

My Iyashikei Game

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“Of course not! Mother would never hurt anyone!” Meng Changshou said confidently. “The coroner also deduced that my mother could not have been the murderer. Furthermore, on that very same day, my mother and my son, Meng Chen disappeared.”

“The old lady was not the killer but she must have known the actual killer to have helped keep their secret for a whole week. She would only do this for someone she was extremely familiar with.” Li Xue zeroed in on the main point. “From what you told me, it sounded like the granny was a kind-hearted person. To be able to make someone like that turn on their moral, the killer would have to be her closest family. In that case, the killer is mostly likely one of you siblings.”

“If granny has already given her cooperation by helping the killer hide the body, why would the killer come after her in the end?” Han Fei signalled for Li Xue to not jump to conclusions. “I feel it is more likely that the granny was giving the killer a chance to surrender themselves to the police. She gave the killer a week’s time but she had greatly underestimated the depth of sin within the killer.”

“The police had considered all these possibilities at the time but they found no evidence. However, not long after my mother’s death, Changxi went missing as well. No one knew where he went. There was no news of his person or discovery of his dead body. The neighbours all speculated that he had run away due to guilt.” The middle-aged man shook his head with a pained expression. “Changxi was introverted and did not prefer human company but I know he would never do something like that. In fact, I doubt any one of us three could do something like this. We were the ones who lost our family but we were also the ones who were treated as the biggest suspects!” The middle-aged man said agitatedly before he started to cough. He reached down to grab a bag of medicine from under the coffee table.

“As you said, Meng Changxi disappeared without any explanation. If we can find his body, then we could narrow down the scope of suspects, but if we cannot, then he’d always be on the suspect list.” Seeing as the middle-aged man was about to take his medicine, Li Xue handed him a glass of water. “In any case, I personally don’t think Meng Changxi is the killer. What do you think?”

“I don’t know.” Han Fei kept the latter half of the answer to himself, ‘But I’ll go and ask the old lady myself later tonight.’

Studying the black and white picture on the table, Han Fei could only think of the game. Try as he might, he could not easily categorize Meng Si as an objectively good or bad

person. At that moment, he truly understood the complexity of human nature. Meng Changshou coughed repeatedly so Han Fei and Li Xue left to allow him the chance to rest.

This case was huge ten years ago but now other than the family members of the victim and the officers on duty, not many people remembered it anymore. Han Fei started to move down the steps when he realized Li Xue stood still at the landing and did not follow.

“Do you have something else to do here?”

“When I screened through the database for you this morning, I noticed something peculiar. Meng Si stayed at the same building as the victim of another case. Coincidentally, both cases happened around 10 years ago.” Li Xue said as she headed upstairs. Meng Si stayed on the 3rd floor and Li Xue led Han Fei to the 4th floor. “Have you heard of the human jigsaw case?”

“No way?!” Han Fei was instantly reminded of what Director Jiang said. The crew wanted to borrow the actual crime scene to use as the set but could not find the owner. They eventually settled on Compound 15.

“The killer of that case is currently unfound as well. The first two victims of that case were found on the fourth floor of this building 10 years ago. The victim was a pair of loving husband and wife.” Li Xue stopped before one of the doors. “10 years ago, the police had once suspected the two cases to be related, they might even be committed by the same person but the modus operandi for both cases were too dissimilar. If the killer from the refrigerator case is mentally twisted, then the killer for the jigsaw case is the literal devil.”

She knocked on the door and about 10 seconds later, the door opened a small gap. A lanky old man appeared behind the door. He frowned at Li Xue and Han Fei. “Who are you looking for?”

“We’re the police.” Li Xue flashed her badge. Her patrol badge actually did not give her the right to enter private residences but clearly the old man did not understand that because he opened the door, albeit unwillingly. Everything was arranged neatly within the 70 square metres room. The old man probably cleaned it daily. After entering the house, one would notice the many pictures that decorated the living room wall. In the pictures, the old man looked so healthy and always wore a big smile. It was hard to believe this was the same person as the grumpy old man standing before them. Other than the old man, most pictures also featured a young couple. The man looked honest and kind, the woman gentle and soft. It was clear that they were deeply in love.

There was a cupboard next to the wall of photos and it was filled with many lego toys.

“I would visit the station every year, I’ve lost count of the number of times I’ve been there, so have you finally caught the killer?” A trace of despair laced the old man’s voice. He caressed the picture on the table as if he was still unable to accept the cruel truth until this day.

