

# PARHELION

## 幻日之時

*After being transported back in time, a social worker meets a police officer who helps to investigate her sister's murder case, and possibly prevent it from ever happening. The trail of clues, however, leads to further unsolved cases that force them to question their motives for altering the past.*

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In 2012, Lin Hsin-Yu's big sister was murdered. With no witnesses, a lack of evidence, and no obvious suspects, the case was never solved. Twelve years later, during an atmospheric phenomenon called a parhelion, an office-building elevator transports Hsin-Yu, now a social worker, back in time to 2012. There she meets police officer Chang Yen, who also lost a beloved sibling. While Hsin-Yu's sister was murdered, Chang Yen's brother killed himself after being framed for a crime. The two begin working together, not just to seek justice for their departed siblings, but to see if they can change the past entirely!

Soon, however, other cold cases emerge: a missing girl, a battered wife, victims of sexual abuse at the hands of a religious cult. As Hsin-Yu and Chang Yen follow the trail of clues deeper, they begin to think that all of the cases might be linked. Altering one will have implications for all of the others. In that case, could changing the past have undesirable consequences? What if the past, despite its tragedies, was already the best possible outcome?

Starting with the understandable urge to right the wrongs of the past, *Parhelion* gradually guides readers into more philosophical terrain. Within the framework of a mystery/suspense novel, author Fourone poses questions about the structure of time, our relationship to the past, and the acceptance of loss. Lovers of contemporary fantasy and suspense will follow the unfolding mystery with relish, but the heartfelt questions and welcome doses of warmth and healing that are sure to satisfy readers of any stripe.



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Bestselling author Fourone is a writer of novels, essays, and picture books that address topics connected to love and healing. The movie adaptation of his essay collection *Do You Love Me as I Love You* was a box office smash-hit in Taiwan. His works have sold foreign rights in Vietnam and Thailand.

# PARHELION

By Fourone

Translated by Lee Anderson

## 01 Make something of yourself

July 18th, 2024

“Has business been good lately, Mr. Hsu?” Hsin-Yu smiled at the seventy-year-old man across from her. Breezily dressed for the heat, her hair was tied back in a neat ponytail and her black purse, from which dangled a sun and goldfish pendant, was placed by her feet.

“Mm-hmm.” Mr. Hsu grunted so quietly that Hsin-Yu wasn’t sure it was a response. He wasn’t even looking at her.

“You’re looking well. Is your hand feeling better since you sprained it?” Hsin-Yu ploughed on undeterred, the smile still clinging to her face.

“Mm-hmm.” Another muffled grunt.

Sensing she wasn’t going to get much out of him today, Hsin-Yu’s gaze flicked to her surroundings. She was sitting just inside the entrance to an old-fashioned grocery store, one of those ones that sold an array of colorful candy right next to towers of sun-faded toilet paper. The small, dingy store was how Mr. Hsu made his living, but it didn’t bring in much and more often than not he had to rely on hand-outs. A little further down the street was one of those shiny new convenience stores that left outdated places like Mr. Hsu’s deserted, save for a handful of elderly neighbors who’d been coming here for years.

At twenty-four years old, Lin Hsin-Yu was freshly graduated from college and currently working as a social worker for vulnerable families, which included providing assistance to those in crisis. The elderly gentleman before her was the first case she’d received when she started, and today was her regularly scheduled home visit.

Hsu Hung used to have four other family members living with him – his son, daughter-in-law, and their two daughters – who all helped take care of the store until the death of his eldest granddaughter, Chia-Chen, twelve years ago. His son and daughter-in-law then died in a fatal accident not long after, leaving just him and his twelve-year-old granddaughter to depend on each other for survival.

That was when the Family First Foundation had become involved, and his case was passed from worker to worker until it eventually landed in Hsin-Yu’s lap. Being the same age as the granddaughter and having lost her older sister at the same time, it had felt like fate.

What we call social services are in actual fact the long journey to heal wounds that do not easily heal. The subtleties of the human heart differ from those of the body; it’s not simply a question of waiting for the scab to fall off, but more of an ongoing emotional tug-of-war with yourself. What social workers do is help you traverse the transition period when you can’t see

where the end is.

The sudden death of her sister twelve years ago had torn Hsin-Yu's family apart, and she'd felt like a piece of her heart had been sliced off ever since. Her sister's killer had never been found, and every detail of that morning was seared forever in her memory. To this day she was still awoken by nightmares from time to time.

