

Iyashikei 71

Chapter 71:

“Don’t act too recklessly!” Noting Meng Changxi’s tone, Han Fei immediately persuaded, “The police have been to Dong Hwa Ice Factory, they know about your plan. Even if you go to Xin Lu’s international business centre now, you won’t be able to get close to Meng Changan, it’ll only deepen the police’s suspicion on you.”

“The plan was written for the police to see. I would update my plan daily but I have never written the actual plan down on paper.” In other words, no one but Meng Changxi himself knew what his plan entailed. “Meng Changan and Meng Changshou are both killers but the real culprit is that butterfly. Even if my brothers are brought to justice, the butterfly who caused this whole tragedy will still walk free. It is hiding behind the scene and has never shown itself.”

“Then all the more reason for us to take it slow. We can start by apprehending Meng Changan.”

“But I don’t have time to take it slow.” Meng Changxi turned around to reveal the festering wounds on his back. “I carry the name of a mother-killer, my life has been long and painful, now I just wish for a satisfactory closure.” Han Fei could empathize with Meng Changxi but he still wanted to stop the man but Meng Changxi was adamant. “After you find those evidence, be careful of your own safety.”

“You’re not in a place to worry about me.” Han Fei countered.

“Listen, you are too deeply involved in these cases so the butterfly will eventually get to you! So you cannot be too careful. I’ve spent a decade hiding from it but even so I’ve almost died from accidents several times. I’m sure they were all the butterfly’s doing.”

“But you just said they are accidents. How is the butterfly involved?”

“The butterfly is a master manipulator and planner, it is an expert at creating coincidences. Two supposedly unrelated events might combine together to be your death trap.” Meng Changxi warned Han Fei. After that, he pointed at the front door. “Leave this place and do not turn back. Pretend that this meeting has never happened, hopefully that’ll confuse the butterfly for a little while longer.” Han Fei stood unmoved, he knew this would be the last time he saw Meng Changxi. Seeing Han Fei’s hesitation, humanity shone on Meng Changxi for the first time, he patted Han Fei’s shoulders, “In the

past decade, the luckiest thing that has ever happened to me is to meet you in my final days. If you really want to capture the butterfly; if you really want to avenge the dead; if you really want to find out the truth, then follow my instructions." Meng Changxi forced a smile but it was a ghastly one as it tore at the scars on his face. "Sorry about that, I'm sure it was not a pretty smile. I haven't smiled in years already, so that was the best I could do."

Meng Changxi's last statement touched Han Fei. "I hope your plan goes without a hitch, good luck."

After that, Han Fei left Wei Youfu's father's home and hurried towards the address given to him by Meng Changxi. As technology moved forward, the city grew in size. Many people would rather squeeze in the hive-like highrise, than stay in the countryside alone. Traversing the barely-used roads, Han Fei eventually found Happiness Neighbourhood behind an abandoned chemical plant. The place was deserted. Wild grass was everywhere. The walls were severely corrupted by rain and a sign warning of dangerous structure stood at the entrance. However, even the sign was from years ago. It was rusted and could topple at any moment. "This building is also 10 storeys tall, similar to the apartment in the game but the layout is completely different. Most of the rooms have wooden doors instead of steel doors."

With open curiosity, Han Fei headed into the building carefully. A moldy smell lingered in the air. Trash and heavily damaged furniture littered the corridor. There was a thick layer of dust over everything. It appeared like even squatters stayed away from this place.

When Han Fei arrived at the 4th floor and glanced at Room 1044, a strange feeling overwhelmed him. It was like the real world and the gaming world had overlapped. He grabbed the door handle and with a slight push, realized the pivot was already broken. Han Fei shivered as he entered the room. It was daylight but the room was eerie. Paper furniture decorated the living room. "It's like the place is meant for the dead."

Due to the way the room was built, sunlight was blocked from entering the living room. The paper furniture had rotten from inside due to the heavy moisture. "Meng Changxi told me the stuff is inside the bathroom."

Making his way through the paper furniture, Han Fei entered the bathroom. He noticed one of the tiles was arranged differently. Han Fei lifted up the tile and found a bloody envelope and a note by Meng Changxi. 7 addresses were written on the envelope, they corresponded to 7 rooms in this building. According to Meng Changxi, the 7 rooms contained the body parts of the 7 victims from the human jigsaw case. This appeared to be part of the ritual. After one connected the locations of the 7 rooms, it formed the outline for a pair of butterfly wings.

“How much does the butterfly know about Perfect Life’s cryptic world and the black box? Why would a building in game mirror a building in real life so closely?” Han Fei memorized the room number for all 7 rooms and then opened the envelope. It contained more information about this building. As Han Fei read through the files, he realized it was not a coincidence that the killer had chosen this building to bury the chopped-up body parts. This building was a famed haunting spot. There were plenty of strange rumours surrounding this place. It was a famous suicide spot at Xin Lu.

Taking out his phone, Han Fei searched for Happiness Neighbourhood on the internet and the result stunned him. The news articles read like a ghost story collection. “The butterfly placed the victims’ body parts strategically inside this building and then used their remaining flesh and the 8th victim to sew out the scariest human carcass. The cadaver fitted its requirement for misfortune, pain and despair but from the result, it does not look like they have managed to find the black box.”

Han Fei continued to read the material left behind by Meng Changxi. Other than details about the human jigsaw case, there were also plenty of notes on the butterfly. He was about to dig in when his phone pinged with a hot news update. Normally Han Fei would have ignored these but this time, it was different. The news was attached with the picture of Meng Changxi!

He clicked on the link and it sent him to a livestream. A bare chested Meng Changxi sat before the camera calmly and coolly regarded the people around him. He looked like he was at some kind of recording studio. “I will not harm anyone in this room, provided that you do not interrupt the signal or play any tricks.” It was unclear who he was talking to. But eventually he turned to face the camera. “Meng Changan, I know that even if I sacrifice my life, I won’t be able to get close to you so this is the only method of communication that I can think of. It is time for us brothers to talk.”

Chapter 72: 72

“When the virtual and the real have no difference, the human construct is no longer that unique. Every day, there are 4 million pictures uploaded and 32 millions status updates posted to the web by at least 14 million active users. This sea of information is not lost, the photon computer collects them to manufacture unique and complex human character models.

“Boss, we have an emergency!”

“Chill down, haven’t I told you that we have to be calm even in the most dire situation?” Kong Tiancheng lectured as he turned away from the mic.

“There is a murderer who has held a whole broadcast studio hostage. He claims to be Meng Changan’s elder brother and Meng Changan is actually the killer for the human jigsaw case that happened 10 years ago!”

“What the fuck! Where did you see this?!” Kong Tianchang glanced towards his phone and then whipped his head towards the location where the higher-ups from Immortal Pharma were seated. 4 of the 5 seats were vacated. A middle-aged man with dashing good looks was staring at his phone silently. The nametag on his lapel identified him as Meng Changan.

Thousand pairs of eyes at the convention stared at him. Meng Changan thought he could use himself to lure Meng Changxi out but he was now put under the spotlight instead. If he left, that would suggest guilt but if he stayed, who knew what else his brother would reveal.

“That is Meng Changan?!”

“The murderer’s younger brother? No, wait, the murderer is Meng Changan!”

“But he does not look like one!”

“What do you know? These kinds of people hide themselves very well.”

“We need to report this to the main company immediately!”

Kong Tiancheng left the stage in a hurry. The speakers broadcasted music in his stead but the music was barely loud enough to overwhelm the exchange among the crowd. Similar situations were happening all over Xin Lu. In this information era, any hot topic would be known by all in a matter of seconds. At that moment, many people were tuned into their phone, staring at the man with the ruined face and scarred body.

