck. While Han Fei contemplated the meaning of her words, she carried the headless ghost’s head into the kitchen.

‘Easiest to breed?’ After the woman left the living room, Han Fei’s eyes landed on the set of sharp knives sitting on the dining table. The woman appeared to possess many such bloodied knives. Each of them had distinct length and making, they seemed to serve different functions. ‘She used this particular knife to pierce through the faceless ghost’s head...’ Han Fei needed to find a weapon to protect himself so he wandered over to the table and reached out to touch the knife. A warm feeling travelled through his fingertip into his body. Then Han Fei jumped back from a shrill shout that erupted in his ears. At the same time, the robotic voice announced, “Notification for Player 0000! You have found Grade G Blood Red Item—Bloodied Table Knife.

“Bloodied Table Knife: A cursed tool. It is extremely sharp. Constant usage will drive the user insane with the urge to slice at people and object around them.”

This was the first time Han Fei encountered a cursed object in the game. Based on his observation, they could be used to injure ghosts but a heavy price had to be paid for using them. As the image of Room 1052’s tenant returned to his mind, Han Fei decided it was better if he stayed away from the woman’s stuff. While Han Fei’s mind meandered about, a thick aroma wafted out from the kitchen. Han Fei swallowed a mouthful of saliva as he leaned to look into the kitchen.

The kitchen door was left half open. Han Fei could see a red figure bustling inside it. As if pulled along by the fragrance, Han Fei waddled over to the kitchen. His fingers landed on the handle. Just as he was about to push the door open, the door pulled open from inside. The woman appeared at the door holding a pot of black braised meat stew. She regarded Han Fei with a smile. Fresh blood stains colored her fingers. An appetizing flavor burst from the pot. However, Han Fei could not help but notice that the faceless ghost’s head had disappeared.

“I have a particular demand when it comes to food, I’ve been searching for the most extreme flavor.” The woman stomped out from the kitchen. She forced Han Fei to stagger backwards, away from the kitchen door. “You should be hungry, right?” She scooped out two ladles of soup from the pot. Then she poured the rest of the stew into the trash can. Han Fei did not spot the ghost’s head inside the stew and he sighed surreptitiously in relief.

“What’s wrong?” Hearing his sigh, the woman casually placed the pot back on the dining table and turned to face Han Fei.

“No, it’s just that, wouldn’t that go to waste?” Regret colored Han Fei’s face. “Your cooking smells so delicious, it’s such a shame that you’d throw them away.”

The woman’s smile burned brighter with Han Fei’s praise. “You obviously do not understand Chinese cooking. For Chinese stews, the essence is in the soup. The ingredients are there to give flavor, you’re not supposed to eat them. Regardless, they won’t go to waste because I’ll feed them to my pet.”

“You mean Room 1051?”

“Indeed, it likes my leftovers.” The woman then stood up and headed back to the kitchen. When the door opened for a split open, Han Fei caught a second glance into it. There were some strange ‘things’ hanging from the ceiling. Han Fei had no idea what they were. They looked like hanging meat that you’d find at a butchery.

In just a few minutes, the woman finished making several dishes. She placed the dishes on the delicate china and invited Han Fei to take a seat at the giant dining table.

“I’ve moved here for quite some time already and you’re only the third guest to come visit me.” The woman lifted up the covers and a heady aroma instantly permeated the room. Han Fei’s stomach grumbled from the smell but when he saw the dishes, his appetite vanished. A plate of animal guts was placed before Han Fei. It was still fresh with blood stains. And that was the most normal food on the table. Other than that, Han Fei also spotted some unusual plants and unrecognizable meat.

“Well, why don’t we dig in?” The woman picked up the napkin to blot at her lips. Her action was graceful but for some reason, her lips grew bloodier with the napkin swipe.

“Do you think my cooking is not good? Is that why you haven’t moved your chopsticks? Or you’re afraid they’re made from human meat?” The woman chuckled in mock offense. She reached out her right hand and scratched lightly at her cheek. “Don’t you worry about that. I’ve never harmed any human and I’m not interested in human meat.” As the woman studied Han Fei’s face, her red pupils wavered as if she was about to faint. She bit on her right pinkie. “Like I told you, I am in pursuit of the most extreme flavor and human meat is not at all delicious.”

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The woman's last sentence caused Han Fei's heart to quiver. The woman gave the statement openly to put Han Fei at ease, not anticipating the alarm it would raise within Han Fei. 'How did she know human meat is not delicious? Has she eaten them before?'

Under the woman's scrutinizing gaze, Han Fei slowly picked up the chopsticks. He reached for the bloody guts and picked some onto his plate. Then he pretended to carelessly brush his finger against it. The system had the power to determine if an in-game object Han Fei touched was unique or not. The perfect example was the cursed table knife. He wanted to repeat the same experiment to identify the food on his plate. If the system provided an item description, then it would mean the food was a 'unique' item and the system would tell him if it was edible or not. If the system did not respond, then the food was probably just horrid looking but perfectly normal.

As his finger scraped against the guts, the robotic voice soon answered. "Notification for Player 0000! You have discovered Grade G Food—Cursed Bovine Heart!

"Cursed Bovine Heart: This heart was soaked in malice and hatred not long after it left its living body. Players who ingest it for the first time will have 95 percent of being cursed and 5 percent of obtaining a random Attribute Point."

Delicious food was a big selling point in Perfect Life. The game promised to replicate delicacies from around the world. Players with cooking ambitions could even participate in their creation. There were many cooking-related professions in game like chefs, food critics and sommeliers. This was a common feature in an Iyashikei game but until now Han Fei did not have the pleasure to enjoy it. After all, he was too busy evading the fate of being made into other people's food.

Studying the bovine heart and sniffing its aroma, Han Fei decided to trust the system. Furthermore, it was not like he was spoiled for choice. If he only gave praise and did not touch the food, Han Fei did not think the lady would be happy with him. To endear himself to the tenant of Room 1052, Han Fei had to steel his stomach. He swallowed a mouthful conspicuously and then took a cautious bite of the heart. His taste buds danced in joy. It was as if the food had put a spell on him. The young man put down the chopsticks and used his hands to feast on it directly. "It's delicious! Delectable! Flavourful! Sweet but not overly so! It's soft with some bite!" Han Fei gave all the praise he knew. Seeing Han Fei wolf down the food, the woman smiled bigger. Her red eyes lingered on Han Fei.

Han Fei finished the bovine heart soon. The system notification returned: "You have gained a random attribute point from ingesting the cursed bovine heart for the first time. Your Charm decreases by 1!"

When he heard that, Han Fei was so stunned that he forgot to chew. 'Charm decreases by 1? I thought my -10 point is already at rock bottom but there are still ways to go?! Is this a reward or a curse anyway?!'

Based on Perfect Life's official website introduction, one's charm would directly affect the in-game NPC's attitude towards oneself. In a normal game, the higher the charm, the friendlier the NPCs would be. However, Han Fei noticed that in his version of the game, his Charm attribute was quite distinct. His charm did not work on living humans but instead on various monsters and ghosts. The lower his charm, the kindlier the ghostly NPCs reacted to his presence. Noticing the -11 Charm value, Han Fei figured he shouldn't be too hung up over it. That was his own unique charm after all.

"How's the food?" The woman's gaze never left Han Fei. She used the cursed knife to carve a small piece of meat and placed it in her mouth. Her table manners were much better than Han Fei's. However, after a quick chew, the smile on her face gradually disappeared and she spat out the meat. "I still can't get used to eating these. Compared to them..." The woman picked up the chopsticks to fish some strand of hairs from another plate. "I prefer to feast on ghosts."

