

My Iyashikei Game

Chapter 16: 16

The neighbour's vicious curses soon faded away. He was dragged by the monster into the innermost bedroom. There were two bedrooms in this house. The deeper one was locked. Han Fei did his sleeping mission in the other bedroom.

'But why would the monster drag the man into that particular bedroom? What is so special about it?' Han Fei had not explored that locked bedroom before. This was one good thing about Han Fei, the man had the uncanny ability to silence his own curiosity. He'd know when to keep his mouth shut and when to stay put. His neighbour's wails gradually disappeared. Studying the ring of keys in his hand, Han Fei started to consider how he was going to lay claim to his neighbour's estate. 'After the monster calms down, I should try to enter that bedroom. If I can locate the neighbour's key, I can make his house my second base.' Since Han Fei could quit the game any time he wanted, he was not worried about walking into danger. After cleaning up the room, Han Fei leaned against the front door and inspected his character profile.

"Notification for Player 0000! After every level gain, you will gain a free attribute point. After gaining 10 levels, you can choose a new profession!"

"Notification for Player 0000! New Player Mission, watch a television show completed! Obtained 1 free skill point. Obtained mission reward—landlord's ring."

"Inventory function unlocked. Mission reward will be placed inside inventory after mission completion."

Honestly, when Han Fei saw the notifications, he was quite disappointed. He had taken such a huge risk during the mission but the rewards did not appear proportionate to the peril he had placed himself into. Han Fei clicked open the inventory and retrieved the landlord's ring.

"Landlord's Ring (Grade G Blood Red Item): After the landlord passed away, his beloved family made a ring out of his ashes. Memories bridge the gap between life and death. You'll feel their presence once you put on this ring."

"Them?" Han Fei had a rudimentary understanding from the item description, "This ring will enable me to see ghosts?" Han Fei put the ring on as a trial. The moment he did, he felt a chill coming from his ring finger. The closer he walked towards the innermost bedroom, the more pronounced the chill. "This ring can act as an alarm. The scarier the ghost, the chillier the presence they'll emit from this ring. Huh. Well, I stand corrected. This thing is quite useful after all. With this ring, I can avoid wandering too close to dangerous areas."

Han Fei had no idea what Blood Red item meant precisely. When he researched on Perfect Life, he did not encounter that particular concept. After he finished studying the ring, Han Fei turned to the skill point and attribute point he just gained. 'I have a free skill point but the problem is, the skills that I currently possess, cooking and acting, will not help me in a fight.' After giving it some thought, Han Fei decided to improve his acting skill. In this hellish game, acting might come in useful, at least Han Fei could imagine it being more useful than cooking.

"Player 0000, your acting skill is now intermediate level 2. When you reach intermediate level 10, the skill will automatically upgrade to Advanced Acting."

'It's surprisingly hard to level up one's skills in this game. But then again, this is just a new player mission. It's understandable that the rewards won't help my character progress much.' Before gaining a new skill, Han Fei decided he would focus on training his acting skill. After all, his intention was to shed his living human identity and join the big family here as soon as possible.

For the attribute point, Han Fei used it to improve his stamina after a quick deliberation. His original stamina was a measly 4, it was too weak. When he apprehended his neighbour earlier, he almost let the man get away. After doing that, Han Fei swung several fists into the air. He could feel his body gaining power and his movement becoming more fluid. 'This is just from the addition of one point. If my level continues to increase, I might one day be able to outrun a ghost!'

With the get-out-of-jail free card in his pocket, Han Fei treated his situation more relaxedly. It was not until then that he felt like he was playing a game. Picking up the cleaver, Han Fei turned towards the front door. He did not intend to disturb the Frankenstein monster but instead planned to go visit Meng Si. 'The old lady is not an innately bad person. If I help her with her problems, she might help me back.'

He had a new appreciation for this game. Other lyashikei games meant to bring healing to the players but this game aimed to heal both the players and NPCs, it was truly a 'masterpiece' of gaming. The moment Han Fei stepped out from the front door though, he felt the chill from his ring finger. Clearly, something was wrong with the corridor. 'This place is quite literally a deliveryman's nightmare.'