“I wish to regale everyone with a story, a story about love and death. A mother took in three orphans, 2 of them had mental problems and 1 had physical disfigurement. However, the young mother still loved them with everything she had, but the repayment she got? She was brutally murdered by her own sons...” Inside Room 1044 at Happiness Neighbourhood, Han Fei was tuned into the stream as well. He knew about Meng Changxi’s past and he understood how long the man must have planned for this day. ‘So this is the swan song you’ve prepared for yourself?’

Meng Changxi revealed everything he knew on video. He did not hide anything, not even the presence of the butterfly. Meng Changxi knew that even if his siblings were apprehended, they would not give up the butterfly. Therefore, with his own life on the line, he decided to expose the butterfly. Some believed him and others did not, but that did not matter because the name, butterfly, was now out there. That alone might cause people to be more alert, thus lowering the number of potential victims.

To avoid facial recognition, Meng Changxi ruined his face; to prevent himself from leaving behind any fingerprint, he burned off his fingertips; for this day, he was in hiding for 10 years. He carved his speech on his own body. Every single scar was part of a sentence. Even after the stream was taken down, people could continue to find evidence on his body via captured stills. From the frozen body case to the human jigsaw case, Meng Changxi admitted everything he experienced, knew and investigated. He did not deny his wrongdoing. He admitted to the murder of He Shouye and the tempering of evidence but that was all he would confess to. He’d not take the fall for things that he did not do.

Meng Changan had laid down an elaborate plan with both surface and hidden evidence to frame his brother. However, he underestimated Meng Changxi, for he was outplayed. Instead of entrapping Meng Changxi, his elder brother tore down the protective web that he had constructed around himself for the past 10 years before everyone’s eyes!

The livestream did not last long and by the end, the stream started to flicker. No one knew what happened before the image went down but they did hear an angry growl by Meng Changxi. “Does a lack of evidence really mean a lack of sin?!”

The stream was cut off but its captured stills and highlights began to flood the internet, it sent the news once more to the top of online discussions. After watching Meng Changxi’s video, Han Fei immediately called Li Xue but her line was busy. So he sent her a few messages. Several seconds later, Li Xue replied. “All 3 Meng Brothers are now in detention!”

“What is your next plan?” Han Fei trusted Xin Lu police but it was hard to have them investigate an elusive butterfly, that alone sounded so preposterous. Meng Changxi’s public exposure of the butterfly

was probably also a measure taken to instigate public opinion to pressure the police to open this investigation.

“The police will pour all their resources to investigate the frozen body and jigsaw puzzle case, including this butterfly mentioned by Meng Changxi.”

“If you’re starting an investigation into the butterfly, I can help you. I have some information on the butterfly with me.”

“Are you still at home?”

“I’m in Xin Lu countryside, I’ll meet you at the station.” Staying inside the room filled with paper furniture, Han Fei felt uncomfortable and he wanted to leave.

“Give me your address, we will go get you.” Han Fei caught the seriousness in Li Xue’s tone.

“I’m at a neighbourhood behind a chemical plant in the Northern countryside, the place is called Happiness Neighbourhood...” Han Fei actually had no idea whether he could help bring down the butterfly or not. If anything, he felt like the butterfly was already onto him and it would be hard to put his plan into action. “The butterfly would have seen Meng Changxi’s stream as well, this place is no longer safe.”

Han Fei hurried and left. He grabbed all the information collected by Meng Changxi. He hugged them to his chest and ran out the building. Luckily, Han Fei did not run into any accident and soon he met up with the Xin Lu police.

Under heavy protection, Han Fei was directly sent to the investigation unit’s office. Two imposing officers personally came to ‘welcome’ Han Fei, one of them appeared to be Li Xue’s former superior. Sitting in the room filled with cops, Han Fei felt no fear. He would reveal everything he should; but what he couldn’t, he’d keep to himself. Han Fei was confident no lie detector in the world was going to detect his omission.

A comedy actor accidentally found crucial clues to a real life murder due to the research he did to commit into his role, that itself could be made into a movie. "Parts of the human jigsaw victims are hidden inside Happiness Neighbourhood Block 1. I'd suggest you send officers over there immediately. Since the butterfly should have seen Meng Changxi's stream, it would take action to destroy the evidence. We have to move faster than it."

"The place has already been put under lockdown." Li Xue's superior studied Han Fei who sat by the table. His investigative instinct told him things were not that simple but his instinct also told him that Han Fei meant no malice. The young man before him appeared to be eager to solve the case, perhaps even more than they did.

"I've already told you everything I know, can I leave now?" Han Fei needed to return to the game at night so he couldn't spend the night at the station.

"Do you have other things on your schedule? We are applying for a citizenry bravery honorary medal for you. Furthermore, you are applicable for the human jigsaw case's reward money considering the contribution you've given to the police." Li Xue's superior knew his way around words. A simple statement and he got all of Han Fei's attention.

"How much is the reward money?" A calculative glow crossed Han Fei's eyes but Han Fei quickly hid it away by lowering his head to take a sip of the water. "The amount does not matter that much of course. I did what I did to help avenge the victims that's all! I got to know the victims' families in the process of shooting the movie and I empathize greatly with their suffering." Han Fei was about to wax more stories when his phone suddenly rang. All the officers in the room turned towards him.

"Jiang Yi?" Han Fei had no idea why Director Jiang would pick this moment to call him. But to avoid misunderstanding, he accepted the call and put it on speaker.

"Han Fei, did you see Meng Changxi's livestream? Now, I'm sure this case will be cracked wide open! Our patience is worth it after all!" Director Jiang sounded so excited. Due to the troubles from the main actor and the victims' families, he was under great pressure because the shooting was forcibly halted.

"Yes, I did." Han Fei continued internally, 'Hell, I even participated in it.'

“When will you come back to the set? This time our script will surely be satisfactory to the victims’ families! Meng Changxi’s livestream will definitely be written into the plot. Not only will it have a climactic effect, it has already helped us garner so much free promotion!” Director Jiang sounded like he had already started to reconstruct the new script in his mind. He sounded like a man who was given water after wandering for days in the desert.

“I can’t return to the set just yet...” Han Fei said apologetically. “I’m currently at the police station, I’m helping the law enforcement with the case.”

“Wait... you are helping the police?” Director Jiang repeated in confusion.

“I’ll have the police explain it to you, Director Jiang.” Han Fei handed the phone to Li Xue’s superior while whispering. “Sir, I have to skip several workdays because I was too busy looking for clues. I know I have caused my director plenty of troubles. Sir, can you please put in a good word for me?”

Li Xue’s superior detailed Han Fei’s contribution in the case to Director Jiang. The captain lavished such compliments on Han Fei that the latter blushed with embarrassment. On the other end of the line, Jiang Yi was stunned with disbelief. ‘I told you study the character, but I didn’t tell you to go and solve his murder!’

Han Fei was the one who found the key clues to help the police solve the frozen body and human jigsaw case. Jiang Yi took a long time before he fully digested this news. The tremor in his heart lasted for a long time before it settled down. When he spoke again, there was a tremble in his voice, “Mr. O... Officer, you have to treat Han Fei nicely. He is the one carrying our whole movie!”

“Han Fei has proven himself instrumental in the resolution of these cases, so we need him to stay a while longer to take his statements, but I’ll be sure to not let that intervene with the shoot. Other than that... I hope that you’ll be able to promote a good image of law enforcement in the movie’s end product.”

“Of course, of course!” Jiang Yi said confidently. After a few more words with the captain and Han Fei, Jiang Yi made Han Fei promise that he would show up at the set tomorrow.

After hanging up, Han Fei continued giving his statements to the police. He had no idea the impact this phone call had left on Jiang Yi and the rest of the crew.

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After ending the call with Han Fei, Jiang Yi immediately dialed a few other numbers. Not all of them were answered so he called a cab and hurried towards a production company. While he rushed into the building, Jiang Yi still did not give up on his call. Finally, it was picked up. "Sister Long, I have something important to tell you!" With the receptionist notified, Director Jiang was led into the conference room where a few individuals in smart, formal outfits were seated.

