

Iyashikei 61

Chapter 61:

Fresh blood flowed down the corner of the Xu Qin's lips. Her finger was chewed until it bled but the woman did not seem to feel the pain. Han Fei's words stimulated a memory buried deep in her mind. Her expression turned even more unhinged than usual.

Staring closer at her face and listening to her repeat the same words, Han Fei was suddenly struck by an inspiration. The name Xu Qin bounced around in his mind. He believed he had seen it somewhere before. When Han Fei was researching the human jigsaw case, he accidentally came across another case that happened around the same time.

He tried to remember more details about it. The case got his temporary attention because it involved a staff from Immortal Pharmaceutical. The victim was the manager at Immortal Pharmaceutical who was responsible for clinical trials of new drugs. The victim's name was Xu Qin.

The victim's only family was her younger brother, the only family they had in life was each other. To look after her younger brother, the sister did not enter any relationship and basically married her work. All the neighbours thought the siblings had a very good relationship so everyone was surprised to find out it was the brother who had poisoned his elder sister. The case was easily solved because the killer was too clumsy. The brother slipped the poison into the food and his sister finished his cooking because she had never suspected her own brother to harbor any malintention against her. The evidence was stacked against the brother. The sister eventually died from food poisoning and the brother was given the death penalty.

A quite famous urban legend arose from this incident. It was said that if you made food delivery around the neighbourhood where the siblings once stayed, you might run into a mad woman brandishing a table knife. She would cry harrowingly while coughing blood. Then she'd proceed to consume both the food and the food deliveryman.

'Could these two Xu Qin's be the same person?' Han Fei studied the woman before him. He still remembered the one statement that she gave him, Xu Qin was the name she used only recently. The tenant of Room 1052 might not be Xu Qin, she might possess many different memories. In other words, she was an amalgamation of curses come to life and Xu Qin was merely one of them.

“Big Sister, are you alright?” Han Fei did not show fear due to the woman’s loss of control. He walked voluntarily over to her. “If you don’t feel well, you should go rest for now. I’ll go lure the people from the 6th floor here.” Han Fei’s real goal that night was the non-locals on the 6th floor. But now Han Fei also wished that he could use these non-locals to stabilize Xu Qin’s emotions. The bloodied lips trembled incessantly. Xu Qin’s bloodless hands went subconsciously to cover her face. “Someone is in hiding, but I cannot remember who. I have forgotten some important things...”

Since he could quit the game any time, Han Fei became more confident and courageous. He escorted Xu Qin back to Room 1052 and then walked up to the 6th floor alone. Walking down the corridor, Han Fei’s smile gradually disappeared. He wanted to smile sincerely from within too but he had lost that ability a long time ago. He could easily muster up a smile on his face due to his acting training but none of them carried actual bliss and happiness behind them.

Sidling up the steps, this was the first time Han Fei arrived at the 6th floor. This was a new breakthrough for him. ‘The building manager used to stay at the 10th floor, there should be important clues left in his room. To get to know this place better, I need to figure out a way to get there as soon as possible.’

Compared to the other floor, the 6th floor was extremely unkempt. Various trash littered the corridor and broken flower pots were left haphazardly on the steps. ‘These non-locals sure are inconsiderate. What if someone trips on them and falls down the stairs?’ Han Fei slowed his movements. He bent over to try to move the pots away when he noticed the wilted plant in one of the pots was tied with red threads. The ends of the threads were dangling with miniature copper bells. ‘Red threads and copper bells? Aren’t these commonly used to ward against evil spirits?’

Han Fei moved the pot closer to the wall but the strange thing was no matter how hard Han Fei shook the pot, the bells refused to ring. It was as if the red threads and bells were unresponsive to living humans.

‘I’m finally on the 6th floor.’ Standing amidst the piles of trash, Han Fei studied the 4 rooms on the 6th floor. He had no idea which room was occupied so he chose the closest door of Room 1064 to knock on. “Is anyone home? I’m your downstairs neighbour.” The knocking reverberated down the corridor but no one came to open the door. ‘I know for a fact that these rooms are occupied. The only reason they won’t come to answer the door is because they’re afraid or cautious.’

Han Fei had his own solution to this problem. Unlike the other neighbour, he was not afraid of raising a ruckus and making himself a target. For the first 3 hours of each gaming instance, Han Fei was extremely careful, his situation was like walking on thin ice, but after he gained the ability to quit the game at any time, there would be a glorious transformation in his mind. To put it simply, he had nothing to fear.

Unless the ghost could follow him back to real life, which none was able to, he had the backbone to provoke anyone.

“I’ll just keep on knocking if you don’t answer the door. I know you’re at home. Don’t just hide in there.” The air in the 6th floor corridor chilled. Han Fei’s insistent knocking caused something to change in the apartment, it was like something had awakened. His 6th floor neighbours were probably extremely nervous. They’d pray that Han Fei would leave them in peace but this Han Fei was recalcitrant with no concern for his own life, which was a dangerous combination.

Actually, Han Fei was quite nervous too. He paid attention to the landlord’s ring while placing his ears against the door to listen. Soon, a small voice came from inside Room 1064. That was the confirmation Han Fei needed. When Han Fei heard that voice, he was like a shark who smelt blood. He opened his mouth wide and shouted, “My dear neighbour in Room 1064, nice to meet you! I know that you are home! I can hear you! I happened to run into one of your friends and he tasked me to return something to you!

“My neighbour from Room 1064, were you the one who littered these trashes on the ground? But why were they tied with red threads and stained with blood? What is the purpose of those things?”

Han Fei specifically mentioned Room 1064 loudly and repeatedly. The tenants inside were probably feeling like frogs in a boiling pan. The other tenants of this building would remember this Room Number and they’d have no chance of keeping a low profile anymore.

“Tenants in Room 1064, can you please open the door to communicate? You wouldn’t want me to come here and knock every night, would you?” This final statement finally scared his neighbour. If this madman really came to raise a commotion outside Room 1064 every night, disaster was bound to happen. The lock sprung and the anti-theft door opened a gap. A bloodshot eye glared at Han Fei with tiredness and anger. “Are you insane?”

“Excuse me? I’m here to do you a favor. How can you treat people like that? Anyway, has one of your friends recently gone missing?” Han Fei did not carry any weapon with him and he gave off a weak presence. The tenant assumed he was a madman who yearned for death.

“No.”

“That’s impossible. Your friend specially requested me to return this thing back to the tenants on the 6th floor.” Han Fei took out the human cocoon from his pocket.

Chapter 62:

After Han Fei took out the human cocoon, the eyes of the person inside Room 1064 were instantly drawn to it. Naturally Han Fei caught this. He purposely put the human cocoon away, “Perhaps I was wrong then.”

“Wait, you were not wrong. This cocoon did belong to my friend. Give it to me.” The door opened some more. Then a thin arm covered in scars reached out from inside the house.

“So this is a cocoon? I thought it was some kind of stone.” Han Fei placed the Human Cocoon back in his inventory. He regarded the tenant of Room 1064 with clear suspicion. “But you said you didn’t have a friend that went missing earlier so this thing clearly does not belong to you, do you think I’m so easily fooled?” A murderous glint crossed the tenant’s eyes. He rarely reasoned with people, tonight, this was an exception. “Was it a woman with a ruined face, long hair and a tattoo of a human-faced butterfly who gave this thing to you?”

When he heard that, Han Fei was honestly startled. He remembered clearly the appearance of the murderer that died in his house. He definitely did not fit the description given by the tenant of Room 1064. Seeing the lack of response from Han Fei, the tenant knew he had accidentally revealed things that he shouldn’t. He quickly added, “If it’s not her, then the person who gave you the cocoon should be a man with a big build that greatly needs a shower. There was a scar near his brow. That man is my brother, he went down the stairs a few days ago and hasn’t been seen since.”

“Yes, it was indeed this man who gave me the cocoon. He was being chased by something and had me temporarily look after this cocoon.” Han Fei thought back to his brush with death and took a deep sigh. “To be honest, he even saved my life. Without him, I probably would have been killed by a monster already.”

“Now can you give the cocoon to me? This thing has no use for you, in fact, it’ll only bring you bad luck.” The tenant of Room 1064 was not in the mood for story time, he just wanted the cocoon.

“I do not sense even a shred of concern for your close friend from you, you only care about the cocoon. I can’t help but suspect, are you two even friends?” Han Fei could quit any time. He was not afraid to push buttons. “I can’t give something that he clearly valued so much to a stranger. He saved my life, I have to fulfil his last wish to my best ability.”