The chill from the ring was within Han Fei's acceptable range. Han Fei slowly entered the stairwell armed with the cleaver. He lived on the 4th floor and the granny on the 3rd. There was only one floor between them but Han Fei was still extremely cautious. The corridor was eerily silent but the strange thing was Han Fei noticed the voice-activated lights on the 6th floor kept flickering on and off. Slinking down the stairs, when Han Fei reached the landing between 4th and 3rd floor, he stopped. Slowly squatting down, Han Fei looked up through the gap in the banister. The lights on the 6th floor were still coming on and off even though Han Fei heard no sounds that would prompt them to do so.

'Is there someone there or not?' Nudging his feet, Han Fei moved towards the 3rd floor. At the last step, the chill suddenly intensified. 'What's happening?'

Han Fei did not retreat because if the situation demanded it, he could quit any time he wanted. He continued to move downwards and saw the door of the tenant opposite from Meng Si's home was open. The cracked Ba Gua mirror still laid on the ground. However, most of the talismans on the door had been peeled off. 'Meng Si kept her door closed due to the presence of her neighbour?'

Han Fei slowly moved towards Meng Si's home. He was finally within range of the old lady's front door. But before he could even knock, a bone-piercing chill came from his ring finger!

Han Fei whipped his head around and saw a little child running at him with a bright smile!

In just the blink of an eye, the child moved from the inside of the house to the front door. Han Fei's nerves pulled taut and he immediately chose to quit the game. Blood once again covered his world. The nervous connection was severed. Once Han Fei regained control of his body, he pulled the gaming helmet off immediately.

He collapsed weakly on his bed. Han Fei's hands shivered uncontrollably, "I was already so careful but without that ring, I would be dead by now. This is one hell of an impossible game."

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Every time he exited the game, Han Fei would have a renewed appreciation of life. He did not rest for too long. Soon he switched on his bedside lamp and turned to study the wall covered with crime scene photos. "Why would the seven victims from the human jigsaw case appear in that form? Are they trapped inside that house?" A haunted house, at least in Chinese culture, referred to any estate which had a history of tenant(s) who perished in unnatural death. The house that Han Fei had in the game appeared to feature seven deaths in total, that was the most 'crowded' haunted house he had ever encountered in his life. "Now that Wei Youfu and Ah Mei are somewhat back to normal, I need to help the other victims regain their sanity."

Han Fei knew the biggest unfulfilled wish these victims would have to be apprehending their killer but he was just a D-list comedy actor, what could he do? If he really located the killer, he'd might end up as the 9th victim. "I need to take this slow, after all, this is not the gaming world. I only have one life to lose." Han Fei took out his phone to jot down the notes, "The apartment building that I inhabit inside the game is very dangerous. Currently, it appears like each floor has 4 units in total. I live on the 4th floor. Based on the reaction of my 6th floor neighbour, he seemed to understand I was staying inside a haunted house. He did not dare to venture in too carelessly. If viewed

from this perspective, the monster inside my house should be considered quite dangerous or at least most of the tenants seem to fear it.

“As they say, the most dangerous place can be the safest place. As long as I do not provoke the monster, the haunted house can provide me with protection from the other neighbours. The other noteworthy detail is the child from the 3rd floor. Even with the Frankenstein monster, my place was not littered with talismans. The house on the 3rd floor will prove to be a big trouble. The child trapped inside that house might be as dangerous as the monster in my house.” Once that detail crossed his mind, Han Fei’s head ached. “Who the hell would tear off the talismans from the door? Based on my earlier experience, I’ll log in at the location that I logged out. If the child guarded the door next time I log in, wouldn’t I walk directly into my death?”

Of course, Han Fei wished he could have found himself a safer place to quit but he did not have that luxury of choice. If he had reacted a second slower, the child would be hanging on his body already. “He moved too fast for me to even escape.” Han Fei was now worried that he’d be dragged into the child’s house when he started the game next. “If there’s a chance in the future, I should invite him over to my house.”

At 4 am, Han Fei switched on the computer, held his phone and started to compare the crime scene photos on the wall. He worked on the clues and relationships between the cases.