"Jiang Yi, you're here because of the human jigsaw killer's livestream, aren't you?" Sister Long was seated at the front of the desk and it was clear that she called the shots here. "We have already been notified. The case's popularity is now through the roof, it'll be immensely helpful to our movie. But this can be a double-edged sword. If we do not handle this sensitively, we'll be buried under public pressure."

"Sister Long, I am now 100 percent confident that I can make gold out of this movie! There is just one small thing that I need to notify you." Director Jiang said seriously.

"What is it? Why don't you come and take a seat first? Don't just stand there."

"I want to change our main character. Ah Cheng is too green to play the role to its full potential. He is unable to carry the presence of a detective with at least a decade of experience." Once Jiang Yi said that, the people in the room started to rustle.

"Even though this movie is only a small budget project, Han Guang Cinema and we, You Long Culture are the main sponsors. Han Guang Cinema's condition for sponsoring the project is that we have Ah Cheng as the main character. Once you fire him, you have to consider them backing out from the project as well. Furthermore, where are you going to find his replacement at such short notice? Even if you have a candidate in mind, where are you going to find the money to hire him?"

"We already have an actor perfect for this role in our crew!" Jiang Yi did not budge. He took out his phone to show an actor's profile. "His name is Han Fei."

“Han Fei? I have not heard of him before.” Sister Long turned to discuss this with the other people in the room. They all frowned in response. Sister Long eventually stood up to face Jiang Yi. “This Han Fei is quite a looker, is he a new actor being cultivated by some big agency?”

“Han Fei is not really a new actor and he is a free agent at the moment.”

“Then, is he one of those serious actors who only take on art films? What award-winning movies has he participated in?”

“Erm, he has none.”

Hearing Jiang Yi’s answer, Sister Long scoffed. “So, let me get this straight, you want me to take on a no name actor with no background, and no star power? Are you kidding me? Is he your nephew? Is that why you’re recommending him?”

“He’s not my nephew, but he is the key witness to the human jigsaw case!”

“What?” Not only Sister Long, everyone in the room was baffled.

“He is a key witness.” Jiang Yi looked into Sister Long’s eyes unwaveringly. “In fact, he was the reason the police are able to solve the human jigsaw case. The law enforcement is going to hold a ceremony to award him with a citizenry bravery honorary medal. I have just confirmed that with the police.”

“You... want the person who solved the case in real life to play the character of the detective in the movie?”

Sister Long was stumped, even she had not encountered something as fantastical as this before. After a temporary silence, the conference room burst into contained chaos.

Inside a high-class apartment at Xin Lu's intelligent city, Ah Cheng looked up at the dark clouds in the sky and silently counted the raindrops that splattered against the window. The phone that hung around his neck was quiet.

"Ah Cheng, you've been standing there for 2 hours already, there's no harm for us to actively reach out to Director Jiang since there is still no word from the agency... Even though the agency has financed this project, it was still quite uncivil for us to quit the crew like that." His manager said carefully. "We'll invite Director Jiang out for dinner, I'm sure he'll offer you back the role if you just talk it out with it."

"It has only been 46 hours, I really don't understand why you are so worried." Ah Cheng turned to lecture his manager. Then he subconsciously reached into his pocket. "Hmm? Where's my phone? Help me find it! I'm sure Jiang Yi is already calling me. We need to find my phone!" Yesterday night, to prevent himself from accidentally missing out on Jiang Yi's call, Ah Cheng strung his phone around his neck. It had been there ever since. Seeing the state her star was in, the manager did not think it was wise to remind Ah Cheng of that fact. "Alright then, I'll go search for the phone in the other room..."

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Han Fei left the station at 8.30 pm. He stopped at a nearby stall and had a quick dinner before he hurried home. "All the potential murderers have been captured but the actual culprit directing their moves is still out there. So now I'll have to be extremely cautious of the butterfly's revenge." Han Fei stood before the wall of evidence and found himself too lazy to take it down. "Why do people like that exist in this world? They're the kind of people who should be treated to a free sample of Perfect Life. They're the ones who require the game's healing more than I do."

Han Fei glanced at the Iyashikei logo on the side of the gaming helmet and couldn't help but grumble. "If I can drag that bastard's consciousness into the game and have it meet my neighbours, then everyone will have a correct channel to vent their inner despair. The sacrifice of a madman can cure everyone, no matter how you look at it, that is a good deal." Justice demands retribution. Han Fei thought that was fair.

After completing a few rounds of physical training, Han Fei wiped away his sweat and sat down by his bed and picked up a book to read. In this era of everything quick, learning and reading were sanctuary for Han Fei's soul. "Personality disorders often surface at one's young age and stabilize around teenhood. It might persist for as long as one may live. Severe personality disorders are behavior statements that delineate a sociopath and a normal person in the study of abnormal psychology..."

Time flies when one is having fun. Soon it was 11 pm. Han Fei connected all the wires and put on the helmet. The world submerged into a red sea. When Han Fei opened his eyes, he was inside a chilly living room. 'It feels like I'm returning to my second home.'

Before starting this game, Han Fei had no friends at all, he was the kind who was destined to die alone. But now with the game pushing him, he started to learn how to be a better version of himself.

Han Fei stood inside the living room and pondered about his complicated emotions. The murderers for the human jigsaw case had been captured. Even though the real culprit was still fluttering outside the net of law, Han Fei had fulfilled one of his roommates' wishes. He wanted to share this good news with his roommates. He sincerely wished that his roommates could slowly walk out from their despair. Han Fei did not anticipate for his roommates to suddenly be able to communicate with him. As long as they no longer lost control, everything that he had done so far would be worth it. Turning to glance at the innermost bedroom, Han Fei gathered his courage and walked towards it.

Creak... The door swung open and Han Fei was greeted by his 7 roommates who sat facing away from him by the bed. No matter how many times Han Fei was greeted by this, the scene still shook the young man's heart. "Your murderers have already been captured, those who hurt you have received their due punishment." Han Fei walked into the room and described everything that happened in real life. However, none of his roommates appeared to hear them. They kept their heads lowered and their expression blank.

"I am unable to back my words with evidence. If I can bring you back to real life, I would." Han Fei took a seat on the bed and sighed deeply. Han Fei couldn't even drag someone into the game with him, much less bring people from the game out into the real world. Furthermore, he had no idea what kind of world he existed in. This cryptic world was isolated from the outside world, it was hidden deep inside the darkest ocean and he appeared to be the only person who could traverse between the two worlds freely.

Using pen and paper, Han Fei jotted down everything that happened in real life and then he placed the notes next to Wei Youfu. "Youfu, when you feel like yourself, please read through these. I'm not lying to you, the murderers have been captured!" Han Fei sighed as he still got no response from his roommates. He turned to glance out into the living room. He frowned when he saw the television. "If only I can record the trial proceeding in real life and then play it for you in this world. But the menu does not offer me that function..." Then Han Fei suddenly narrowed his eyes. "Wait, I remember the normal version of Perfect Life possesses the feature for its players to input videos they recorded in real life! Then, Perfect Life can simulate the captured videos in the game for the players to relive the experience again! Assuming this place is really Perfect Life's cryptic world, then I only need to bring my roommates to the surface world and then they'd be able to witness the apprehension of their murderers through

my eyes!” Initially Han Fei only wanted to escape as soon as possible with his life intact but now he wanted to bring all his neighbours with him. They deserved a far better ‘after’life than being trapped in a world of endless despair.

“It’ll be hard to find the door that connects the cryptic world and the surface world. By then, I would have made a lot more friends and neighbours. After all, the game has been urging me to be more social...” Han Fei feared that one day, he might cause a tremor that would affect both the gaming and the real world. “Will I be opening the Pandora’s Box then? Is it wise to suck the whole game into the world of the dead?”