Then what happened next shocked Han Fei. A soft wail evoked from the strands of hair. Hearing that, the smile returned to the lady's face. This was the brightest she had smiled all night.

'She suffers from allotriophagy?' Han Fei was curious about the woman's death. Her behavior was too suspicious. Han Fei's interest was piqued.

"This is the best meal I've had! Can I come to share more meals with you in the future? I will bring big sister more presents of course." Han Fei blinked pleadingly at the woman. He looked too sincere to bear a rejection.

"Naturally you can. I'm glad that you've enjoyed my cooking so much." The woman nodded. She was very satisfied with Han Fei.

"By the way, what is big sister's name?" Han Fei still did not know her name. While he was there, he might as well get that information.

"I have many names." The woman bit on her right finger and blood stained her lips. "But recently I've been using the name, Xu Qin."

“Notification for Player 0000! You have gained Xu Qin’s approval! Xu Qin’s friendliness increases by 10! Forming a peaceful neighbourly relationship is the first step to a perfect life.”

Using this break, Han Fei glanced at the mission interface.

“You have completed the Grade G Hidden Mission, Do not Turn Your Head Around! You have obtained the basic reward—1 Free Skill Point!

“Warning! Different completion rates for the hidden mission will offer different levels of reward! You not only did not turn your head back in the allotted 15 minutes, you’ve successfully made use of your environment to eliminate the non-locals who tried to infiltrate into the apartment building! You’ve gained double the EXP and a unique reward! Congratulations for unlocking a potential hidden profession, Midnight Butcher.

“Midnight Butcher (Hidden Profession): To become the midnight butcher, you have to eliminate 10 non-locals that infiltrate into the apartment building before reaching level 10.

“Notification for Player 0000! Hidden Professions have their own unique profession skills and specialties! They are extremely rare!

“Notification for Player 0000! You have successfully reached level 4! You’ve obtained 1 Free Attribute Point!”

Like usual, Han Fei entered the skill point into acting and the attribute point into stamina. As his level continued to increase, Han Fei could sense clear changes to his acting skill and physique.

In terms of acting, he could now utilize the smallest expression to manifest the deepest emotion while the change to his physique was observable by increased strength.

However, there was a deeper reason why Han Fei focused on levelling his stamina. Earlier when he came into contact with the cursed table knife, he was almost overwhelmed by the curse. His physique was still too fragile so he wanted to get strong as fast as possible. When he could lay actual claim to the knife

without falling for the curse, then he would finally have some offensive measures against the ghostly threats.

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Xu Qin's cooking was riddled with curse. From the information Han Fei found on the official website, this kind of food, that carried with them a unique effect, was extremely rare.

After a brief hesitation, Han Fei tossed that thought out of his mind. The plate of hair kept screaming, Han Fei could not imagine swallowing it. He opted for the other relatively normal-looking dish and once again surreptitiously brushed it against his finger. To his disappointment, all the dishes on the table appeared to contain the same curse. The effect could only be triggered the first time Han Fei ate them. 'These dishes are all Grade G Food. Based on Xu Qin's passion in cooking, if I can provide her with greater ingredients, she might be able to make some higher-level food.' Han Fei lavished Xu Qin with more praises. Somehow, this mad woman with painted lips and crazy eyes who had an abnormal appetite was turned into a beautiful, kind sisterly neighbour with awesome cooking skill through Han Fei's descriptions. Xu Qin probably did not get praises for her cooking often. The more she spent time with Han Fei, the more she enjoyed his company.

"You mentioned I was the third guest to come visit since you moved here. Big sister, who are the other two?" Han Fei wanted to know who else was so courageous.

"The building manager used to drop by, but unfortunately he does not know anything about good food. He has horrible taste."

"The building manager used to come here?" Han Fei's interest was instantly piqued. He had been yearning for information on this mysterious building manager.

"Yes, the building manager shares a good relationship with many of the tenants here. It's a shame that he has gone missing." Xu Qin said as she took out a key from her jacket pocket. "But I suspect he knew this would happen. Before he disappeared, he handed the key for the first floor steel door to me." Toying with the rusted key, Xu Qin's blood red lips curled. "He knows that I will go grocery shopping every week. He was probably worried that I'd go harvesting within the apartment should I am trapped inside the building so he thoughtfully left me with the key. I suppose he had predicted his tragedy beforehand." Grocery shopping was a banal activity but Han Fei knew it would entail something much more terrifying in Xu Qin's case.

“After the building manager disappeared, the spare keys went missing. As a result, a lot of non-locals sneaked into the building, in fact, a few of them are squatting on the 6th floor right now.” The woman’s smile took on a morbid glow as she reached over to caress the leather doily underneath the china. “The second guest I had was one of the non-locals. He stayed on the 6th floor. The man knew nothing about food. To help him understand the meaning of good food, I purposely had him leave behind his skin.”

Xu Qin’s pale fingers danced on the beige-colored leather. Han Fei’s eyes twitched. His legs were trembling but he kept his upper body as normal as possible.

“Are you alright? You don’t look so well.”

“I’m fine.” Han Fei soon recovered. He licked at his lips and said as if to himself. “I was just thinking, one guest is only enough for you to make a small doily. If you can get all of them, you’d have enough material to change a new tablecloth.”

After hearing that, the woman chuckled, “Great minds think alike.” Han Fei had no idea what was going through Xu Qin’s mind, he simply did not like the non-locals on the 6th floor. After all, one of them did try to kill him for no reason. These non-locals appeared to be completely dominated by hatred and bloodlust. Seeing how happy Xu Qin was, Han Fei laughed along with her. He finished his plate of food and regarded the empty plate with regret. “I’m so blessed to be able to enjoy this feast with you. I promise to bring you more ingredients to cook in the future.”

The atmosphere at the table was joyful. If the plates were not filled with hair, mannequins, and if the walls were not covered with struggle signs and blood stains, it would be a Kodak moment. After the satisfying dinner, Han Fei left Room 1052 accompanied by Xu Qin. To be honest, he still had more questions for Xu Qin but since this was his first visit, Han Fei’s goal was not to interrogate but to lay the foundation for a neighbourly relationship.

When he reached Room 1044, Han Fei realized his back was soaked. It was like he had just come out from the pool. “Xu Qin stays on the 5th floor alone. She has absolute control over the entire floor, that shows how eerily powerful she is.”

In any case, Han Fei had a lucrative outing that day. He not only levelled up, he had made a new acquaintance.

Xu Qin mentioned that she'd go grocery shopping every week. Han Fei wondered if he could tag along and leave the apartment with her when Xu Qin's friendliness level with him reached 100. In this horizonless city shrouded in darkness, to find one's way around, one needed a guide.

Shutting the anti-theft door behind him, Han Fei turned to look at the innermost bedroom. It was still closed. Han Fei did not dare to venture towards it earlier but now that he could log off at any time, he moved to open the door. The Feng Shui of Room 1044 was such that the most Yin energy would be gathered at the innermost room. Once the bedroom door was open, the temperature inside the house dropped conspicuously. Han Fei was already mentally prepared but when he glanced into the bedroom, his heart still skipped a beat.

The seven broken victims stood beside the bed with their heads lowered. Their bodies were bleeding. Their blood mingled together to form the blurry shape of a monster. All 7 of them resisted their inner despair, they did not want to turn into the monster.