“If you really want to repay him, then give the damn thing to me!” The tenant’s voice hissed through his teeth. He was tormented by Han Fei. His muddy eyes colored with black and red veins.

“If you can prove that you are really his brother, then of course I will return this to you.” Han Fei was not afraid of the man at all. Compared to his Big Sister on the 5th floor, this crazed tenant was like a cute puppy. The man’s pupils turned slowly. It was clear that his patience was wearing thin. “I have a lot of his things in my room. If you don’t believe me, why don’t you come in and see for yourself?”

“If you have the evidence, then why don’t you get them to show me? Why should I enter your room? It shouldn’t trouble you that much to go take something of your friend to show me, right?” Han Fei exclaimed loudly. He was fearless. It caused the man’s eyes to twitch.

“Fine, I’ll go take one for you now.” Knowing Han Fei wouldn’t be fooled into the room, venom crossed the man’s eyes. He answered in an angry whisper.

“Is your throat fine? Can you speak louder? Why are you still standing here by the way? Aren’t you going to take the evidence? Hmm. Why are your eyes so bloodshot? Do you suffer from pinkeye?” Han Fei bombarded the man with questions. It caused the man’s temper to boil even further. The man’s personal info was aired openly, and that was equal to summoning death in this world. The sound of teeth grinding came from behind the door. The man’s arms that hid behind the door tightened as if he imagined closing them around Han Fei’s neck. The red eyes bounced in their sockets. The man’s shoulders trembled. He bit on his tongue and blood leaked out his mouth. Seeing this scary expression on his neighbour, Han Fei opened the menu. Staring at the lit up quit button, he leaned closer to his neighbour and asked in a concerned and innocent tone, “My friend, are you alright? You look like you’re suffering from epilepsy.”

Unable to resist the provocation anymore, the man’s arm lashed out from behind the door. Just as the arm was about to snake out from the gap, another person from inside the room held him back. A man about 2 metres tall walked out from the bathroom inside Room 1064. He had been hiding inside the bathroom. If Han Fei entered the room earlier, he would be ambushed by this man.

“Go and get the accursed picture.” The man had a surprisingly feminine voice. It did not match his size at all. The small, thin man, who almost lost his cool, turned away from Han Fei. He walked back into the room and took out a black and white picture from the bedroom. It was a group photo of about 10 adults. They were of varying ages and most of their faces were ruined beyond recognition.

“We used to work at a nearby cinema. This is a picture taken of us together. Now do you believe us?” The man about 2 metres tall stared straight at the cocoon.

“This one picture does not prove anything.” Han Fei squeezed the cocoon between his two fingers and continued to incense the tenants of Room 1064. The cocoon was right within their grasp. The eyes of the 2 non-locals gradually became dominated by blood.

“The man once saved my life, I have to be careful to obey his last wish. Even though this thing is useless to me, I swear to return it to its deserving owner...”

“It’s clear that you’re a man of honor.” Han Fei was interrupted by the imposing man. “Since my brother was willing to hand this thing over to you, that means that you have gained his approval. A friend of my brother is a friend of mine as well.” The dainty voice was like a snake’s whisper. The man slowly reached his hand out of the door. “I have not seen you before, did you just move here?”

“Yes.”

“This is a dangerous place. Having more friends to help look over your shoulders is never a bad thing.” The man stopped his hands before Han Fei for a handshake. “My name is Chong Lou, what about you?”

“My name is...” Han Fei just raised his hand when the man suddenly leaned forward. His hand reached for Han Fei’s body. At the same time, the smaller man jumped out from behind the door. The cold steel shone in his grasp. The duo worked together seamlessly. Once the tall one apprehended Han Fei, his partner would deliver a fatal stab into Han Fei’s heart. The two made their move suddenly but Han Fei was prepared for it. He never trusted them to begin with, he was just playing a role. The stamina that he upgraded came into use then. Han Fei’s reaction speed had an obvious increase. After narrowly escaping the man’s grapple, he turned to race downstairs.

“Go get him!” To acquire the cocoon, the two tenants hurried after Han Fei. The temperature in the corridor continued to drop. With the amount of noise they’d made, it had attracted the attention of

some other stuff in the apartment. Han Fei raced ahead, the small man with the knife followed close behind. They soon arrived at the 5th floor. The man with the knife slowed down at the landing. It was not until he saw Han Fei enter the fifth corridor safely that he picked up his speed again. With his face twisting, the man chuckled wickedly, "There's nowhere for you to run!"

Han Fei and the man rushed past the open door of Room 1051. The large man did not think much about it but when he crossed the open door, pairs of dark hands suddenly reached out from the room. The invisible hands dragged him into the room. Hearing his roommate call for help, the small man stopped. He realized something was wrong. He was about to abandon his roommate to retreat back to the 6th floor when the door to Room 1052 behind him opened. The color of blood flashed and two stained table knives stuck into the man's ribs. Han Fei jumped on the man and closed the man's jaw to prevent him from screaming. What happened next was too gory to describe. Xu Qin soon dealt with the small man and Chong Lou was consumed by Room 1051.

Xu Qin shut the door to Room 1051 and glanced upstairs. Both she and Han Fei heard a strange footstep. It sounded like someone staggering down the stairs step by step.

"Get in here!" Xu Qin hooked her fingers through Han Fei's collar and dragged him into Room 1052. As the footsteps approached, Xu Qin closed the door. His heart throbbed painfully. The ring on Han Fei's finger chilled intensely. He knew there was something incredibly scary outside the door. He held his breath for 10 minutes before the chill dissipated. He was about to give a sigh of relief when he turned and saw Xu Qin's red pupils glaring at him. "Why did you take so long?"

"It, it has nothing to do with me. It was them..." Han Fei stammered as he regarded the small man on the ground. "They wanted me to stay with them because they insisted on being my friends. The kind who would take two stabs to the ribs for me."

Chapter 63:

"Well, they did stick to their promise." Xu Qin extracted the knives out from the man's ribs. Singlehandedly, she dragged the dead man's body into the kitchen. "Care to join me?" Han Fei shook his head. He noticed after the man's body was dismembered, black threads oozed out of his body. These threads wiggled inside the man's body as if they were alive, "What are those black threads inside his bodies?"

“All of the non-locals have these black threads in their bodies, they appear to be some kind of curse.” Xu Qin dragged the man into the kitchen. During this process, the man’s body started to disintegrate and the black threads vaporized into black smoke.

“Curse?” Han Fei was reminded of something Chong Lou said, they carried an accursed picture with them.

“Yes, these curses are like drugs. They stimulate the non-locals’ already broken minds and make them even crazier, crueler and madder. Therefore, you shan’t show any mercy when dealing with them. If you do not kill them immediately, you’ll be the one getting killed.” Xu Qin then shut the kitchen door. In her way, this lady cared about Han Fei. Moments later, horrifying sounds came from inside the kitchen. But after listening to it for some time, Han Fei discovered a soothing rhythm to it.

“Big Sister, I’ll leave you to your cooking. I’ll return to the 6th floor to look around. Perhaps these non-locals might hide some goodies in their room.” Han Fei was worried that his loot might be stolen by others if he did not move fast enough.

“I would not advise you to leave now. You heard the footsteps from earlier, right?”

“The staggering footsteps?” Being reminded of that oppressive tapping sound, his spine tingled with apprehension, “Who is behind it? Is it our neighbour from upstairs?”

“I’ve not seen the tenant in person either, but I suspect they might reside on the 9th floor.”

“9th floor? There’s someone staying up there?”

“I believe so.” Black blood dribbled out from the gap in the door. Xu Qin’s tone took on a hue of excitement, like a child on Christmas.

“I wish to get to the 10th floor to meet the building manager so I’ll have to pass the 9th floor eventually. The meeting with the owner of the footsteps is inevitable...”

“My advice is for you to abandon that thought. The 8th floor is a forbidden zone at this apartment and if you value your life, do not get too close to the 9th floor.” The kitchen door opened a gap. To warn Han Fei, Xu Qin walked out. Her eyes were startlingly red as if she tried to sear the fear into Han Fei.

“Why?”

“You only need to understand this. The building manager is the building manager not because he was well-loved but because he was the only person who could traverse through the 9th floor freely.” Xu Qin’s morbid eyes stared at Han Fei. Her tone was sharp and cold. Worried about Han Fei, she placed heft behind her warning.

“Don’t worry. Before I am fully prepared, I won’t do anything stupid.” Just as Han Fei said that, a bloodied arm reached towards his neck. The tapered fingers caressed his cheek softly, “If you’re so intent on dying, I wish you’d come to me. I’ll gladly help you with it.” Xu Qin’s words were definitely scary but for some reason, Han Fei found a trace of concern in her scary promise. “Dying is not my intention, I still have very important things to do, like finding the most extreme flavor in the world with you.” Han Fei somehow had gotten an Iyashikei experience out of this hellish game.

