

My Iyashikei Game

Chapter 8: 8

Han Fei thought Li Xue was a suspect like himself so he opened up to her but turns out the woman was a police officer. However, standing at the cell door, watching Li Xue walk away, Han Fei did not feel as despaired as before for at least now one officer was willing to listen to his side of the story.

“Hey! Don’t be fooled by her looks. If you’re innocent, with us, you’ll at most stay here for a while but if you fall into her grasp, you’d wish that you had ended up in jail.” Zhang Xiaotian signaled for Han Fei to follow him to another room. Inside the small room, a middle-aged officer was holding the phone angrily. This was probably the man who lectured Li Xue earlier. He looked imposing and had an intense presence but somehow, he failed to get Li Xue to abide by his orders.

“Captain Wang, calm down. At the end of the day, she’s an inspector who has been given multiple awards. She’s here basically to experience life of the locals. There’s no need to get serious with her.” Zhao Ming poured a glass of water and placed it on the table.

“So what if she is an inspector with multiple awards? It is meaningless when she does not act like one! If she refuses to follow the rules, then tell her to stop reporting to work tomorrow!” The middle-aged officer said angrily.

“Sir, if you really fire her, her parents will most likely come to thank you in person. I heard she comes from a rich family, and her parents have been protesting her choice of profession.” After this comment, Zhao Ming realized it only got his superior angrier so he quickly changed the subject, “Captain Wang, by the way, this is Han Fei.”

Hearing the name Han Fei, Captain Wang finally calmed down and tuned into work mode. “Kid, so sorry for letting you wait so long. We just have some questions to ask you, hopefully you won’t hide anything from us.”

This was the first time Han Fei was summoned to the police station in his life so he was inadvertently a little bit nervous, “Of course, I will cooperate as much as I can.” As technology advanced, police work also became far simpler than before. Every citizen had their own personal information model, the computer could even predict the criminal potential within an individual based on their everyday conduct. Other than that, most officers had a lie-detector app and a case analytics app within their personal phone. With the aid of computers, the chance of unjust trial had been lowered to the bare minimum.

They chatted for an hour before the police allowed Han Fei to leave. Be it the computer analysis, or the probability derived from his database personality modeling, Han Fei was revealed to possess no criminal suspicion. The system's hazard assessment on Han Fei was an extremely rare 0. In other words, Han Fei would not commit crime under any circumstance, he was objectively speaking, a fine, law-abiding citizen. Or at least that was what the computer thought.

"Captain Wang, we're letting him go just like that?"

"We can't do anything about it, the police station has no right to detain suspects without evidence." Captain Wang studied Han Fei's citizenry information and his brows pleaded together. "Our district has been selected as the safest district within Xin Lu City for the past 5 years but this arson case will change everything. Even until now, the Evidence Department is unable to find out the cause of the fire. This is one hell of a difficult case."

"Do you want Zhang Xiaotan and me to go and tail this fella?" Zhao Ming could read his superior's mind after years of working together.

"Okay but be careful you're not spotted by him." Captain Wang put all the info about Han Fei away. "This is the first time in my working life I've encountered an adult with 0 score in hazard assessment. My former superior once told me there are only two kinds of people who will have such extraordinary scores. The first is the kind who is born a saint and has a naïve view of the world, but even such individuals would rarely maintain a 0 score throughout their lives."

"Then what is the other kind?" Zhang Xiaotian and Zhao Ming leaned over.

"They are super-criminals who are extremely dangerous and cunning. They possess incredibly high IQ, and are either extremely familiar with hacking technology or know the human mind so well that they can self-hypnotize themselves, to trick the computer system." Captain Wang took a deep breath. "In any case, these people are experts at manipulating human psychology. They will do anything to suppress their criminal personality. They look harmless on the surface but internally they're the most twisted individual humanity has to offer."

"And you think this Han Fei is someone like that?"

"I'm not sure but it's best that we be careful."

...