"Is there anything that I can help with?" Han Fei's eyes scanned the numb, icy faces. "I promise to capture the killer on your behalf! I'll avenge all of you!"

All 7 victims heard Han Fei but only Wei Youfu appeared to understand him. The man's head slowly raised. Resisting an unimaginable pain, before his body got torn apart, he wrote down a character in the air.

"An? An from Meng Changan?"

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"Meng Changan? Are you trying to tell me that he's the killer?" Before Han Fei could get an answer, the victims' bodies were shredded and they gradually coagulated to become the dangerous monster. It had no hope, no kindness, and no rationality, the monster only had the urge to destroy.

'The 7 victims have to suffer the pain of dismemberment every night?' Han Fei retreated out from the bedroom. He glanced at the clock. It was about 4 am, the time of death for the 8th victim. 'They too have been mounting their own resistance...' Before the monster emerged, Han Fei quietly closed the door. Room 1044 was about to become very dangerous, the monster would attack anything in sight

indiscriminately. 'The 7 victims are separate individuals but they were brutally sewn together by their killer. I wonder if there is anything I can do to ease their pain?'

In any case, that was homework for another day. After the adventures he had had, Han Fei was tired. He came to the corner of the living room and logged off. Removing the gaming helmet, Han Fei picked up the glass of water and gulped it down. He sat on the edge of his bed and studied the wall of victims. His eyes eventually landed on the picture of a man. "Meng Changan."

Fatigue and drowsiness engulfed him. Han Fei's brain shut down and he slumbered.

...

Han Fei was woken up by his ringing phone at 10 am. He glanced at the caller Id and quickly answered it. "Li Xue? Is there an update?"

"I'm at your home now. Do you mind opening the door for me?"

"You're already at my door?" Han Fei hung up and hurriedly dressed before he rushed to open the door. "Why did you come to visit me so early in morning? Don't you need to work?"

"I am working. Come, we'll talk inside." Li Xue said severely. Based on her tone, something serious must have happened. After drawing the curtains closed, Li Xue dragged Han Fei into the room. "Yesterday night, the law enforcement launched a carpet search at Xin Lu's nature reserve. The mission went on for an hour before they found a black wooden house."

"That's wonderful!"

"Don't get your hopes up just yet. The CSU investigated the wooden house inside and out. They even took samples of the dirt around the house. There was no trace of human activity, dead or alive."

"But that's impossible!"

“Wait, there’s more.” Li Xue signalled for Han Fei to quiet down so she could continue. “The whole charade smells fishy, so under my teacher’s insistence, the team expanded the search circle. Another 4 hours passed and an officer unluckily slipped and fell into a swamp. While his colleagues worked to save him, they came across another identical black wooden house hidden deep inside the swamp.”

“Of course, the real house wouldn’t be found so easily. After all, Wei Youfu took two trips before he returned with the child’s piece of clothing.” Seeing the paleness on Li Xue’s face, Han Fei asked softly, “So what did you find at the house?”

“The black house is like a time capsule. There is no modern technological product. The house is small but there are two floors, one on the surface, and the other underground. The first floor is very normal, it looks like a small hut built by a forest ranger. But once you stepped through the hidden tunnel which led underground, you’d arrive at a different world.” Li Xue’s expression worsened. “A lot of children’s clothing and daily needs are stashed there. The items are carefully arranged and neatly kept. The place has a crypt-like feel to it.

“The police eventually found their way to a hollowed-out room. The wooden sign outside the door labelled it as the House of Eden.”

Eden was paradise uncorrupted by sin. It brought forth images of untouched flora and fauna. Blessed humans lived there without concern and worry.

“What is inside that room?” A bad feeling choked up Han Fei’s heart.

“Even the most experienced officer started to puke once they stepped into the room.” Li Xue took out her phone to share some pictures with Han Fei. “The room was covered in strange talismans and copious amounts of blood. The police also dug up many children’s bodies buried in the soil. According to the coroner, the oldest body in that room died 20 years ago.”

“Can these children be identified?”

“Most of them are abandoned babies and orphans, they are not in the system but we did have a clear identification on the earliest victim.” Li Xue swapped to a different picture. “This is He Yuhuai, he donated his kidney when he was six. His father was the director of the private orphanage at Xin Lu’s Northern Street, He Shouye.”

“Hold up. The director of the orphanage that kept Jiang Jiang was also named He Shouye, right? The body of his own child was buried inside this black house?” Han Fei voiced his confusion.

“Yes, the whole thing makes no sense but as we dug deeper, more suspicious details surfaced regarding this He Shouye. He was connected to the swamp land where the black house sat on. Suspicion was raised about his child’s kidney donation as well. There were rumors that the donation was not voluntary, but it was actually a business transaction. Basically, the father sold his son’s organ for money.”

“What kind of father is he?! No, he’s not even a human anymore!”

“Regardless, he disguised himself very well. Basically everyone that interacted with him had nothing but good things to say about him. After his child died from illness, he even forked out his own money to remodel Northern Street’s Orphanage in the memory of his son.”

“What a fabulous excuse.” Han Fei’s eyes chilled. “Where is the bastard now? Is he in police custody?”

Li Xue shook her head. “Despite his suspicion, He Shouye had ironclad alibis when Wei Youfu, Ah Mei and Gu Hwa were murdered. Furthermore, He Shouye had already died in a car accident years before the first jigsaw murder occurred.”

“He’s already dead?”

“Yes. Jiang Jiang and He Shouye, the two individuals most directly related to the case are dead. It is like someone has been cleaning up their tracks.” Noticing the deep frown on Han Fei’s face, Li Xue said comfortingly. “Even though we have not captured the killer, this is still a great breakthrough. For now, we suspect there is more than one killer. There is reason to believe the killers might have traded their targets.”

“What do you mean?”

“I cannot give you the details but the police are sure He Shouye was involved in Xiao Qing, Chui Caiyi and Chui Tianchi’s deaths, but not the others. So we speculate the killers might have had each other finish off the other’s marks. In any case, with the advancement in law enforcement technology, I believe it

won't be long before the truth is revealed!" Li Xue's expression darkened with concern. "However, the reason I came to find you today is because I need to warn you. These killers are cruel, cunning and extremely vengeful. They might come after you."

"Me?"

"That's right. The movie that you're in right now might attract their attention as well. You'll have to remind everyone to be careful."

Li Xue stood up to leave but Han Fei held her back. "Li Xue, wait a minute. I've been examining the case for the past few days, and I need your help to investigate someone for me!"

"Who is it?"

"The youngest son adopted by the old lady from the frozen body case, Meng Changan." Han Fei switched on his computer. "I know he has a squeaky-clean record and his friends adore him deeply but if there's anything He Shouye has taught us, it's that we shan't judge a book by its cover."

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"It does appear that the human jigsaw case and the frozen body case are connected, the police are also investigating their connection. Naturally the Meng Siblings are within our scope of investigation.

Currently, Li Xue was showing Han Fei Meng Changan and Meng Changxi's information models. According to the system, Meng Changan, overall, was a good person but Meng Changxi had a severe antisocial tendency.

"I find that hard to believe." Han Fei voiced his skepticism. The system rating went against Meng Si's understanding of her own sons.