After hearing that, Xu Qin’s crimson lips curled into a smile before she turned to head into the kitchen. Several minutes later, Xu Qin came out with a brand-new doily. “It’s a bit small, don’t you think?”

“The design is a bit too simple if you ask me. I heard from the non-locals that one of them has a man-faced butterfly tattoo...”

“Man-faced butterfly?” Xu Qin’s interest was clearly piqued.

“I’ll come to you when I have a new clue.” Han Fei stayed in the room with Xu Qin until 4 am and then they both left Room 1052 together. Xu Qin dragged Chong Lou’s body out from Room 1051. Han Fei looted Chong Lou’s clothes while Xu Qin claimed the man’s carcass, they both got what they wanted. Chong Lou was quite unique among the non-locals. Without Xu Qin’s help, Han Fei believed he would not have been able to defeat him. Rummaging through Chong Lou’s clothes, Han Fei found two rather interesting objects.

“Notification for Player 0000! You have found Heaven Cinema’s Work Id!

“Heaven Cinema’s Work Id (Grade G Normal Item): One of the prerequisites to trigger the celebrity profession. With this Id, you can enter Heaven Cinema freely.”

Han Fei noticed astutely that the item description only mentioned the Id allowed the owner to enter the cinema freely but not leave it freely. Han Fei predicted there were some problems brewing at that cinema, either the staff were all cursed, or they were all murderers.

“A place that’s easy to get into but hard to get out. That sounds dangerous but I’m quite interested in the celebrity profession, I just wonder if the word, celebrity here carries the same connotation as one in real life.” Perfect Life had no limitation to the amount of profession a player could undertake. However, to be an expert at a specific profession, one had to put in plenty of time and effort. A normal player would spend years to train a profession to its maximum potential. Han Fei had unlocked the mission for a hidden profession, he did not plan to give that profession up, he merely felt like he needed a normal profession to provide him with a front. If he ran into other players in this game, when they got to know each other, Han Fei couldn’t possibly say he was a Midnight Butcher. That would give him away too easily.

Other than the work Id, the other unique item Han Fei found was the black and white picture that he saw a glimpse of earlier. There were 17 people captured in the picture.

“Notification for Player 0000, you have found the accursed group picture!

“Accursed Group Picture (Grade G Blood Red Item): Every single person in this picture deserves a horrible death! That is my final wish!”

Reading the item description, Han Fei had a sneaking suspicion that this Heaven Cinema was more dangerous than he thought but that was a concern in the far future. He had not even explored the whole apartment yet, why would he venture out of it? He did not have either the ability or the guts to do so anyway.

After storing the two items away, Han Fei returned to the 6th floor alone. He entered Room 1064 and saw pools of blood as well as broken bits of bones inside the house. A horrible stench permeated the room. He looked around and realized the stench that heaviest around the bedroom. He pushed open the door.

“What is this?” The bedframe of the bed was hollowed out. It was stuffed to the brim with decomposing limbs. Among the decaying heap of flesh, Han Fei spotted a human cocoon that was almost blood red in color.

Chapter 64:

The surface of the human cocoon was wrapped in something that looked like blood capillaries. It was feeding from the broken limbs. “The non-locals escaped into this apartment to rear this thing?” The human cocoon in the bedroom was hugely different from the human cocoon Han Fei had. He did not dare to carelessly reach out for it. Instead he found a broom and lightly knocked against the thing. The outer casing of the cocoon was extremely thin, it was basically transparent. When Han Fei’s broom knocked against it, he could see a shadow inside wiggling in response. “It feels like the thing inside is about to break out from its cocoon soon.”

To get to the bottom of this mystery, as much as Han Fei was wary of it, he had to place his hand on the cocoon for the system to examine it further. He gathered his courage and reached his hand into the heap of human carcasses. His fingers tried to evade the body parts. When Han Fei’s hand was about several cm from the cocoon, a thin blood thread emerged from the bottom of the cocoon. The thread pierced into Han Fei’s finger like a needle. Sensing the pain, Han Fei quickly pulled his hand back. The human cocoon in Room 1064 had been carefully looked after. It was well nourished. The thing inside the cocoon was not only alive, it could sense the immediate outer world around it.

‘The thing inside appears to possess intelligence, it is not a normal insect.’ Han Fei studied the wound on his fingertip. It was not big, but it was deep. ‘It is of no use to me, if anything, its existence is a danger to me.’ Han Fei took out the lighter from his pocket, he carried this thing originally to light up the cigarettes. “Are you an insect or a ghost? Or something else completely?” A dancing flame flickered inside the cold room. Han Fei grabbed some waste paper, wrapped it around the end of the broom and made it into a temporary torch. The man’s shadow swayed along with the dancing flame. Han Fei held the lit broom in his right hand while his left hand slowly approached the human cocoon. “I dare you to poke me again.”

The flame casted its ray on the cocoon. Under the skein, the small shadow trembled anxiously but it had nowhere to run. The blood capillaries charred from the flame. Han Fei could hear a wailing inside the room but at the same time, it also sounded far away. “Was that you?” Regardless, Han Fei was unfazed. He placed the lit torch right above the human cocoon. His hand finally got the chance to touch the blood red cocoon.

“Notification for Player 0000! You have found Grade G Blood Red Item, Human Cocoon.

“Human Cocoon (Blood Red Item): The cocoon for some kind of insect. It has feasted on a lot of blood and curse, it is in its final preparatory stage to break out from the cocoon.”

Staring at the cocoon that sat on top of the decomposing heap, Han Fei hesitated. The thing was about to break out from its cocoon soon, if he removed it from this environment, he might disrupt its growth. Han Fei personally wanted to see what kind of monster would emerge from this cocoon, after all, these non-locals had spent so much effort to provide it with a warm bed. However, Han Fei had no idea how long this preparatory stage would last. It was unrealistic for him to wait here forever, what if his other neighbours decided to drop in for a visit? It was unlikely that Xu Qin would be interested to come and do some bug watching with him either. “Those two are not the only ones staying on this floor. I’ve not explored the 3 other rooms yet. If I leave this thing here, it’ll definitely be taken away by the other non-locals.” Several seconds later, Han Fei made a decision. He reached out to tear away the capillaries on the cocoon’s surface. He yanked the cocoon off the bed and then shoved it inside his inventory. The moment he tore off the capillaries, the wailing intensified and strange noises came from the other rooms of the same floor.

“I better leave this place soon. It’ll be terrible if I get blocked up inside this room.” Han Fei did not want his loot to be taken away by others so he left Room 1064 in a hurry. “I’ve basically searched through the entire room, there’s nothing else that is worth staying for.”

After returning to the 5th floor, Han Fei knocked on the door to Room 1052. “Big Sister, I’ve found another cocoon on the 6th floor.” When he was inside the room, Han Fei handed the cocoon over to Xu Qin. Xu Qin was surprisingly interested to witness the birth of the thing inside the cocoon. In the end, the two decided to keep the cocoon inside Room 1051 for now. The thing inside the cocoon was very sensitive. It could sense the danger inside Room 1051. It wailed miserably but that only increased Xu Qin’s interest in it even further. “I believe a cursed ghost is trapped inside the cocoon. It is very unique.” Xu Qin personally set the cocoon inside Room 1051. “Don’t worry, I will keep it well fed.”

Han Fei then said goodbye to Xu Qin and returned to the 4th floor. He did not log off because he had another task to do that night. Han Fei glanced downstairs. While he still had time, Han Fei wanted to have a talk with Weep. When he reached the 3rd floor, Han Fei noticed the door to Room 1034 was wide open. A chill draft seeped out from it. Han Fei hesitated sensing the ice from the ring. The last time he entered Room 1034, he barely escaped alive. While he hesitated, the strange footsteps returned. This time, it moved even faster and it sounded like it was heading right for Han Fei. “Xu Qin is right, I shouldn’t stay in the corridor for too long.”

Han Fei wasted no time and rushed into Weep's room. Closing the door, Han Fei felt like he had walked into a morgue. He looked at the broken furniture and torn talismans, he felt quite sorry. He stepped over to the ceremonial urn at the corner. When the footsteps in the corridor disappeared, he asked softly, "Weep, are you here?" There was no response. Weep, who wished for companionship and friendship, did not appear to want them from Han Fei.