“Actually, the reason we’re here is because we have a few questions for you.” Li Xue pulled out her phone and opened a few law-enforcement apps. She tossed out questions expertly. While leading the questioning, she tried not to place the old man in too much pain. Her method and tactic of questioning was far more mature than Zhang Xiaotian and Zhao Ming.

While Li Xue conducted her inquiry, Han Fei sat to the side quietly. He made use of the time to study the photos hung on the wall. The man in the photo was Wei Youfu, the man he was about to play in the movie. Inside the game, Meng Si lived on the 3rd floor while Han Fei stayed on the 4th floor. In real life, the old lady also stayed on the 3rd floor while Wei Youfu and his wife stayed on the 4th floor. Even though the apartment buildings in real life and in game were wildly different, this coincidence did catch Han Fei’s attention. He now suspected the ghost that he saw in the game yesterday night was Wei Youfu’s wife, the woman who was brutally murdered inside the bathroom.

The seemingly unrelated aspects had their paths crossed and the point of intersection was Han Fei. Through Li Xue’s questioning, Han Fei gained a brief understanding of Wei Youfu’s family. They were basically good people. If the tragedy did not happen, they would continue to live happily together.

‘They are not people with malice when they were alive.’ A very brave thought surfaced in Han Fei’s mind, ‘To survive in that hellish game filled with monsters and ghosts, I need to find a safehouse. If I can gain Wei Youfu and his wife’s approval, I should be able to stay with them! Then at least I would have a place I could recuperate without worry!’

The already dead appeared in the game, be it human or ghost, Han Fei decided the best way to survive was to join them. With this idea in his mind, Han Fei stood up and sidled close to the old man. While the old man and Li Xue looked on with confusion, Han Fei asked the old man, “Sir, actually I was good friends with Brother Youfu. Can you tell me if there’s any unfulfilled wish that he had in his life?”

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“Brother Youfu?” The old man was naturally suspicious of Han Fei. “You said you were Youfu’s friend so how come I have not heard of you before?”

“I’m sure he had. My name is Han Fei, does that ring a bell?” Han Fei looked at the old man with such sincerity that the latter thought maybe his memory had really failed him. After all, this was from 10 years ago.

“Well, now that you mention it, Youfu did have plenty of friends, but you did not look their age.” The old man commented.

“I’m an actor so I have to take good care of my appearance. Due to official characterization, I have a stringent skin care routine.” Han Fei quickly changed the subject before his lie was caught. “Sir, I really just want to do something for Brother Youfu.”

“Well, he did have plenty of unfulfilled wishes. All he ever wanted in his life was to build a family with Ah Mei. Not long before their accident, the kid came to me, telling me that he had saved up some money because he wanted to compensate Ah Mei for the wedding ceremony that he owed her. When they registered, they did not have one because of economic constraint.” The old man shook his head, “But it’s pointless to talk about these things now. If you ask me, the biggest wish he’d have now would be for someone to catch their killer, after all, the person had murdered the love of his life.”

“Got it, family, wedding, and catch the killer.” Han Fei memorized these details. He took a look at the old man, “Sir, I believe Brother Youfu would be greatly concerned about your health as well. You have to take good care of yourself and I promise I’ll try my best to catch that sick killer!” After leaving his phone number, Han Fei chatted with the old man for a while before he left with Li Xue.

“Hey, why did you lie to the old man by pretending to be Wei Youfu’s friend? You’re not going to take advantage of the poor old man, are you?” After they left the building, Li Xue voiced the suspicion in her mind.

“Of course not!” Han Fei did not know how to explain his situation. He turned to glance at the dilapidated apartment behind him, “But I was not technically pretending to be Wei Youfu’s friend, because we will be actual friends soon.”

“You’re one strange fella.” Li Xue hopped on her bike. When she passed Han Fei, she tossed him a helmet, “Come on.”

“Where are we going?”

“I’m dropping you home. Where else?”

...

After he returned home, Han Fei curled up at the corner furthest away from the study table and stared at the gaming helmet sitting on it. The blood stains inside the helmet had dried and they seemed to form a strange red pattern on the inner wall. Earlier a part of Han Fei prayed that this was just an elaborate prank but after everything that happened today, he had completely abandoned that hope. “The game did say that completing the New Player Missions will aid me to better understand the gaming world so that should be my next goal.”