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The sun shone on his face. Han Fei had no idea when he fell asleep. He woke up blurrily. When he saw the clock on the wall, he jumped out of bed immediately. “Jesus, it’s already 9 am. Director Jiang will have my head.” After a quick shower, Han Fei left his home and headed towards Northern Street. As expected, he was late. When he arrived, the shoot already started. “I’m sorry for being late.” Han Fei apologized but his apology was brushed off easily, “The first scene will be between the antagonist and the first victim. The actor playing the antagonist is not even here yet, so you’re not technically late.”

The floor manager who was scared witless by Han Fei last time sauntered over. He handed a cup of coffee to Han Fei. “You better get used to this. This is not the first time that our great antagonist is late to the set.” Han Fei heard the message between the lines. “I’m sorry but do you mind telling me who the actor playing the antagonist is?” Han Fei played the second victim and this actor played the killer, they would be in plenty of scenes together so it was normal for Han Fei to ask such questions.

“You probably have heard of him before; his name is Zhan Yueyue. He has appeared in many variety shows but he has not nabbed any signature role in his career. I suppose one would consider him a B-list celebrity. This time, his agency wants to use our movie to help him branch into acting.” The floor manager explained to Han Fei.

“He hasn’t acted in anything before?” Han Fei put down the coffee. “But the antagonist can often break or make a movie.”

“Well, Zhan Yueyue himself is a character of interest these days and the fact that this will be his first antagonist role will be a great selling point. Furthermore, he graduated from a famous acting academy, so he should have the basics down.” The floor manager said as commotion came from outside the building. It was followed by a series of footsteps.

“I was at a variety set late into the night. This business is taxing on one’s health.” A young man about 20 entered the set with his manager. One could easily pick up the scent of cologne and the alcohol that it was trying to mask.

“Just get to make-up.” Director Jiang uttered without even raising his head. After all the crew members were in place, Zhan Yueyue finally arrived.

“You have very little lines, and your first scene will be inside the stairwell. The killer you play has targeted Ah Mei. You’ll tail her into the stairwell. I need you to create the impression that you’re an unshakeable, scary shadow of hers.”

“Okay, understood.” Zhan Yueyue nodded confidently. The actor playing Ah Mei was young and thus inexperienced so she was not a helpful scene partner. The killer played by Zhan Yueyue gave no tension. If anything, from the camera, it did not look like the girl was tailed by a crazed murderer but a drunkard. Even Han Fei could not accept this level of acting, much less Director Jiang. Just a simple scene had to be shot over several times. Zhan Yueyue was required to climb the stairs up and down. It took a toll on the young man and he eventually collapsed on the stairs and refused to move. “Director, you have to understand that I have my own style and I wish to infuse it into this role that I play.”

“If the style that you wish to accentuate in this role is frivolity and frippery, then bloody job well done.” Director Jiang said acerbically, “You have the acting chops but if you want to take on an antagonistic character, then you have to act like one. You are a serial killer with at least 7 known victims. There’s a veritable hell hidden inside your heart and mind!”

“But Director, this is just the first scene. I am helping you pace the story. When the time comes, you’ll see that I’ve been working towards building the scary climax!” Zhan Yueyue countered.

“Alright, show me that then. We’ll just shoot a close up of that scene now.” Once Director Jiang said that, everyone turned their eyes towards Zhan Yueyue. The young actor was silent for a long time before he suddenly waved the prop knife around and squealed like a rubber chicken.

“Cut! Cut! Cut!” Director Jiang sighed and said, “Just ask anyone here, did your acting scare any of them? Did they feel any scary vibes from you?” Director Jiang turned to the floor manager and asked with Zhan Yueyue standing right there, “Well, did you feel even a smidge of fear from his performance?”

“Not really.”

“What about you?”

“It’s quite funny actually.”

A few more people were asked. Most felt nothing.

“Every twitch of the muscle, every shot of the gaze is part of acting. The actor who played one of the victims yesterday managed to scare our floor manager but the killer that you played is more like a drunk ruffian. Did you even read the script before you came?”

