

Iyashikei 301

Chapter 301

301 The Bride's Room

The message on the wall was dripping with intense hatred. After the game character entered the nuptial chamber, similar blood messages appeared on his body. "This curse is quite doable. As long as we don't cry, we can survive at Ziggurat." Han Fei remembered the location of this room but just as he was about to control the character to leave, the picture on the wall started to shift. The groom bled from all orifices but the scarier thing was the woman in the bridal gown and veil had disappeared.

Han Fei instantly moved towards the door but at that moment, all the doors slammed shut on their own and a woman in a bridal gown appeared behind the game character, standing in an awkward posture. Sharpened nails pierced into the character's neck, she basically pinched and lifted the character up from the ground. Seeing as life drained away from the character, Han Fei did not panic, if anything, it appeared like an epiphany dawn on him. His eyes were not even on his character, instead they were fixed on the bride. He even tried to adjust the camera angle to try to look under the bride's veil. After multiple attempts, Han Fei finally got a good look of the face under the veil just as his character died. 'It is her. So she lives in Ziggurat's first floor Room 3!'

Staring at the bride on screen, a professional smile carved Han Fei's face, he was genuinely happy. The bride could be considered his aid at the Ziggurat. After knowing her location, he would go find her directly, that would aid greatly in his exploration of the Ziggurat. 'Even just getting that information makes my trip here today worthwhile.' His character had already dissolved into a blood pool but Han Fei was still staring at the bride.

Seeing Han Fei like this, Zhuang Ren sucked in a cold breath and silently moved away from the man. Technically there was nothing wrong about the young man before him, but Zhuang Ren just felt some kind of strange energy coming from him. Holding the controller, his character was already dead, but he was still looking at the scary bride ghost with such happiness and joy. It felt like Han Fei knew this ghost, like perhaps she was his first love. Zhuang Ren wanted to leave but then he was reminded of something. His own family was trapped inside Ziggurat and Han Fei said that he was experiencing the same thing, so could the bride really be Han Fei's family?

Taking in the shock, Zhuang Ren breathed out, "Is that ghost your wife?"

"What are you talking about? Her husband's picture is clearly on the wall." Han Fei turned to glance at Zhuang Ren, he couldn't understand the man's thoughts.

The sky was already darkening. Han Fei put down the controller and prepared to leave. "Why don't you stay here tonight? We need to clear this game as soon as possible!" Zhuang Ren's most desperate wish now was still to see his own family.

"I still have something else to do at night. If everything goes smoothly, I'll be back tomorrow morning."

"If it doesn't go smoothly?"

"Then you might not see me again." Han Fei said in a serious tone. "Do not tell anyone about the game. There should be other people looking for it, other than me. And the person who murdered your family might be one of them." Han Fei didn't sugarcoat the truth, he really did think the Butterfly might have orchestrated the death of the director's family.

"Murder?" Hearing that, the look in Zhuang Ren's eyes changed.

"I've already memorized your family's names and appearance, I'll help you pay attention for them." Han Fei was going to enter the cryptic world's Ziggurat. If he met Zhuang Ren's family there, he would try his best to help them. Han Fei had just exited Pear Blossom Neighbourhood when he noticed every pedestrians' heads were turned towards the east. Han Fei then realized that the sky wasn't as dark as it should be. He also turned his head to the east and realized there was a giant virtual screen above the intelligent city and it was filled with the number 5.

"That is... the official countdown date for Perfect Life's OB? Isn't this a bit much?" Han Fei had spent a whole day at Zhuang Ren's home so he didn't realize the chaos which had happened online. Deep Space Tech and Immortal Pharma finally released the final trailer of the game and the trailer didn't take long to break records for most views of a gaming trailer online. The two giants were preparing for the game's OB not only on the web but also in real life. The countdown screens were activated at the intelligent centres of the nation's 7 biggest cities. Han Fei could barely imagine the amount of money that must have gone into this.

On the internet, people held different opinions. Some were very averse to Perfect Life, believing it would ruin humanity, trapping everyone inside their own dreams; others had deep expectations of the game, they saw it as the herald of a miracle, the chance for humans to create their own heavens. However, no matter where you stood on, no one could stop the arrival of the new age. Viewed from the future, this game's OB might be a turning point in human history.

The changing of time was often initiated by a single individual. Using himself as an axle, Immortal Pharma's Director had slowly turned the world on its axis.

Han Fei felt dwarfed by the large virtual screen. He stared at it for a while before pulling his attention back. 'Regardless, this has nothing to do with me, my main goal is still to survive.' Han Fei didn't stop to admire the spectacle but took a taxi home. After reporting to the police his location and basic status, Han Fei inspected his room. After ensuring there was no danger, Han Fei crawled into the gaming hub. 'There's a reason for its price, this gaming hub is more comfortable than my bed, I should probably just sleep here in the future.' Han Fei's rental was so small that he was considering removing the bed and replacing it with another work table to analyse the cases. Time was ticking. As the clock moved towards midnight, Han Fei's heart pounded faster. 'The Unmentionable must hate me so much since I've escaped from it twice already. If I were him, I would stay at that spot until the end of time to wait for me to return.'

When the clock struck midnight, Han Fei connected all the wires, put on the gaming helmet and closed the hub door. Blood fell and Han Fei saw in his mind a city frozen in blood. Somewhere in the city, something sensed his arrival and a pair of horrifying eyes slowly opened. The moment the eyes opened, Han Fei's eyes flew open as well. He had appeared on the 2nd floor of the security company.

Chapter 302

302 A Song for the Butterfly

In just one night, many changes had happened at the security company. The building looked like it had been singed, the fire took down the surrounding buildings as well. All the ghosts had been eliminated, forming a death zone where no one dared to enter. 'The Singer looks mad but this is good too. The greater its destruction, the bigger the chance Butterfly would think it was The Singer who ruined the sea of flowers at the basement 4th floor.' After narrowly escaping the Singer and shoving the blame of the company's destruction onto it, Han Fei knew he mustn't stay a moment longer at the security company. The elevator was not working. He came to the 2nd floor window. Just as he prepared to jump, the ground covered in blood and curse slowly protruded. There was rustling and then a black stone appeared in sight.

"Big Sin?" The poisonous insect with spines and menacing blood pattern rushed towards Han Fei happily. "Notification for Player 0000! You've been infected by Soul Poison, please seek immediate medical treatment!" Han Fei was glad that Big Sin was still alive but his Life Points didn't allow him to do much celebration. Hugging Big Sin, Han Fei jumped down from the 2nd floor window. When he parted from his neighbours yesterday, he promised to meet them here at midnight. It was now midnight but

there was no sign of them, they seemed to have run into trouble as well. There were hidden dangers at every corner of the cryptic world, other than Unmentionables like the Singer, no one dared to wander about freely.

“We should wait a little bit longer.” Han Fei couldn’t quit the game and he was alone. He felt extremely low on security. Time ticked by. Han Fei was pricked by constant anxiety but he had no idea where it came from. He only knew his heart was pounding very fast. ‘Perhaps it’s better for me to find a place to hide first.’ Han Fei signalled for Big Sin to follow him but it was acting very strangely. It was inordinately lively. It bounced about like it was dancing and the bloody pattern on its shell was startlingly red.

“What’s wrong with you?”

As he reached out to touch Big Sin’s back, Han Fei received 2 more notifications. “Notification for Player 0000! Big Sin’s ability, Omen of Death has been triggered! It sees a thick haze of death on you, if there’s no surprise, you only have half an hour left to your life!

“You’ve been infected by Soul Poison, please seek immediate medical attention...”

“Omen of Death? I’m showing an omen of death?!” Han Fei looked at the Big Sin who was still twirling about and he was suddenly reminded of the feeling he had when he logged in earlier. Inside the blood frozen city, a pair of eyes slowly opened and locked onto him! ‘That can only be the Singer, it knows that I am here!’

Han Fei’s face twitched but he came to a decision immediately. He grabbed Big Sin and rushed towards the Ziggurat. ‘To exit the game, I have to complete 1 mission and stay for at least 3 hours. Big Sin already sensed death on me and the system said I only have half an hour to live, in other words, the Singer would arrive in half an hour!’ The bigger the danger Han Fei was in, the faster his brain would work. ‘Even with the collaboration of all my neighbours, they won’t be able to fight the Singer, so it’s pointless for me to return to Happiness Neighbourhood.’ Han Fei’s mind was clear. Since the Singer had targeted him and he had nowhere else to run, then he would go to Ziggurat. ‘Instead of just waiting for death, why not try to make something out of it? Even if I die, the Butterfly and the Singer would not have a good life, at least that would help the police and Huang Yin buy some time.’ After training in the cryptic world, Han Fei could maintain his clarity of mind at any moment, including when he was about to die. If he couldn’t change the ending, then he would make his death as valuable as possible.