Night eventually fell. Han Fei walked to the window and glanced at the skyscrapers situated around the city centre. As the world around him changed with the advancement of technology, sometimes Han Fei felt detached to even the real world, much less a gaming one. Time rolled continuously forward, leaving those like himself, who had no resource to catch up with the rapid footsteps of technology, behind. Facing new technology that surfaced every few days, Han Fei sometimes felt so helpless.

“O well, hopefully, I’ll live to see another day.” Han Fei sat in front of the computer and started to research the cases from 10 years ago. Since this was deeply related to his survival, Han Fei was extremely serious. He printed out all the available information and pasted them on the wall before the study table. The originally empty wall was soon covered in clues and crime scene photos of various old cases. Those who did not know him would assume he was a private detective from his living arrangement.

“There are 8 victims from the human jigsaw case. When the first 7 victims were found, they were all missing a body part. The 8th victim was mostly pieced together from these missing parts. After comparing all the databases, the police failed to find actual information on the 8th victim, therefore, when the case came to the press, they simply referred to the 8th victim as Number Eight...” Han Fei busied himself until late into night. By then he had a rudimentary grasp of these old cases. He glanced at the time at the lower corner of the computer screen. He reached for the gaming helmet as the clock was about to strike midnight. “Dead people are appearing in game, and there are so many mysteries to be solved but for now, my most immediate concern is to ensure my own survival.”

His sight was swallowed up by blood. The sense of dizziness and suspension arrived at once. Just as Han Fei was about to faint, a robotic voice rang deep inside his brain. “Welcome to Perfect Life where you are free to choose your own perfect life!”

When his eyes reopened, Han Fei realized he was leaning on the ground floor staircase. His surrounding was tomb-like quiet. ‘I better go find Meng Si first!’

After his previous gaming experience, Han Fei had a clear goal this second time around. He would try to get some quests from the old lady and attempt to overstay his welcome for the whole 3 hours at her house. This was because after 3 hours, he could quit the game any time he wanted and that would make it perfect for exploration. He could quit should the situation get too dangerous. In other words, the most dangerous period for Han Fei was the first three hours he logged into the game.

Some unknown black substance stuck to the rusted steel banister. Eerie doodles decorated the dusted walls. Han Fei noticed most of the human caricatures were incomplete, they looked bizarre. Han Fei tiptoed up the stairs and came across the cleaver on the steps. He picked it up and headed to the old lady’s home. The black plastic bags outside the house had been cleared away. Only two black stains remained of them. They seemed to leak out from the mysterious stuff which was wrapped inside the plastic bags.

“Granny?” Han Fei knocked lightly on the door. He used the lightest force possible but the echo still sounded loud in the silent corridor. “Is no one home?” Han Fei leaned his ear against the door. There was no sound coming from inside. It was as if the place had been abandoned.

“Where could they have gone to so late at night?” Han Fei knocked on the door again and as he listened for a possible reply, he noticed something was not right. He pulled his ear back from the door and tuned up his sense of hearing. Yes, something was moving down the quiet corridor!

The person purposely moved slowly so as to not make too much noise but Han Fei still captured the sound of rustling footsteps. ‘The sound came from upstairs. Someone is heading my way! Did it get notified by my earlier knocking?’ Han Fei sidled back to the staircase and he looked up through the gap in the stairwell. Han Fei’s neck slowly twisted as the muscles in his body constricted. On the 6th floor, there was a face looking down at him! As their eyes met, both parties picked up their paces!

Han Fei started to race upstairs while the owner of the face flew downstairs.

‘4th floor! I need to get back to my room!’ Han Fei knew that the apartment front door was locked so he’d trap himself if he ran downwards. His only option was his own home on the 4th floor!

‘I’m now on the 3rd floor and the thing is on the 6th floor! Technically I’m closer to the 4th floor but I have to take into account the time needed to find the key and open the lock!’ He reached into his pocket and pulled out the large ring of keys. When he returned home from granny’s yesterday, he used one of the keys on the ring to open the door and left it inside his pocket ever since.

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Han Fei’s brain calculated everything within 0.1 second because he knew time was not on his side. He had to move fast. Both parties were racing against time.

“Quick! Hurry up!” His musculature and physique training as an actor helped a lot in this case. Even though his heart was shaking, his hands were not. The moment he landed on the right key, he shoved it into the keyhole. As the spring clicked, Han Fei pushed the door open and dashed into the house. He slid the door close and clamped his hands over his mouth. Through the door, Han Fei could hear a beast-like breathing coming from the other side. ‘What the hell is it this time?’