That appeared to be the source of Zhan Yueyue’s problem but the man naturally would not admit it. “Director Jiang, there’s no need to resort to exaggeration just to pick on my acting. How could an actor in the role of a victim possibly scare a professional crew member?”

For some reason, the argument circled around to Han Fei. Director Jiang had Han Fei walk over to him. “You’ve read all the parts, right?”

“I did.”

“Okay, you rehearse this scene for him.”

“Me?” To be fair, Han Fei had been putting himself in the mind of the murderer but he wasn’t doing that for the sake of acting but he wanted to figure out more clues to solve the case. “But I’m just a comedy actor.”

“Stop it with that nonsense. Come, show him how it’s done.” Director Jiang had great confidence in Han Fei. The latter actually wanted to keep a low profile but since he was named, there was nothing he could do.

He lowered his head and his initial encounter with his 6th floor neighbour appeared in his mind. The man was holding a sharp knife and poked his head out from the staircase banister. He stood at the dark corner, waiting for his prey to walk into his trap. The desire for blood and flesh was clear on his face. He worked hard to suppress his urge to destroy and ruin. He could not wait to plunge the sharp instrument into his prey’s fleshy body. An oppressive breathing, a wicked gaze. His prey finally entered the dim stairwell. Now was his chance to strike. No one was able to stop him now.

He slowly raised his head. Han Fei stared at Zhan Yueyue's neck and a smile slowly bloomed on his cracked lips.

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To survive in Perfect Life, Han Fei had repeatedly studied the human jigsaw and frozen body case. He tried to put himself in the killers' shoes and stared at the wall of crime scene photos deep into the night. So many innocent lives were snuffed off like candles in the wind. Whenever he was reminded of that, Han Fei's heart gripped with pain. Why would someone do something so inhumane?

Han Fei knew he would have to detach himself to understand the killers. Through the medium of the crime scene photos, Han Fei constructed the image of the killers in his mind. Twisted minds and deformed emotions, compelled by hatred, they used drastic methods to achieve their own goal. Within the killers' perspective, they followed their own form of logic. Every single one of their kills were meticulously planned, this was not a crime of passion. Their expressions might speak of madness but their actions were entirely logical. Many things were wrong with their minds. There was no empathy and love in their emotions. The selfishness, hatred and heartlessness were carved deep into their bones.

The puzzle derived from the victims gradually clarified. A human figure slowly surfaced, albeit blurrily. He was introverted, selfish, heartless. He was sensitive in a way and had trouble communicating with others. He was definitely clever but not in the conventional sense. He wore a mask in the day and would only shed it when he was ready to work on his prey. At that moment, he lost all his disguises and revealed a smile.

The smile was like a rose growing above one's grave. The thorn dug deep into the bones. The pretty flower grew from a desecrated and dirty soil. When Han Fei lifted his face to reveal that grin, Zhan Yueyue hugged Director Jiang's arm and both men took an involuntary step back. No one shouted for the camera to stop, no one even dared to speak. When Han Fei took another step forward, Zhan Yueyue and Director Jiang retreated again until they knocked into the staircase banister.

Zhan Yueyue, who was going weak in the knees, attempted to push Director Jiang out as bait. It was then that Director Jiang came to. He sucked in a cold breath and nodded with admiration, "Cut! Cut! Han Fei, would you consider playing the killer in this movie? The role is born for you. From your gaze to your expression, there is not one shred of madness, but there is no one present that is not stunned into fear."

Zhan Yueyue's face was pale. He finally scurried out from behind Director Jiang. In terms of acting, he was indeed no match for Han Fei. Compared to Han Fei's performance, Zhan Yueyue's earlier takes appeared even more ludicrous. He realized how big of a clown he must have looked back then. Even though Zhan Yueyue wished for a hole to hide himself in, for this character, for the preparation that his agency had

done, he had to say something. If he lost this role due to this reason, he would have a hard time explaining it to his agency.

Zhan Yueyue's mouth opened but this normally quick-tongued young man found himself at a loss. The acting skill between the two of them was so obvious that even the non-professionals could easily determine who was the better actor.