"Where's Chia-Ju today?" Hsin-Yu asked, referring to the granddaughter who was the same age as her.

"Oh, who knows? She'd rather hang around with that bunch of good-for-nothings than get a real job. I hardly ever see her." The mention of his granddaughter's name finally got Mr. Hsu talking, but his tone was full of reproach and regret. "She's going to wind up like Chia-Chen sooner or later—"

"Don't talk like that, Mr. Hsu. Chia-Ju is Chia-Ju. She's not her sister," Hsin-Yu offered in an attempt to defuse Mr. Hsu's anger. "She'll be fine."

"I just don't know what she's going to do when I'm gone—"

"And you can stop talking like that as well. Didn't I just say how well you're looking? Just keep taking your medicine like the doctor tells you and you'll be around for many more years to come, don't you worry." Hsin-Yu glanced at the packets of pills scattered on the table, and took the opportunity to change the subject. "Did you finish taking all the medicine the doctor prescribed you last time? When's your next check-up?"

"I haven't finished it yet. And what's the point me going to the hospital? I feel fine. It's going to the hospital that makes you sick."

"That's no excuse not to take your medicine."

"Yeah yeah, OK. Just get off my back, will you?"

"Deal. Right, it's time for me to be off, Mr. Hsu. I'll be back to see you next month."

"Mm-hmm." Mr. Hsu, clearly tired of talking, dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

"Bye, Mr. Hsu."

Hsin-Yu's smile dropped the second she left him and, expressionless, she walked over to the bus stop, her cold demeanor at complete odds with the person she'd just been. She found a shaded spot in which to wait for the bus, then fished a notebook from her purse and began to record the outline of her conversation with Hsu Hung, how the atmosphere had felt, and points to bear in mind for the next home visit. After jotting down a few key takeaways, she pulled out a handkerchief and lightly dabbed the tiny beads of sweat gathering on her neck and forehead. The pendant hanging from her purse caught her eye as it flashed in the sunlight. As she looked at the goldfish and sun, symbolizing the nicknames that had been given to her and her sister, Hsin-Yu's thoughts drifted back into the past.

## **August 20th, 2012**

Hsin-Yu was standing before her sister's memorial altar, tears streaming down her face. On top of

the altar, a photograph of her sister was framed by a wreath of white flowers, and all around her were the comings and goings of people whispering things like “She was so young”, “What is the world coming to?”, and “I’m so sorry for your loss”. But Hsin-Yu remained rigid as a statue, transfixed by her sister’s photo as the tears rolled down her cheeks.

“Now now, your sister would be sad if she saw you crying like this,” a woman said, her hand gently patting Hsin-Yu on the head. Which only made Hsin-Yu cry even more.

“Here, take this. This way your sister will always be by your side.” The woman pressed something into Hsin-Yu’s hand – a pendant bearing a goldfish and a sun. Hsin-Yu looked up in surprise. She’d never seen this woman before, but something about her face was familiar.

“Your big sister will always be there to watch over you,” the woman continued. “You need to grow up and make something of yourself.”

Hsin-Yu accepted the gift through her tears, and it was true that the pendant had accompanied her through life every day since.

The arrival of the bus forced Hsin-Yu to shake off her memories. Once on board, she took out her phone and started scrolling through the day’s news, a habit she’d developed since starting her job as a social worker. One item caught her attention:

*There will be something different about the sun over the next few days. It will be surrounded by a halo, and if you look carefully you’ll see what looks like an extra sun on either side. This natural phenomenon, known as a sun dog or parhelion, is as rare as it is beautiful; the last time one was observed was twelve years ago. With the Central Weather Administration forecasting a particularly dry summer, scientists are saying there might be multiple parhelia visible this year, so remember to keep an eye on the skies over the coming months....*

Hsin-Yu’s chest tightened as she was once again reminded of that morning twelve years ago. Her face remained as impassive as before, but there was an almost imperceptible twitch in her cheek. That had been a summer too, and there had been parhelia that day... A surge of grief washed over her and she felt tears coming to sting the corners of her eyes. Quickly tilting her head back, she took some deep breaths to try and regain her composure, then turned her attention out the window. There was only one sun in the sky. Not three.

At her stop, Hsin-Yu disembarked and entered the office building on the corner of the street, then pressed the elevator button for the fifth floor: the Family First Foundation, where she worked.

DING!

No sooner had she walked through the elevator doors than she heard someone call her name.