Putting on the mask, Han Fei hid his presence and then raced towards Ziggurat with Big Sin attached to him. ‘The promise with the bride is that she’ll come get me 4 days later. If I go to her home now, would she be there? If she’s not there but her husband is, things will be so awkward.’ Then again, Han Fei had

no other solution. The Singer's appearance had shattered all of Han Fei's plans but in a way, it had already ruined the Butterfly's plan as well. Everything was jumbled up and moved forward.

Ziggurat was the most dangerous locale at Yi Ming Street. The closer one was to Ziggurat, the stranger and scarier the ghosts one would meet. Han Fei was wise to hide from them. Han Fei found a second use for Big Sin. Whenever it acted with excitement, Han Fei knew immediately he had to turn around and use another path. Everyone saw Big Sin as the manifestation of disaster, but Han Fei saw it as a treasure. He didn't blame Big Sin for predicting his death, it was not its intention, that was merely its nature. Furthermore, it was all thanks to Big Sin that Han Fei managed to know about the imminent danger. Before the Song arrived, Han Fei had already escaped from the scene. When he believed he was close to the Ziggurat, the strange song finally echoed from behind him. 'It is here!'

Han Fei's back straightened. He ran faster without even turning around to look. The Singer appeared suddenly and it moved incredibly fast. This time, it swore to not let Han Fei slip away again.

Han Fei abandoned his disguise and ran as fast as he could. Finally the cluster of buildings appeared at the end of the street. Compared to the other buildings, this cluster of buildings radiated a thick sense of death. The bottom of the buildings was covered in darkness. Han Fei could feel the buildings summoning him, calling him to join them. "Notification for player 0000! You are about to enter the Grade E Hidden Map—Ziggurat! You are 15 levels too early to challenge this map! Please consider this carefully!" The system kept giving warnings and hints, this had never happened before. But this also showed the danger and uniqueness of the Ziggurat.

The map left behind by the previous manager flashed in Han Fei's mind, he had purposely circled out Ziggurat. This place was not only the most dangerous locale in this area, it also contained his memory fragment! If Han Fei could enter Ziggurat, he might have the chance to see Fu Sheng again. 'I know this place is dangerous but I have no other choice!'

Han Fei was thankful that he had added all of his attribute points into stamina because the version of himself in the past wouldn't have completed this journey in half an hour. The Singer was right behind him. Han Fei started his final sprint. His mind was clear as his fingers gripped around Big Sin. When the shrill song exploded beside his ears, he rammed right into the black mist.

"Notification for Player 0000! You've entered Grade E Hidden Map—Ziggurat! You've triggered the Grade E Hidden Mission—Death Curse!"

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“Death Curse (Grade E Hidden Mission): You’ll die in a predestined way at a certain moment in time!

“Mission Requirement: Change that destiny and survive.

“Due to the player’s low level, additional hint is provided: Room 4444.”

The mission information was very short, compared to essays from previous missions, this was just several sentences, but that only made Han Fei more nervous. Grade F Mission corresponded to Level 10 to 20; Grade E 20 to 30 but Han Fei was only level 12. If not for the Singer, he would not have challenged this map so early. Speaking of which, even after entering the mist, the Singer still didn’t let Han Fei go, but their distance slowly widened. The black mist was like a maze, any people and ghosts who entered it would appear at different locations. As Han Fei continued to walk deeper, he realized the blood on his guard uniform was fading and so did his memory and consciousness. In his mind, the black mist wasn’t that big but Han Fei felt like he had been walking for a long time already. There was no exit, no light and no one else. The longer he stayed there, the fuzzier his mind. The black mist could transmute and consume memory.

“Where is the Ziggurat?” He was unable to tell his directions, but whenever he lifted his head, the tall skyscrapers would be around him. They were connected by walkways and death oozed out from them. Han Fei continued to wander inside the mist until the blood on the guard uniform had fully disappeared. Spirit of death inside the mist suddenly boiled and it solidified into a spear to lunge towards his body!

At the same time, blood red characters surfaced on Han Fei’s skin. The story Jin Sheng left in him was working. The blood melted into the death curse and surged towards his mind. His head felt like it was going to break. There was a voice in his mind giving him direction, pushing him towards completing the story. With nudging steps, Han Fei until he found a black door. He had no idea how long he had wandered in the mist. He pushed the door open and cold light showered on his face.

His body tumbled to the ground and the piercing pain in his mind abated. Slowly, Han Fei opened his eyes. His neck, arms, cheeks, basically body parts which were not shielded by the guard uniform were bleeding. The blood was black and thick with death. The Cattle Mask was unable to stop the infiltration of the mist. Han Fei did not look like his usual self at all at that moment. He tried to move and pain came from everywhere. If not for Jin Sheng’s story, Han Fei would be dead before he even entered Ziggurat.

With a spinning head, Han Fei turned subconsciously to his right arm. Big Sin was missing but a blood red pattern was left on his arm, it was similar to the pattern on Big Sin's shell. 'I can't stay at a place for too long.' Dragging his wounded body, Han Fei turned back to look. There was a steel door behind him. He was now currently on the first floor of the Ziggurat!

'If the Ziggurat here reflects the Ziggurat in the game, then the bride's room should be on this floor, Room 3 to be specific.' With his hands on the wall, Han Fei planned to move forward when he heard frantic footsteps coming from the stairwell. 'There're 2... no wait, 3 people coming this way!' Han Fei had no idea who was coming. He was so wounded that he could barely walk, much less fight. Staring at the door of Room 3, Han Fei gritted his teeth and tried to move as fast as he could. His wounds tore open. When he came to the door, the few footsteps also arrived at the first floor corridor.

"Is anyone home?" Han Fei tried the door but it didn't budge. There was no answer to his knocking either.

"Who is there? Don't move!" Rays from flashlights fell on Han Fei. He raised his hand to shield his eyes and leaned against door 3 weakly. The footsteps approached and Han Fei looked through the gap in his fingers. 2 men in guard uniform stuck to each other as they moved nervously towards him. 'Security? Ziggurat's security?' Han Fei's brain made up the solution in seconds. He slumped even weaker down the wall.

"Didn't I warn you not to move? Where did you come from? And why are you wearing our neighbourhood's guard uniform?" The 2 guards stopped 2 metres away from Han Fei. Their voices were loud but it did nothing to hide the shaking in their voices.

Han Fei didn't look like he possessed the energy to speak. He opened his mouth and blood leaked out.

"Brother Hwa, I don't think he's going to make it." The younger guard moved forward with concern but he was held back by the middle-aged guard.

"Don't go near him! It's currently very dangerous in the neighbourhood, there are so many missing people cases lately and we mustn't let our guard down around strangers."

"So we just leave him to die?"

“Have you forgotten about the things that happened on the first floor? What did your senior tell you before he disappeared? Do not go downstairs after midnight!” The middle-aged guard grabbed the other guard by his clothes. He shone his flashlight firmly on Han Fei. “Currently we’re the only 2 guards at Building 1. Before the new guard comes to join us, we better be careful.” Han Fei heard the conversation. With dying breath, he used his finger to dip into the black mouth trickling from his mouth and wrote on the wall.

“He seems to be writing something.” The younger guard walked forward again to take a closer look at the uneven characters. “Do not go out? There is... Outside...?”

Han Fei seemed to lose all his energy after writing those words. He collapsed in a pool of blood. With tears in his eyes, his black and cracked lips moved like they were going to say something. Seeing the state he was in, even Brother Hwa was shaken. He glanced at his wrist watch, and after a few minutes, said, “Bring him upstairs first!”

The young guard carried Han Fei while Brother Hwa stared closely at Han Fei’s face. He asked, “Why are you at Building 1 and wearing our guard uniform?”

“I... am the new guard assigned to this neighbourhood.” Han Fei said raspily, “There are ghosts outside. Can’t see clearly. Whenever a song begins, someone will die...”

“Ghosts? Is this building really haunted? The other disappeared guards were all captured by ghosts?” The young guard who carried Han Fei was fearful and shocked.

Han Fei was confused when he heard that. The guards here appeared to have their memory changed. They had forgotten many things and then inputted with new memories. Memory manipulation? Wasn’t that the specialty of Fu Sheng?

When Han Fei barged into the black fog, his own memory was touched as well. Thankfully Jin Sheng’s story saved him or else he would be like these guards, injected with new memories and turned into the Ziggurat’s puppets.