Standing outside the police station, 'super-criminal' Han Fei held the bread he just bought from the auto-vending machine. "Police officers don't need to eat these days?" It was almost 11 am but there was still no reply from Li Xue. Han Fei decided to head home then but he only took a few steps when his phone vibrated. When he saw the caller Id, he was quite surprised.

“Director Jiang, how can I help you?”

“I need you to come to the old city’s Northern Street at 1 pm today. I am shooting a new movie, you should try out for it.” Han Fei was about to reject it on account of the problems he was currently embroiled in but before he could say anything, the man already hung up.

“Hello, Director Jiang?” Han Fei pressed his dry lips listening to the dial tone.

‘I’m not going to be a good comedy actor if I’m in no mood to even entertain myself...’ That was what Han Fei believed but he eventually convinced himself otherwise. Director Jiang was kind enough to extend him an olive branch when no one would so it’d be rude to reject him. Therefore, Han Fei went home to take a quick shower, change and rush towards Northern Street.

Xin Lu was an international metropolis and its land mass was huge. The core of the metropolis was modelled into a high-tech intelligent city, replete with skyscrapers and tech companies. It also housed top talents from all over the globe. In comparison, the older part of the city appeared more decrepit. The place still retained its appearance from years ago.

“I’m sorry but is Director Jiang Yi around?” When Han Fei arrived, he was surprised to find two film crews on set. One of them was shooting a modern comedy romance, while the other had a criminal, thriller theme. Han Fei’s previous works were all related to comedy so he naturally wandered towards the former.

“Han Fei?” The worker who was checking the actor’s list spotted Han Fei. “Haven’t you been fired from the agency? Why are you here?”

“This is our agency’s film?” Han Fei was confused too. “It was Director Jiang Yi who told me to come.”

“Huh? But the director for this drama, Secret Urban Romance is not Jiang Yi. Have you come to the wrong place?” The worker was just a small-time worker at the agency. He pitied Han Fei’s condition so he explained the situation to him patiently.

“The director is not Jiang Yi?” Han Fei was certain he was at the right place. Since the director of this modern romance was not Jiang Yi, then the latter could only be responsible for the other set.

Slowly turning around, Han Fei stopped to study the eerie apartment building on the opposite side of the street. The closed apartment door had a poster pasted on it. It had the following written in blood red ink—Flower of Sin.

“Wait... He wants me to act in a horror movie?”

Chapter 9: 9

After walking to the apartment building, Han Fei knocked on the door lightly. Soon a crew member came to meet him. "Director Jiang Yi told me to come for casting, but I've run into some troubles lately, I might not be able to..."

"But I've no experience in this genre and I have more important things to do later tonight..."

"Director Jiang! The new actor is here!" The crew member shoved the script directly into Han Fei's hands. "Normally, there will be a special room for casting, but we're running on budget here so don't mind it that much. Hurry on over, Director Jiang has been waiting for you for a long time already." Holding the script copy, Han Fei was manhandled into a room. Six actors about his age stood by the wall. None of them dared to utter even a word.

"Do you call this acting? Do any of you have actual respect for this profession? Such ridiculousness!" In the middle of the room, a middle-aged man pointed vexedly at the few actors. His tone was severe and loud. One of the younger female actors was almost in tears.

"Do you think tears will help your acting? Why is the fake blood only on your clothes? What about your face and hands? Do you think the murderer will take your beauty shot into consideration when he's coming after you? Let me tell you now, if you're afraid of dirtiness and tiredness, don't be an actor! I don't care if you're here because of the sponsors, if you're on my set, then you'll have to follow my standards." Director Jiang was famed for his temper. He was once a lecturer at Xin Lu Movie and TV Acting Academy, Han Fei finished a course under him before. After a long lecture, Director Jiang finally turned to Han Fei, "I've heard about what happened to you. I have a character that you can read for."

Studying the room, Han Fei knew it was unwise to say no directly but instead he uttered respectfully, "But Director Jiang, I have not acted in the horror genre before."