Shaking his head, Han Fei did not want to be the one branded as the crazy person who raised the dead. Prices had to be paid for crossing the line between life and death.

“In any case, that is a worry for the far future. For now, I better focus on maintaining my survival.” Han Fei stood up and slowly retreated out from the room. Just as he closed the door, Wei Youfu reached out to take the notes. His pale fingers danced with black blood threads. When he saw the words on the papers, Wei Youfu’s broken body trembled incessantly.

Han Fei just walked into the living room when the robotic voice announced. “Notification for Player 0000. You have successfully triggered the Grade F Mission—Human Jigsaw!

“Human Jigsaw (Grade F Blood Red Mission): 7 pieces of human jigsaw are hidden inside 7 rooms at this apartment building! You need to find all of them within 3 days!

“Warning! Since the mission grade is unproportionate to the player’s current level, completing the mission will award the player with additional, unique rewards!”

Chapter 75: 75

Reading the mission details, Han Fei was honestly a bit confused. What he had done since he logged in was have a single-way conversation with his roommates and suddenly the system notified him that he had somehow triggered a Grade F Mission.

'The biggest difficulty of this Grade F Mission is to locate the 7 human jigsaw pieces. If one does not know their location beforehand, one would have to wander aimlessly around the building which is filled with death traps, searching through the rooms one by one. Thankfully, I have already memorized all the 7 locations. That will save me a lot of trouble so it is not impossible for me to complete the mission.'

Han Fei remembered the room numbers provided by Meng Changxi.

When he took another glance, Han Fei realized that on the mission interface, there was a new mission beside the Grade F mission. It was a normal Grade G Mission— Explore the 6th floor. 'Exploring the entire apartment is probably the whole main plot for the entirety of the first part of this game. Currently, only 3 rooms are occupied on the 6th floor. If Xu Qin is willing to help, it shouldn't be too difficult to clear the floor out. Now the only thing I need to be careful of is the stumbling footsteps roaming the corridor.'

Han Fei planted himself down on the couch, he planned to sit there for 3 hours. Of course, he did not waste these 3 hours doing nothing. He revised the studies he did in the day and then took some time to further his combat training. Han Fei noticed that as bizarre as this hellish game was, his focus would be unusually sharpened whenever he was in the game. It helped tremendously with his studies and training. 'When I connect to the surface world, perhaps I can open intensive self-improvement classes here. That's not a bad way to earn some extra income.'

After a fulfilling 3 hours, Han Fei picked up the cleaver and exited Room 1044. The corridor was as quiet as before. It was as if there was no life inside the building. Han Fei did not close the door. Gripping the cleaver, he carefully moved up to the 5th floor. When he came to the landing between the 4th and 5th floor, he noticed all the doors on the 5th floor were all shut. 'Strange, even the door to Room 1051 is also closed. Is Xu Qin not home tonight?'

Han Fei knew that Xu Qin would go for occasional 'grocery' shopping. The building manager left her with the apartment's entrance key before he disappeared so that her shopping trips could continue unimpeded. 'If Xu Qin is not with me, it's too risky for me to venture up to the 6th floor alone.' Han Fei stopped to think. 'Still, I shall go and knock on the doors. If she's really absent, I'll go find Weep and spend some time with him until she comes home.' With the plan made, Han Fei continued up the stairs. Suddenly hurried footsteps came from downstairs. When he turned back to look, Han Fei saw a scarred arm shut the door to Room 1044.

'This is not good!' Two bare-chested men stood before Room 1044. Their torsos had serious burns and multiple cuts. Both of them held sharp knives. 'It's clear that these two are coming after me! I don't know too many tenants in this building and the only ones who have it out for me are the non-locals staying on the 6th floor.' Han Fei's brain spun quickly. 'They probably were hiding on the 3rd floor

waiting for me to exit Room 1044. Since they dare to attack me today, it does suggest that Xu Qin is away. Since she's not home, running upstairs is equal to trapping myself so my best solution now is to run downstairs to seek help from Weep.'

The decision was made in a split second. The two non-locals moved towards the stairwell. One of them guarded the landing between 3rd and 4th floor to block Han Fei's escape while the other launched an attack at Han Fei. At that moment, Han Fei decided the best defence was offence. He used his cleaver and met the attack.

When the cleaver collided with the knife, Han Fei staggered back two steps but the scarred man stood his ground firmly. 'Damn, he is much stronger than I am!'

The non-local aimed to kill. Every wound on his body was like a split grin and they were cackling noiselessly. The man's knife aimed for Han Fei's chest. Caught in the narrow stairwell, Han Fei could barely avoid the attack. If he was slightly careless, there would be new holes on his body. The two men could easily apprehend him after he was injured. 'Even though the 3 hours are already over, I have not completed any missions so I can't quit the game yet. If I'm captured by these 2, who knows what they'll do to me!'

His adrenaline shot up. Han Fei decided he'd rather be consumed by ghosts than be kept as a torture victim by these madmen. 'I need to escape. Since I can't go down, then I'll have to go up! At worst, we'll all die together!'

Gritting his teeth, Han Fei rushed up the stairs. He slammed crazily on Xu Qin's door. 'I need to make as much noise as I can! I need these ghosts and crazy murderers to fight over me. Then perhaps I can have the chance to slip away!'

The two non-locals easily guessed Han Fei's plan. They quickly gave chase after their prey. The knives brushed past his body. Han Fei used his physical training to dodge the dangerous slashes. To prevent himself from being cornered, Han Fei slipped away from Xu Qin's door and continued to run up the stairs. When Han Fei came to the landing between 5th and 6th floor, what he saw drained his energy. There was a non-local standing in front of Room 1062, blocking Han Fei's path. The person had a unisexual appearance and they held a long syringe in their hands.

"Don't be afraid, my child. You won't be feeling any pain soon." The pair of eyes followed Han Fei like a snake. The voice was laced with resentment. Han Fei did not stop to listen to what the person had to say. Instead of slowing down, Han Fei picked up his speed, charging towards the person. The person also

raised the syringe in response. The sharp needle enlarged in Han Fei's eyes. At the last moment, Han Fei lashed out his hand and the cleaver swiped at the man's face.

Just as the person leaned back to avoid Han Fei's sudden attack, Han Fei careened forward on his momentum and kned the person right between their legs!

Han Fei realized then the non-local was a male because he doubled over with a groan. Han Fei did not stop to continue the fight. There were still 2 more crazy men chasing after him. He caught this opening and hurried up to the 7th floor.

'Those lessons by Li Xue are definitely useful!' The comedy actor charged up the stairs as fast as he could but due to the interruption of the man on the 6th floor, the two scarred men were catching up to him. When Han Fei arrived at the 7th floor, he remembered Meng Si's warning that he should never go up to the 8th and 9th floor. Han Fei rammed into the first door he encountered. To his surprise, the door to Room 1074 was not locked and it opened easily. 'Beggars can't be choosers!'

Han Fei fled into Room 1074. The first thing that Han Fei saw was a full-length mirror that was placed facing the front door.

Chapter 76: 76

The mirror was placed right in the middle of the living room and it was the first thing one'd see after opening the front door. Han Fei's reflection was conspicuously missing from the mirror but instead the following was written on its surface—Stay or Die. 'A mirror that shows no reflection? And why is it aimed right at the door?' Han Fei had not encountered this kind of interior design before because facing a mirror towards any door was a huge taboo in Feng Shui. In the study of Feng Shui, the entrance is where the air of prosperity and luck enters the house. If you place a mirror facing the door, you're basically reflecting the good aura back out.

'The warning is for me to stay inside this house or it goes as far as banning me from even moving an inch of my body?' In any case, Han Fei didn't have time to ponder the ambiguity of the term. He needed to lock the front door to ensure his own safety but when he tried to do so, he realized with dawning consternation that the bolt was broken. 'Damn it!'