“It’s taboo to talk about these things after dark!” Brother Hwa scolded sternly. After glaring at the young guard, he turned back to Han Fei. “What’s your name?”

“My name is Bai Sinian. Because I was too afraid, I stayed very far away from the song and that was how I managed to survive.” Han Fei perfectly adopted Bai Sinian’s story. Not only that, he also inherited the young man’s personality, way of speaking, mannerism and personality. “By the way, I have something else to tell you.” Han Fei looked at the empty corridor and his heart jumped unevenly. “I heard 3 sets of footsteps coming down the stairs earlier but you were the only 2 that came into the corridor. I’m afraid there’s something else inside the corridor, watching us...”

Chapter 304

304 Guard Room

3 sets of footsteps echoed in the midnight stairwell but only 2 people appeared from it. When Han Fei said that, both the young guard and Brother Hwa were startled. They were certain there were only 2 of them who went down the stairs. Cold sweat slid down their faces. Brother Hwa steadied himself as his grip on the flashlight tightened, “We better head upstairs first. We can talk about that later.”

Brother Hwa had been urging them to go upstairs but based on Han Fei’s experience, the higher the floor, the more dangerous it would be. Or the situation at Ziggurat was different than at Happiness Neighbourhood?

The ‘dying’ Han Fei leaned on the young guard’s back as he took in his surroundings. The corridor was tiled but the tiles were dirty due to lack of cleaning. He even saw several strands of very long hair. The stair banister was made from iron and it was painted red. It jumped out at you in the dark. The distance between each step was the same but for some reason, the young guard kept getting tripped. But the thing which was strangest to Han Fei was that only the odd number floors had voice-activated lights. When they came to the even number floors, it would be completely dark. Therefore, all the guards here were armed with flashlights wherever they went. They were already used to these strange events.

In the blink of an eye, the young guard already carried Han Fei to the 3rd floor. From the looks of it, they still wanted to continue to go up. Han Fei was apprehensive of that so he ‘woke up’ and said, “Which floor are we going to?”

“We’re going to the guard room, it’s the safest place after dark.” The young guard was honest and answered Han Fei.

“Which floor is the guard room at?” Han Fei didn’t think there was really a safe place at the building. He even suspected the two guards didn’t really want to save him but was trying to find a quiet place to kill him.

“It’s on the 4th floor, we’re almost there. Don’t worry.” Brother Hwa thought it was because of the heavy wounds on Han Fei’s body that he kept asking these questions. The unbearable pain was killing him.

“The 4th floor?” When he heard that, Han Fei who pretended to be nervous became really nervous. At Ziggurat, the room with more 4’s in its number would be more dangerous. And they were heading to the 4th floor?!

Han Fei finally understood why the guards would keep disappearing, their base itself was not safe. After climbing past the 3rd floor, the young guard carried Han Fei and charged towards the 4th floor which had no light. When they opened the safety door of the stairwell, the 3rd set of footsteps reappeared. Han Fei heard it clearly, the sound was coming from the 1st floor and was rapidly hurrying to the 4th floor!

Hearing those frantic footsteps, the back of Han Fei’s back crawled with goosebumps. But the young man and Brother Hwa didn’t seem to hear it. They still moved slowly and cautiously. Han Fei wanted to urge them but in the end, he wisely kept his mouth shut. As they stepped into the corridor on the 4th floor, the chill wind picked up. This floor had no light so the corridor was incredibly dark. The guards used their flashlights to scan around and the pale wall appeared to have mourning faces.

“We’re here, this is the guard room.” The young man stopped beside one of the doors, while Brother Hwa urgently tried to find the key in his pocket. Han Fei slowly lifted his head to glance at the room number of the guard room and his heart almost stopped!

‘Room 1044?!’ This room had the same number as his house at Happiness Neighbourhood. It had two 4’s in the room number, it should be the most dangerous room among the lower floors.

“Many things have happened here. No one knows what really transpired but after they hired some sensei, the strange occurrences finally stopped.” While Brother Hwa searched for the keys, the young man explained in a whisper, “I hear that someone has once died here, that happened before this place was sold. To calm future buyers, the developers decided to turn this room into a guard room, to use the guards’ Yang energy to stabilize this room and protect this building.”

“Yang energy?” In other words, they were using the guards’ lives to satisfy whatever creature that lived here so the other tenants wouldn’t be targeted. Only Butterfly would do something like that. The footsteps were rapidly approaching. When it appeared on the 4th floor stairwell, Brother Hwa finally found the key. The 3 of them entered the room. When they closed the door, Han Fei heard footsteps run past the corridor outside. With his back to the door, Brother Hwa finally sighed in relief. The young guard was pouring sweat.

Brother Hwa’s back was drenched in cold sweat. His uniform was stuck to his skin but he didn’t notice it himself, he still acted tough and calm. “It’s better to stay in after dark. Previously, there was a guard who went downstairs after midnight and then he never returned.” Brother Hwa arranged his collar to hide his shaking hands.

“Big brother, I heard that two deliverymen had died on the first floor? The killer ordered them into the room and then killed them. Until now, no one have seen their bodies...” The young guard placed Han Fei on the couch, he was trembling in fear too.

“You’re new here so you don’t know these things.” Brother Hwa lowered his voice, “When I patrolled the first floor that 1 time, I heard a knocking. But the strange thing was I knew none of the rooms on the 1st floor were occupied. I followed the knocking and went to check. Guess what I saw.”

“What?” The young guard looked at Brother Hwa with plain curiosity.

“A deliveryman wearing a red uniform. He was carrying a giant, bleeding delivery bag as he leaned on the door. He leaned on the door and kept mumbling—The meat you’ve ordered is here, the meat you’ve ordered is here...” Brother Hwa mimicked it so perfectly that the temperature in the room dropped.

“Really? Brother Hwa, you dared to go to the first floor alone? That doesn’t sound like you.”

“Do you think I’ll lie to you?”

The two guards were sharing the strange things that they had seen or heard about the 1st floor, and Han Fei paid his attention to listen. The monster Brother Hwa described was similar to the monster he encountered in Zhuang Ren’s game so that confirmed the Ziggurat Game was reflective of this Ziggurat in the cryptic world!

While he was eavesdropping, Han Fei also studied his surroundings. He didn't expect the first room that he'd enter at Ziggurat would be Room 1044, it was like things were written in the stars. The haunted room that contained two 4's in its room number looked normal on the surface. There were various patrol requirements, working schedules and so on in the room. It looked official. Compared to a normal security room, this building even provided the guards with rubber batons, strong flashlights, stab proof vests and gloves. Han Fei even spotted 4 walkie-talkies on the table in the inner room. There were many different accoutrements but there were few that were of real use. 'There is not really anything special in here.'

Based on the Ziggurat game, after entering the Ziggurat, one had to acquire a Death Curse as soon as possible or else the Ziggurat would randomly assign one to you. 'Each room here should correspond to a Death Curse, but this room...' Han Fei was confused when he realized Brother Hwa and the young guard had stopped talking. With pale faces, they looked over Han Fei's shoulder.

"That thing is back again?"

"Who brought it back? Haven't we already dumped it?"

The two guards said in trembling voices. Piqued, Han Fei turned back to look. Inside the toilet of Room 1044, there was a long red dress. The skirt dragged on the ground. It looked like someone was standing inside the toilet.

Chapter 305

305 Is Anyone Home?

Han Fei was quite spooked to turn back and be greeted by something like this. After all, he was the closest to the toilet.

"Haven't we dumped it inside the trashcan already?"

"It's useless, the red dress will always return..." Brother Hwa's face was frighteningly pale like something bad was crowding his mind.

“Then how did the other guards deal with it? Burn it? Cut it into pieces? Bury it?”

“It’s all useless. That last time it appeared, the people inside the security room at Building 1 continued to die in strange accidents until the last guard remained. Only then it stopped appearing.” Brother Hwa shrunk his neck and said carefully. “It felt like a blood ritual, only death and blood could chase it away.” Brother Hwa’s words turned the young guard and Han Fei’s expression blue. No one knew where the red dress came from but its appearance meant death. This thing was even scarier than the actual curse. Compared to the young guard, Han Fei was more familiar with the situation of the guards at Ziggurat. Based on the information he got from Yi Ming Security Company, all the guards at Ziggurat were specially picked ‘pots’. The meaning of their existence was to nurture the human cocoons with humanity so that they could bloom with the most brilliant ‘flower’. The Butterfly didn’t care about these guards’ lives. It changed their memory and dropped the guards inside Ziggurat, everything it had done, it was for the human cocoons. As long as it could raise even 1 percent to cultivate the flower, it didn’t mind killing millions of innocent guards.