"It's the audience's power to pigeonhole an actor but it's the professional actor's job to break out from those preset molds. Get it? So, are you a professional actor or not?" Director Jiang walked towards Han Fei with the script. "Our script is based on a real case that happened several years ago, the human jigsaw case. Until now, the murderer is still on the loose. To help get into character, I'd advise all of you to read up on the news articles at the time, to get to know the characterizations better."

"Erm, Director Jiang, who will I be playing?"

"Officially, the police have revealed 7 victims to the public but in reality, there are 8 victims because the murderer used parts from his previous 7 victims to piece out an eighth body. You will be playing his second victim, Wei Youfu." Director Jiang spoke

quickly as he flipped through the script. “I’ll give you a brief summary of your part. Wei Youfu is your typical white collar worker. He reached home late one night after a long OT session. He came home to find his wife missing. He sent a few messages to his wife and the latter replied saying that she had gone temporarily back to her mother’s place. The man who was tired did not think much of it and entered the bedroom. Here’s the kicker. The wife did not return to her maiden home because she was already dead. The murderer was hiding inside the bathroom, cutting through her body. The message was sent to Wei Youfu by the murderer.”

“Director Jiang, what kind of personality did Wei Youfu have?”

“Don’t interrupt me. The hardest thing about your role comes at the latter part. As Wei Youfu drifted off to sleep, he heard the bathroom door open. His wife’s head was placed by someone at the door. His fear was instantly ignited and horror swallowed him! The murderer walked out from the bathroom and made him the second prey of the night.” Director Jiang circled some of the few acting points on the script. “The government will never allow us to shoot a gory scene like dismemberment so you will have to use your expression to have the audience feel that intense sense of fear. You have to draw into your own primal fear to evoke the same sensation in the audience! Can you do that?”

“I’ll try my best even though I’ve not attempted this genre before.” Han Fei’s dream was to be a comedy actor, he had no idea how he’d end up reading for a horror movie role.

“Okay! We’ll go right to the set to have you feel everything out.” Director Jiang waved to summon the few cameramen up to the second floor. “We initially wanted to use the original crime scene as the set for authenticity but we failed to contact the original house owner so we settled on this place.” Heavy blinds were set up in the set. With the lack of light, the set looked quite the part.

“Alright, everyone, it’s time to get into place! Get moving! Since the main antagonist is absent, floor manager, you put on the mask and take his role as the murderer working inside the bathroom for now. Remember to calculate your timing pushing out the human head. Then you’re to jump out from inside the bathroom.” Five minutes later, everyone was set and the room quieted down.

With Director Jiang’s guidance, Han Fei slowly got into character. Lying inside the dim bedroom, his body was gradually swallowed up by darkness. Han Fei closed his eyes. He did not really need to act for the horrendous memory from last night was still fresh in his mind... the spine-chilling cold and unshakeable despair.

Creak... A soft gasp whispered inside the quiet room. Han Fei opened his eyes blurrily. His eyes darted about before landing on the bathroom door. His wandering pupils eventually focused on the door handle. It was like he had rehearsed this scene many times. Before Han Fei fully awakened, the bathroom door handle started to move on its own. Perhaps it was the light distortion but the camera captured the bathroom door opening a small gap.

The darkness behind the small gap appeared to hide a world of the dead.

When the five fingers reached out from the gap, the terror in Han Fei's memory was invoked! His pupils narrowed and his heart pulsed. He felt a chill caress his face. His blood surged through his body and his adrenaline level shot through the roof. Han Fei's face paled and his body kicked into self-defensive mechanism. His psychological terror triggered a biological reaction. The wife's head rolled out from the small gap. The familiar face careened down the bedroom floor. She appeared to be smiling but the smile was chilling, like she was asking when he was coming to join her.

The suppressed dread within Han Fei sparked off when the bathroom door was shoved open and the bloody knife entered his sight! The murderer was coming after him!

The familiar darkness carried with it the familiar dread. The despair from his previous failed escape froze him into place!