Han Fei leaned his body weight into the door as his pursuers slammed into it. He knew he wouldn't be able to hold the bulwark much longer. 'They can easily corner me inside this house once they get in!' He was physically weak compared to one of them, much less three. He watched with increasing desperation as the door slowly pried open. 'I don't think it's safe for me to venture deeper into Room 1074 either. The only solution I can see now is to make use of the opening when they crash into the room to sneak out!'

Han Fei gritted his teeth. When the door was pushed open a palm wide, he voluntarily took a step away from it.

Bang! The heavy anti-theft door slammed against the wall. Han Fei's sudden retreat caused the 3 non-locals to tumble forward from their inertia. They rolled into the room. Han Fei's original plan was to make use of this opportunity to sidestep the 3 murderers and escape but he forgot to account for the trio's collective size. The three of them formed such a large wall as they careened forward that Han Fei would have to step deeper into Room 1074 or he'd be crushed under their weight. When Han Fei did so, his back accidentally knocked against the mirror that sat in the middle of the living room.

"Notification for Player 0000! You've successfully triggered Grade G Hidden Mission—The Mirror God's Game!

"The Mirror God's Game (Grade G Hidden Mission): Once this mission starts, your reflection in the mirror will mimic the first action you do. After that, he will add a new action that you'll have to mirror. This goes on back and forth between you and your reflection. If the game manages to last for 10 minutes without any mistake, the mission will be successful."

When the notification rang in his mind, Han Fei did not know to cry or laugh. If he could finish this mission, then he'd be able to leave the game but the problem was there were 3 madmen beside him. 'That Huang Yin has to be lying to me. These hidden missions are everywhere!'

After Han Fei accidentally knocked into the mirror, 4 figures slowly appeared inside it. They were blurred out but they corresponded to the 4 persons currently inside Room 1074. With the warning from the mission details, Han Fei did not dare to make any drastic move. However, the caution was not reflected in the 3 non-locals. Seeing Han Fei freeze to the spot, they immediately lunged towards their prey. After they made the first step, their reflections in the mirror did the same. However, their reflections halted after they took the first step and then they all lifted their heads to look out the mirror with their dead gaze.

The man with the syringe was the first to notice the problem. He too halted in his movement. One of his friends though was completely overtaken by bloodlust. He only had Han Fei in his mind and strong was the desire to chop Han Fei into pieces. He growled wickedly. He ignored the strange mirror and aimed his knife at Han Fei's neck. But when he was 3 steps away from Han Fei, pairs of grey arms reached out from inside the mirror to grab the man's body. No matter how hard he struggled, he was unable to shake loose. Slowly, he was dragged towards the mirror.

Ding!

The non-local's knife dropped to the ground before Han Fei. The man disappeared into the mirror like he was never there to begin with. Silence blanketed the room and the remaining players did not dare to make any more sudden moves.

'This is one hell of a scary mirror.' Han Fei shivered. The non-locals were stronger than he was but that meant nothing when he violated the mirror's rules. He only lasted for several seconds before he was consumed by the mirror. 'Meng Si told me the real dangers are on the 8th and 9th floor. But this one mirror is scary enough if you ask me.'

The mirror was bizarre but it had a clear weakness. It was not mobile. Furthermore, the mirror came with a warning so a normal person wouldn't voluntarily come into the room seeking death. It was pure accident that Han Fei had awakened the mirror. Neither Han Fei nor the non-locals knew about the mirror's terrifying nature. They say ignorance is bliss but this time their bliss could cost them their lives.

The 3 inside the room did not move. About 10 seconds later, the grey arms reached out from the mirror again. The non-local's reflections stared at their real counterpart with malice. The feminine man frowned as he observed his surroundings. When he lifted his eyes to meet his reflection's gaze, the grey arms that were about to reach him disappeared.

"I need to mimic the action of my reflection?" The man was very smart. As he saw the grey hands disappear, he said in the way of explanation. The scarred man who remained caught the hint. He too lifted his head to glare at his reflection. The murderous intention was still thick in his eyes. The grey hands that reached towards the 2 non-locals shrunk back into the mirror. But the arms around Han Fei increased in numbers.

'Looks like you can't stay in a fixed pose for too long either. If you do not commit to the next action within 15 seconds when it is your turn, the grey hands will appear.' It was Han Fei's turn to do something for his reflection to mimic. Han Fei took a tentative step towards the anti-theft door. His

reflection did the same thing and then Han Fei inside the mirror bent over to pick up the knife on the ground. When Han Fei saw this, a very bad feeling rose within him. If his reflection decided to plunge the knife into his heart, wouldn't he be forced to do the same thing?

This game sounded so simple but it could also be incredibly harrowing. "The grey hands will only emerge if you do not do anything 15 seconds after your turn starts, so please take this slow!" Han Fei told the two others inside the room. Naturally it was not out of concern that he shared this tip, Han Fei only wanted to buy more time. In any case, the two non-locals did not heed Han Fei's advice. They adopted their own strategy to play the game. The scarred man moved towards the mirror while the feminine man approached Han Fei.

"You want that blood red cocoon, don't you? I'll give it to you, I have no use for it. This is not the time for us to fight between ourselves. There are 2 of you and 1 of me. You can easily overpower me. There is no reason to risk your lives in the process." Han Fei worried that he'd be surrounded by the two men while in the middle of this mission so he used his silver tongue to persuade them to focus more on surviving the game than to kill him. "We are neighbours living in the same building! We should put down our differences for now and try to leave this room alive! If all of us die inside this room then everything will be for naught!"

Taking in Han Fei's persuasion, the feminine man gradually slowed down. However, the scarred man had a different goal in mind. His face etched with intimidating determination as he took deliberate steps towards the mirror. When it was his turn to do an action, the man raised his knife and thrust it heavily towards the mirror.

Chapter 77: 77

The sharp knife stabbed into the mirror. Cracks crackled on the previously smooth surface. To make things stranger, blood oozed out from the cracks! The mirror inside Room 1074 appeared to be alive!

The scarred man was stunned that the stab made with his most powerful swing only managed to cause a few cracks on the mirror. Before he could make his next move, an arm holding a sharp knife reached out from the mirror. Just like how the man had stabbed at the mirror, the arm spared no mercy as it thrust the blade into the man's body. But that was not all. Just as the man struggled to push the mirror back, endless pairs of grey arms reached out to grab him. They tore mercilessly at the man.

Blood flowed like rivers as the man cried out for help. However, both Han Fei and the other non-local instead silently moved towards the front door as if they had discussed this beforehand. Without

communicating, their thoughts went to the same place. Unfortunately, the scarred man was only able to hold on for less than 2 seconds before he too was dragged into the mirror. A chilling presence came from behind them and Han Fei stopped moving immediately. 'This is bad! Even with the sacrifice of 2 'friends', we've bought ourselves less than one extra minute!'

4 people entered the room and in less than 3 minutes, only half remained. This seemingly normal hidden mission was rampant with death traps. In the mirror, only Han Fei and the feminine man's reflections remained. As the rounds of mimicry went back and forth, their figures inside the mirror gradually clarified. Staring at himself inside the mirror, Han Fei even had a moment of hallucination where he believed he was the one trapped inside the mirror world. Rubbing his eyes, Han Fei noticed the room around him had blurred. Han Fei inside the mirror also rubbed his eyes and then a wicked smile appeared on his face. 'The hidden mission is called Mirror God's Game. Who is this Mirror God? Is it this mirror? But what does it gain by mimicking and consuming ghosts as well as living humans?'

After Han Fei copied his reflection's action, he moved backwards towards the entrance. The feminine man was on the same wavelength as Han Fei but he was closer to the entrance than Han Fei was. Naturally, he reached it before Han Fei did. After the man mimicked his reflection's action, he grabbed the door handle and pulled the door open. Now it was his turn to repeat his reflection's movement but the man did not stop. After the door opened, he rushed out the door without any hesitation. The moment he violated the game's rule, pairs of hands emerged from the mirror! They bound around their target like a lasso.