“Then what should we do now? We can’t just let it stay here, can we?” The young guard hesitated. “How about we try to destroy it more permanently this time? We’ll burn it and then bury its ashes.”

“It’s useless, it will still return.” Brother Hwa took a quick glance at the young guard’s neck and then he shook his head violently to keep his mind clear. The sudden appearance of the red dress had flustered Brother Hwa.

“I have a suggestion...” Han Fei raised his arm with difficulty and offered. “Didn’t you say the 1st floor is very dangerous? Many strange things have happened there?”

“Yes, do not go to the first floor after dark, that is the unwritten rule among us guards.” Brother Hwa had no idea what Han Fei was trying to say.

“Then do you know which room is the most dangerous?” As if afraid of the red dress himself, Han Fei slowly nudged his body over and whispered, “How about we leave the red dress inside the most dangerous room?” Both the young guard and Brother Hwa were stunned. “You are a genius!” Brother Hwa’s eyes lit up, but he was soon conflicted again. “But we do not have the keys to any of the rooms.”

“Then we can just slide it through the gap in the door. If that doesn’t work, we can cut up the dress and shove them into every single room in this building.” Han Fei’s suggestion was alluring. To be fair, he came up with this idea because he knew there was no tenant at the Ziggurat who was innocent.

“That’s not a good idea... What if the tenants find out...”

“Then we’ll just leave the pieces inside unoccupied rooms which are suspected to be haunted. This way, we won’t hurt the tenants. After all, we’re not bad people, we’re just looking out for ourselves.” Han Fei still couldn’t leave the game. He had to be very careful.

“You... have a point.” Brother Hwa nodded. “That is a method we have not attempted before.”

“But if the red dress is so dangerous like Brother Hwa said, and we send it into the other haunted rooms, would it cause chain effects? Like having the ghosts in those rooms to come haunt us instead?” The young guard was worried.

“It’s all up to our luck now, isn’t it?” Han Fei had no confidence either. He scanned the patrol schedule. Building 1 had 24 floors and there were 3 rooms that had two 4’s in its room number—1044, 1144, 1244. These 3 rooms should be the most dangerous rooms in Building 1. Han Fei felt he was quite ‘lucky’, at the start of his mission, he was already inside 1 of them.

“We better make our move now. The longer the red dress stays here, the more unsettled I feel.” Brother Hwa walked towards the toilet. His sweat basically made his uniform his second skin. He was clearly very afraid but he needed to maintain the appearance of a senior before Han Fei. Brother Hwa mumbled something on his lips, it sounded like he was asking for protection from all the Gods he knew. After a series of chanting, he removed the red dress from the hook in the toilet. Even just holding it, Brother Hwa’s arms couldn’t stop shaking. He wanted to maintain the confidence of a senior but he realized he couldn’t even walk normally. His legs were going numb. He felt like the red dress was looking at him.

“Is it dyed in blood?” Han Fei asked with interest.

“It’s just a normal red dress, or at least it looks that way.” Brother Hwa walked shakingly out from the toilet. “The most dangerous room on the 1st floor is 1004. It’s an empty room. The delivery monster that I saw earlier was leaning against that door. I suspect that it was the previous owner of Room 1004 who murdered the deliveryman.” Holding the red dress, Brother Hwa walked to the door. “Xiao Fang, help me open this door and grab a pair of scissors. We’ll go together and get this done with as soon as possible.”

“Okay.”

Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang took 15 minutes to get ready both mentally and physically, but just as they were going to leave, footsteps came from the corridor. Then knocking came from the room next door and a spine-tingling male voice came from outside. “Is anyone home? Your delivery is here...”

Hearing that, Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang appeared frozen. They stood at the door and didn’t even dare to breathe too loudly. “Is anyone home? Is anyone? Is anyone home!” The knocking was insistent until a latch sprung. It appeared like the door had finally opened. The voice disappeared instantly. Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang shared a look and they saw the cold sweat on each other’s face.

“Should we... wait for a moment before we leave?”

“We should dress Bai Sinian’s wounds first before we do anything else. If we leave him in this state any longer, his condition will worsen.”

“Brother Hwa, you’ve thought about this further than I do. No wonder you’re the senior.”

The 2 guards retreated to the toilet and hung the red dress back. They took out the med kit from the cupboard and started to bandage Han Fei’s wound. Seeing how cowardly these two guards were, Han Fei couldn’t help but smile helplessly. He wanted to tell them the truth. The reason the other ghosts didn’t come to Room 1044 was not because it was safe but this room was where the real danger lay! This was one of the 3 most dangerous rooms at Building 1, not even ghosts dared to come near it!

Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang took their sweet time to deal with Han Fei’s wounds. After a half an hour and there was no more sound from the corridor, they put away the med kit and prepared to leave. “Xiao Fang, we need to be fast. The moment we slide the dress into the door, we have to run back. We mustn’t stay on the first floor one moment longer.” Even though Brother Hwa’s own legs were shaking, he didn’t forget about his junior.

“Okay.”

The two guards cheered each other on and then they picked up the red dress and left Room 1044. Once the door closed, Han Fei’s previously weakened gaze sharpened immediately. He stood up and

inspected his wounds. The wounds left behind by the black mist were mostly on his cheeks, neck and arms. The death intention within them punctured Han Fei, and prevented the wounds from fully healing. Before the death was siphoned out, Han Fei was practically disfigured. This was fatal for an actor but Han Fei just brushed it off. In fact, he was thankful because this way no one would have recognized him and he could play the role of Bai Sinian even more easily. "The wounds look ghastly but they are not deep. They do not affect me that much." After resting for so long, Han Fei's stamina had basically recovered. He walked around Room 1044, trying to look for clues and information. But he only took a few steps when he whipped his head around because he felt someone was watching him. His eyes scanned the room before they settled on the toilet. "Haven't Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang already taken away the dress?"

The lights inside the guard room flickered and then went out. Han Fei stood in the darkness alone. He quickly leaned against the wall and stayed motionless. At this crucial moment, the guard room door was knocked on and the eerie voice followed. "Is anyone home? Your delivery is here..."

Chapter 306

306 The Red Dress

"The delivery is here? Right at the moment the guards have taken the red dress away?" Han Fei stared at the door in the dark. Through the door, he could imagine what was happening on the other side. A deliveryman covered in blood, carrying a giant box with a dead body leaning against the anti-theft door. 'The lights suddenly went out, that proves that there is something else other than the red dress inside the room with me. Should I open the door to let the deliveryman in?'

Han Fei also encountered the deliveryman inside Zhuang Ren's game but different from that game, in the cryptic world, Han Fei was not totally defenseless. He was already level 12. 'Hmm, I better not. After all, I'm Bai Sinian, an extremely cowardly new security guard who is afraid of ghost stories.' The deliveryman came to knock on the door after the red dress had been taken away, that proved a lot of things. The scariest thing inside Room 1044 should be the red dress, that was why he only dared to come knocking when it was not around.

"Is anyone home? Is anyone home? Is anyone home!" The horrifying demands continued. The doorknob of the room wiggled and then sounds of nail scratching against the door followed. Han Fei slowly retreated and hid behind the cupboard. He put on the anti-stabbing vest and shoved the flashlight into his pocket. He was as prepared as he could be. The doorknob shook harder and harder but about 10 seconds later, all the noises outside the room suddenly stopped.

'It left?' Han Fei's heart slowly relaxed. Just as Han Fei was about to come out from behind the cupboard, he saw the living room door slowly open. "If no one's home... then I'll just come in and drop off the delivery!" The smell of decomposition permeated the room as a bloody arm reached into the room, sticking close to the wall. It was holding an open empty cake box. It wanted to enter the room when the sound of water came from the toilet like the shower had been turned on. Hearing the sound, the bloody arm slowly distorted. It was so dim that even with Han Fei's eyesight, he couldn't see that clearly. The anti-theft door continued to swing open. There was no one outside but a giant bleeding box. 'That box is the deliveryman?'

Han Fei believed he saw something crawl out from the box. It slithered on the ground rapidly like a snake and into the bedroom. After the delivery was made, the bloody arm dropped the cake box to the ground and slowly closed the door. It was like nothing had happened.

'If the owner is not home, the deliveryman will still drop off the delivery? But what was it? It appears to have gone hiding inside the bedroom.' The gushing of water was still ongoing and now something new had occupied the bedroom. If the red dress returned later, Han Fei worried that he might not even survive 1 night here. His brain spun quickly to come up with a solution, to see if he had missed anything. At that moment, the moisture in the air suddenly increased. A light stench entered his nostrils, his fingers touched the cupboard and it was wet.