"Director Jiang, you have to be joking. I don't have the personality to take on the role of the antagonist." The antagonist role had a lot more scenes and due to the plot requirement, he would have to work a lot of nights. Han Fei's current focus was still on the game, after all, he would have to be alive to act. After rejecting the director, he turned to Zhan Yueyue and said gently, "You are a very good actor but you've been in the variety genre for too long. You just need some time to adjust your acting style. Furthermore, I have a deeper understanding of the human jigsaw case than you do, but that can be fixed easily, I shall share some of the related information with you in a bit. That should help you construct the killer role more fittingly." Han Fei was being extremely kind. Even though it was public knowledge that Zhan Yueyue's acting skill was so much worse than his, Han Fei did not mock the man but chose to elevate his fellow actor's performance. He stressed in a roundabout way that he was not going to snatch the role away from Zhan Yueyue and was willing to help with the man's acting skill.

By then, Zhan Yueyue's alcohol had completely cleared. He seemed to witness a halo of light coming out from behind Han Fei. 'Am I in the presence of an angel? This is practically unheard of in the entertainment business!' The understanding of his fellow castmate's difficulty, the lack of selfishness, the humility despite the scary acting skills, who would not love this kind of colleague?

Seeing this, most of the crew were confused. Why would Han Fei's previous agency let go of such a precious talent?

Han Fei did not waste time. Based on his own experience, he listed out the few places that he believed Zhan Yueyue needed to improve on. One didn't need to be so intense when playing an antagonistic character, exaggeration of one's performance would very easily cause the opposite effect. Director Jiang concurred with Han Fei's advice. After a brief discussion, even though Zhan Yueyue was still not as good as Han Fei, at least he was no longer as awkward as before.

Standing quietly to the side, Han Fei played his role of a side character perfectly. He knew that he'd be better at the killer roll than Zhan Yueyue but now was not the time to take the centre stage. Through the window in the stairwell, Han Fei looked across the street. The drama of his previous agency—Secret Urban Romance was also shooting. He heard from his new buddy, the floor manager that the second main male character for this drama was the person who usurped his place in his old agency.

Han Fei of the past would have surrendered to this cruel fate without making a fuss because he knew a small character like him could not do anything to rival against the agency. However, after experiencing Perfect Life, Han Fei had a reassessment of his perspective. The time spent at the edge of death gifted him perseverance and faith. "There is nothing impossible in this world."

Turning his head to look at Zhan Yueyue, Han Fei's expression revealed nothing, even though he could notice the limitation to the man's performance. Zhan Yueyue's acting still had a long way to go. Some people were blessed with natural talent in acting, others honed their craft from years of experience, Han Fei's skill though was a present from constant brushes with death. There was no chance for NG, a bad acting job would lose him his life.

Zhan Yueyue's first scene wrapped up around late afternoon but the second scene finished quickly because Han Fei was there to provide aid and Director Jiang purposely focused the camera on Han Fei. There were not many frames on Zhan Yueyue, so the scene was done with just 2 takes.

Han Fei who finished all of Wei Youfu's scenes in one go left the set around dusk. When he left the set, he noticed a rather luxurious car parked by the roadside. The exhausted Zhan Yueyue and his agent walked towards it.

"Director Jiang is famed for his high standard, thanks for helping our Yueyue earlier." The manager handed Han Fei a gift box. "How shall I refer to you?"

"My name is Han Fei."

"Mr. Han, I hope you'll help Yueyue more in the future. Our agency has placed high hopes on Yueyue. After your guidance today, his acting has shown great improvement." The manager was telling the truth. In fact, he only came to talk to Han Fei because he saw the opportunity to wrangle more acting lessons out of Han Fei.

"I did not provide much guidance, we were simply helping each other." Han Fei waved his hands and rejected the gift box kindly. His mind had already wandered over to the analysis of the frozen body case.

"Teacher Han, thank you for everything today. I have to admit that I drank too much yesterday night, but I promise you this will not happen again." Zhan Yueyue was slightly younger than Han Fei. The young man had a vibrant personality and honestly, he was more suitable for variety shows than acting roles, but of course Han Fei would not be so blunt to point it out.