Standing on weak knees, Han Fei forced himself to look through the peephole. There was nothing in the corridor. ‘The sound of breathing has disappeared but the smell of blood is still there!’

Han Fei was not dumb enough to pull open the door to check. He adjusted the angle of his eye and finally caught a human face hidden at the lower corner of the door. 'The thing from the 6th floor is still here! He's hiding at my blind spot and probably waiting to ambush me!'

If the old lady from the 3rd floor gave Han Fei a feeling of kindness with a trace of creepiness, then this thing from the 6th floor exuded a sense of madness, bloodlust and cunningness. 'I surely have been given the best choice of neighbours!' Han Fei took a step back and wiped away the cold sweat from his forehead. 'I can't leave since that thing is waiting outside the door. But to quit the game I have to complete at least one mission. It would appear like my only choice is to complete one of the New Player Missions inside this house...'

To be perfectly frank, the seemingly simple New Player Missions had left a deep psychological scar on Han Fei.

'In any case, I should wait the 3 hours out first.' Han Fei stopped to assess his own situation. There was a bloody murderer waiting to pounce at him outside his home and the ghost inside his home would come alive at night. He was stuck between a rock and a hard place. 'But now I am only level 1. Perhaps after levelling up, things will get much easier.' Since he was forced to continue this game, Han Fei found solace in this little self-deception. Han Fei took note of the time from the wall clock. Han Fei did not dare to venture too deep into the house. After switching on all the lights, he stayed close to the front door. The smell of blood in the corridor thickened and occasionally there was a strange noise. The thing from the 6th floor was very patient, Han Fei just wished he'd use a more conventional approach to come greet his new neighbour.

'When I completed the fuse mission, the system hinted to me that forming a peaceful neighbourly relationship is the first step to a perfect life. In other words, the game hopes that I would share a good relationship with my neighbours. Perhaps, this means that I would need the friendship and help from my neighbours to survive in this game.' Smelling the blood in the air, Han Fei grimaced painfully, 'This is one hell of an Iyashikei game. I suffer from society anxiety so it formulates a treatment that forces me to face my anxiety or I'd die.'

Time eventually arrived at 3 am. The 3 hours limit was over. Now Han Fei only needed to complete a mission and he could quit the game. His 'passionate' neighbour was still posted outside the door. Han Fei's exit was blocked so after much consideration, he decided to attempt the New Player Mission again. 'If the ghost reappears, I'll run out the door. Hopefully the ghost will take care of my neighbour from the 6th floor. Then I'll inherit his place and keys. I promise to live the best life on his behalf, I won't let his sacrifice go to waste.' That was of course the most idealistic situation, but the cruel truth was Han Fei would most likely be killed by his 6th floor neighbour once he opened the front door.

Pulling up the mission interface, Han Fei hesitated for some time before he chose the second mission—watch a television show. Han Fei already knew about the presence of the ghost inside the bathroom from his other new player mission. The first mission would bring him too close in comfort to his ‘housemate’. He could not imagine a world where he’d voluntarily go shower with a ghost.

“Player 0000 has accepted Grade G New Player Mission, Watch a Television Show!

“Mission Introduction: Ever since your move here, you’ve lost count of the times you failed to fall asleep. Stuck with insomnia, you have decided to watch some television.

“Mission Requirement: Please switch off all the lights in the house and switch on the television. Watch any channel for 30 minutes. Please do not move your eyes away from the television screen within these 30 minutes.”

The mission again sounded deceptively simple but Han Fei knew the real challenge it would bring. Since Han Fei was unable to leave the house, there was not much else he could do. He switched off all the lights and switched on the television set at 3.05 am. The old-fashioned television box buzzed noisily. Probably due to bad signal, not many channels were available, most of them consisted of black and white static. The New Player Mission had officially started. With the remote in his right hand and the cleaver in his left, Han Fei sat up straight on the couch and stared transfixed at the television screen.

‘It’ll be fine, 30 minutes will go by in a jiffy.’ Han Fei surfed through the channels. When he stopped at channel 44, homophonous to Death Death in Chinese, there was finally a viewable broadcast. The light in the room was dim, and that added to the already blurry state of the broadcast. Han Fei tried to raise the volume but the show apparently was soundless. It appeared to be a cartoon but Han Fei could not recognize it. He had not seen anything like it before. It had such a strange animation style. ‘Is this a cartoon from hell?’