"We might have started this on the wrong foot. Let's start from the beginning one more time..." Noticing the lack of response, Han Fei retreated to the door and said slowly, "You should still remember the name, He Yuhuai, right?"

The moment Han Fei uttered that name, the temperature in the room dropped. The scattered talisman and paper money rustled noisily. The paper dolls quivered in fear. A thin arm reached out from the broken urn. It was followed by a flimsy shadow.

"Weep..." Han Fei voiced out the thoughts that were in his heart, "He Shouye is dead but the crime he committed is not. Many souls are awaiting their justice and they need your help. Do you mind if I ask you some questions?" Just the mention of He Shouye's name caused the shadow to twist. Children's faces appeared on its body. Weep scratched at its body madly. Black blood splashed onto the ground.

"Calm down! Alright, I won't ask any more questions. Please calm down."

Weep looked like he was in extreme pain. He was about to dig out his own flesh. The child appeared to possess intense hatred towards the body that carried He Shouye's lineage. Han Fei could not imagine the despair the boy must have gone through to harbor such intense hatred towards his father even after death. "Weep, the man is dead, no one is going to harm you anymore."

After knowing He Yuhuai's history, Han Fei couldn't help but pity the child. He resisted his innate fear and slowly approached the boy. The small shadow mutilated himself. No matter how hard Han Fei consoled him, he could not stop Weep from literally tearing himself apart. Stooping before the boy who was blind with self-contempt, Han Fei subconsciously committed to this action. He opened his arms and lightly pulled Weep into a hug. "Everything's okay now. I'm here for you, you hear me? I'm here for you."

The black blood splashed on Han Fei's body. They sizzled with pain but the man did not let go. His body was frozen numb but his heart was warm. He had no idea why he had done this. He was very afraid and very tired, but he knew he had to stop Weep from hurting himself. From his perspective, Weep had

done nothing wrong, the one who should be punished was He Shouye. After a few minutes, Weep finally calmed down.

Han Fei was fully drained by then. He decided not to pressure Weep further. The past was too painful for the boy.

Han Fei released his grasp enveloping the boy. His arms were sore and paralyzed. It probably did him no good to have such close contact with a ghost.

Weep kept his head lowered. His arms dangled weakly by his sides. He still refused to actually acknowledge Han Fei's presence.

"If you ever feel lonely, I will come to visit you, I'll be your friend, the one who will stand by you." Since Weep still did not give him any response, Han Fei gave a sigh and climbed up. He headed to the door. When he was about to reach the door, Han Fei turned around as if he was reminded of something. He looked at the small shadow at the corner, "You lost to me in the game of hide and seek. You remember our bet, right? You promised to help me do 3 things."

Finally, that got a response from Weep. Seeing Weep reacting to his words, Han Fei's face softened with a smile. "The first thing that I need you to do is to take good care of yourself. Don't blame and injure yourself anymore no matter what happens in the future."

The eyes slowly raised. When Weep looked to the door, Han Fei had already left Room 1034.

Dragging his exhausted body to the stairwell, the robotic voice suddenly erupted in his mind. "Notification for Player 0000! Friendliness with He Yuhuai increases by 5! Forming a peaceful neighbourly relationship is the first step to a perfect life."

Chapter 65:

Han Fei was quite surprised to hear that notification because he had not helped Weep with any mission. Weep's past caused him to block himself off deeply from the world. Han Fei initially thought Weep would be one of the hardest neighbours to befriend, but after some actual interactions, Han Fei realized

Weep was not as scary as the boy portrayed himself to be. Ironically, the ghosts in this world still retained the warmth of humanity. 'One day, I swear to return the smile to Weep's face.'

With that decision made, Han Fei felt a sense of buoyancy. He found it hard to believe that the game was able to isolate him so completely from his problems in real life. With just a slight improvement in his neighbourly relationship, Han Fei was overwhelmed by satisfaction. 'I should carry this feeling with me as a reminder. Bringing people laughter, isn't that why I became a comedy actor in the first place? My dream hasn't changed but, on the way to pursue that dream, harsh reality has dulled my passion so much that I couldn't muster up my own smile anymore.'

Han Fei turned to look at the talisman-covered door. A trace of confusion bubbled up in his heart. 'How come I never felt this sense of gratification when I worked on the stage in real life? If anything, being on stage drains me but here, bringing comfort to these dead people is greatly satisfying. Why?' Han Fei never really gave this any thought because in real life, he was too busy earning money, pleasing the right people and fighting for a chance to stay before the camera. 'Is it all just because of the constant threat of death?'

He stared down the eerie corridor and the faces of all the neighbours he had met came up in his mind. None of these people were perfect, they either had physical imperfection or mental imperfection. To survive in this apartment, Han Fei would have to heal their pain, to help them regain their lost humanity. 'In a way, this is truly an Iyashikei game in every sense of the word.'

Han Fei had stayed in the game long enough that night. He was about to log off when the door to Room 1031 suddenly opened.

"Get in quick." Meng Si appeared at the door. "Do you need help? Don't stay out there in the corridor for too long!" The old lady lectured like she was talking to her unruly grandson. Spotting Han Fei standing alone in the corridor, she quickly pulled him into her house. "Why did you go over to Room 1034 again? Haven't I warned you about how dangerous that place is?"

Meng Si's chiding belied a deep-seated concern for Han Fei. Han Fei found himself warmed even though he was being nagged at.

"I knew something was not right when I heard the opposite door open. I've been waiting by my own door, preventing people from wandering cluelessly into that room." Meng Si's house was lit up with red candles. Once bitten twice shy. She was extremely cautious of Weep after what happened to Chen

Chen. "Young man, you are too brave for your own good. Other people couldn't wait to get away from that place but you voluntarily rushed into it? Have you lost your mind?"

Han Fei didn't know what to say in response to Meng Si's words. "Granny, actually Weep is not as bad as you think." Han Fei relayed Weep's past and everything the boy had to endure before he died. After hearing Han Fei out, Meng Si was silent for a long time before she said, "The boy is pitiable, yes, but ultimately he is different from us. He is a ghost."

Surrounded by the red candles, Han Fei hesitated for some time before he chose to broach the subject, "Granny, do you really not remember anything?"

"What do you mean?" Meng Si clearly had no idea what Han Fei was talking about.

"Actually..." Holding her hands, Han Fei looked into the old lady's face and came out with the truth. "Granny, you and Chen Chen died 10 years ago..." Before Han Fei finished, half of the candles got snuffed out. In the flickering light, Meng Si trembled as she leaned on the dining table. "What kind of nonsense are you talking about?"

"For the frozen body case, the mother found out that her adopted son had murdered someone. To give that son a chance to surrender himself to the police, she helped him hide the body. That happened 10 years ago."

"I know, it was me who told you..."

"The mother gave her son one week's time but before the week was over, the mother was found murdered alongside her grandson. Their bodies were found inside a cold chain transport truck's freezer cargo." Han Fei spoke hurriedly, "The murderer did not stop after killing the mother and her grandson. If he is not detained, more people will fall to his prey."

All the red lights in the room extinguished. The temperature dropped. The freezing sensation was different from anything Han Fei had felt in this game before. It was like he was locked inside a freezer and the chill was slowing down his veins and heart. In the dark, Meng Si shook harder and harder. A face gradually emerged from the back of Meng Si's head.

Han Fei did not expect his words to have such a drastic effect. However, he stayed. He did not run from fear. Instead, he gripped Meng Si's icy hands harder. "Tolerance will not make the murderer repent, it only gives him more chances to hurt others!" Two scary, wiry arms reached out from the old lady's head. Essentially, a monster was crawling out from Meng Si's mind!

"The demon probably is probably out there targeting some other innocent child as we speak. He thrives on breaking up happy families. We need to capture him as soon as possible!" The temperature dropped to freezing point. The warm little house was encased in a frozen hell. The old lady's body quivered violently. Painful memories surfaced in her mind as her kind face gradually lined with deep regret. It seemed like with the appearance of the monster inside her head, some of Meng Si's memory returned as well.

"The mother must have seen something before she died, she will not want her own son to commit more irreversible mistakes!"

When Han Fei said that, the old lady's gnarly hands suddenly clenched around Han Fei's wrist powerfully. Meng Si's lips trembled like she was mumbling something. Han Fei had to lean in very close before he could make out the words—Dong Hwa Ice Factory.

"An ice factory? But based on the statement given by the mother's eldest son, Meng Si and Meng Chen's bodies were discovered inside a truck!" Han Fei had more questions but suddenly the bedroom door opened. When Chen Chen saw his grandmother in this state, he cried immediately. Hearing the boy's wails, the monster's struggle to escape conspicuously slowed. Han Fei was flustered. He quickly disentangled himself from Meng Si's grasp to switch on all the lights in the room and relit all the candles. After the lights came back on, the monster slowly retreated back into Meng Si's head.