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Han Fei did not accept Zhan Yueyue's gift. Even though his social anxiety was not as serious as before, he was still not that good at interpersonal relationships. Or rather,

with the training under a certain game, his social ability was progressing down a different direction.

After cleaning the table, Han Fei studied the wall filled with the victims' photo. "My monster roommate's biggest wish is to find its killer but how am I supposed to deal with a crazed murderer on my own? I am just a barely-known actor and the enemy is a crazed murderer who has managed to escape police detection after killing 8 people! This shows that the killer is extremely clever, has a great sense of counter-surveillance and is good at disguises! If I get too close to the killer, won't I end up being silenced first?"

Han Fei's face paled. Detective series always looked so good and easy on tv but it was extremely dangerous to replicate in real life. "I will need cooperation from law enforcement but how can I do that without exposing the presence of the game? I also have to keep a low profile to prevent the murderer from coming after me. Now he is hiding in the dark and so am I. We're both shrouded behind anonymity, but once the spotlight shines on me, it's guaranteed that he'll come after me to save his own skin."

Han Fei gripped his fist in frustration. He knew his limit, he was only a minor mob with 5 points in stamina. "I can quit the game but not real life." Han Fei stood up from the couch. "I need to do something about this." Switching on the computer, Han Fei went online to order metallic pens, nunchucks, safety torches and electric tasers. Then he visited several relevant websites to purchase tons of literature on criminology, self-defence and survival. In this day and age, as long as one was willing to pay, knowledge would always be available. "I have been wasting my life away. I will have to invest more into myself from now on."

He set up a schedule for physical training and mental exercises. Those who did not know Han Fei might get the impression that he was an optimistic and cheerful person. After the plan was in place, Han Fei threw himself into studies. He not only had to figure out the killer's criminal workings, he had to learn how to rescue the victims from despair, this two homework would greatly improve his chance at survival. When it was almost midnight, Han Fei locked all the windows and doors before putting the gaming helmet on with hesitation.

"Last time, I logged out on the 3rd floor. I need to watch out for that kid. I have to rush up to the 4th floor the moment I log into the game!" The connection was secured. When midnight struck, blood enveloped Han Fei's world.

"Welcome to Perfect Life where..." Before the robotic voice finished, Han Fei opened his eyes. In that moment, his face paled. The chill that came from his ring finger froze his entire body. Han Fei turned his head slightly and the door which was previously covered in talisman was left half ajar. A barely visible child was sitting right inside the room!

'He is indeed waiting for me!' Chilblains immediately crawled over his body. Han Fei thought he had experienced the worst the game had to offer but, in that moment, he realized he was still too naïve. The horror of this hellish game had far exceeded his expectation. 'I still have not completed any mission and stayed for more than 3 hours, if I am dragged into the kid's house...' Han Fei did not even dare to imagine the possible consequences. He tried to nudge his body away from the door but once he did, the kid lifted his head. Han Fei's back tingled as he felt the kid's eyes on him. 'If I run as fast as possible, I should be able to get to the 4th floor before he does, but I still need time to open the door.' Han Fei was at the verge of despair but at that moment, the child suddenly stood up. While Han Fei was wrapped in confusion, the door behind him suddenly opened.

"Come in!" Han Fei felt a force pulling him into the house opposite from the kid. Hearing the familiar voice, Han Fei leaned into the pull. He only had one chance, he cooperated fully to mount a quick escape. From the corner of his eyes, he saw the child crawling after him. With just the breath of a hair, Han Fei managed to retreat into the safety of granny's house.

Bang! The door slammed shut. The sound of nail scratching came from outside the door. Han Fei collapsed to the ground. His back was soaked in cold sweat.

"Are you alright?" Meng Si coughed several times as she helped Han Fei up from the ground.

"Granny, if not for you, I'd be dead by now! Thank you!" Han Fei said sincerely.

"Why would you suddenly appear on the 3rd floor?" Meng Si's face was pale and her body appeared frailer than before.

"My house is haunted! And I'm here because I have some questions that I need to ask you." Han Fei was not lying, his house was truly haunted.