The man tried to cut at the hands with his knife but it was pointless. He could only watch on helplessly as he was dragged back into the room. The feminine man was pulled back until he was right before the mirror. To Han Fei's surprise, the hands did not drag the man directly into the mirror, instead, the hands planted him right before the man's own reflection.

'The grey hands will only appear when one violates the rules, in other words, it plays the role of the game master. But the punishments it gave the scarred men and this feminine man are different. The murderers who wanted to harm the mirror and the game were consumed by the mirror while this person who just wanted to escape was dragged back and placed right up to the mirror. This mirror appears to have a mind of its own. The purpose of this game is not to kill. However, why would it come up with a game that allows it to repeatedly mimic a 'human's actions? Is it possible that it wants to be a 'human' too?'

Han Fei had no idea what kind of ghost, if any, lived inside the mirror but the mirror appeared to be using this strange exercise in mimicry to attempt to assume or perhaps regain 'humanity'. 'There really is all kinds of neighbours inside this building.' Han Fei thought it was already strange enough that one of his neighbours kept an actual room as a pet but now there was this new neighbour who was a living

mirror. 'No wonder there are no living humans on the 7th floor, probably no one will appreciate waking up to realize they have been trapped inside a mirror.' As this thought crossed his mind, Han Fei had to ponder a darker possibility. 'Wait, there might be other tenants on the 7th floor in the beginning but they have all been consumed by this mirror!'

In any case, Han Fei decided to play along and finish the hidden mission first. When it was his turn, he deliberately tossed the sharp knife in his hand out the front door. 'I will eventually remove all sharp objects from this room'. If his own reflection wanted to use the knives to harm himself, then he'd have to move out from the room to pick them up first. Honestly, that was not a bad idea but what happened next caused Han Fei to shiver in cold sweat.

The feminine man who was placed before the mirror had correctly guessed the game's rules by now. He did not struggle pointlessly like his friends did but obediently resume the game as he stood before the mirror. When it was his turn, he took a cautious step back. His reflection did the same and then the man in the mirror did something absolutely mind-boggling. He raised his finger and pushed it right into his left eye. Seeing this ghastly image, both Han Fei and the feminine man were dismayed.

Han Fei soon overcame his shock but the color drained from the other man's face. He slowly raised his finger but he couldn't muster the heart to poke his own eye out. The timer of 15 seconds was soon over. Pairs of grey arms crawled out from the mirror. Their grip tightened around the man. Faced with certain death, the feminine man finally made the decision. He followed the rule and plunged his finger right into his left socket. Hearing the sound that came from the man's face, Han Fei's scalp numbed.

The enormous pain caused the man's hands to involuntarily fly towards his left eye. The reflection in the mirror smiled wickedly as he did the same thing. And then he proceeded to poke out his right eye. Two bloody holes were left on his face.

If the man became fully blinded, then he would not be able to see and mimic his own reflection's actions anymore. This was essentially a death sentence for the feminine man. Since he was cornered by the mirror, the man decided to make a run for it. He pretended to move his finger towards his right eye and then he turned to race towards the door. As if anticipating this final struggle, the grey hands appeared just as the man made his first step. The man's only eye glared venomously at Han Fei. Before he was pulled into the mirror, he shouted angrily. "This is all your fault, but don't worry you'll be sure to join us soon!"

Han Fei was now thankful that the 3 murderers followed him into the room. They had used their lives to buy some time for Han Fei. The room quieted down and there was only one reflection remaining in the mirror.

'Before the hidden mission is completed, I need to abide by the game rules and try to slow the game down as much as possible.' Compared to the 3 madmen, Han Fei was as obedient as a child. He cooperated fully with the mirror. He did everything his reflection wanted him to. However, Han Fei was not dumb. After seeing what happened to the feminine man, he knew the only way to survive was to win at the mirror's own game.

The feminine man lost because he was unable to mimic the action made by his mirrored reflection, so all Han Fei needed to do was to come up with actions that his reflections in the mirror would not be able to copy.

Han Fei actually had a great plan in mind. He kept his actions small but delicate. To his knowledge, most ghosts and monsters were consumed by negative emotions and shackled by despair. Therefore, they would have a hard time understanding and replicating pure bliss and happiness. So instead of focusing on high difficulty physical acts, Han Fei turned towards his acting skill to depict emotions of extreme joy and warmth. Through expert manipulation of his facial muscles, Han Fei churned out expressions that radiated positive energy, kindness and euphoria.

Chapter 78: 78

Thus the strangest scenario appeared inside Room 1074. In the grim room, a young man smiled and laughed at his reflection in the mirror. It looked like he was giving himself the greatest pep talk in the world. The man's reflection in the mirror appeared to enjoy putting on these unusual expressions as well. It wanted to experience the range of emotions humanity had to offer, only then would it become more real and humane. With a great foundation in acting, Han Fei emoted many different expressions. They included joy, happiness, dream, anticipation and so on. His reflection in the mirror kept up the mimicry.

However, when Han Fei expressed that he was emotionally touched, his reflection's expression became awkward. As a monster, it had true difficulty in expressing the feeling of having one's heart touched. After all, it was supposed to be heartless. It was unclear what kind of torment it had been through but in its heart, there was nothing left but fury and resentment.

The reflection attempted for a long time before it managed to force out a broken smile that was relatively affected by gratitude.

‘My plan is working!’ Now that Han Fei knew what to do, he threw his whole energy into it. The man was a professional actor and he had been applying all his skill points into acting. Normal humans might find problems expressing themselves but Han Fei’s face was essentially a living emoji. From anxiety and pain, to despair and resignation, these were the emotions familiar to the reflection. However, the challenge was just starting. Han Fei’s face then brightened with hope as if he saw the light at the end of a long tunnel. After a difficult struggle, he finally found salvation. His reflection was unable to mimic the sense of redemption evoked by Han Fei. The mirror might have consumed many ‘people’ but before Han Fei arrived, none of the citizens in this world had experienced true redemption and salvation.

The face of his reflection in the mirror contorted as it tried to copy Han Fei’s facial expression. ‘Have I gone too far?’ Han Fei thought worriedly as he watched his other self try to assume this positive human emotion. For those without formal training, expressing one kind of emotion was hard enough, much less trying to imitate Han Fei who went through a whole emotional roller-coaster in one go.

Expression was the manifestation of one’s soul. The reflection in the mirror could easily replicate one’s actions but its expressions were always tinged with pain and hatred. Han Fei’s reflection took a long time to master Han Fei’s expression but as it continued to put in the work, the figure inside the mirror gradually coalesced. Under Han Fei’s tutelage, it became more and more like an actual human. Han Fei had no idea whether this was a good thing or not. He had no time to think about that. He just wanted to finish the mission and then escape from this room. The time ticked by. The reflection eventually emoted something akin to salvation and at the same time, Han Fei received the notification in his mind that the hidden mission had been completed.

“Notification for Player 0000! Grade G Hidden Mission—Mirror God’s Game has been completed! Obtained basic reward—1 free skill point! Obtained a unique reward from completing the hidden mission—Mirror God’s Blessing.

“Mirror God’s Blessing (Unique Passive Skill, cannot be upgraded): User possesses extra 30 points resistance to mirror-type cursed objects!

“Warning! The new unique passive skill has been activated. This skill is only obtainable by players under level 10!”

When he heard the notification, Han Fei’s gaze changed, it sharpened immediately. ‘An extra 30 points resistance to mirror-type cursed objects?’ Han Fei knew there were many cursed objects in this world, for example the table knife at Xu Qin’s home. These objects were the only weapons that could be used to injure a ghost but utilizing them would drain the user as well. ‘If I gain maximum resistance against a

cursed object, does that mean I can use it without taking damage myself? Unfortunately, Mirror God's blessing is only usable on mirror-type objects... If only it was meant for blade-type objects...'