Everything returned to normal. The old lady collapsed to the ground. Her face was pale.

'What was that all about?' Han Fei carried the old lady to the couch and placed her gingerly there. He then started to think. 'Most of the neighbours I can communicate with at this apartment have forgotten about their own death, they cannot even recognize the fact that they are ghosts. Part of their memory is lost but at the same time, it carried away their pain. Was the monster inside Meng Si's head the manifestation of that painful memory? Or was the monster the actual Meng Si?'

Studying the fainted old lady, Han Fei considered all the possibilities. 'Could this be the working of the former building manager? He sealed up these neighbours' painful memories to help them settle into this

world more easily? But this does not solve the problem, the pain is still there, it is merely swept under the rug temporarily. The pain will not go away because it is not seen!

Chapter 66:

In the entire apartment, there were not many tenants that were powerful enough to tamper with other neighbour's memories. The mysterious building manager was one of them, so Han Fei's suspicion was not unfounded. After a few days of gaming, Han Fei could categorize the tenants into two types, the communicable ones and the ones who were dominated by pain and despair. They shared the same apartment and had some kind of connection between them. Han Fei had not discovered the whole truth yet, he had a feeling more would be revealed once he stepped into the building manager's house. '10th floor, I need to get there as soon as possible.'

After Meng Si's status stabilized, the exhausted Han Fei left Room 1031. He returned to Room 1044 and closed the anti-theft door. 'Meng Si on the 3rd floor cares a lot about me and I'm still trying to befriend the Big Sister on the 5th floor. Weep has begun to change his mind about me. Now I only need to help my roommates recover their sanity, then I would have completed the small goal of forming a peaceful, neighbourly relationship.' After playing the game for some time, Han Fei's mindset also slowly changed. Initially he investigated the cases for the sake of his survival, but as he dug deeper into them, Han Fei sincerely wanted to unearth the truth, to help bring justice to his neighbours.

'It's time to leave, the longer I stay here, the more authentic this gaming world feels.' Pressing the quit button, the world was swallowed by red and Han Fei's consciousness flagged.

Removing the gaming helmet, Han Fei laid in bed and refused to move. Compared to physical fatigue, the mental fatigue bogged him down even further. 'I doubt there's any acting job coming in soon, thankfully I have some savings that can sustain me for a while.' Han Fei used his phone to log into his bank account. 'I see two possible ways to earn money in the near future. The first is to wait for Perfect Life to enter OB, but I doubt my collected items will have any sale value in the normal game world. The second method is to claim the reward money from helping the police solve the case.'

Han Fei's eyes swept to the picture of Meng Changan but what he saw was 50000 RMB stuck on the wall. 'Well, it is still an honest way to earn money.'

This time Han Fei obtained a crucial clue from the game—Dong Hwa Ice Factory. The most painful memory for Meng Si happened at this place, this was news to Han Fei. He planned to visit the place in person the next day.

...

At 10 am, Han Fei was woken up by his alarm. After a quick breakfast, he pulled out his phone to call Li Xue. "Are you free now? Can you accompany me to investigate a place of interest?" Even though Han Fei was not a detective, he had seen many detective movies. Conducting investigation without backup often led the main character into danger, he did not want that for himself.

"Where is this place?"

"In the frozen body case, the cold chain transport truck's cargo was most likely not the first crime scene. Meng Si and Chen Chen's bodies were planted there."

"We knew about that already."

"Then do you have any idea where the first crime scene is?"

"Not for now."

"I'll bring you there."

Han Fei did not need too long to convince Li Xue. One hour later, Li Xue arrived at Han Fei's place. On her bike, they journeyed to Xin Lu's Northern Countryside together. Xin Lu City was extremely large, the upper class and middle class stayed at the intelligence city. Beyond that was the old city. Low income citizens called this place home, before the citizenry database was constructed, it was a hive of crime. Other than the intelligent city and old city, Xin Lu also had 4 country areas facing the 4 nautical directions. As the technology advanced, the people previously residing in the countryside surged towards the city and Xin Lu outskirts became more and more abandoned. Currently, they were mostly populated by rotting flats and deserted factories.

Dong Hwa Ice Factory was at Xin Lu Northern Countryside, it was a small-scale plant. It was built in the countryside because the utility bills would be cheaper and the lack of surrounding neighbours meant no chance of being complained. After leaving the highway, Han Fei and Li Xue weaved through the squalid flats. It was noon but there was no one around. After about 10 more minutes, Han Fei finally spotted the

signboard for the plant at the end of a small alley. The paint of the board was peeling and the words rusted.

“It looks like this place has been shut down for a long time already.” The road that led into the plant was cracked and unkempt.

“Even if this is really the first crime scene, what can we find after 10 years? Any evidence would be gone by now.” When Li Xue first heard the news, she was excited but her mind cleared on the way here, “Also, Han Fei, how did you know this is the first crime scene?”

“By using logical deduction.” Han Fei grumbled a random excuse. He studied the 2 metres tall cement walls. With a running start, he leaped upwards and his hands managed to grab the edge. He groaned as he pulled himself up to the wall. ‘My stamina is indeed better than before, I used to get asthmatic attacks just from climbing a tree.’

“Don’t rush ahead so blindly and do not stay too far away from me, understood?” Li Xue appeared beside him. She was clearly more experienced than Han Fei. Her action was quick and light, she made no sound at all as she flipped over the wall.

“Okay.” The two lowered their voices as they moved along the walls towards the factory building. When they were inside the yard, the duo stopped communicating to make as little noise as possible. Instead they trained their attention on clue-searching. The plant was not big. A set of severely rusted ice-brick maker and ice-crusher sat in the courtyard. The simple sheds built around them had been reclaimed by nature.

“Let’s check out the main factory.” The two entered the dark building. The temperature here appeared to be lower than normal. It had been too long since the original crime was committed, so it was not surprising that they found nothing inside the factory. While Han Fei pondered if he had missed anything, Li Xue wandered about the place.

Her pacing attracted Han Fei’s attention. “What are you doing?”

“An ice factory should have an ice-storage or an ice-cellar to keep the ice bricks but we have not encountered such a place yet.” Li Xue stopped at the north-eastern corner of the building. She kicked away the broken carpet and it revealed a thin metallic slab underneath.

“Let me help you.” Han Fei was about to walk over when Li Xue raised her palm to signal Han Fei to stay where he was. She walked cautiously around the metallic slab and switched on her law enforcement app. Then she pulled out a police baton. By then, Han Fei had noticed the discrepancy as well. Unlike the other objects at the factory, the slab was not covered in a layer of dust. That suggested recent use.

‘There’s someone down there?’

Li Xue made a gesture at Han Fei for him to grab something to arm himself. Then she reached out to grab a corner of the slab and slowly lifted it up. A rustling wind could be heard coming from the underground ice cellar. This cellar appeared to be connected to some other location. Taking out her phone, Li Xue rattled off a series of coordinates to her colleagues. Then she switched on the torchlight function and descended into the cellar alone.

Chapter 67:

Dong Hwa Ice Factory was closed many years ago but its underground ice cellar was surprisingly tidy, which suggested that it was cleaned often. “Stay up there and guard the entrance. We can’t both go down there. What if someone tries to lock us up when we’re down there? I’ve already called for reinforcement so you won’t be alone for long.”

Li Xue used the flashlight on her phone to look around and she soon discovered something. “What is that?” The light from the phone aimed at the corner. Li Xue spotted a ceremonial urn and a colored picture of Meng Si. “A photograph of the victim? Why would her picture be here? Someone has set up an altar for her here?” The underground ice cellar was small enough that one could capture everything in it in one glance. There was nothing to block one’s sight either. It meant that the possibility of an ambush was zero. Li Xue walked towards the corner but instead of messing up the evidence, she used her phone to record everything.

“Did you find anything?”

“I found a picture of Meng Si, someone specifically made an altar for her here. Based on the ash inside the urn, this has been here for quite some time already.”

“That’s all?” Han Fei valued the clue given by Meng Si greatly but Li Xue did not treat it as seriously as he did, after all, she did not know about its source. “How about we exchange places? I’ll go up there and you’ll come down?”

After helping Li Xue up, Han Fei jumped into the ice cellar. The moment he entered the cellar, a strange familiarity overwhelmed him. Claustrophobia, eeriness and endless waves of darkness. His limbs numbed, Han Fei was instantly reminded of what he experienced at Meng Si’s house when the old lady lost control. The feeling Han Fei had at Room 1031 was similar to what he was feeling now inside the underground ice cellar. ‘So that chill was a replication of how the lady felt when she died!’