The image of the pale human face hidden under the bedside lamp overlapped with the real-life murderer. For a split second, Han Fei could not tell what was real and what was fake. The actual death threat from the system turned his face into a mask of fear!

Words could not describe the expression in Han Fei's eyes. Even the floor manager who played the murderer had to stop himself and turn around to look behind in alarm.

"Cut!" Director Jiang who held the script rushed over. He roared angrily at the floor manager, "Why did you turn around? You're the murderer! Why did you stop to look behind you?"

"I'm sorry, Brother Jiang." The floor manager removed the mask and his face was covered in cold sweat. "When I saw the expression Han Fei's face earlier, I really thought there was something behind me so my head instinctually turned around."

"You are supposed to be a fucking murderer, how can you be so easily scared? You've wasted such a good shot!" Director Jiang then ran back into the bedroom and personally helped Han Fei up from the bed. "Han Fei, your acting has improved tremendously! You are born to be a horror genre actor! This talent of yours should not be wasted!"

"Is my acting really that good?" Now that Han Fei had calmed down, his expression returned to normal.

"Yes! It was as if you were there in person, and experienced what Wei Youfu did yourself!"

Chapter 10: 10

Han Fei was embarrassed by Director Jiang's heavy praise. He thought about telling him the truth but he realized how ludicrous it would sound.

"You're a gem. With you in this movie, the earlier scenes of this movie are settled." Director Jiang flashed a gratified smile at Han Fei. "I don't understand how come you never achieve popularity considering how good your acting skill is. Now I realize it's because you were in the wrong genre all along. You should attempt more horror films in the future."

"It's still my dream to be a comedy actor. I like to make people laugh; I enjoy that feeling a lot."

"There is more than one road that leads to Rome. You can make a name for yourself as a great horror actor and then you will have the freedom of choice to pick the script you want." Director Jiang was very satisfied with Han Fei. "Needless to say, you've passed the casting. Go home and rest. You'll officially join the crew starting from tomorrow."

"I..." Han Fei had no idea whether he would even live to see another day. Based on the game's rules, he would have to log in every day.

"I'll do my best for you in terms of pay so don't you worry about that." Director Jiang wore his feelings on his face and that could be why like, Han Fei, he had not caught his big break. Only about 10 minutes had passed since he arrived at the set. Han Fei swiped a boxed lunch from the crew and was about to leave when his phone vibrated. This time it was Li Xue who called. "Have you found anything?"

"Old City, Northern Street, Compound 21, I'll be waiting for you here. I've found Meng Si."

"Okay, I'll be there immediately!" The set for Flower of Sin was situated at Compound 15 so it was not that far away from Compound 21. Han Fei followed his GPS and ran over there immediately. After passing through many old buildings, Han Fei finally arrived at the entrance of a family compound which looked quite aged.

"This way!" Li Xue's voice echoed from inside the compound. She looked the same as she did in the morning. There was a Honda Repsol parked beside her.

"Meng Si stays here?"

"There are 12 Meng Si's listed in the city, I've screened through all of them but none matches the description you gave. However, you did not look like you'd lie to me for no reason so I expanded my net of research, and I finally found your Meng Si." At this point, Li Xue stopped and stared at Han Fei for a long time.

"Well, why'd you stop? And why are you looking at me like that?"

“Follow me.” Li Xue led Han Fei into the compound and they headed up to the third floor. There was a pot of ash placed at the door of the house on the right. There was half-burned paper money inside it. Looking into the house, there was a ceremonial table painted black which had a black and white picture on it.

“The Meng Si whom you described for me in the holding cell fits this old woman who died 10 years ago.”

“She’s already dead for 10 years?” Han Fei stood at the door and did not even dare to step into the house. The convenience store boss died several days ago and this Meng Si died a decade ago. Han Fei realized that everyone who was related to the game, other than himself, was already dead.

‘No, wait, there is still another character in this story.’ With one last bit of hope, Han Fei turned to Li Xue. Before he spoke though, Li Xue seemed to know what he was about to ask.