He lifted his head and saw that something was protruding out from the white ceiling, it looked like a crying face. The room was still the same, the furniture hadn't been moved but the place felt different. Everything inside the room had small but sinister changes to them. The fur on the couch appeared to grow longer; an eye slowly opened on the water inside the teacup; the food inside the boxed lunch was decomposing; the broken television screen came alive with flickering caricatures. There were many similar changes. The room in the dark and in the light was 2 completely different places. The ground was rustling noisily like fingers were scratching underneath it. Han Fei heard it correctly, it was not the downstairs neighbour, it was something sealed inside the floor. Shielding his hands before him, Han Fei could feel something awakening in the dark, all these strange changes were the harbinger of its arrival.

The window was suddenly blown open and the curtain fluttered in the dark. At the edge of night, a human figure slowly appeared. Her hands were placed in such a manner that it looked like she was trying to strangle Han Fei's neck. Her eyes were bulging and her mouth was screaming soundlessly. Her vocal cords appeared to be severed, her throat was covered with specks of blood. The curtain quieted down and the human figure disappeared. But everything reflective inside the room, like the window glass, the television screen, the mirror, the glass mug, they all had the reflection of a human-like face. Han Fei switched on the flashlight but it had malfunctioned. With no other choice, Han Fei gripped the rubber baton and headed towards the window. The window was cracked but the woman's face had disappeared. He approached cautiously. As he tried to close the window, a force pushed him from behind!

Holding onto the ledge tightly, Han Fei turned around, swinging the rubber baton as he went. He didn't hit anything but he was sure something pushed him earlier, trying to throw him out the window!

Han Fei edged away from the window and returned to his hiding spot behind the cupboard. Just as he wondered if he should run into the bedroom and deal with the other ghost, running footsteps came from the outside corridor. The lock jiggled and the anti-theft door opened again. Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang rushed into the room still catching their breaths. When the two opened the door, the lights came on and all the strangeness disappeared. Standing in the living room, Han Fei's bandaged wounds started to bleed again. His face was frighteningly pale like he had just woken up from a nightmare.

'Everything's back to normal?' This strange development naturally caught Han Fei's attention but he didn't say anything.

"What happened to you? You look so pale." Even though Xiao Fang was still gasping for air, when he saw the state Han Fei was in, he asked with concern.

"After you left, the deliveryman came to knock on the door. He shouldn't have the key but he managed to open the door. The empty cake box on the ground was the thing he delivered." Han Fei leaned against the couch, he looked like he had lost his soul from the fright.

"And then? What else did he do?" Brother Hwa reacted more intensely than Xiao Fang, his pupils were shaking.

"I couldn't see clearly but when the deliveryman opened the door, another black shadow crawled into the bedroom."

"Are you sure?" Brother Hwa switched on the flashlight and dragged Xiao Fang into the bedroom. They checked for a long time but found nothing. "Are you sure you didn't imagine things? Don't try to scare us! We still have to sleep here tonight!"

"It's all real." Han Fei didn't fixate on this problem. "How did it go with you guys? Was it successful?"

“When we arrived, the door to Room 1004 was open so I tossed the red dress inside and closed the door.” Xiao Fang placed his hand over his heart. “I really couldn’t bring myself to cut that dress.”

“Hopefully that will stop the red dress from ever returning.” Brother Hwa glanced at his watch. “It’s now 1 am, we better take some rest, we have another patrol at 3 am.”

“You’re leaving again at 3 am?” Han Fei couldn’t believe it, these people were just courting death.

“There are tenants at this building who rely on us. If we, the guards, are afraid too, then who are going to protect them?”

“They can move away if they’re that worried.” Han Fei offered. He had to persuade Brother Hwa because if he didn’t go on the patrol with them, he would be left alone inside Room 1044; if he followed them on the patrol, he probably wouldn’t return alive.

“That’s not what a responsible guard would say but I’ll let it slide because you’re new.” Brother Hwa was tired. “I’ll stay up to be on the lookout. You and Xiao Fang should go into the bedroom to take a quick sleep or else you might not be able to be awake for the patrol.”

“Big brother, how do you expect me to sleep inside there? The red dress might be coming back tonight, I think we should stay together.” Han Fei shuffled to the bedroom door and closed it. “It’s better for us to stay in the living room.”

“Okay.” Brother Hwa took out the mattresses from the bedroom and laid them on the living room floor. He waved for Xiao Fang to join him. “You should lay down and sleep because you’re injured. We’ll wake you if there’s anything.” Brother Hwa looked reliable but Han Fei hadn’t fully trusted him.

Han Fei laid down on the couch but he didn’t dare to sleep. Until now he hadn’t even completed a mission yet, if he died, he would die in real life. His brain was stuffed with questions. Han Fei didn’t focus on what to do next but instead parsed through all the known info about Ziggurat. The surroundings slowly quieted down. Fatigue lapped at Han Fei like waves. His head was spinning and the wounds drained his stamina. He could feel his eyes drooping. He bit on the edge of his tongue to use pain to maintain his consciousness. Half an hour passed like that. Suddenly the temperature in the room dropped, he subconsciously reached for a cover but when he turned around, he saw something bleeding hanging inside the toilet.

'The red dress?!'

Chapter 307

307 Midnight Patrol

The bathroom door was left half-ajar. The bleeding man was standing at the spot where the red dress occupied earlier. His body appeared to be boneless as he hung there limply. Blood trickled down his shirt and dripped to the ground, dyeing the white tiles red. Han Fei felt a pair of hands closing around his throat, suffocating himself. His limbs were getting cold. His eyes froze at the sight before him. It was not a red dress in the darkness but a man drenched in blood. The wounds were hidden under the guard uniform while the blood soaked his shirt. The man kept his head lowered. From his face shape, he looked very similar to Xiao Fang. The windows in the bathroom were probably left open because Han Fei could feel the draft coming from it.

The guard who was hanging inside the toilet suddenly lifted his arms, he sought out a pair of sharp scissors from his pocket!

The scissors were stuck with blood and red pieces of clothing, Xiao Fang did say he wanted to use the scissors to shred the red dress. Holding the scissors, the man started to shear through his skin. The blood oozed out immediately but the guard didn't seem to feel the pain. He moved faster and faster, like he was unable to control himself.

Han Fei's heart raced, he wanted to warn the man but Han Fei was frozen to the spot on the couch. He was unable to speak or move. He struggled as best as he could and at the last moment, the red pattern on Han Fei's arm started to move. It felt like needles were piercing his skin and that woke Han Fei up immediately. He screamed and Brother Hwa who had fallen asleep jumped up from the ground. He scanned the flashlight around.

"The toilet! Save Xiao Fang!" Right after Han Fei said that, they heard Xiao Fang's wails coming from inside the toilet. He collapsed on the ground with new wounds on his body.

"Xiao Fang, why did you come into the toilet in the middle of the night to do something like this?" Seeing the state Xiao Fang was in, Brother Hwa was frightened.

"I don't know. I fell asleep and got caught in a dream, I saw the red dress return. I wanted to destroy it, cut it with scissors and bury it into the ground..." Xiao Fang's eyes were red and his face grimaced from the pain. "When I woke up, I'm already here. Brother Hwa, what is going on? Am I being haunted by the red dress?" Xiao Fang's voice was brimming with fear. Before Han Fei suggested that they drop the red dress at another room, Xiao Fang did suggest they should cut the dress with scissors. Now the dress was not cut, but Xiao Fang himself was cut!

Taking in the state of his junior, Brother Hwa was both afraid and pained. He leaned closer to help with his junior's wound when his footsteps halted as something came into his view, "Xiao, Xiao Fang, behind you!" Xiao Fang, who was already scared witless, turned around when he heard that. He shouldn't have because he almost peed himself due to what he saw. The red dress was stuck to his back, like a drowning person, pulling down a victim into the depths with them.

Xiao Fang screamed and quickly pulled the dress off himself. He was about to drop the dress on the ground when the incident that happened to him earlier entered his mind. With extreme caution, he eventually placed the red dress gingerly inside the bathtub.

"What should we do now? It has not only returned, the color on it has grown brighter like it has sucked on more blood." Xiao Fang collapsed on the toilet floor. His eyes filled with panic.

Brother Hwa said numbly, "Everything will repeat itself. The red dress will only stop when there's only one of us left." He then moved to grab the medkit and helped dress Xiao Fang's wounds. The red dress was quite kind in a way because the wounds were only surface wounds. They looked appalling but they weren't fatal.