Han Fei leaned his body forward to get a closer look. At that moment, footsteps rang in his ears. The sound was too close to have come from the corridor. As mentioned earlier, the show was a silent one. So this could only mean that someone was moving inside the house!

The footsteps slowly approached Han Fei. He was now sure the ‘person’ came out from the bedroom and made its way towards the man on the couch. ‘Is it the same ghost as before?’

Han Fei did not dare to move and eventually the last footfall was heard right behind the couch. Han Fei was watching television at 3 am alone inside a dim room. Suddenly there was spattering of footsteps and it disappeared right behind him. ‘The thing has left or is it still standing right behind me?’

His Adam's Apple trembled. Han Fei resisted the urge to turn around and instead fixed his stare on the screen. The animation still had no sound. In the show, the main character had a disability and it was trying to hide from something. Whenever it stopped to rest, a pair of invisible hands would grab at it to pull it back. Han Fei had no idea what the meaning of the animation was but when the character was pulled back for the third time, Han Fei felt a heaviness land on his left shoulder.

It took everything he had to not turn around. He glanced from the corner of his eye and he believed he saw a pale hand.

His heart started to pound involuntarily. Han Fei gritted his teeth as he forced himself to focus on the show, but as he turned his attention back to the television, a scarier surprise awaited him.

A pair of legs emerged from behind the television shelf where the television box sat on. There was more than one ghost inside this house! Han Fei's body started to shake. Based on how well things were going, he thought about running to the front door and go invite his 6th floor neighbour to come join him before the television.

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To enjoy blessing and misfortune together, that was how one should treat one's friends and neighbours. Watching television inside a haunted house at 3 am was too exciting to be done alone so Han Fei decided to invite his neighbour to join him.

As he adjusted his posture little by little, Han Fei's mind churned to come up with multiple solutions. The 6th floor neighbour was hiding at the corner of the front door to prevent Han Fei from spotting him directly through the peephole. Based on his neighbour's action so far, Han Fei believed that if the door was suddenly opened, the former might turn on the aggression without checking who the person behind the door was first. Therefore, to help the ghost inside the house and the monster outside the house form a better bond, Han Fei had to figure out a way to make the ghost go through the front door before he did.

That was the plan but it was incredibly difficult to put it into action. His body was drowned in the darkness, the chilliness soaked into his every nerve. Even a small movement of his body caused his heart to tremble. The sole light that came from the television screen seemed to dim. The broken character struggled through the endless cycle of capture and escape. Han Fei could not tell what was the abductor, all he knew was that escape was futile for the main character. The character's soundless screams appeared to be an omen. Its struggle was futile. It was dragged by the invisible hands back into the black house again and again. It tried many things and utilized every object it could grab on to mount a resistance. Every time it was able to escape from the black house but every time it did, it would lose another part of its body.

The ruination to the character's body became more pronounced and its movement speed slowed. When it attempted the seventh escape, it seemed to know its imminent end. This time it did not wait for the invisible hands to catch up, instead it turned around to face its captor. The camera angle turned and the screen showed a monster sewn together by various human body parts. It had been following the main character. The amalgamated hands morphed into a billowy black smoke. After it apprehended the cartoon character, it once again dragged it back into the black house.

Not long after that, the door opened again and the character who had lost yet another part of its body staggered out the door. This time, it did not even attempt to run. It stopped with despair at the entrance. It looked at the dark hole of the front door and slowly walked back into it.

Then, the camera angle traveled into the black house for the first time. Han Fei held his breath. He too wished to know what was inside this nightmarish black house. The gory scene that he anticipated did not appear. Instead the décor of the black house was surprisingly normal. There was a shoe rack by the front door and the tiles were slightly cracked. The walls were mottled with black and red stains. The old electric clock on the wall showed that it was 3:15 am.

'Wait a minute...'. A couch was placed in the middle of the small living room. The television set in front of the couch was playing a show. The main character's body was bent over with defeat. It stopped resisting and slumped with despair on the couch. The broken character stared at the television screen. Han Fei could feel its empty stare on him and his skin crawled. Han Fei's heart skipped a beat. He was sure that the nightmarish black house was exactly the same as the house that he was currently staying in!

The character in the cartoon watched the television silently when a face poked out from the bedroom behind it. Then came its neck and body. The monster pieced together from body parts seemed to have grown larger since its last appearance. The monster sidled up to the couch and proceeded to place its hand on the main character's left shoulder and then right shoulder.