Despite the small internal jab, Han Fei was quite thankful. Then he narrowed his eyes at the mirror before him. Well, wasn't there a mirror-type cursed object sitting right before him? 'But how am I supposed to use it in a battle? Carry it on my back?' Han Fei studied the mirror silently and his reflection did the same. Their eyes met and the greed was reflected in each other's gaze. 'Currently, I'm still too weak to wield this mirror. I should come back when I'm a lot more powerful.'

Han Fei resumed the game. He did not hurry to leave, instead he continued to play with the mirror while moving little by little towards the anti-theft door. When his reflection was stumped by the emotion of compassion, Han Fei responded with a smile. "I'll return one day to teach you the true meaning of salvation." With that, Han Fei charged out from Room 1074. Before the grey arms appeared, he clicked the quit button. Blood froze before his eyes and Han Fei yanked the helmet off. "That was too close! You really can't be too careful in that game!"

Han Fei assumed as his relationship with his neighbours continued to grow, his life inside the apartment would slowly ease into normalcy. The ambush by the non-locals was a real wake-up call. There was not a moment of reprieve inside the game, once he let his guard down, his life would be gone. "The NPC in this game has to be the most cunning and cruel characters I've ever encountered. I mustn't underestimate them."

After the close brush with death, Han Fei collapsed in his bed, fully exhausted. "After I have enough money, I should consider purchasing the gaming hub. A good one costs about 300000 RMB, well, after I help the police with another 5 more cases, I should have enough..." Thinking about the comfort of a future gaming hub, Han Fei drifted off to sleep.

...

Sunlight filtered into his room. Han Fei felt like he had not slept for that long when he was awakened by his ringing phone.

"Director Jiang?"

"Can you come to the set? I have something important to tell you."

“Okay.”

Hearing the serious tone in Director Jiang’s voice, Han Fei did not dare to waste time. After a simple morning ritual, he rushed towards Northern Street. Munching on an egg sandwich he bought from a roadside stall, Han Fei walked into the set. Many crew members greeted him affectionately when they saw him. Han Fei nodded shyly back. He was still not used to being under the spotlight.

“Han Fei, this way!” The floor manager jogged to meet up with Han Fei. He led Han Fei to a room on the second floor. “Why are you dressed so casually today?!”

“But this is how I’m dressed every day!”

“Give me the sandwich and hurry in.” Without explaining further, the floor manager snatched away his sandwich and sent Han Fei into the room. 5 people were seated inside the small room. Director Jiang was one of them.

“Han Fei, let me make some introduction, this is Sister Long from You Long Culture, she is our producer and the CEO of our main sponsor. The lady next to her is the main female actor for our movie—Mian Nian...” Han Fei was confused as Director Jiang went through the introduction.

“Actually the reason we called you here today is because we wish to offer you a different role in this movie.” Sister Long did not look down on Han Fei due to his casual dressing, if anything, she was quietly impressed that the man did not seem to be the kind who’d be hard to please.

“A different role?” Han Fei was startled, “What role?”

“We want you to play the male main character for the Flower of Sin.”

Chapter 79: 79

After hearing what Sister Long had to say, Han Fei accepted it calmly but an emotion slowly surfaced in his mind. Starting from his graduation, to his days working behind the camera, and then from having his

own stage to losing everything, the memories floated up in his mind. Han Fei slowly raised his finger to point at himself. “Me? The main character?”

“Yes, after considering everything, we’ve decided that you’re the most suitable candidate to play the movie’s main character!” Director Jiang nodded affirmatively, then he patted Han Fei encouragingly on his shoulder. “When you reach the height of stardom, don’t you dare forget about me!”

His lifelong wish was fulfilled in that moment. It all seemed like a joke. When Han Fei poured every bit of his soul to fight for the spotlight, he ended up losing everything. However, just as he considered taking a break from acting and decided to focus on crime-solving, the role of a main character fell right into his lap.

“This is the script that we’ve specially written for you, take a look at it.” Sister Long handed the script to Han Fei. “You are the main character in this movie, basically you’ll be playing yourself.” Han Fei was not blinded by the sudden joy. He looked through the script seriously and everyone else waited for him to finish. After about 10 minutes, Han Fei put down the script and said, “This script is too fictional, I’m not as remarkable as it makes me out to be. Honestly, the main reason the human jigsaw case can be solved 10 years later is all thanks to the Xin Lu law enforcement and Meng Changxi.”

“Meng Changxi?” What Sister Long and Director Jiang knew of Meng Changxi was through the livestream that the latter did.

“He is the elder brother of the real murderer, the key evidence that I gave to the police came from him.” Han Fei sat down and summarized the whole story for the group. “In this case, I am more like a middleman. If there has to be a main character, I feel like they should be either Meng Changan or Meng Changxi. One of them is light in the darkness and the other is darkness in the light.” A normal actor would not have intervened so openly with the script but Han Fei was a unique case, after all, he had participated in the solving of the murder himself.

“Personally, I’d suggest for Meng Changxi to be the main protagonist and Meng Changan to be the main antagonist. That will be the closest adaptation to reality.” Han Fei stared at the script and shared his thoughts.

“We also wish for the movie to be as close to the real event as possible, but can you hold up the role of Meng Changxi? This character is incredibly complicated and we don’t know too much about his background.” Sister Long was an experienced producer, she too voiced her concern.

“If there is a person who can truly understand Meng Changxi in this world, it’ll be me. I’ve seen the man without his disguise and I’ve heard all about his childhood from his mother as well.” Han Fei was confident that he would be able to bring Meng Changxi to life on the silver screen.

“Okay, but who is there to play Meng Changan? These two characters will be in direct contradiction against each other, so if one’s acting skill is too disproportionate to the other, then it’ll cause the movie’s flow to become severely imbalanced.” Sister Long shook her head. “Running through the available actors that we currently have, I do not think there’s anyone in the crew who can really act out the deeply-hidden, twisted mind of Meng Changan.”

“Perhaps I can play the role of Meng Changan as well.”

“You want to play 2 roles?”

“I wish to give that a try, after all, I believe I am the only person who knows the real versions of these two individuals the best.” Han Fei thought back to everything he had researched on Meng Changan, drawing inspirations from the books that the young Meng Changan read as well as the stories told by Meng Si. His facial expressions changed rapidly as different characters flashed across his mind. First Han Fei took on the expression of the blood-crazed murderer from the 6th floor, and then came the unbridled desire and sickness observable on Xu Qin’s face. After that, he manifested the sadistic brutality of the two scarred men, before ending with the venomous glare of the feminine man. In a short amount of time, Han Fei went through the performance of four sick individuals with distinctive personalities. It stunned everyone in the room.

But that was just the beginning. Neither of these four personalities really matched Meng Changan’s. The latter was a very rational, and talented criminal. He was a good citizen and a good worker, no one questioned his qualification as a manager at a company as big as Immortal Pharma. No one would have tied him to the terms, ‘crazed’ or ‘murderer’. However, Han Fei was privy to his real nature. Meng Changan grew up torturing small animals to vent his frustration. This was a man who would stop at nothing to search for his obsession, the butterfly.

His madness and lunacy might be evident when he was young but as he grew older, Meng Changan knew how to better disguise them. Fury, bloodlust, desire, suppression, these emotions cultivated a demon inside the man’s heart.

The frightening expressions on Han Fei gradually faded away but the demon grew as he feasted on these negative emotions. The more normal he appeared on the surface, the crazier he was inside. When the last trace of ghastliness disappeared from Han Fei's face, the demon inside his heart had assumed a total takeover.

His eyes flew open and Han Fei studied everyone in the room. A unique kind of oppressive tension swept through the room. The others felt like they were being sucked into a dark abyss.