He switched on the flashlight function on his phone and turned to examine the picture and the urn at the corner. Meng Si in the picture was still young, there was no white in her hair. ‘Why didn’t the person use a more recent picture of Meng Si?’ Han Fei thought. ‘He probably couldn’t get his hands on one...’

“Dong Hwa Ice Factory should be the first crime scene so the person who made this memorial probably knew about the truth of the case and is extremely close to Meng Si. The chances are, it is one of Meng Si’s 3 sons. The eldest has an altar at home so there is no reason for him to purposely set up a second one here. So it is between Meng Changxi and Meng Changan.” A cold draft ruffled Han Fei’s hair. Even though the ice cellar was built underground, it had surprisingly good ventilation. This drew Han Fei’s suspicion. “Why does an ice cellar need good ventilation?” He followed the draft to a different room corner. The draft came from a sewer duct that was embedded into the ground. The duct cover had a gap in it and there was where the wind came from. Han Fei squatted down and grabbed at the edge of the cover. As he suspected, the cover was an entrance and it led into a tunnel. “It goes further down?”

Han Fei hesitated as he stared into the thick darkness. The moisture in the air increased and a light stench emitted from the tunnel. “Li Xue, the cellar’s original drain has been hollowed out and it connects to the city’s underground sewer system. Should we go down to take a look?”

“We should wait for reinforcement. Xin Lu used to employ a subsurface web-style pipe drainage system but with the expansion of the city, it has been updated to the subsurface corridor-style drainage system. The former employed a convoluted web of buried pipes to facilitate liquid and solid sewage transfer, while the latter expanded the underground tunnel system to include manmade irrigation systems and to accommodate other underground transmission lines. The most iconic example is the Paris Sewer System. Therefore, it is a literal underground maze down there and we’ll get lost without a map.” Li Xue was a former heavy crime detective. With her wealth of experience, she knew when to charge and when to hold back. They waited for 10 minutes before Li Xue’s two colleagues arrived. They were different from normal civilian officers, they were from the investigation unit. One of them came with a temporary warrant to enter the city’s drainage system. He pulled out the map and they followed it as they ventured underground. A faded stench lingered in the air as the underground rivers gushed noisily. They walked

down the paved corridors for the maintenance workers. Above them were the pipelines for water, fibre optics and gas that were built decades ago.

“Assuming Dong Hwa Ice Factory is the first crime scene, is it possible that the killer used this underground tunnel to move the bodies?” Li Xue contemplated out loud while Han Fei pondered over every single word Meng Si had said to him. The other officers continued to study the map.

“Sister Li, this area that we’re at does not show up on the map.” One of the officers enlarged the digital map. “Someone has dug out a tunnel underneath the ice cellar.” The city’s drainage map did not match the actual scene. Li Xue’s group had entered an area that was not supposed to exist. They followed along the tunnel and when it opened up, Li Xue and Han Fei could not believe their eyes. The underground ‘room’ was filled with various pictures and stacks of documents about the human jigsaw case and frozen body case. Most of the documents were yellowed, they were here for a long time already. Someone had been collecting them for years.

“Do not touch anything! Put on your gloves now!” But there were more surprises waiting for them. On the deepest wall of the cave, there was a collage of different individuals. Most of them had a circle drawn over their faces with black marker. 3 of them were the exceptions. The first was He Shouye, his picture was crossed off with a red marker. The second of Meng Changan. His picture was circled with a red marker. The picture was also punctured at many places, pock-marking Meng Changan’s face. The cave owner really hated this person.

The last picture was also the most surprising. The picture was quite recent, it was probably taken not too long ago. The man in the picture was Han Fei. A black marker was used to draw a question mark over Han Fei’s face.

“The people with the black circles are all suspects in the two cases but they have been cleared of their suspicion. The owner probably conducted his own investigation to come to the same conclusion.

“The red cross means his eliminated target, the red circle is probably his next target. Lastly the question mark...” All the officers turned to Han Fei, the latter shrugged. “I reported to Li Xue that I was being followed that one time, could it be this guy who was tailing me?”

“That is very possible. But why are you given a question mark? Did you do something unusual that day you were followed?” Li Xue stared at Han Fei’s picture.

“Hmm... I believe I had just left the set for Flower of Sin then. I was talking on the phone with you, I remember saying something along the lines of, ‘Compared to Meng Changxi, you should focus more on Meng Changan. He is more dangerous.’” Han Fei’s eyes widened. “Yes! I remember now! Right after I said that, I heard a sound come from behind me. Probably that statement struck a chord with my stalker!”

“From all the information the police have so far, all the evidence points towards Meng Changxi, you’re the only person who believes in his innocence.” Li Xue glanced at the stacks of documents inside the cave and made a judgement, “Could it be Meng Changxi who has been living in this underground cave after he has gone missing?”

Chapter 68:

“There is no modern device in the cave, at least none that requires internet connection. It is the perfect hideout. The ice cellar contains an altar for Meng Si so that proves that the owner of this place is deeply connected to her. Overall, the chance of the owner of this place is Meng Changxi is very high.” Li Xue’s analysis sent a tremor of excitement through her colleagues. Now the entire police force was searching for Meng Changxi but they had zero clue. But this was a giant breakthrough. Putting on the gloves, Li Xue plucked down Han Fei’s picture. “This photograph was taken only a few days ago, see if the CSU can get any prints from it. Then try to analyse the buildings in the picture as well as the camera angles. After that, pull out the surveillance footage from the related areas.”

“Wait a minute.” It was not until the picture was removed from the wall that Han Fei noticed there was something written on the back of it—The Last Prospect. “I am Meng Changxi’s last prospect? What does he mean by that?”

Li Xue pulled down He Shouye and Meng Changan’s pictures to see if anything was written on the back of them as well. The back of He Shouye’s picture was covered in bloody smudges while a date and time was written down on the back of Meng Changan’s picture.

“Wait, isn’t that today?” Li Xue was the first to notice the problem. She looked through the stack of documents and noticed something unusual. “A fake Identity card model? The structural layout of Immortal Pharma’s Xin Lu Branch? The map of Xin Lu’s international business centre?” When Li Xue found these things, she researched them on the internet. “Today at 1.30 pm, there will be a big gaming convention at Xin Lu’s international business centre. Immortal Pharma and Deep Space Tech have been advertising it for weeks. The event is to unveil the world’s newest and biggest space gaming hub.”

“Assuming the owner of this cave is Meng Changxi, the reason he familiarized himself with the map of the convention is because he will be there in person? But the business centre is in the intelligent city, there will be a surveillance camera every few steps. The moment he appears on the camera, he’ll be discovered!”

“Meng Changxi is not going to take such a huge risk for a mere game. He has his own reason to show up there.” Han Fei took out his phone to conduct his own research and he soon found something, “The latest gaming hub is a joint project between Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma. Some higher ups from Immortal Pharma will be present at the venue.” He turned his phone screen over to show the police. “One of them is Meng Changan!”

“Meng Changxi is going there to murder Meng Changan?!” The two officers were shocked. They were going to call in this update immediately. If an important personnel from Immortal Pharma was murdered in broad daylight, it would cause great public distress.

“Calm down!” Li Xue scanned the documents in the cave. “Initially I didn’t quite believe what Han Fei said either, various evidence suggests that Meng Changxi is the murderer but now that we’re here, I think the case is not that simple. Why would a murderer spend years to investigate a case he committed? Only someone who was framed would do that.”

“Other than that, Meng Changxi is a very clever person. He is also extremely patient so why did he choose this particular timing to make such a risky move? He has already waited for a decade so why now? From what I gathered about the man, he is not one to do anything drastic unless he has no choice.” Han Fei turned to the two other officers.

“Yesterday midnight, the station received an anonymous tip. The person handed over solid evidence that confirms Meng Changxi as the killer of the frozen body case.” One of the officers looked at Li Xue and then at Han Fei before he began hesitantly.

“We have new evidence?” Li Xue was shocked. “How come I’ve not heard about this?”

“You’ve been insisting that we should focus more on Meng Changan and use kid gloves around Meng Changxi, that goes against the vein of our investigation.” The officer shook his head. “The evidence we received is a series of recordings. They record a young Meng Changxi burying different animal carcasses. There were mutilated birds, stray cats and dogs. That is firm evidence of the man’s twisted mind. Of course, that was not all. The last video was a stealth recording of Meng Changxi carrying a dead body.”