"Brother Hwa, what exactly did happen last time?" Han Fei was curious about Brother Hwa's previous experience. The man looked fearful whenever the subject came up. After a long hesitation, Brother Hwa opened his mouth, "The red dress last appeared a few months ago. At the time, Building 1 had 4 security guards, 2 seniors and 2 juniors. I can still remember the details clearly. The earlier half of the night was normal but the red dress suddenly appeared after midnight..." He sighed, "At first, we dumped the red dress inside the trashcan. But during our late midnight patrol, one of the juniors suddenly tripped over the window and fell to his death. The location of his death was right at the trashcan where the tenants here used to recycle and separate their junk. At first, the 3 of us didn't make the connection.

"The red dress kept reappearing after that. It was always there. Accidents happened to the 2 other guards and when I was the only one left, the red dress suddenly disappeared." There were so many missing details in Brother Hwa's story that Han Fei had trouble believing the red dress had disappeared on its own. He suspected Brother Hwa had omitted crucial parts of his story. Plus the man didn't explain

how the two other guards died. Han Fei had reasons to believe it was Brother Hwa who had murdered them. Most people were good in their hearts but when one's life was on the line, one would choose the safety of oneself over others.

Humanity was constantly tested at the Ziggurat to cultivate the most beautiful flower, that was the purpose of the flower 'pots'. The atmosphere inside the room tensed. Xiao Fang wanted to cry, he had the feeling he would be the first to die. "I've interacted with the red dress the most, it will not let me be..." While Xiao Fang was caught in his despair, he saw the weak Han Fei reach towards the red dress inside the bathtub. "You're the only one who hasn't touched it. I'd advise you to stay away from it."

"I want to test something." This was the first time Han Fei held the red dress. He placed it in his palm, feeling the sensation of the cloth. The tailoring of the dress was normal and it didn't use great material but it was smooth to the touch. Han Fei felt like he was touching baby skin. The dress didn't have much pattern but they were delicate. The original owner appeared to like the dress a lot because even though it looked drenched in blood, a fragrance still lingered on it.

"What... what kind of testing do you have in mind?" Brother Hwa asked. The way he looked at Han Fei was how one would look at a crazy person.

"One moment." Han Fei carried the red dress into the bedroom. He lifted up the bedsheet and placed the dress under the bed. "Let's close the light and leave this room." Han Fei knew that the room would be different when the light was off but he wanted to know if the red dress could deal with the thing left behind by the deliveryman. If the red dress accepted this offer, then Han Fei could try to negotiate with it.

Before the other 2 guards knew what Han Fei was doing, Han Fei switched off the lights and they were ushered out from the room. Just as the door closed behind them, a terrible wail came from inside Room 1044. The scream lasted for a minute. It caused all 3 guards to shiver uncontrollably. When the yelling stopped, Han Fei hid behind Brother Han as the 3 of them re-entered the room.

The lights were switched back on and everything looked normal inside the bedroom. But when Han Fei lifted up the bedsheet, everyone shivered in cold sweat. The red dress was still lying where it was but there was a large pool of blood underneath the bed, like a blood-filled balloon was squeezed and popped.

“Do you remember what I said earlier? The deliveryman has left something inside the room, that something probably has been dealt with.” Han Fei lifted up the red dress. “This dress not only kills people, it also kills ghosts. Perhaps we shouldn’t antagonize it but try to coexist with it.”

“Coexist with a dress?”

“I’ll explain it in a different way.” Han Fei held the red dress solemnly, “Maybe Room 1044 is originally her room, we’re just her tenants. Since we’re her tenants, is it not normal for her to claim rent from us?”

“It is.” Xiao Fang and Brother Hwa nodded.

“Money is meaningless to them so our life is the rent. If we don’t want to die, perhaps we should find another way to pay her rent? Like sacrificing something else inside the building?” Han Fei formulated an idea. “She appears to like the ‘food’ dropped by the deliveryman. Before we were even out the door, she already started her feast. In that case, why not deliver to her the deliveryman himself?”

“The deliveryman?” Brother Hwa didn’t even know what to say.

“As the guards, we have the responsibility to keep this neighbourhood safe. The red dress is our tenant and the deliveryman has trespassed into this neighbourhood, entering the tenants’ room without permission. Shouldn’t that be punished?” Han Fei’s argument was very reasonable. He slowly persuaded Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang to his side. Without realizing it, Han Fei had become the core of this group. “It is now time for late midnight patrol, let’s go together.”

With Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang watching with shock, Han Fei folded the red dress nicely. Only then they realized, when Han Fei said ‘together’, he included the red dress as well.

Chapter 308:

308 Sleep-Walking Child

“Are you sure you want to bring her with us? If any of the tenants see that, they might have the wrong idea.” Brother Hwa was already very cautious with his words. His real thought was, ‘aren’t you afraid of bringing chaos to the whole building by carrying this thing with you?’

"It'll be fine, I'll do my best to not let anyone see it." Han Fei had finished folding the red dress. "I'll just hide it from people's view."

"You sure know how to be considerate towards the tenants." Brother Hwa said with a helpless smile, "Is that something your senior taught you?"

"Actually, he's currently missing, I'm also looking for him."

"Sorry to hear that." Brother Hwa subconsciously stepped away from Han Fei and the red dress. "Just keep it well hidden then. Do not leave it inside rooms that are occupied by people."

"Don't worry, I've worked in another neighbourhood before and all the tenants became my friends. I came with a shining recommendation." Han Fei was telling the truth.

"You're a nice person, it's just that your mind works in an inexplicable manner." Brother Hwa patted Han Fei's shoulders. "Regardless, the 3 of us have to work hard. Recently, strange things keep happening here and the tenants are very afraid, so we have to try our best to give them security. Remember now, the purpose of our nightly patrol is not to discover the truth but to announce to the tenants that we're still around to protect them."

"Okay." Han Fei nodded consecutively. He admired Brother Hwa's work ethics but he also wondered what kind of memory Butterfly had injected them with and where was their butterfly pattern hidden.

"Okay then, get packing and we'll prepare to leave. Hopefully, we'll pass the night safely." Brother Hwa checked the patrol schedule and then opened one of the lockers. He moved away some of the stuff to reveal a clay figurine of Guan Yu at the back. He bowed 3 times at it before replacing all the stuff and left the room. "It is now well past midnight and the date is 4th of April, I have a feeling something bad will happen. You two better stay close to me, if we run into danger, do not run away, we need to stick together." Brother Hwa said in a serious tone.

"Brother Hwa, you have the watch, can you tell me what time it is now?" Han Fei noticed something, it was not 4th of April in real life, the guards' memory might be stuck on this day. If Han Fei didn't show up, this was probably their last day.

“It’s 3.27 am, why are you asking?”

“I have noticed that the number 4 is extremely taboo in this building. It is the 4th of April so I have a feeling something extremely scary will happen at 4.44 am.” Han Fei’s single statement sent chills into the two other guards’ hearts.

“Then we’ll try to return before 4 am.” Brother Hwa waved. He led the way while the injured Xiao Fang and Han Fei followed behind him. It was clear that man was afraid as well. He kept turning back every few steps as if to confirm that Han Fei and Xiao Fang were still behind him. Perhaps to relieve this tension, Brother Hwa coughed once and started to share his ‘experience’ with Han Fei and Xiao Fang. “You two are new so I have the responsibility to inform you about our rules. We night security have to patrol 4 times each night, at 8 pm, 12 am, 3 am and 8 am. We’ll start the patrol from the left stairwell, moving up to the 24th floor and then coming down from the right stairwell to the 1st floor. If you wish to give the red dress to the delivery monster, let’s hope that we’ll be lucky enough to run into him during our patrol.” Brother Hwa had no idea whether running into ghosts should be considered lucky or not. Han Fei noticed Brother Hwa had a natural aversion to the deliveryman like he had some extra history with the man that he had not told them. “No matter what, the patrol has to be carried out like normal. We need to check the fire equipment, surveillance cameras and blind spots on each floor...”

All the guards were worried about the arrival of 4 am. They didn’t say anything verbally but they moved incredibly fast. Han Fei also understood why Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang insisted on doing the patrol no matter what, it was not only their sense of responsibility. It was because if they didn’t show up on the surveillance camera at given times, they would be fined the next day. Being the security at a haunted neighbourhood came with a lucrative pay but if they didn’t follow the rules, the fine was severe as well. Xiao Fang didn’t go into details about what the punishment was, he just urged Han Fei to abide by the rules at all times.

The trio entered the stairwell and came to the 5th floor.

The voice-activated lights came on and the oppressive feeling disappeared. Only the odd number floors had lights at the Ziggurat and the light seemed to be able to chase away the chill. “Should we stay on the floor longer?” The 3 didn’t communicate much but they all slowed down. Such was the understanding between the group of guards. After dragging things out for as long as they could, Brother Hwa readied his flashlight as they prepared to head to the 6th floor.