"Of course, the system is not 100 percent correct, it is merely a reference. Actually, before we got permission to search Xin Lu's nature reserve, another unit was dispatched to investigate the Meng Siblings." Xin Lu law enforcement was effective. They operated like a well-oiled machine. "They came

back with plenty of information about the eldest, Meng Changshou and the youngest, Meng Changan. However, there is a gap in the middle son, Meng Changxi's data. He went missing soon after the human jigsaw case. Ever since then he has logged zero digital trace, that is extremely abnormal. One would not do that unless he has a big secret to hide." Li Xue scanned Meng Changxi's information model, "This man has been a loner since he was a child. He has low self-esteem due to the birthmark on his face. He was often the target of bullying. At his job, he received multiple complaints from his clients. Other than his wife and siblings, no one around him thought he was normal."

"But that does not mean that he has antisocial personality!" Han Fei still believed a mother's assessment more than a computer system's.

"There are other clues as well. If you must know, there was another case lodged against Meng Changxi. The case was reported by his wife. According to his wife, Meng Changxi suffered from paranoia. This was around the time before he disappeared. He kept telling her there was someone out to get him and that scared her enough to seek police help. During their home visit, the police found a lot of notes regarding the frozen body case as well as animal and insect specimens under Meng Changxi's bed. That was the thing that pinned the suspicion on him."

"Have you considered the possibility that Meng Changxi was framed? The evidence found at his home was planted?" Han Fei provided a different perspective, "If Meng Changxi was not lying, then it was perfectly reasonable for him to go into hiding, someone was trying to murder him! That person most likely was the one who framed him too!" The person who knew Meng Changxi the best in this world was not his new bride, or his non-biological siblings but his adopted mother. Han Fei gathered the most crucial information from Meng Si herself. Even though Meng Changxi was not by any means a sunny, or even likeable, person, he had a gentle heart. In contrast, it was Meng Changan who had the twisted heart. Whenever Meng Changan was lectured or scolded by Meng Si, he would torture insects or small animals to vent his anger and frustration. But all of these testimonies died with Meng Si. Meng Changan was, according to the system, a model citizen and Meng Changxi, a sociopath.

"As you said, the system is not 100 percent correct. Is it not possible for one to trick the system by fabricating a fallacious individual information model?" Han Fei was not a tech whiz but he knew that human nature was much more complex and dangerous than a computer system could calculate. "Take for example, Meng Changan, if he has been making careful and deliberate life choices for the past 10 years, is it not possible for him to fool the system? Can the system tell when a person is wearing a mask?"

"Why are you so against Meng Changan?" Li Xue studied Han Fei for a while before she answered his question, "Theoretically, what you described is entirely possible. It was why I said the system's rating is mostly just a reference."

“That is all the more reason to keep a close eye on Meng Changan. I have my reasons to find him distrustful.” Han Fei said affirmatively. Even though Li Xue had no idea where Han Fei got his confidence, she decided to trust him. After all, all the tips given to her by this comedy actor had been proven useful so far. With Han Fei’s words, Li Xue decided to make Meng Changan a person of interest. She would go beyond scanning his information model and have people look into his detailed schedule. Of course, all these investigations would require manpower and time. “Okay, I’ll return to the station and discuss this with my teacher.” Li Xue stood to leave but she was stopped by Han Fei again. “Is there anything else?”

“After hearing what you said, I am actually panicking slightly. The crazed murderer might come after me, so I wish to learn some self-protective measures.” Han Fei eventually came out with the favor. “Do you mind teaching me actual fighting skills?” This skill would help Han Fei defend himself in real life, and it would also come in useful in the game.

“You want me to teach you how to fight?” Li Xue regarded Han Fei with shock. “This is the first time I’ve encountered such a weird request.”

“Your colleagues said you’re the best fighter at the station so why not learn from the best? Pretty please.”

“Fine.” Li Xue glanced at the time on her phone. She had some time on her hands. She then led Han Fei to the rooftop of his building, “I’m doing this because you might be in actual danger. This is not within an officer’s job scope, understood?” It sounded more like Li Xue was persuading herself.

“Of course, you are merely helping a citizen look after his own safety.”

“Then let’s not waste time. Before we start with basic fighting skills, I need to explain to you the anatomical theories of the human body’s seven most crucial joints as well as the vitals points on the human body...” Li Xue gave a brief lecture but Han Fei managed to memorize everything. The man had superior memory skills.

“Normally, when a person faced down a criminal, they would curl back in to defend more often than to strike with offense, that is human nature. However, in hand to hand combat, offense is truly the best defense. So the first thing you need to do is to break down that innate fear and be courageous to go on the offensive.”

“Don’t you worry about that. Even if I run into the dastardliest criminal, I won’t feel a shred of fear.”

“Tamping down one’s fear is only the foundation, building upon that, you have to ensure that you also do not lose your head. Hand-to-hand combat is not a brawl, you have to keep your head cool and take everything around you into consideration...” Li Xue taught Han Fei some simple fighting and grasping skills. Unlike the flashy skills described in wuxia novels, these skills were practical and effective. After a half an hour of lesson, Li Xue was impressed by Han Fei’s learning capability and physique. “Were you an action movie actor in the past? With what I’ve taught you, I’m confident that you can even take down an unguarded patrol cop.”

“I’ve always been a comedy actor.” Han Fei looked at his arms. He too noticed that his physical mobility and reactive speed had gained a stupendous improvement. “I merely maintain a daily, strict physical training like a good actor should.”

Chapter 56:

“An actor’s physical training?” This was the first time Li Xue heard something like that. She found herself getting more intrigued by Han Fei. This man claimed that his dream was to be a comedy actor but he unearthed many clues to an actual case by participating in a horror movie. He looked

“Do not use these skills unless absolutely necessary. When you’re in danger, the first thing you should do is to call the police.” Seeing how serious Han Fei was in training, as if he expected to put these skills to use in real life, she quickly added in warning.

“Of course.”

“In any case, you shouldn’t worry too much. The police will add surveillance around your place.” Li Xue decided to leave Han Fei to his training. “I’ll depart for now. If there’s a new update with the case, I’ll inform you.”

“Thank you.” Han Fei kept at his training. He wished to work these movements into his bodily instinct, only then he would be able to survive in that hellish game.

When noon arrived, Han Fei fixed up a casual lunch at home. At the dining table, a book was placed next to his plate. The time that he'd normally spend on gaming and watching videos in the past was now reconfigured into time for hardcore learning. He studied up on sleuthing, surveillance and counter-surveillance. He was bitten by the learning bug due to his need for survival. Submerging in the ocean of knowledge, Han Fei never felt so fulfilled with his life. The joy he earned was different from a temporary rush. The skills and knowledge he gained would benefit him long term, and that brought him elation one would get from achieving life goals. "I have to study hard and surprise all the bastards who want to kill me."

At 3 pm, Han Fei received a call from Jiang Yi, the latter wanted to have a talk with Han Fei. To be honest, it was extremely rare for a director to call an actor, especially one as unknown as Han Fei. This showed how much Director Jiang valued Han Fei. Han Fei arrived at the set for Flower of Sin at 4 pm. To his surprise, he found the victim's families gathered outside the building. But this time, there was no argument. They merely stood there with their placards and mounted a silent protest. There were some reporters taking videos of this scene.

"Sir, the police have reopened the human jigsaw case, I'm sure they'll come out with the result soon. You shouldn't tire your body like this at your age." Wei Youfu had helped Han Fei multiple times in the game so Han Fei wished to repay his kindness by looking after his family in real life. Furthermore, Han Fei did admire Wei Youfu's father. Like father like son, they were both people with a heart of gold.