"That will have to wait. I need to go check if the child is gone." The old lady picked up the red candle from the dining table and placed it right next to the front door. The candle light flickered and it was then that Han Fei realized the lights in the house were off again. The old lady studied the dancing light and the shadows on the wall. After a long time, she said, "There is no sign of the child's shadow, he did not follow you in here."

"What is up with that child? He is so scary!" Han Fei slowly gave out a sigh.

Instead of answering, Meng Si picked up the candle and moved shakily back into the room.

"Granny, there was only a short period of time between me noticing the child and you opening the door, have you been staying by the front door? Or this is all a coincidence?"

Han Fei had his suspicion. He knew the old lady was not a bad person but a little caution went a long way.

“I have been watching the house next door.” Meng Si admitted as she placed the red candle back on the table. She sighed and the wrinkles on her face deepened. “Chen Chen is gone. I suspect he has run to the opposite house.”

“Wait, Chen Chen is missing?” Han Fei was shocked.

“Aiz, why do you think I always keep Chen Chen locked up in his bedroom?” The old lady slumped weakly on the chair.

“Why?” Han Fei had indeed pondered that question before. During his first visit here, the old lady unlocked the bedroom door before she called her grandson out for dinner. Han Fei still remembered how strange he thought this behavior was.

“That is because Chen Chen always wants to go and play with that child who should not exist. I have noticed early on that Chen Chen keeps repeating this unfamiliar name. He also often sits alone next to the door covered in talisman. His lips would move as if talking to another child.”

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“Chen Chen has always been a shy boy. He normally won’t approach the other children in the building and prefer to be alone. But from who knows when, he suddenly became more extroverted. At the time, I was quite happy at this change.

“One time, he stayed out until very late. I got so worried that I asked the building manager’s help to find him. We searched for a long time before we found him inside the neighbourhood’s abandoned water tank. He was curled inside all alone and his body trembled from the cold. We asked him what he was doing and he said he was playing with hide and seek with his friend. When I asked him for the name of his friend, Chen Chen held out for a long time before he was willing to reveal his friend’s name. It was Weep.

“At the time, I was confused. What kind of parents would name their child Weep? But when the building manager heard the name, his expression shifted immediately. He then asked Chen Chen whether this Weep stayed on the 3rd floor. Chen Chen nodded. The building manager then told me something that haunts me until this day. The room with the talismans is not the site of any murder but it is the location for an incident that is much inexplicable and horrible than that.

“When the neighbourhood was first built, there were children going missing every so often. Naturally a search was initiated and they found the missing children’s clothes and toys inside Room 1034 on the 3rd floor. It was then that the rumours of Room 1034 being a child-eating home started to circulate. It was not until everyone worked together

to seal up all the windows and doors of Room 1034 that the disappearance stopped. I have no idea how the child by the name of Weep is related to the house, but once the disappearance ceased, so did the appearance of this child. Weep has not been heard of for a long time until Chen Chen mentioned his name again that day.”

The old lady’s wrinkles folded together. “Ever since I forbade Chen Chen from going out with Weep, it was like some spirit had taken over Chen Chen. His temper turned explosive and he kept saying that someone was waiting for him, calling his name. Whenever my heart softened at his pleas, he’d run to the opposite house and mumble to himself by the front door. He’d laugh and cry on his own. In the end, I had no choice but to lock him up inside the bedroom.”

After hearing the old lady’s story, Han Fei’s heart chilled. There were so many scary things inside this building. However, none of them dared to get close to Room 1034 and had to eventually seal the house shut, that went to show how scarily powerful this Weep was.

“After I decided to lock Chen Chen up in his bedroom, his personality worsened. Yesterday, after lunch, the kid sneaked out when I was not paying attention. When I got to the door, I noticed the door opposite was left half open. Someone had removed the talismans and wooden boards.” The old lady sighed. It was clear that she was truly concerned about Chen Chen.

“Chen Chen might have removed the talismans himself but he’s too small to peel back those boards. It should be the work of some other tenants.” Han Fei realized none of the tenants here was normal so he had to consider things from the worst perspective. “Has there been anything serious and out of the place that happened here recently?”