Li Xue's other colleague spoke, "Sister Li, I'm sorry but evidence speaks louder than subjective opinions. After the station received the evidence, the captain ordered to heighten the search for Meng Changxi. We have employed the latest technology to locate him. He probably sensed the danger and knew he'd be found sooner or later so he had to take this risk."

"Are those recordings true?"

"Yes, the tech has checked for their authenticity."

With that, Li Xue turned to Han Fei. She only insisted on Meng Changxi's innocence due to Han Fei's words but now with this new evidence, her conviction also started to shake.

"Something's wrong!" Han Fei claimed confidently, "The videos only show Meng Changxi burying the animal carcasses, right? Did they show him torturing and killing them?"

"No, but that is not the point. One of the videos caught Meng Changxi on the camera trying to drag away a dead body, that is more than enough to convict him!" That silenced Han Fei. However, Han Fei knew the truth deep down. Meng Si told him personally that, as Meng Changan's actions got more demented, his elder brothers started to intervene. Meng Changshou helped Meng Changan register in counselling sessions while Meng Changxi helped Meng Changan deal with his horrible mess. In other words, the animal carcasses buried by Meng Changxi were Meng Changan's hapless victims. Meng Changan did not appreciate none of the things his elder brothers had done for him. If anything, he turned their kindness against them by silently recording the videos of Meng Changxi burying the animals. When he was so young, he already knew how to make use of his brother's love to his own advantage.

The damning evidence of the dead man was probably taken the night Meng Si encountered the siblings at the abandoned bungalow. Meng Changxi was carrying a secret video camera on him that night. While he was being lectured by Meng Si, the camera recorded his brothers moving the dead drifter whom Meng Changan killed.

Meng Changan had a handsome appearance that inspired confidence and trust while Meng Changxi who was born with a facial birthmark would give others a bad first impression. Probably since the moment Meng Changan started his search for that butterfly, he already decided to use his brother as his scapegoat.

At this point, something cleared in Han Fei's mind. Meng Si was the person who knew the 3 siblings the best, she was the only person who could absolve Meng Changxi's suspicion so she would have to die.

'The evidence that the police found at Meng Changxi's home is definitely planted by Meng Changan. This devil has planned everything. He has been keeping this 'smoking gun' on Meng Changxi. Once his position is threatened, he'd push Meng Changxi out to take his fall.' But to the devil's credit, none of the evidence was technically tempered. They were merely framed a certain way. Meng Changxi was guilty but the real sinner was Meng Changan.

"Take a look at this!" The officer found a hand-painted map at the corner. It marked out the camera locations at the centre, and used that to plan a relatively safe route through it. "The fake id is prepared for the disabled. Citizens with facial disfigurement or blindness can skip the facial recognition registration. We have no idea where Meng Changxi got that Id but the system will not be fooled for more than 5 minutes. The alarm will ring after that! In other words, he only has 5 minutes to commit the murder after he enters the centre. According to the route he mapped out, 5 minutes is more than enough to do that and escape without being seen. His plan is perfect."

After knowing the murderer's plan, the two officers launched into action. Han Fei did not follow them, instead he stayed to study the killer's supposed route. He placed himself in Meng Changxi's shoes. If he was going to do something like this, he'd memorize the route and then burn away the evidence. Why leave it behind to be discovered?

"It feels like Meng Changxi purposely left these behind for us to find. He probably knew we're onto him. If that is the case, this route has to be false.

"On the other hand, the fact that Meng Changan will be present at the convention is suspiciously easy to find. He could have easily hidden away his names like some of the other higher ups, so why didn't he? After sending the videos to the police, he knew it would place a great pressure on his brother so why make an obvious target out of himself? Unless of course, he has something else planned... This whole thing smells like a trap.

"Neither of the two siblings is dumb. They would have been able to guess the other's plan. But the pressure is on Meng Changxi. If Meng Changxi does not go after Meng Changan now, he'd lose his chance and eventually be captured by the police. He'd be condemned due to the overwhelming evidence against him. So in this situation, what can Meng Changxi do?"

At this point, Han Fei turned to his own picture. "Why am I the last prospect for Meng Changxi? How do I figure into his plan?"

Chapter 69:

The killer might commit another murder, Li Xue's colleagues had to report this to their superior. They were cordial towards Han Fei as they politely but firmly escorted him out from the cave. In the name of protecting the crime scene, they guarded the cave entrance and talked into their phones. They effectively blocked Han Fei outside the cave. They had not fully trusted Han Fei. "Thank you for your help but leave the rest to us."

The reinforcement soon arrived. Staring at his own picture, Han Fei realized there was nothing else he could do here without angering the law enforcement. "I'm glad that I was able to help, I'll be leaving then." As a professional actor, normal people wouldn't be able to read his expression that easily. He gave a relieved sigh as he prepared to leave but in reality, Han Fei already had something else planned.

"Li Xue, can you drive me back?"

"Sure." The two who first discovered the cave were also the first to leave. Li Xue used her bike to send Han Fei back to the old city. Along the way, the duo did not exchange a word. It was not until Han Fei got down from her bike that Li Xue had to ask, "You still think Meng Changan is the killer, don't you?"

"My suspicion towards him has not changed but your colleagues aren't wrong either. Meng Changxi should not have tempered with the evidence. He was wrong." Han Fei handed the helmet back to Li Xue and did not elaborate. After Li Xue left, Han Fei studied his home as he reached his hand into his pocket and curled his fingers around the taser. If you know you were being followed, you probably would have a hard time acting normal, you might even avoid going home to find somewhere else to stay for a few days but Han Fei was different. The apartment that he called home might be dangerous but he had been to a different apartment which was a thousand times scarier. Han Fei took his first step towards the stairs when his phone suddenly vibrated.

After he read the phone message, Han Fei frowned in confusion. "Why would Wei Youfu's father message me all of a sudden?" After giving it some thought, the situation clarified for Han Fei. Since he was a person of interest, Han Fei's home would be heavily monitored. It was impossible for Meng Changxi to meet him at his place so the most effective method was to gain help from a third party. "Assuming the person who followed me was Meng Changxi, then he must know I have a good relationship with Wei Youfu's father."

The message was short and simple. Wei Youfu's father wanted to see him. There was no explanation, thus no chance for Han Fei to read into it. Han Fei replied to the message instantly and hurried towards Northern Street. When he passed the set for Flower of Sin, Han Fei noticed the apartment was deserted, and the crew did not arrive for work. 'Director Jiang did not continue the shoot? He has decided to wait for the result of the actual case?' This was good news for Han Fei but it was not the time to dwell on that. He knew where Wei Youfu's father lived because he had visited him with Li Xue before. The old father lived in the same apartment as Meng Si's family. Wei Youfu's father stayed on the 4th floor while Meng Si's son, Meng Changshou lived on the 3rd floor. Without making any noise, Han Fei arrived on the 4th floor. He knocked on the door and the door swung open easily.

"Sir, are you home?" Han Fei walked into the room like he did not find the whole situation suspicious at all, even though every single nerve that he had was strung tight. The sound of faucet running came from the kitchen. Han Fei ventured towards it when suddenly the door to the bedroom opened. Han Fei leaped away from the door and pulled out the taser. Perhaps he had gone through too many scary things in the game, Han Fei was surprised by how calm he felt at that moment. A suspected murderer was in the room with him but he felt no fear. He was completely at ease.

"A normal person would be frightened when they see this face of mine but you were not affected at all. I knew I got the right person, your acting job is merely a front, isn't it?" The voice was hoarse as if nails were shoved down the man's throat. Hearing the voice evoked a sense of pain.

"That's where you are wrong. I am a real actor, a comedy actor to be precise." Han Fei looked to the bedroom, a man with serious facial disfigurement stood at the door. His face suffered from such intense burn damage that his facial features were indiscernible. However, his gaze was exceptionally sharp like a blade. While Han Fei studied the man, the man did the same in reverse.

"You appear to know that I would be waiting for you here." The man with the ruined face revealed a scary smile. "There is a stench on you that I am all too familiar with. You just came from the sewer under Dong Hwa Ice Factory. I didn't think I had left any crumbs behind, so how did you find that place?"

"You sure have many questions, Meng Changxi." When Han Fei mentioned the name, Meng Changxi, the smile on the man's face disappeared. Han Fei felt no fear under the glare of the scary-looking man. Han Fei's composure inhibited the man so much so that Meng Changxi did not dare to act too rashly. After a long time, the man with the ruined face slowly raised his arms in surrender. "I have not heard that name in a long time already. Don't worry, I have no malice towards you."