At that same moment, Han Fei felt the hair on his shoulders and neck stand on end. His right shoulder slumped from an unknown weight.

'Oh my God!' The main character in the cartoon appeared to be Han Fei and the Frankenstein monster was standing behind him. The despair of the cartoon character filtered through the screen into Han Fei. Futile escapes led to continuous dismantling of his body parts, this was an unsolvable nightmare. The character inside the cartoon had given up. The monster behind it slowly fractured, revealing the many faces hidden inside its body.

The sound of skin tearing and bones creaking appeared behind Han Fei as well. He was experiencing what the cartoon character did in real time. The difference was that

the cartoon character had already given up but Han Fei had not. Han Fei stared closely at the monster on screen. He scanned the visible human faces underneath the monster's gory appearance. Before he logged into the game, he did his research into the human jigsaw case. He thus had seen all the pictures of the victims. Currently, he spotted them again inside the monster's body. Among them was Wei Youfu and his wife, Ah Mei.

A pressure on his shoulders locked him into place. Han Fei was so nervous his breath stopped at his throat. A chill came from his shoulders and an unknown force tried to drag him away. The character inside the cartoon had its own body torn apart. Blood splattered on the screen and some even dripped out onto the floor near Han Fei. Han Fei started to feel pain gathering around his shoulders. This was probably the closest he had been to death so far. The cartoon character did not struggle as it was pulled into pieces. That was a foretelling of Han Fei's final ending. Under the great pressure of death, Han Fei decided to attempt one last plea.

"I am not surprised to be killed, but if it's possible, can you let me hear my wife's voice again? She is waiting for me to come home and I once promised her a beautiful wedding." Tears wetted his eyes. At the last moment of his life, the man facing death did not care about his own life but the one promise that he had given his wife. The simple words seemed to evoke some kind of power. The pale hands that were made from multiple human body parts appeared to hesitate. "I work very hard and often have OTs that last deep into the night. However, I never feel tired because I know there will always be a light waiting for me to come home. I am really not afraid of death, I am just afraid that I'll disappoint her. I'm afraid that she'll keep on waiting for me. Can you give me a chance to bid her farewell?"

Unfallen tears, and reddened eyes, the man's face filled with determination. Inside the cartoon, the human faces of Wei Youfu and Ah Mei inside the monster's body appeared to come alive. They no longer looked that vicious. They stared at Han Fei as if staring at their life partner. The monster stopped moving. The seven human faces inside it appeared to come at a conflict.

Han Fei uttered those words from the perspective of Wei Youfu. At the time, no one had given Wei Youfu the chance to do anything, but now the power of choice had been given back to Wei Youfu. Time ticked by. The human faces turned anxious. Just as the monster was about to launch another attack at Han Fei, the honest-looking Wei Youfu suddenly bit at the human face next to him.

The room appeared to shake. The pair of legs behind the television set disappeared. Something was definitely happening. Suppressing his curiosity, Han Fei kept his eyes on the television screen. However, he could feel the force on his shoulders dwindling. Soon the half an hour was up. The oppressive feeling inside the room dissipated.

"Notification for Player 0000! You have completed Grade G New Player Mission— Watch a Television Show!

“Notification for Player 0000! You have successfully reached level 2!”

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The robotic voice sounded in his mind but Han Fei was not distracted by it because the man’s entire focus was still on the television screen. The strange cartoon was still playing. On the screen, the monster made from human parts stood behind the couch.

That meant that if Wei Youfu and Ah Mei’s faces were damaged, or they lost their humanity again, Han Fei would be placed under fatal threat once more. ‘Dead people in real life have reappeared in this game. I am not sure what their current condition is but one thing’s for sure—they still retain part of their living memory. At least that was evidenced from Wei Youfu and Ah Mei’s ability to understand my earlier plea.’ Viewing the tormented monster on the television screen, Han Fei resisted the urge to turn around and instead said softly, “A blissful life together was ruined by that crazed murderer. Are you looking for revenge?”

Han Fei realized how redundant his statement was but he hoped that this would remind the monster of the actual culprit behind its current torment. That hopefully would shift the monster’s hostility away from him. It was not Han Fei who caused this tragedy, Wei Youfu and Ah Mei were faultless either, the real criminal was the person who murdered them. Even though Han Fei had not officially studied psychology, he had been to many psychotherapy sessions to deal with his social anxiety. He remembered the following from one of his many psychologists’ office walls—To understand a man, you’ll have to walk a mile in his shoes.