“Not that I know of.” The old woman shook her head, but after giving it some thought, she added, “Wait, now that you mention it, I have not seen the building manager for a long time already. It’s like he too has gone missing.”

“The building manager?” This person kept getting featured in this tale so Han Fei had to ask, “Granny, who is this building manager that you keep mentioning?”

“He’s the tenant who has stayed here the longest. He’s about 60 and is very kind. He shares a good relationship with most of the older tenants. But as they departed one after another, his physical conditions deteriorated. It was as if their departure took a physical toll on him.”

‘Can one’s physical condition not take a toll from staying at this place?’ Han Fei thought back to what Meng Si said and her description of the building manager did match someone in his mind, “Granny, this building manager, does he have a head of white hair and a black mark around his neck...”

“Yes! Where have you seen him?” The granny nodded with shock.

'It is really him?!' The clues slowly lined up in Han Fei's mind. The building manager was the old man who sold Han Fei the gaming helmet! There was more to this old man than he appeared! The cemetery custodian was probably just one of his identities!

Han Fei's brain worked quickly. He still had too little information. "Granny, do you know where I can normally find the building manager?"

"He stays at Room 1101 on the 10th floor. Do you plan to get the building manager to help find Chen Chen?" Meng Si frowned deeply, "But the corridor is very unsafe. Furthermore, if we leave now, we might run right into Weep."

Han Fei memorized the number 1101, this was the first important clue he obtained since he entered the game. 'If I wish to get to Room 1101, I need to go upstairs. But I am now just level 2, the chance of reaching the 10th floor is too low. I better take this slow.'

Taking a glance at Meng Si, Han Fei had an idea. Chen Chen was Meng Si's most important family. If he could rescue Chen Chen from danger, he would gain absolute trust from Meng Si. Han Fei would never fathom the possibility of forming an ally with an old lady when he started the game but now, he could use every help he could get. Furthermore, Meng Si did technically save his life earlier so this was his way of repaying her.

Han Fei's plan was to somehow lure Weep into his own home on the 4th floor and have the Frankenstein monster deal with Weep. Suppose the monster was unable to kill Weep, at least it would be strong enough to hold Weep back for some precious time, time that Meng Si and Han Fei needed to enter Room 1034 to look for Chen Chen. Even if Chen Chen was still not found after doing all that, Han Fei should have gained sufficient trust from Meng Si due to the many risks that he had taken on her behalf in search of Chen Chen. By the end of the day, Han Fei would have a neighbour that he could truly call his friend inside this scary hellish apartment!

After much deliberation, Han Fei made the decision. He opted to reach for this rare opportunity. Taking a deep breath, Han Fei told the old woman in a tone that suggested a death-instilled determination, "Granny, I have an idea that might save Chen Chen."

"What kind of idea?" The old lady asked anxiously.

"I'll be the bait to lure Weep upstairs. You will use the opening to enter the opposite house. If Chen Chen is really in there, you have to grab him and leave."

"No! You will be risking your own life! I can't let you do that!" The old woman rejected it firmly.

"Granny, we have to do something." Han Fei offered his sincere thoughts. "How about this, we'll wait here for 3 hours. If 3 hours later, Chen Chen still hasn't returned and Weep is still guarding outside the door, we'll follow my plan. I'll lead him away and you'll

go to the opposite house to find Chen Chen. If Weep leaves within these 3 hours, then we can go upstairs to get other neighbours to help us.”

“But, be it luring Weep away or going to ask other neighbours for help, they are both extremely dangerous. A careless move and you’ll lose your life, aren’t you afraid?” The granny was worried about Han Fei.

“Of course, I am afraid but there is no better solution.” Han Fei said firmly as he worked his icy fingers. “But true courage is only shown when one chooses to do the right thing in face of fear and danger.”

Noting Han Fei’s willingness to go so far for her grandson, Meng Si was truly touched. At that moment, the robotic voice suddenly rang inside Han Fei’s brain, “Notification for Player 0000! Friendliness with Meng Si increases by 10. Forming a peaceful neighbourly relationship is the first step to a perfect life.

“Notification for Player 0000! Grade G Hidden Mission, Search for Chen Chen has been triggered! Will you accept this mission?”