Patrolling a haunted building at 3.30 am was itself something scary but if their imagination got the best of them, it would only make things worse. The even number floors didn't have voice-activated light so the 6th floor was incredibly dark. It felt deserted. After they arrived at the 6th floor, Han Fei and Xiao Fang hurried towards the 7th floor but Brother Hwa stopped. "Guys, wait a minute. A divorced mother stays on this floor, her son has the habit of sleepwalking. He likes to get the key to open the front door at late midnight and then hide in the corners of the corridor."

"That's... interesting." Han Fei didn't know what to say.

"Well. No matter where the mother hid the key, her son would be able to find it. The mother was confounded. She even locked it inside the safe and her son would still leave the house with the key in the middle of the night." Brother Hwa lowered his voice. With the flashlight in hand, he moved slowly forward. "In the end, the mother turned to us for help. She asked us to keep an eye out for her son when we are out on our patrol." Brother Hwa might be cowardly but he was quite a responsible person. He pushed open the safety door to the 6th floor and looked down the corridor. There was nothing there.

"Looks like the kid didn't go sleep-walking tonight." Just as Brother Hwa was about to sigh in relief, they heard the sound of marble rolling on the ground. The 3 of them squeezed together and turned to the sound. They saw a pale kid squatting behind the safety door. He was about 5 years old. His eyes were widened and he looked dazed. He kept repeating something on his lips. After he rolled the marble out from behind the door, the marble would roll back to him like someone was playing with him.

Xiao Fang was frightened by the child. He was about to wake the child when Brother Hwa stopped him. "You can't wake a sleep-walking child, the elders say that it'll make them lose their soul."

This was not the first time Brother Hwa did something like this. He knelt down behind the boy and slowly picked him up. "I'll send this boy back to his mother." When Brother Hwa hugged the boy past Han Fei, the latter could finally hear what the boy was mumbling—If you turn back, you'll die, if you turn back, you'll die, if you turn back, you'll die!

His neck rose in goosebumps and Han Fei subconsciously turned back, he saw a hand reach out from behind the safety door where the boy was earlier to pick up the marble and then disappeared. 'Someone was playing with him?' Han Fei took a deep breath. He just looked back and he was fine. After knowing that was not his death curse, Han Fei kept looking back. 'I wonder if my death curse has been triggered and if it has, what is it?'

The door to Room 1064 was left open. Brother Hwa didn't enter the room but knocked on the door. Soon a woman with black long hair appeared at the door. She thanked Brother Hwa profusely and brought the child back into the room. As the door closed, Brother Hwa seemed to be in a better mood. "By doing good things, you'll feel better."

Xiao Fang and he prepared to move to the 7th floor. As they walked into the right stairwell, Han Fei turned back to look. He was shocked to notice there was another boy standing behind the safety door! The boy was identical to the boy earlier but his skin was even paler. He held the marble and stared fixedly at Brother Hwa.

'Was that really the woman's child who was carried into the room? If it was not, then what was the thing that Brother Hwa had been carrying into Room 1064 every night? Who is the woman's real child?' His scalp was numb. When Han Fei turned back again, the boy was gone.

'Every floor here is dangerous, it'll be hard to survive the night.'

Chapter 309

309 The Suffocated Angel

When they arrived at the 7th floor and light shone on them, the 3 guards all sighed in relief. When one patrolled inside the Ziggurat, one had to pay extra attention to the even numbered floors, there were too many things hiding in the dark.

"Brother Hwa, when you dropped that child home, did the mother say anything?" Han Fei had a feeling it was not the mother's child that Brother Hwa had sent 'home'.

"She thanked me profusely."

"That's all?"

"What else do you expect? And that is our job anyway." Brother Hwa was very humble. He wanted to be a good guard and tried his best to protect the tenants. Standing underneath the camera on the 7th floor, Brother Hwa waved at it and then led Xiao Fang and Han Fei to check all the fire security devices. After ensuring everything was fine, they headed up to the 8th floor. They were about to abandon the light and

head into darkness but it was inevitable. Taking the step one by one, at the landing between 7th and 8th floor, the voice-activated lights on the 7th floor suddenly snuffed out. Han Fei took up the rear of the team and darkness immediately claimed him. He felt a strange chill run back his spine. Han Fei turned to look back and there was a woman covered in blood standing basically right behind him! Her red dress draped down the staircase, like she was dragging a red hell with her!

The icy fingers reached for the crook of Han Fei's arm, where he placed the red dress. If Han Fei was one second slower, he might be dragged down the stairs by the woman. He screamed and all the lights on the 7th floor came on at once, chasing the woman away.

"Brother! Why did you do that? You almost made me pee in my pants." Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang jumped when they heard Han Fei scream and they immediately turned around. Han Fei stood frozen at the corner. He was so close to death and his heart couldn't stop racing. But even during that scary moment, he didn't forget to observe all the clues, that was already part of his instinct. 'The red dress woman is a Large Lingering Spirit! Her gown was long enough to cover 2 entire floors!' Without the aid of his neighbours, Han Fei definitely couldn't take on such a powerful adversary. 'I've just entered Ziggurat and this is only Building 1...'

He tried to calm down and bring up the red dress woman's face again. He realized that the woman looked different from the woman who tried to push him down the window in Room 1044. There were many ghosts in Room 1044 and the red dress woman was the scariest one among them and she was the only one who could leave the room freely.

"Hey, are you alright?" Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang were worried about Han Fei. Seeing Han Fei standing there all frozen, they hurried to his side to guard beside him.

"That red dress just reappeared. When the lights went out just now, she was there behind me." Han Fei's face was pale.

"How about... we put the dress back in Room 1044?"

"It's too troublesome to go back now, plus we've already gotten so far." Han Fei's arm that held the red dress was numb. His skin was cold like it was frostbitten. With Han Fei's insistence, the trio reached the 8th floor. Just as they reached this floor, Han Fei heard singing. He was so sensitive to a tune that the moment he heard the song, he blocked the red dress before him like a shield.

“Don’t worry, there’s a livestreamer living on this floor. She’s often online at night. I’ll go talk to her about it.” Brother Hwa knew the tenants well. He pushed open the safety door and walked down the dark corridor. Han Fei wanted to call him back, he didn’t want to risk too much trouble. “All the problems seem to come from the even-numbered floor, we should probably leave as soon as possible.” Han Fei followed closely behind Brother Hwa. The closer they came to Room 1084, the louder the singing was.

“Tsk. It’s already 3 am and she’s still making so much noise. When will she learn her lesson?” Brother Hwa pressed on the bell for Room 1084. No one answered. Probably because the music was so loud that the owner herself didn’t hear the doorbell. Brother Hwa then proceeded to knock on the door. Several seconds later, the door finally opened to reveal a cute girl. “I’m sorry. How can I help you?” She was the one at fault but she sounded so wronged and afraid like the guards were bullying her.

“It’s already 3.40 am. Even if you don’t need to sleep, others need to. There are students preparing for exam in this building, you can’t keep doing this!” Brother Hwa warned sternly, “It’s not that we are forbidding you from livestreaming but you have to be conscious about the volume.” To push the point home, Xiao Fang purposely darkened his face and said in a sinister voice. “The situation is very uneasy at the building now. Something unsightly has entered the place. If you keep raising the volume, you might attract those things.”

“You mean ghosts?!” When she heard Xiao Fang, the girl appeared even more excited.

Brother Hwa turned to glare at Xiao Fang, “The reason she moved here is to capture the supernatural on her livestream.”

“What? Is she serious? She’s risking her life just for money and popularity?” Xiao Fang took a second gander at the girl. She was cute and small, the kind people wanted to protect. She looked soft and weak but she had a brave heart that belied her appearance.

“He’s not totally right. I didn’t do this to run into ghosts, I’m just curious about them. By the way, I heard that a livestreamer once died here as well. No one dared to move into her former room and so it was remodelled into the guard room.” The girl leaned against the door and revealed this little nugget of information.

“The original owner of Room 1044 was a livestreamer too?” Han Fei’s interest was piqued.

“Aren’t you a guard here? Shouldn’t you already know about that?” The girl was shocked. “She was a very nice girl but she was afflicted by a deadly disease. During the last period of her life, she tried her best to accept treatment and live out her best life. To send positive vibes to others in the same situation and to bring hope to others in the dark, she started to record her limited life through livestreaming, to share her goodness with the world.”

“Well, she sounds wonderful.” Han Fei held the red dress and with the real person present, started to discuss the past livestreamer with the girl.