"I know." Han Fei slowly retreated to the living room. "Where is Wei Youfu's father?"

"The gentleman is sleeping, I won't hurt him."

Meng Changxi pushed open the door to another room. Wei Youfu's father was sleeping in bed, his chest rising evenly. Seeing the old man, Han Fei sighed in relief. His minute reaction caught Meng Changxi's attention, "When I was tailing you, I noticed you share a good relationship with the families of the human jigsaw case's victims. Are you one of the victims' family or friends?"

Han Fei was reminded of his roommate in the other world and he nodded slightly, "I have my own reason to apprehend the killer. I unearthed the truth about Meng Changan through my own investigation. He is tied to the murder but there is one question that still boggles me. How do you figure into the picture? Why did you choose to disappear several years ago?"

"If I didn't do that, my wife and I would be the next to die." Meng Changxi touched the scars on his face, "Big brother and that animal have both lost their minds. It was too dangerous for me to stick around."

"Wait, your big brother? Meng Changshou?" Han Fei's eyes narrowed. This was someone he had fully ruled out as a suspect!

"I can see the shock on your face. To be honest, one of the biggest reasons I chose to go into hiding is my big brother." The scars on Meng Changxi's face twisted together. "There was a question that eluded my understanding in my mother's murder, why would she bring Chen Chen to Dong Hwa Ice Factory? There was no reason for her to do that unless she did not bring Chen Chen there with her, but Chen Chen was used as bait to lure her there.

"Initially, I suspected it was my younger brother, Meng Changan, who was behind all these. However, one thing did not add up. Chen Chen was not close to my younger brother but you know who he was close with?" There was no emotion in Meng Changxi's voice, as if he had lost touch with human emotions. "My big brother was a very honest and kind person. He was not that bright so everyone thought he was a push over. People took advantage of him but he was always such a natural around kids.

“After the incident with my mother and Chen Chen, he became quite unlike himself. He would utter less than 10 words in a week. I became so worried about him that I brought him to the hospital for a checkup.”

“And what did you find?”

“I thought that it was the loss of our mother and Chen Chen that tipped big brother over the edge but when I saw the result of his brain CT scan, I got the shock of my life.” Even though this happened a decade ago, Meng Changxi remembered it clearly. “The X-ray showed that big brother’s pars orbitalis, frontal cortex, parietal cortex and limbic cortex suffer from functional deficit. When you trace the outline of these impaired areas, they form the shape of a perfect butterfly.”

Adsense still doesn’t work for me. In this trying time, your donation will mean a lot to me.

Chapter 70:

“There is a butterfly inside Meng Changshou’s brain?”

“The doctor said big brother’s brain suffered abnormal development and it had caused permanent damage. It was a rare situation where biological influence could lead to potentially dangerous psychosis.” Meng Changxi’s every word radiated with chill. “It was at that moment that I realized the animal was not the only sick individual in our family. The big brother who had been helping me and looking after me was equally insane.”

“So Meng Changshou is the butterfly?” Han Fei gasped.

Meng Changxi was shocked when he heard Han Fei say that. “Wait, you knew about the butterfly?”

“What I know is that Meng Changan has been searching for the butterfly, but I have no idea what exactly this butterfly is... Until now of course.” Han Fei paid full attention, he was going to memorize everything Meng Changxi said.

“No, you got it wrong. Big brother is not the butterfly, in fact, the butterfly is not even a person. However, it did manage to corrupt my younger brother through my big brother.” Meng Changxi elaborated. “When Meng Changan started school, his condition worsened, the treatments he attended had no effect at all. The counselling treatments were arranged by my big brother who by then was already working. After the hospital visit, I started to suspect this whole arrangement. Digging through some old files, I found the information about the psychiatrist big brother supposedly hired. The doctor said he had no record of treating Meng Changan at all. So it turns out it was not a psychiatrist who had been treating my younger brother but something else.”

“Something else?” Han Fei noticed Meng Changan used ‘something’ and not ‘someone’.

“Yes, I don’t know how to describe it, the thing is not like us humans.” Meng Changxi peeled back his sleeves. Scars were left on his arms. They looked like a string of numbers. “I’m sure I’ve seen it before but for some reason, I cannot remember its face. To make sure I do not forget the last bit of information I have on it, I recorded everything on my body.”

Seeing the scars on Meng Changxi’s arms, Han Fei’s eyes twitched, “You sure are cruel towards yourself.”

“You have to understand that before I met you, I had no other prospects.” Meng Changxi pointed at his own face. “Nowadays, there are cameras everywhere and they are connected to the central computer. The moment a criminal’s face appeared on camera, the law enforcement would be notified. To prevent capture, I had to do this to my own face.” Due to the layers of ghastly scars, it was hard to tell whether Meng Changxi was smiling or crying, “The thing would treat my younger brother only at night. It saw the human body as a receptacle for the soul. From its perspective, the soul is a life’s true form and it is the soul which transmutes the potential life energy within the body into physical reality. This process is also known as the creation of life.”

“I have to be honest and admit that I do not understand all that. Can you give me a simple description about that thing? What stands out about it? I wish to capture it to avenge my friends.” Han Fei cut to the point.

“Well, there is a tattoo of butterfly wings on that thing’s arm. I cannot remember its face but I do remember that tattoo.” Then Meng Changxi revealed something very important. “It is searching for a box, a box that is filled with the human world’s greatest tragedy, misfortune and despair. The box is supposedly hidden deep inside one’s soul. It searched for that box in my younger brother but the box was not there.”

“A box?” At this point, Han Fei could confirm that the butterfly’s target was the black box in his own head.

“The box would only appear within those born with the greatest misfortune. The butterfly spent years seeking for it but it was to no avail so it planned to create souls which were sick enough to foster the appearance of the box.” Meng Changxi removed his jacket. “10 years ago, the butterfly selected 3 candidates for this project. They were all murderers in the human jigsaw case.”

“There were 3 of them?”

“The first was the orphanage director at Northern Street, He Shouye; the second was Meng Changan and the third, my big brother. At least these are the three that I know of, who knows if there are others out there.”

“Do you have actual evidence to prove that they are the killers?” Han Fei wanted to help Meng Changxi but he also knew that if Meng Changxi had actual evidence, he wouldn’t have to go into hiding. The room sunk into silence. After about 10 seconds, Meng Changxi bit on his already broken lips. He looked at Han Fei and began slowly, “Can I trust you?”

“Of course.”

“You answered too quickly. You do not even know me. I’ve killed He Shouye, I am an actual murderer.” Meng Changxi’s scarred face matched perfectly with his wicked statement.

“I’ve guessed that already, which is why I hope that you’ll surrender yourself to the police after the real culprit is caught.” Han Fei had seen too many gory scenes to have a scared reaction even when he was in the same room as a killer.

“I do not have actual proof but everything I had, I collected and stashed at an abandoned neighbourhood in the countryside. The place is called Happiness Neighbourhood. All the evidence will be inside the bathroom of Room 1044.” Meng Changxi slowly moved his gaze away. “The police will soon catch up to me. When Meng Changan committed those murder, he already decided for me to take his fall. I do not have much time left.”

“The place you mentioned...” Han Fei was startled when he heard the address from Meng Changxi. His home in the game was also Room 1044.

“What’s wrong?” Seeing the first genuine expression on Han Fei’s face, Meng Changxi was confused.

“Nothing, I’m just surprised that you have researched into the human jigsaw case as well. According to the news I heard, the police merely received damning evidence on you for the frozen body case. If Meng Changan has evidence on you for the human jigsaw case as well, why not...’

Han Fei was cut off before he finished, “Meng Changan will not deign to do something like offer the law enforcement an anonymous tip. He was too clever to do that because interaction with the police might lead the trail back to him. Instead, he would have buried those incriminating evidence along the path of the law enforcement’s investigation. He would make it so that the police came to their supposedly unbiased conclusion that I was the killer.”

“Then who mailed them those recordings?”

“If I have to guess, it was my big brother.” Meng Changxi’s voice pained with the mention of Meng Changshou. “I have no idea what is the relationship between those corrupted by the butterfly but compared to Meng Changshou, Meng Changan is the butterfly’s more satisfied product. Therefore, if there is an accident, the butterfly will most likely order my brother to take the blame on Meng Changan’s behalf. They always have a backup, which is why I am wary to come out with my collected evidence.”

“But what do you plan to do after handing all your hard work to me?” Meng Changxi’s statements sounded too much like his last words for Han Fei’s comfort.

“There is no need for you to know that. Just remember the address I gave you.” Meng Changxi’s eyes stared at Han Fei. “If I die, hand over all the things you find there to the police.”