To console those in pain, it would be unwise to define their pain within one’s subjective understanding. Since he had not personally experienced those pain before, it would be presumptuous for him to give advice to them. A good psychiatrist was often a good and patient listener. Han Fei was not a trained psychiatrist by any means, but whenever the doctor assumed this attitude during their sessions, he would feel more at ease. Therefore, now he decided to put that practice into good use.

Inside a haunted house at 3 am, next to a Frankenstein’s monster, he chose to be its listener. He could not see the monster but he could hear the torture in the monster’s voice.

“I can’t imagine how long you’ve been trapped here already...” Han Fei pulled out these words from his counselling sessions. He screened through them and selected the ones most appropriate for the situation. Gradually, the cartoon in the television changed. The two faces that represented Wei Youfu and Ah Mei stopped fighting. They seemed to be touched by Han Fei’s words. The madness fell away from their faces to reveal some brilliance of humanity.

However, while Wei Youfu and Ah Mei slowly calmed down, the other faces headed down the other direction. It seemed to like they were ready to transfer the pain and

despair they meant for Han Fei onto Wei Youfu and Ah Mei. The other faces were unaffected by Han Fei's words. They were too deep in pain to be persuaded by his psychobabble. The ache in their hearts cut deeper than the killer's first two victims. 'The later they died, the deeper their pain? Why? What has the jigsaw killer done to them?' The cartoon was a reflection of 'real' life. Seeing Wei Youfu and Ah Mei's faces being torn apart, Han Fei knew he had to step in immediately. The two victims regained a trace of their humanity, that was key to changing everything. If they were consumed by the other victims, then Han Fei would come to face a monster who would be crazier and would not hesitate to consume its own kind!

Technically, Han Fei had already finished his New Player Mission so he could exit the game now but he chose to stay. "You've saved my life so I will not leave you and your wife to this fate. I shan't leave on my own. If the other victims wish to vent their hatred, then I will get them a new target."

Han Fei hurried to the front door. As he moved, so did the monster. The other five faces did not plan to let Han Fei go that easily. Pain and despair twisted their features. Smelling the blood in the air, Han Fei knew his neighbour was still there. 'If my neighbour shows no intention to harm me, then I'll try to communicate with him to get his help to detain this monster; but if communication is impossible, then I'll have to lure him into the house and make him the target for the jigsaw killer's victims.'

Wei Youfu and Ah Mei were by then almost devoured. The monster was at the verge of losing control. Han Fei knew he had no time to lose. He grabbed the front door handle and pulled it open!

The moment it did, a sharp knife plunged in through the gap. Han Fei, who was prepared, narrowly dodged the attack. The neighbour appeared to be privy of the situation inside this house so he did not follow up his attack. He stayed firmly outside the door. Han Fei noticed this as well. Just as his neighbour pulled back his weapon, Han Fei reached out to grab the man's arm which was holding the knife and yanked the man forcibly into the house!

Bang!

The two men fell to the ground. His neighbour sensed something immediately and quickly got up but Han Fei reacted faster than he did. Han Fei did not try to escape, instead he used his body to ram against the front door and slam it close!

He locked both himself and his 6th floor neighbour inside the house!

The light from the television set casted a cold light on their faces. His 6th floor neighbour was lost in bloodlust during his pursuit of Han Fei but at that moment, he seemed to snap out of it. Sensing the new intruder in the room, the despairing faces turned to the latest arrival. This time Wei Youfu and Ah Mei did not intervene. A giant

shadow loomed over the room. The monster inside the television charged out from the living room.

The 6th floor neighbour reacted fast. He instantly reached for the front door but Han Fei made use of this opening to knock him back. The two fell to the ground again. His despaired neighbour glared angrily at Han Fei. The bloodlust was gone from his eyes. What remained were anger and confusion. It was as if he was saying—‘Why did you drag me into this?’

The tormented monster grabbed at Han Fei’s neighbour. Pairs of deformed arms appeared to flail in the darkness. The neighbour struggled as best as he could. He directed a flurry of expletives at Han Fei.

Han Fei watched as the man was slowly dragged deeper into the house.

In response to the horrid curses flung at him, Han Fei smiled brightly at his 6th floor neighbor. “Pleasure to meet you. Glad that you’ve decided to stay with our big, happy family.”