“At the start, only her doctors, friends and other patients logged into her livestream but perhaps due to her beauty, kindness and personality, she gained more and more followers. However, from who knew when, some negative voices appeared in her comments section. Some suspected her of faking her illness because how could someone who was dying be so positive and beautiful? Those people forced her to show her diagnosis paper, to prove that her claim was valid.

“At first, she tried to reason with them but eventually things started to develop in an unexpected direction. Someone started a rumor that she was a kept woman and the money she used for treatments was provided by some big businessman. The woman’s father reported the harassment to the police and the person who first spread the rumor was caught and detained for a day. He released a public apology but it was already too late.

“Whenever she came live, people would come to harass her.

“If she went to the hospital that day, they would say she was wasting her parents’ money on a dying person; if she splurged occasionally on, like a glass of milk tea, they would say she was not taking care of her health and ignoring her doctor’s advice; when she finally lost her temper, they captured it and posted them elsewhere, ‘exposing’ her; When she cried from the pressure, people said she was making money out of people’s pity.

“Those people never really wanted any proof, they just like the fun of bullying people. They tried their best to ruin her life, because perhaps there is a devil in all of us. And the internet provided the best anonymity to unleash them.

“There were always 2 batches of people arguing in her chat but she was always the one who got hurt in the end. They demanded for her death; even when she showed the hospital papers, they claimed she had falsified them. It was a dark moment in her life, the whole world was covered in thorns and she’d be hurt no matter where she went.

“But different from her virtual life, people cared about her in real life. Her doctors, her family, her friend, they were her source of comfort, but one day, she found a note slipped through her door. It contained some disgusting comments, they insulted and threatened her. That was just the start, the harassment continued.

“The pain from the internet leaked into real life. She was trapped inside a cage made from hatred and she found difficulty even breathing. The police were brought in again but she failed to wait until the investigation result came out.” The girl said with regret. “She ultimately didn’t die from her illness but she gave up on her own life.”

“Have the police eventually caught the culprit behind the harassment?” Han Fei was more concerned about that.

“They did, it was a deliveryman who often delivered to this building. He was her fervent watcher and followed her in both her real and virtual lives.”

“A deliveryman?” Han Fei was immediately reminded of the delivery monster on the 1st floor. That could provide a way for Han Fei to lighten the woman’s hostility towards him.

“I don’t know much of the details. The reason I moved here is because I want to get to know the whole truth.” The girl smiled. “If there have been strange occurrences recently, I believe it’s because she’s back.”

Chapter 310

310 Auntie Jia

This petite and young female livestreamer was clearly interested in the woman who lived in Room 1044. If not for Brother Hwa stopping her, she would have slipped into it already.

“We shan’t talk about these after midnight!” Brother Hwa glanced at the folded red dress from the corner of his eye. After seeing the red dress hadn’t reacted in any way, he sighed in relief, “We need to continue with our patrol. Turn down the volume of the music. Don’t go looking for trouble yourself.” The girl looked chastened but she agreed to close the music and stop her livestream. When the girl

turned to her bedroom to do all that, Han Fei looked through the door. Her Room 1084 was filled with cam recorders and unused surveillance cameras.

“Let’s go and leave her be.” Xiao Fang suddenly urged like he had noticed something. He dragged Brother Hwa by his sleeve and practically pulled him away. Han Fei realized something was off about Xiao Fang. He resisted the urge to investigate the room and left the 8th floor with the 2 guards. The voice-activated lights on the 9th floor came on. When they were on the landing between both floors, Xiao Fang looked at them nervously, his face covered in fear. “Didn’t you notice it?”

“Notice what?”

“That girl has an altar for a dead person inside her toilet but the black and white picture of the deceased was herself!” Xiao Fang was very afraid, “Does that mean she’s dead? Then again, why would a living person be so interested in ghosts?”

“You did remind me of something. There was a water stain on the corner of the girl’s shirt. Before she came to open the door, she wasn’t livestreaming but was inside the toilet.” The more he thought about it, the more Han Fei was confident there was a connection between the woman in Room 1044 and the girl in Room 1084, perhaps they were friends or even family. “Should we go back to check?” Han Fei’s suggestion was vetoed by Brother Hwa and Xiao Fang. Just as the 3 argued about whether to go back, the sound of door opening came from the 9th floor. At the same time, the lights went out and the 3 hugged each other.

“Don’t, don’t worry, there’s an old lady living on the 9th floor, that should be her...” Brother Hwa raised the flashlight and led the way. He pushed open the safety door slowly and an old lady in black jacket and black scarf stood in the black corridor. After seeing the old lady, Brother Hwa sighed in relief, “Auntie Jia, why are you out wandering about so late at night again? It’s not even 4 am yet.”

The old lady frowned, “When you’re old, you wake up earlier than most. Sleep doesn’t come that easily, I just want to come out to take a walk.”

“Auntie Jia, there was a security guard that went missing not too long ago. You better stay at home for now.”

"I can't sleep and feel unsettled trapped inside the house. I'll only feel better when I'm outside." Auntie Jia waved her hands, "Plus I'm already in my 80s, I've lived long enough. Just leave me be." This old lady was rather stubborn. She refused to go back home but didn't really provide the actual reason. Han Fei believed things were not that simple. "Auntie Jia, is it because you keep having nightmares whenever you try to sleep?" Han Fei tried to make his tone as gentle as possible.

"Are you trying to sell me some kind of sleeping aid? I don't need things like that." The old lady had quite a temper. She didn't have much time for her neighbours and refused to listen to people's advice. She pushed Brother Hwa away and walked towards the stairwell on the right.

"Aren't we going to stop her?" Seeing Brother Hwa remain unmoved, Han Fei was confused. That was very unlike him.

"We won't be able to. The old lady is the earliest tenant here and she can be quite stubborn. She always wakes up punctually at 3.30 am and wanders around the building. She has other strange habits like never taking the elevator, never going to the top floor, never calling people by their names and never smiling." Brother Hwa was just rambling but Han Fei memorized everything. He believed that the old lady knew something. Perhaps she purposely didn't do these things to avoid the Death Curse at Ziggurat. Han Fei stared at the old lady who walked away. She held the wall as support. Occasionally she fixed her scarf. When she moved the scarf, Han Fei spotted a small butterfly pattern on the back of her neck. 'The old lady is Butterfly's flower pot too?' Han Fei paid a special note to this. He believed the old lady was doing this patrol of her own because she was looking for something.

'As long as she keeps wandering about, I might run into her again.' Han Fei wanted to converse with the lady alone but not now. He had too little information about her. She might cheat him and he'd never know about it.

"Let's go. Nothing bad ever happened on the 9th floor. We can relax a bit now." Brother Hwa's words raised Han Fei's suspicion again. Why was the 9th floor where the old lady stayed, the safest? Was it because she had already taken care of all the possible dangers here?

The strange old lady appeared to be their lucky star. They finished checking 4 consecutive floors and nothing happened. And then they came to the 14th floor. When Han Fei turned at the landing of the 13th floor, a chill suffused his body. He shivered involuntarily. Han Fei glanced at the number 14 and a bad feeling rose within him.

“A madman lives on the 14th floor, hopefully he’s not acting up tonight.” Brother Hwa also didn’t wish to stay for so long at the 14th floor but as fate would have it, the security devices had some problems on this floor. The surveillance camera in the corridor had been destroyed, the lock on the safety door was removed and various trash scattered the ground. It made the floor sticky.

“When we patrolled this place around midnight, everything was still fine!” Xiao Fang walked through the trash. He wanted to pull Han Fei along with him but realized the latter was staring intently at the trash, “What are you looking at?”

“We can find out a person’s life from their trash.” Han Fei used the rubber baton to sift through the trash. Soon, his arm halted in mid-air.

“Did you find something?” Xiao Fang and Brother Hwa came over. They looked at the thing Han Fei’s rubber baton was pointing at and they didn’t feel too good. Inside an inconspicuous bag, a bleeding chopped finger was hidden.

“My God!” Xiao Fang staggered two steps back. He gripped Han Fei’s clothes. “This has to be a murder, right?!”

Han Fei was stunned as if he couldn’t believe what he saw. It was like he wasn’t used to seeing gore, his face turned green from nausea.

“Both of you calm down! Don’t panic!” Brother Hwa was the only one who could remain calm. He was about to pull Han Fei away when Xiao Fang beside him yelled. “Behind you! Brother Hwa, look behind you!”

Brother Hwa and Han Fei turned around at the same time. One of the doors in the corridor of the 14th floor was open. A face poked out and was staring at them in the dark.

“That’s Room 1144, right?”