“Hsin-Yu, are you busy right now? I was hoping you could pop over to the police station.” It was her boss, Hsu Hsiu-Hui.

“What’s up?” Hsin-Yu asked, the smile instantly returning to her face.

“It would appear that Chiang Shang-Lin’s gotten himself in some trouble.”

“Shang-Lin? He’s a good kid... What has he done?” Hsin-Yu’s mind conjured up the face of the sixteen-year-old, who was another one of her cases.

“The Shengsan station can’t get hold of his mom, and I know you’ve got a good relationship with him, so I was hoping you could go to the station and find out.” Hsiu-Hui’s fingers danced across her phone as she spoke. “I’ve just sent you the name of the officer in charge. Oh, and the old police station is undergoing renovation works so they’ve temporarily relocated to the third floor of the building next door.”

“OK, I’ll head over there now.” After checking she’d received her boss’s message, Hsin-Yu turned and left the building again without even making it back to her desk.

As soon as she stepped out of the taxi at Shengsan police station, she was immediately assaulted by the summer heat. The freshness of the morning had receded and the sun hung high in the sky, blinding and fierce.

Just as she was about to enter the building housing the police station, she suddenly noticed the clusters of people in the street angling their phones to the sky. She slowly looked up in the direction of the cameras, using her hand to protect her eyes until they’d adjusted to the harsh sunlight, then gradually spreading her fingers so she could see between the gaps.

Parhelia.

Just the same as it had been on that stifling hot day twelve years ago. The sun flanked by two smaller suns, connected by a halo of light.

“Whoa, it actually looks like there are three suns in the sky!”

“It’s like the sun is wearing a ring.”

“I heard this only happens once every ten years or something.”

Hsin-Yu stood there in a trance, emotion rippling beneath her calm exterior until the voices of those around her brought her back to the present. She turned and scurried into the building in front of her.

*Where is everyone?* There was no one occupying the front desk, nor the office space behind it. Papers and stationery were strewn across the desks, and a pile of cardboard boxes were stacked in one corner.

Her worry for Shang-Lin surpassing her initial confusion, Hsin-Yu hurried over to the elevator and pressed the button for the fifth floor. As it began its slow ascent, she suddenly remembered what her boss had told her: the old police station had temporarily moved to the third floor of the building next door. She’d instinctively pushed the fifth floor because that was the floor her office was on. She quickly jabbed the number three button, but the elevator had already passed that floor; she was going to have to go all the way up then come back down again.

“It’s because I was distracted by the sun,” she muttered to herself.

DING!

The elevator doors opened on fifth and she was greeted with the same emptiness as downstairs. No evidence of human activity, just four ash-colored walls. It struck her as odd; had there actually ever been anyone on this floor? As the doors began to close, she pressed the third

floor button again to make sure she'd definitely end up in the right place.

The elevator descended slowly. She couldn't see that it was, but she could feel the downward pull of gravity. Hsin-Yu's mind played out possible scenarios about what could have happened to Shang-Lin, not really paying attention to the movement of the elevator.

DING!

Now the doors reopened on an office dimly lit by a dull fluorescent light. Rows of shelving units holding cardboard boxes and folders ran along the edges of the room, and there was another pile of boxes in one corner. An old TV set was showing the news. In the center of the room were some desks, their lamps spilling a sickly yellow light over their scattered paperwork.

*At least it actually looks like somebody works here,* Hsin-Yu thought to herself, although she still couldn't shake the feeling that something wasn't quite right. It just didn't *look* how she'd have expected a police station to look.

"Hello? Is anyone here? I'm a social worker," she called out as she exited the elevator, but there was no reply.

She approached the shelves to see if there was anyone hidden behind them, but the place was completely deserted. Just as she was turning to leave in the belief that she must be in the wrong place again, her eyes were suddenly drawn to a whiteboard on which was written a name she knew: Hsu Chia-Chen. A photograph of a young girl had been pinned up next to it.

*Isn't that Mr. Hsu's granddaughter?*

She walked over for a closer look and found there were other names and photographs on the whiteboard, including Hsu Hung's, with various lines connecting them. It looked like an evidence wall right out of a crime movie.

And Hsin-Yu recognized every single one of the people on this board – they were all connected with Chia-Chen's death. When she'd been handed Mr. Hsu's case, she'd read over his files a dozen times and knew every detail inside out. And besides, you never forget your first case.