“Chen Chen was indeed Meng Si’s grandson, his actual name was Meng Chen. He also died 10 years ago.”

‘So they are all dead people?’ Han Fei felt a chill run up his spine. He did not expect every single NPC he had encountered in the game would be dead people from the real world. He thought he had found warmth and comfort with these ‘people’ in the game. Thinking back to his experience, his scalp numbed. ‘What kind of hellish game have I gotten myself into?’

“I’m sorry but if there’s nothing else, please leave. I do not wish to be disturbed anymore.” A middle-aged man with surprisingly white hair walked out from the small house. He looked around 40 but his mannerism suggested an age much older.

“Uncle, we do not wish to disturb you but there are simply too many suspicions in this case. With far advanced technology, many cold cases have found previously-missed breakthroughs. You would wish to see the actual culprit brought under the punishment of law, right?” Li Xue, who appeared so brash and impersonal to others, was now so kind and patient with the victim’s family.

“It has been 10 years and there is not one trace of the murderer. My body is failing me by the days, I can’t stand much more disappointment.” The middle-aged man walked into the kitchen and took out a bowl of cooked dumpling and placed it on the ceremonial table. Then he lit a joss stick and bowed thrice at the black and white picture.

“Granny would make dumplings on the first day of every new year, right?” Han Fei studied the picture of the old woman on the table as he wandered into the room. “I remember she liked to say that dumplings have the meaning of unity and they are meant to usher in the new year. Having dumplings on 1st of January will help you chase away the negative aura from the previous year.” Han Fei’s words seemed to evoke

some memory within the man because he turned to look at Han Fei with disbelief. “Granny was a very good cook, she was especially famed for her fish stew. The soup would be milky white in color and you could smell her cooking it from miles away...”

“How did you know all these?” The middle-aged man staggered towards Han Fei. “You’ve met my mother before? But you would be only around ten when she died.”

“I have indeed met her before, she even treated me to a bowl of dumplings.” Han Fei did not know how to explain the situation without sounding like a crazy person so he wisely changed the subject, “Uncle, can you tell us more about granny?”

Some memories were incredibly painful. The middle-aged man hesitated for a while before he entreated Han Fei and Li Xue to join him in the living room.

“Mother was a very kind person. She did not marry but she did adopt three orphans. Every single penny she earned, she used to raise these three children.” The middle-aged man took the edge of the couch. “I was the oldest but I was born with a weak constitution. My mom named me Meng Changshou, I’m also the least gifted of our three siblings.”

“My first younger brother is called Meng Changxi, he was an abandoned baby with a deformation on his face. But he had a bright mind and he always did well in classes. However, due to his appearance, he had low self confidence. He was shy and introverted.

“My second younger brother is called Meng Changan, he’s the brightest of us three siblings. He excelled at school and had many friends. The number of awards he had won could fill up a whole wall. He was scouted by Afterlife Pharmaceutical and currently I hear he is the head of his own department.”

Speaking of Meng Changan, the middle-aged man’s eyes brightened somewhat but that radiance soon dimmed. “He still sends me a monthly allowance but we have not met since our mother’s accident.”

“What exactly happened to granny 10 years ago?” Han Fei was most curious about that.

“Actually, I did not know much about it at the beginning. It was not until Changxi’s disappearance and the police’s visitation that I realized something was wrong.” The middle-aged man’s eyes filled with regret and guilt. “After mother retired, she opened a dessert shop. The police found many animal carcasses and a dead body inside her shop’s refrigerator.”

“What? She was involved in the famous Frozen Body case?”

“The coroner determined the time of death for the victim as 1 week prior. It was impossible for mother to not realize a dead body was stuffed in her refrigerator for that

seven days but there was no report of her calling the police about it.” The middle-aged man crossed his arms.

“The granny wouldn’t have killed that person, right?” To determine the nature of the old woman was crucial to Han Fei, it would be a great breakthrough for his necessary survival in the game.