Taking in a light breath, this was the first time Sister Long encountered such a scary actor in her career. Han Fei acted so well, it was beyond even her wildest imagination. "Remarkable." Sister Long grabbed the script and tossed it into the trash can. She walked towards Han Fei. "I rarely see such impressive acting skill, much less in an actor so young. We are right to choose you as the main character. Young man, you are destined for stardom."

Han Fei needed some time to extricate himself from Meng Changan's character. When he did, he said, "This is my first time carrying such a big role, I promise not to disappoint but I hope that the producing company will try to respect the truth and those who have been wounded by this case."

"No problem, we promise to stick as close to the facts as we can." Sister Long turned to Jiang Yi. "Go and get the scriptwriters. Han Fei, you'll be part of the script-writing process as well. When the new script's done, resume the shoot as fast as possible. We're seriously lagging behind in schedule due to the long break we've taken."

"Of course." Director Jiang took out his phone to call the scriptwriters. Sister Long had the female actor come over, "Han Fei, this is a new actor who has just joined our company. I'll be honest, we are sponsoring this movie mainly to promote her. I hope that you'll give her pointers in terms of acting."

Studying the female actor's slender arms, Han Fei slowly stood up. "She's supposed to be a female officer in this movie?"

"Yes, in the original script, she would be helping you with crime solving. You two were supposed to be partners."

"Knowing how to act is indeed important but compared to that..." Li Xue's image appeared in Han Fei's mind. He walked towards the female actor and asked, "Do you know how to fight?"

Chapter 80: 80

It was clear the actor had never been posed that question before. She did not know how to answer so she turned her pleading gaze towards Sister Long.

“Mian Nian graduated from Xin Lu Movie and TV Acting Academy, she is a very good dancer but she has not attended any fighting classes before.” Sister Long answered on the girl’s behalf.

“That won’t work. Nowadays too many media products portray law enforcement, especially the female officers, as mere decors. That is simply not the case in reality.” Han Fei remembered his first encounter with Li Xue. The former heavy crime detective was punished because she ‘accidentally’ broke a suspect’s ribs while apprehending him. The suspect had to be sent to the ER before he could be processed by the police. “I’ve interacted with many professional female officers in real life. They are experienced, and determined. Some of them even fight better than their male counterparts. Other than that, they benefit from their natural attention to details and can often provide a unique perspective to cases.” With Li Xue as the model, Han Fei studied Mian Nian as he tried to overlap the two females’ images in his mind’s eye. “If you can master the role of the female cop, I guarantee you’ll obtain many new fans but the premise is that you can bring this character to life.”

Han Fei tried to teach Mian Nian some simple combat gestures. “These are some of the basic fighting skills a police officer would know. Here’s a tip, when you are faced with a criminal, do not lose your focus. Aim for the fatal points and strike like it is the last chance you have.”

“Wait, you even have a background in combat?” Sister Long was impressed. Based on her research, Han Fei was supposed to be a comedy actor. So how did he pick up all these impressive skills?

“I merely studied them for self-defense.” Han Fei’s lesson for Mian Nian stopped at these combat stances. He did not comment on the girl’s acting skill. After all, he did not know her that well, as a fellow actor in the same movie, it would be impolite for him to do so. Mian Nian, who had not studied combat before, thought Han Fei was being quite absurd. She thought he was merely showing off but after she saw how Han Fei managed to flip the stunt double over easily with a few simple maneuvers, her attitude changed.

“We do not have much time left for training, so try to revise these stances whenever you have the chance.” Everything Han Fei did was for the greater good of the movie, he did not bring his personal

emotion into it. About half an hour later, the balding scriptwriter arrived. He was grumbling when he entered but with one glance from Sister Long, he shut up immediately. The pertinent parties stayed to discuss the plot. By noon, the foundation for the new script was emerging.

“As meaningful as the name, Flower of Sin, is, I do not think it suits our movie that well anymore. Before this, the main goal of the movie is to show that love is able to bloom even in the darkest abyss of sin. However, now that the focus has moved away from that storyline and towards the conflict between the two brothers, the name does not fit anymore.” The balding scriptwriter frowned. “Does anyone have a better name in mind?”

“How about Twin Flowers? It is an evergreen often bearing a pair of fragrant flowers. The flowers compete with each other not only in beauty, but also in nutrients and water. In flower language, the twin flower bears the meaning of an inescapable bond that will last until one party is dead.” Han Fei added, “Even though Meng Changxi and Meng Changan are not biological brothers, they grew up in the same family. They are like twin flowers of the same stalk, one has to shrink for the other to thrive.” Han Fei’s suggestion was approved by all. After a simple lunch, they continued to work on the script when Han Fei received a sudden phone call. “I’m sorry, it’s a call from the police, perhaps there’s a new update with the case.”

“Go and answer it then.” Han Fei’s reason was so justified that no one even considered stopping him. Han Fei left the room to answer the call, “Li Xue, is the case closed?”

“After plenty of investigations, and combined with the evidence provided by Meng Changxi, we have more than enough to charge Meng Changshou and Meng Changan.”

“That’s great.”

“Don’t hang up just yet. I have something else to discuss with you. The government plans to release an official commendation on the internet for your bravery. Give me your social account. We’ll wire you the reward money when it’s available. When the law enforcement official website comes out with the commendation, remember to share it on your social account. Also you’ll need to do an interview with reporters from various publications so clear your schedule.”

“Do we really have to do so many things?” Han Fei was startled.

“It can’t be helped. This is now a big current event. If the law enforcement does not take this into our own hand, you’ll be harassed by paparazzi instead. The publications we invite are at least filtered by us beforehand. You’ll have to understand that some people will do anything to get their news.”

“My social account id is Han Fei. Just search for it.” Han Fei sidebar-ed the call and opened the social account that he had not used for a long time. His account did not have an official profile picture, he had no fans, no followers and no status update. The only thing available was the identification of him as an actor at the introduction bar. A click on the ‘actor’ pulled up a pop-up list. The photon computer provided a list of the top 10000 most influential actors based on factors like their popularity, wealth of work and so on. Han Fei was not on that list.

Suddenly his phone vibrated. Han Fei saw his fan number had grown from zero to one.

September Snow is now following you!

“Han Fei, are you sure you’re an actor? This is the first time I encounter an actor’s profile which has zero fan.” Li Xue’s voice drifted out from the phone.

“Well, you might not know this but I actually have many fans but you’re just the first one to follow me online.” Han Fei added self-deprecatingly to himself, ‘In fact I have so many dying fans that they literally will not leave me alone even after death.’

“I’ve already forwarded your account to my boss. By the way, you should be more active on social media, as an actor, you need a stronger online presence.” Li Xue then hung up. Studying the singular one shown on his page, Han Fei chuckled to himself. He was about to put his phone away when more notifications came from the social platform.

“Xin Lu’s Internet Security Unit’s Official Page is now following you!

“Xin Lu Old City’s Happiness Street’s Police Station is now following you!

“Officer Zhang Xiaotian is now following you! And given you a like!

“Xin Lu Law Enforcement Old City Division’s Investigation Unit’s Official Page is now following you! And left you a comment—Brave, intrepid, and righteous. A model citizen!”

Noting the rising number of followers, Han Fei was quite happy but his list of followers was undeniably quite unique and different from what you’d expect from that of a normal celebrity.

“O well, some followers are better than none.” Han Fei switched his phone to silent mode and returned to work with the scriptwriters. At around 4 pm, a ruckus erupted from outside the set. It sounded like some kind of conflict.

“What’s going on?” Han Fei moved to the window to get a better look. He saw the victims’ families and a bunch of reporters surrounding the apartment.

“Han Fei! Look at your phone! The Xin Lu Police has just released the official commendation for everything you’ve contributed to the case!” The floor manager rushed in with the news. He patted Han Fei proudly on his shoulder. “Brother! Your big break has finally come!”