*What's this doing here?*

Twelve years ago, a police officer was struck when a car refused to stop for a routine stop and search. The seventeen-year-old driver, Wu Kuan-Lun, was accidentally injured by a warning shot fired during the subsequent pursuit, and his family were quick to hold a press conference accusing the police of brutality and demanding compensation.

However, when the police searched Kuan-Lun's vehicle the following day, they found a cell phone belonging to Hsu Chia-Chen, a young girl who had been missing for several weeks. Kuan-Lun flatly denied knowing Miss Hsu. Two days later, after the Wu family press conference and ensuing media frenzy, another teenage girl identified Kuan-Lun as the one who'd abducted her friend Chia-Chen. What had started out as a hit-and-run had quickly turned into a kidnapping case – one that ended in murder. The police investigation revealed that Chia-Chen had rejected Kuan-Lun's advances, and out of humiliation he'd murdered the fifteen-year-old and dumped her body near Taichiang Bridge.

The story caused such a sensation that even Hsin-Yu, who was only in sixth grade at the time, remembered hearing about it. And one month later, her sister had been murdered. That

summer had been like a butcher's knife cutting Hsin-Yu's childhood short, leaving some part of her forever trapped there. The memories haunted her still.

*Didn't they solve this case twelve years ago?*

As Hsin-Yu examined the familiar names on the evidence wall and thumbed through the documents pinned there, she was surprised to find that there was information missing. The board only went up to July 17th. There was nothing regarding Chia-Chen's friend and the discovery of the body two days later. Perhaps due to her personal connection with the case, Hsin-Yu felt compelled to pick up one of the markers and complete the timeline.

July 18th: Lo Wen-Chun comes forward.

July 19th: Hsu Chia-Chen's body discovered next to Taichiang Bridge.

"Who are you?" A man's voice suddenly rang out from behind her. It did not sound best pleased.

Hsin-Yu spun round with a start and saw a man roughly the same age as her, wearing a police uniform and with a cigarette tucked behind his ear. The smell of smoke wafted toward her as he approached, and she saw the name badge pinned to his chest: Chang Yen.

"Officer...Chang? Hello, my name's Lin Hsin-Yu and I'm the social worker responsible for Chiang Shang-Lin. I'm here to speak to..." She'd already produced her business card, and was now fumbling with her phone to try and find the name of the police officer her boss told her to talk to. Flustered, she dropped her phone and it went skidding beneath one of the desks. She quickly knelt to the floor and began scrabbling to retrieve it.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Chang asked, taking a cursory look at her card and tossing it on the desk. Ignoring Hsin-Yu, he strode over to the evidence wall and scanned the whiteboard. "Wait, have you been messing with this?"

"Me?" Taken aback, it took Hsin-Yu's mind a few seconds to comprehend what he was talking about. She picked up her phone, now with a crack running along the screen, and stood back up to explain. "I'm sorry, it's just that I noticed you'd missed out some information, so I added it for you. I also work with the fam—"

"What did you add?" Chang interrupted, his expression furious.

"Just what happened after..." she replied, pointing sheepishly to the two new lines.

Chang read them and scoffed, then hastily erased her additions.

"Can I ask why you're being so rude?" Hsin-Yu was upset with how this police officer was treating her, but she was careful not to let it show.

"Shit, talk about the pot calling the kettle black! You're the one barging in here and defacing our work."

"What do you mean, defacing? It's all true, you can check the files if you want."

"Quit your yammering. Today's the eighteenth, how the hell do you know what's gonna happen tomorrow? And no one called Lo whatever has come forward today. So if that's not defacing police work, what is it?"

"Lo Wen-Chun," Hsin-Yu repeated the name, her voice firm. "And what are you talking about, tomorrow? All of this stuff has already happened – they found Chia-Chen's body on the nineteenth!"

“Oh, are you one of those psychics? Or a fortune teller or something?” Chang sneered. “If you’re ill, I suggest you go to the hospital instead of causing trouble here. Now go.”

“I’m not here to cause trouble. I told you, I’m here to speak to...” Hsin-Yu looked down at her phone, but it must have broken when she dropped it because the screen was black and unresponsive. She searched through her memory and finally recalled the name her boss had given her. “I’m here to speak to...Officer Huang Shih-Hsiu.”

“There’s no one called that here. You’ve got the wrong place.”

“Huang Shih-Hsiu,” Hsin-Yu said again, before asking, “This is the third floor, right?”

“No, this is the second basement. And the third floor is just the archives, there won’t be anyone there.” With that, he shooed her away and turned back to study the evidence wall.