"Thank you for your concern, but this is the only thing left that I can do for Youfu." The old man gripped Han Fei's shoulders. His milky eyes were filled with complicated emotions. He wanted to say something but in the end, he merely sighed. "Young man, thank you so much. I like the Youfu that you portray in the movie."

Due to everything Han Fei had done for the victims' families, which included using his body to block one of them from the danger of a flying pail, they treated him like family. "I promise all of you, the real killer will be apprehended soon." Han Fei was just an actor. He had nothing to do with the case but for some reasons, the families found comfort and assurance in his words. The way they looked at Han Fei softened, it was as if they could see the image of their loved ones on Han Fei.

After he bade the family farewell, the floor manager led Han Fei to a room on the second floor. Once he opened the door, Han Fei was hit by a wall of cigarette smoke. Jiang Yi was seated at the table with two other middle-aged men. Several versions of the script sat on the table.

“Xiao Han, the scriptwriters and I have worked many nights editing the script. Since you have a better relationship with the victim’s family, I hope you can help me to convince them to accept this latest edition of the script.” The ashtray between them was stuffed with cigarette butts.

The troublesome nature of multiple editing was evidenced by the two writers’ greying and balding heads.

“You’re sending me to go persuade them?”

“Yes, and tell them that this is the biggest compromise I can give them. If they still refuse to meet us halfway, I’ll have no choice but to press on with the shoot.” Jiang Yi said with difficulty. “I may be the director but I am not the person who really calls the shots when it comes to the movie production.” Han Fei picked up the script. It started very well and the investigation process matched the one in real life but it gradually became more and more fantastical.

“The victims’ family will not agree to this and I will not persuade them to accept this script either.” Han Fei placed the script on the table. “The human jigsaw case is far more complicated than you think. Instead of running off with absurd fictionalization, why not reference and study the actual case further?”

“How did you know we have not studied the case? Everyone’s a critic nowadays.” The balding scriptwriter pinched his cigarette. “Director Jiang, I’ve worked on more than enough editing. To be honest, I’ve done my best by you. Furthermore, the contract that we’ve signed did not specify that our script needs to be approved by the victim’s families anyway.”

“That’s right, this is the last edit we’d do. Young man, you’re an actor so take the script and do your job.” The other scriptwriter stood up and prepared to leave. “Listen, I agree that movies have societal responsibility but we live in a capitalist society, not an idealistic one. Our most prior responsibility is to turn a profit.”

“Director Jiang, and Mr. writers, I know that you’ve poured a lot of hard work into the script, in fact, another crew would not have gone so far in compromise. They probably would not have cared about the concern of the victims’ families.” Han Fei opened the window next to the door to let air into the room to dissipate the gathered smoke. “But why can’t you wait a little longer? The movie will soon have its real ending.”

“Why must we wait for the real ending? Do you think the market will prefer the real ending? Have you ever studied the market before? Do you know anything about our target audience and our movie’s particularity?” The balding writer grabbed his jacket and headed to the door. He reached out to shove Han Fei out of the way.

“I might not understand the market but I do know justice needs to be served.” Han Fei stood his ground, his eyes landing on the writer’s neck and rib. The chill in his gaze froze the writer’s arm in the air. In the end, the writer coughed awkwardly and pretended to flick an invisible dust from his jacket.

“Director Jiang, if you see the movie as nothing more than a commercial machine, then go ahead and run with this script but I won’t be a part of it.” Han Fei stated matter-of-factly. “Even though I might be a mere extra, I respect my profession as an actor. I will not waste time on a meaningless flick.”

Han Fei then left the room. Studying Han Fei’s retreating shadow, Director Jiang sighed and took out his phone. His eyes wandered between the numbers of the executive producer and Ah Cheng. In the end, he did not make the call to get Ah Cheng to return but instead he called the producer.

“Sister Long, can you give me a few more days?”

“You still need more time? How many extra days I’ve already given you? Your main actor is on strike and the victims’ families are still protesting. The movie has already received so much negative press before it even finishes shooting. And you want me to give you more time?!”

“3 days, just give me 3 more days! I’ve found a new candidate to play the main character. In terms of acting and character, he is a million times better than Ah Cheng, but mainly, he has a natural air of a detective about him! He fits my image of the main character perfectly!”

Chapter 57:

“Ah Cheng, are you sure Director Jiang will call?” The female manager paced nervously in the room. “Why don’t you call the director to apologize?”

“What’s the hurry? It’s only been 21 hours and 36 minutes. Director Jiang needs me.” Ah Cheng chuckled confidently but his anxiety was belied by his fingers that scratched against the leather sofa.

“Everything is within my calculation. Trust me, the crew is now in a pickle and they’ll come crawling to get me to save them soon.”

“Really?” The manager took in Ah Cheng’s twitching legs and wandering gaze. In the end, she sighed tiredly, “Then we shall wait some more.”

...

“Jiang Yi, do you know how much negative impact it’ll cause to change the main character at this juncture? Do you know how much effort I’ve used to persuade the agency behind Ah Cheng to sponsor this project? Do you really think there are sponsors out there lined up for this film?”

“I’ll try my best to cut down on the budget further. Furthermore, if you ask for my honest opinion, we’re paying too much for Ah Cheng to play this role. The money he gets doesn’t match the work he puts in. In comparison, this other actor...”

“That’s enough. You’re giving me a headache. Fine, I’ll give you three more extra days. Use these three days to clear your mind and really see what’s important here.” Sister Long then hung up the call. Director Jiang and the two scriptwriters were left in the smoky room.

“Director, are we going to edit this script again?” The scriptwriter took out a cap to cover his balding head.

“Everyone has worked extra hard for the past few days. We should take a short break for now.” Director Jiang then lit a cigarette and chased the rest out of the room.

After Han Fei left the set, he stopped to chat with the victims’ families. He wanted to gain more information to get to know his roommates better. After all, he shared the same roof with them. Through stories told through their loved ones, the ghosts in Room 1044 took on color and life.

“I am sure they will feel your love and adoration. They know that they are missed.” Sitting with the families, listening to their remembrance, a feeling which Han Fei never felt before rose within him. Flimsy as it was, there was a thread that connected the warm, real world and the eerie, hellish game

world. The thread crossed the border between life and death, linking both together. Han Fei could not help but wonder if there was a higher purpose to the existence of this Perfect Life game...

At 5 pm, just as Han Fei was about to bid the families farewell, he got a call from Li Xue. After moving away from the others, Han Fei accepted the call. "Have you found anything on Meng Changan?"

"Not really. More clues surfaced when we looked into Meng Changan but they all pointed towards Meng Changxi!" Li Xue's voice drifted out from the phone. "Furthermore, the crime scene report at the black house was just out. We found DNA traces of two individuals, one was He Shouye, and the other Meng Changxi. Other than that, we pulled up the copy of the traffic cam from several years ago. We spotted Meng Changxi at the street adjacent to where He Shouye died in the car accident. Now we suspect He Shouye's car accident might not have been an accident after all."

"You think it was Meng Changxi who killed He Shouye?" Han Fei pulled up the victims' relationship web in his mind, "Why would he kill He Shouye? There was no connection between them."

"He probably did it to silence his accomplice. Like what I suggested, they are both killers who might have exchanged each other's targets. After the deal was completed, to keep his evil deed a secret, Meng Changxi murdered He Shouye."

"Is it possible that someone has framed Meng Changxi? Isn't it a bit convenient that everything points towards him?"

"There's that possibility, which is why we have not put out a warrant for Meng Changxi yet." Li Xue's tone changed. "To ensure that we do not get the wrong killer, we dig very deep into both He Shouye and Meng Changxi's past. We did not find anything truly incriminating other than the ones we already have on Meng Changxi. However, He Shouye was a different case. It was like we had opened Pandora's Box. He was not a local, he was married and had his son before he moved to the city. We paid a visit to his former neighbours and went through a lot to search for his ex-wife."

"Ex-wife?"

"That's right. He Shouye was divorced. According to his neighbours, He Shouye was a real model citizen before he was a married man. He was their village's prime bachelor. However, after his marriage was confirmed, his real persona was revealed. The man was a horrid gambler and wife beater. It only got

worse after their son was born. He Yuhuai was born with a congenital disease. He was frail and weak. He Shouye was not satisfied with his son and he vented his anger on both the boy and his mother. Domestic violence was common. Eventually his wife could not suffer his wrath anymore and escaped from home. However, she did not bring her son with her.

“He Shouye used He Yuhuai’s life to threaten his wife to return. He said he’d kill the boy if she refused. In the end, the wife had to go to the police. They got a divorce after that.

“After the divorce, there was a big argument over the estate settlement, both parties wanted the house but neither of them wanted the burden of the child. Some of their neighbours teared up talking about that boy. He had no friend and he was always locked up at home. He grew up in fear. His parents took out their negative emotions on him. The sound of a boy crying had never ceased at their house. The neighbours often heard He Shouye roar, ‘Boys don’t weep! Stop crying or I’ll snap your neck!’

“Perhaps because of his firstborn, He Shouye developed an extreme hatred towards kids. According to his neighbours, He Shouye could be perfectly normal at one moment but go crazy the next if there was a child crying around him. In the end, both parties shared their assets evenly, and the boy was given to his mother. The tragedy did not end there though. The mother did not want the boy. She only gave birth to him because He Shouye wanted a child. So one day, she brought him to somewhere very far away for a game of hide and seek. When it was the boy’s turn to hide, the mother abandoned him.

“He Yuhuai’s mother did her own hiding, taking all her money from the divorce. After the police found the boy, they had no choice but to bring him back to his father. You knew what happened next. News surfaced that a millionaire’s son at Xin Lu suffered from kidney disease. When He Shouye found out his son was a possible donor, he made a private transaction with the businessman.

“This whole tragedy started with that boy. If his family had showered him with some love, and learned to accept him, then perhaps the rest of the tragedy could have been avoided.”

Li Xue told the story and a particular person kept appearing in Han Fei’s mind. The boy who lived in the room beneath his in Perfect Life, the boy by the name of Weep; The boy who stood alone by himself, the boy who kept up this game of hide and seek that had no ending in sight; The boy who lived in a house filled with nothing but the sound of crying.

‘Perhaps I should spare some time to talk to Weep...’ The name He Yuhuai echoed in Han Fei’s mind. He planned to meet Weep that night.

Chapter 58:

“He Shouye, who despised kids, somehow became the director of an orphanage? That just screamed suspicion. While managing the orphanage, he adopted many abandoned kids and babies.

“With the suggestion from several criminal psychologists, we went through the notes left behind by He Shouye and we did notice some problems. After He Shouye’s son died, it was like he changed into a completely different person. His tone, his hobby, his personality had a 180 change. He started to peruse books about philosophy and the mental world. He’d lock himself up in his office and he was seen occasionally wandering out alone at night. It felt like he was looking for something or someone.

“We visited a few kids who grew up at the orphanage. Most of the kids had a very good impression of their director and they appreciated his care. However, a small group of them thought the man was very weird because he would often ask them questions that were inexplicable. Questions like whether they had dreamt about someone standing beside their bed at night; whether they had dreamt about a black box; and whether they had seen a butterfly that would only land on people’s heads.

“It sounded like He Shouye was looking for a specific child but he failed to find them. Therefore, he decided to create one that would fit his requirement and that child was most likely the 8th victim in the human jigsaw case.

“What kind of child was he looking for? And why would a dead child fit his requirement? No one has the answer.

“It felt like he was conducting some kind of ritual, a ritual that was guided by his twisted mind. Throughout the transmutation process of his whole personality, a term appeared many times in his notes and that was the butterfly. In the later half of He Shouye’s life, the butterfly was more than just a bug, it took on a symbolic meaning.

“This discovery reminded our officers of another haunting resemblance in the history of another person of interest. Yes, when we looked through the stuff left behind by Meng Changxi, like He Shouye, it showed that he also had been studying up on the human brain and the butterfly. He too had been searching for the butterfly. This is the connection between Meng Changxi and He Shouye, the butterfly.”

At this point, Han Fei had no choice but to interrupt Li Xue. “Meng Changxi has been missing for so long already, these information that he supposedly left behind could have been easily planted.” Han Fei had met Meng Si in person. Through her, he knew for a fact that the person who was obsessed with those books and the butterfly was not Meng Changxi but Meng Changan.

“It’s not easy to manufacture fake evidence. First the culprit has to familiarize himself with Meng Changxi’s handwriting and then he has to know all of Meng Changxi’s social account password, and ultimately, who would spend years to set up all these things?”

“Simple, the real killer would. Meng Changxi is his scapegoat so naturally he has to do all these things.” Han Fei lowered his voice to say, “Compared to Meng Changxi, I still think you should focus on Meng Changan. This seemingly harmless man might be the most dangerous and heartless one. One who might be cold-blooded enough to murder his own mother.”

Just as Han Fei said that, he heard a noise come from behind him. He reacted quickly but even so, when he turned around, he only saw an empty can roll down the street.

“Who’s there?” Han Fei was not reading those sleuthing books for no reason. Without a change to his expression, he whispered into the phone, “Li Xue, someone is following me. I suspect they have overheard our conversation.”

“Where are you now?”

“I’m at the entrance to the set of Flower of Sin. The families of the human jigsaw case’s victims are all here.”

“Don’t go home yet. Come to Northern Street’s Frontier Mall instead, there are crowds there. I’ll go meet you there as well.”

“Okay.”

After hanging up as casually as he could, Han Fei wandered towards the mall. He did not take any public transport because that was not something he’d normally do. The feeling of being followed was not

strong. Han Fei sauntered around the mall for a long time but he did not spot Li Xue. It was not until dusk that he got a call from her.

A few officers had been observing Han Fei through the mall surveillance, everything was normal. Han Fei did not meet up with the police to explain his situation. Thankfully the police did not lose their trust in Han Fei due to this incident, if anything, they all decided they needed to add more security detail on Han Fei. As a low popularity actor, Han Fei had never been followed before. This time, he finally got to experience the life of a celebrity, however, it was not paparazzi who was tailing him but a dangerous criminal.

After purchasing a week's worth of groceries at the mall as well as a few new locks, Han Fei returned home. Han Fei cooked a simple dinner and added the new locks to the door and window. "This should be safe enough."

He placed the weapons that he bought from the internet around him. He practiced a round of the fighting skill Li Xue taught him. Then he settled down to read through the books he bought online, these were the same books Meng Changan read when he was young. When it was almost midnight, he rubbed his eyes and put the books down. "Of all the questions that He Shouye asked the kids, there are two that stand out. One is the dream about the black box and the other is the sight of the butterfly that would only land on people's heads."

Li Xue did not know about the Easter Egg of the black box in Perfect Life. However, Han Fei did know about the Easter Egg, from his conversation with Huang Yin. "Is it possible that the butterfly is also searching for the black box in my brain? But Perfect Life wasn't in existence when the human jigsaw case happened a decade ago. Or the black box has long been in existence, even before the game, Perfect Life?"

"He Shouye and his gang have been looking for abandoned babies and children, are they looking for a suitable candidate who could neurologically support the black box?"

Han Fei stared at the gaming helmet on the table. He possessed a piece of information that he had been keeping from Li Xue, he was also an orphan. However, he did not grow up at Xin Lu Northern Street's Orphanage but at a place called Happy Orphanage situated in the old city. The orphanage once gave him a feeling of home, the people around him were the walking definition of happiness. They would celebrate all the major holidays at the orphanage, but one day, everything changed.

“Before I have the chance to make all of you laugh, I’ve lost my own laughter, life really is full of surprises and ironies.”

Connecting all the wires, Han Fei cleared his mind. Before midnight struck, he put on the helmet. Blood dripped and Han Fei’s world turned red.

Chapter 59:

Opening his eyes, Han Fei saw the clock point at midnight. Han Fei crawled up from the ground and studied the dark living room. “As moldy and dark as this place is, after you stay here long enough, it does feel like home.” The sound of static drifted into his ears. The television had been mysteriously switched on. The image slowly cleared on the grainy screen. The door of the innermost bedroom was opened. A child walked out with his head lowered. As if hypnotized, he dragged his broken body to the living room and plopped himself down on the sofa.

‘Chui Tianchi?’ The boy’s expression kept changing. Sometimes it was ghastly, other times it was innocent. It was like two forces were fighting within him. Han Fei was cautious to not get too close. The boy did not come after Han Fei either. Perhaps the boy had gotten used to Han Fei’s presence, or perhaps it was some other reason, in any case, Chui Tianchi completely ignored Han Fei.

‘Today is the day the victims will gather to watch television again?’ Han Fei knew the victims watched the television show not for the sake of entertainment, this was the only link back to their past and the only way they could retain their last shred of humanity. That was what Han Fei gathered after spending time with his roommates. The fate of the victims was tragic. They had been resisting the monster within them. Should they lose their sense of self, they would be glued together permanently and terrorize this hellish world as a brainless monster.

‘I hope they’ll be able to revert to their old selves once the case is solved.’ The victims streamed out from the bedroom and came to gather before the television. Han Fei pulled over a chair and sat to the side. He watched his roommates with concern. The whole scene was strangely harmonious, they looked like a family. Han Fei sat with them until 3 am. He turned to look into the innermost bedroom. ‘Wei Youfu is the most unique of all the victims. He retains the most memory. He should be my breakthrough to reach the other victims.’

Now was a rare opportunity. The victims filed out into the living room based on their time of death. Wei Youfu died at 3.04 am so he was still inside the bedroom. Without the hindrance of the other victims, Han Fei believed he could gain more information from Wei Youfu. With that in mind, Han Fei slipped

into the innermost bedroom. He found Wei Youfu and Gu Hwa standing by the wall. Their pale skins were crawling with black veins. Their expressions suggested they were at the brink of madness.

“Youfu?” Han Fei called out softly. Hearing his name, Wei Youfu’s pupils bounced crazily in his eyes. Veins popped in his eyes as they bulged forward. At that moment, Han Fei feared for his own safety. Han Fei did not dare to push the man further. He slowly retreated out from the room. When he was at the door, he caught something at the corner of his eyes. There was a pile of laundry stuffed behind the door. One of the clothes stood out to him because it was worn by his 6th floor neighbour when he came to visit. The neighbour himself had disappeared but his clothes remained. Han Fei swiped the clothes and sneaked away. ‘I still can’t communicate with them normally.’

Leaving his roommates to their peace, Han Fei placed the clothes of his former 6th floor neighbour on the dining table. He spread it open to examine it further. He was curious if anything was left behind inside the pockets. His fingers just touched something when the robotic voice announced in his mind. “Notification for Player 0000! You have discovered Grade G Blood Red Item—Human Cocoon.

“Human Cocoon (Blood Red Item): The cocoon of some kind of insect.”

Han Fei opened his palm. A greyish-yellow stone about the size of one’s thumb sat in the middle. It was tough to the touch and faded blood capillaries covered its surface. ‘This is a cocoon? But if the name is Human Cocoon, how is a human a kind of insect?’ He stored the item in his inventory before he continued to search the other pockets. ‘Looting is a crucial part of any game. How could I have forgotten about that?! Right... I was too busy running for my life.’ After turning all the pockets inside out, Han Fei found nothing else other than the Human Cocoon. ‘A crazed murderer only drops this one unknown cocoon after his death? This game is quite stingy.’ Han Fei pulled out the cocoon from his inventory. No matter how he studied it, the thing looked nothing more than an ordinary pebble with unique striations.

‘Even though I am clueless about its use, this thing should be very important to my former 6th floor neighbour. He shared the floor with the rest of the non-locals, perhaps they’d recognize its value as well. Hmm, to unlock the hidden profession, I have to eliminate 10 non-locals before I reach level 10.’ A plan slowly formed in Han Fei’s mind. ‘Since its original owner is already dead, as a kind citizen, I should return it to his friends. Perhaps I should call the big sister on the 5th floor to come along while I do them this favor.’

The plan rooted in Han Fei’s mind. He toyed with the cocoon while he came up with the details of his plan. Suddenly he felt a prick of pain from his palm. Studying the cocoon closer, he noticed there was a barely noticeable spine at the bottom of the cocoon. The spine punctured his skin and was sucking his blood. ‘This thing feeds on blood?’ Han Fei was about to fling the disgusting thing away when he realized

the color of the capillaries on the cocoon surface deepened after it imbibed Han Fei's blood. 'This why I hate bugs. I should return this to its lawful owner as soon as possible.'

Storing the cocoon back in his inventory, Han Fei walked to the anti-theft door carrying his former neighbour's clothes. 'I still haven't completed the mission that required me to explore the 5th floor. I might as well attempt to finish it while I go and visit Xu Qin.'

After his unexpected trigger of the hidden mission, the corridor left a deep emotional scar on Han Fei. He now would observe the corridor for a long time before he stepped out the door. 'It's very quiet. There shouldn't be anyone around.'

Pushing the door silently open, Han Fei sidled up the stairs while sticking to the wall. Han Fei felt assaulted by an oppressive feeling. It permeated the whole apartment building. It appeared whenever he left Room 1044.

Han Fei was lucky this time because he did not trigger any hidden mission. He successfully reached the landing between 4th and 5th floor. The door to Room 1051 was still open, the dark room yawned like a monster's jaw.

'The big sister sure is something else to have turned a room into her pet.'

Han Fei slunk over to the door of Room 1052. He tapped on it lightly. "Big Sister, are you home? I'm your neighbour from downstairs."

He waited for a long time but the door did not open. However, the sound of bone sawing and meat slicing did come from Room 1054. Standing alone in the dark corridor, listening to that horrid butchery, Han Fei's heart twitched. He waited for another 10 minutes before the door to Room 1054 suddenly opened. Xu Qin walked out with a black plastic bag. Her red jacket was brighter than Han Fei remembered. The morbid passion was still dimming in her eyes.

"Big sister, I've prepared another small present for you."

Xu Qin was not surprised to see Han Fei. Her red pupils regarded Han Fei's face before she stepped forward. "Do you know the implications when a boy keeps sending a woman gifts?"

Xu Qin had leaned in far too close for Han Fei's comfort to study the Human Cocoon he just retrieved from his inventory. He answered in a fluster. "What, what do you mean?"

The blood-painted lips hooked into a soul-wrenching smile. Xu Qin did not answer. She tossed the black bag into Room 1051 and then used her bloody hands to open the door to Room 1052. "Why don't you come in?"

Chapter 60:

Han Fei followed Xu Qin into Room 1052. He looked on as Xu Qin twisted open the faucet in the bathroom to wash her hands. The clean sink was immediately dyed red. "What are you in the mood for today?" With her head lowered, Xu Qin was fully focused on cleaning her hands. She even went in to scrub out the blood stains between her nails.

"Big Sister, actually I'm here today to discuss something with you." Han Fei placed the human cocoon on the dining table. "I found this among the dying possessions of our 6th floor neighbour."

"The people from the 6th floor? They are not our neighbours, they came from outside." After washing her hands, she moved back to pick up the human cocoon to study, "This is the present you want to give me?"

"It's called a human cocoon, it's an insect cocoon. I believe it is quite rare so I brought it over to show you."

"Human Cocoon? Well, I have not had that before, I wonder how it tastes." Xu Qin's pale fingers squeezed on the cocoon as her red gaze turned to Han Fei, "How do you think we should cook it?"

"Big Sister, temporarily I have no intention of eating it. Instead, I have another plan for it." Han Fei said with an innocent smile. "When the non-local from the 6th floor died, this was the only thing he carried, so this should be quite important to him and his friends. I'm thinking perhaps we can use this thing to lure the people from the 6th floor out from their lair."

“And then what do you plan to do after that?” A sick excitement entered Xu Qin’s eyes. She turned to Han Fei with some anticipation.

“We will have a good chat with them about their blatant disregard for the apartment rules. We will show them how to be a good neighbour.” Han Fei’s every word was civilized.

“Are you sure that’ll work?” Xu Qin turned to study the table knife in her grasp. “How can you be sure that they’ll even listen to us?”

“If they refuse to listen to reason, then we’ll press our number’s advantage. The minority has to follow the rules of the majority. We’ll force them to change.” Han Fei sounded like he was mediating a common neighbourly argument.

“Huh? But we’re the minority in this case, there are only 2 of us.”

“Big sister, that’s where you’re wrong. If they refuse to sit down peacefully to chat, then there will only be one of them left.” Han Fei’s innocent eyes turned to Xu Qin. “This last remaining person will help us find more non-locals so that we can educate them.”

The two pairs of eyes met. Xu Qin’s smile burned brighter.

“Notification for Player 0000! Xu Qin’s friendliness increases by 5! Forming a peaceful neighbourly relationship is the first step to a perfect life.”

The sudden system notification startled Han Fei. He had no idea why Xu Qin’s affection towards him had increased.

Han Fei clicked into the mission interface and realized the mission to explore the 5th floor was still incomplete. He gave it some thought and realized that it was probably because there were still 2 rooms on the 5th floor which he had not visited. Now that he had stayed in this game for 3 hours, after he completed this mission, he could log out at any time. That would give him a lot more leeway to go after more dangerous missions.

'Without the get out of jail free card, my action will be heavily restricted. Xu Qin might even look down on me.' Han Fei calculated internally. He closed the mission interface and turned again to Xu Qin. "When I arrived at the 5th floor earlier, Big Sister, you were in Room 1054. Does all 4 rooms on this floor belong to you?"

"Originally, only Room 1052 was mine but eventually my neighbours volunteered to give me rooms." Xu Qin bit on her finger and blood dripped down her lips. "To be honest, I don't know what I've done to deserve such generosity."

"That is quite weird." Han Fei wiped away the cold sweat from his forehead. "Then what is inside Room 1054 and Room 1053? Have the original tenants left anything behind? Can I take a look inside them?"

"Of course, there's no problem.... As long as you believe you can stomach what you'd see." Xu Qin chuckled. "There was this one time when I helped the old lady from the 3rd floor with a small favor. She later came over to thank me in person, and when she arrived, I was inside Room 1054."

"And then what happened?"

"After she saw what was inside the room, she never came to visit me anymore."

"The elderly are less susceptible to new things but I'm sure it'll be different for young people like me." Han Fei stood up and headed to the door. Xu Qin watched his back and licked away the blood on her lips. She picked up the knife and followed. "Do not stay too long out in the corridor, be careful of being captured." After they were out of the room, Xu Qin spoke in a much smaller voice. The fact that Xu Qin acted that way meant that there was something much scarier hiding inside the building.

"Room 1053 is my storage room. I place my rarer ingredients and my homemade art projects here." Xu Qin opened the door to Room 1053. It was filled with artistic projects made from sanded bones as well as tons of weird specimens.

"You made these all yourself?"

"Yes."

“That’s quite impressive!” Han Fei carefully walked into the museum of bones. He’d occasionally turn around to glance at Xu Qin at the door. He was contemplating how to endear himself to this neighbour of his. Normally to befriend a lady, you gotta know her first. To do that, one could always look into her hobbies, her pet, the items inside her bag and the people she hung out with. In terms of Xu Qin, her hobby was to eat ghosts, her pet was a living house, she had no bag but she had an impressive collection of knives. Her neighbours gifted her their houses just to avoid her. In conclusion, a woman like her was extremely rare.

“Room 1054 is where I handle my food ingredients. Some of them struggled quite a bit so the room is a bit messy.” After a tour of Room 1053, Xu Qin led Han Fei to Room 1054. Pushing open the door of Room 1054, he was hit by a chilling draft. Then it was followed by a thick scent of blood. The whole room was covered in red. A large chopping block sat on the ground. The walls were decorated with scratch marks.

If not for the training he received from his roommates, Han Fei would be fainting right now. His heart pounded but he moved into the room without a twitch on his facial muscle. The only good news was, he realized the scratch marks were not left behind by human hands but more like the signs of a last struggle from various monsters.

“The place is a bit messy.” Fear did not show on Han Fei’s face. After he took a look around, he returned to Xu Qin’s side. “Big sister, I know how busy you are. If you don’t mind, you should leave the minor jobs like cleaning up to me.” The red pupils turned to Han Fei. Xu Qin imagined many scenarios but he did not expect Han Fei to say these things after visiting the hell-like room. “You should focus on the things you love and work on your recipes. Your hands are blessed with unique cooking skills. So you should leave the miscellaneous jobs to me, you shan’t dirty your hands with menial tasks.”

Han Fei said those to draw himself closer to Xu Qin so that he could be a dinner guest at Xu Qin’s place more often. She might come up with more food that could raise his attributes. But to his surprise, after he said those things, Xu Qin’s bloody red eyes zeroed in on Han Fei. It caused the man to chill.

“Someone has once given me those same promises but he turned out to be a liar.” Xu Qin bit on her fingers anxiously as she studied the bloodied knife. “He disappeared from my life. He went into hiding! So where is he now? Why can’t I remember anything about him?!”

“Notification for Player 0000! You’ve successfully explored all the rooms on the 5th floor. Grade G Mission—Explore the 5th floor completed! Obtained mission reward 1 Free Skill Point! Friendliness with Xu Qin increases by 20!”

Announcement: The raw for this book just got contracted on Qidian.com so the chance of this being picked up by AllNovelFull.com has increased exponentially. Now, I can't even guarantee that AllNovelFull will take me on as the translator if that happens.

That might be a good thing because there, you will get a better translator team and more consistent update rate. Or at least I hope that's the case, this book is very dear to me.

Of course, this might all be a false scare. In any case, thank you so much for your continuous support. I'll keep working on this until I'm told I can't anymore.