

Constellation Door - Chapter 1

Silver City.

At the Inspection Office.

Young Li Hao was thin and had dark circles under his eyes as though he had stayed up all night.

In the attire of a Level 3 patrol officer, Li Hao entered the office. It had been only one and a half year since he had joined the Inspection Office, he didn't have much experience yet. He usually made it a point to arrive a little early to proceed with some simple cleaning. He often put a kettle to boil and waited for his colleagues to arrive.

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But today, Li Hao went a little later to his office than usual. Many people had already arrived.

"Little Hao, you are late today," said a middle-aged woman in a uniform similar to Li Hao. She sat on her desk near the door. "You have dark circles under your eyes. Seems like you might have had a lot of fun last night!"

Li Hao directed a friendly smile towards her. He waved his hand. "Sister Yu, don't you talk any nonsense now! I don't even have a girlfriend yet and I am not likely to find one if this rumor gets out!"

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The middle-aged woman chuckled. "Child, you have already been here for almost a year and a half now. And yet, you can't even keep up with a bit of gossip." She enjoyed teasing him. Li Hao laughed with her.

"Little Hao, I usually don't have time to cook when I am by myself. The food outside isn't very clean either. Why don't you come to my house for dinner later tonight?"

Li Hao smiled. "Oh Sister Yu, I don't really want to trouble you," he politely refused her offer.

1

Before Sister Yu could respond, a middle-aged man from the next desk snorted. "Little Hao, did Sister Yu just invite you for dinner? She wants you to be her son-in-law, you little brat! Why don't you accept it if you know what's good for you?"

2

“Hahaha!” The office burst into laughter.

Sister Yu’s agenda was exposed. But she did not seem embarrassed. “I would be happy!” she said fiercely in good faith. “Little Hao is a good kid. He has a good character and he is intelligent. He looks good too! If he really becomes my son-in-law, I would wake up happy every day.”

Everyone laughed but some nodded in agreement. Many people had such high hopes for Li Hao.

The middle-aged man who had broached the subject didn’t much mind. “Little Hao is not bad. But it’s a pity!” said the man regretfully.

Li Hao didn’t know what was so pitiful about his decision. But he didn’t mind. He smiled amiably. “It was my choice, Brother Zhao. What’s there to regret?”

Zhou still felt that it was such a waste. “Don’t say that, Little Hao. The Inspection Division is not bad but you have been a regular here for a year and a half now. You are in your third rank. If you didn’t withdraw from the Silver City Ancient Academy and chose to complete your graduation, you will be granted a place as a Level 1 patrol officer. That is such an opportunity.”

3

The moment Zhao voiced this out, everyone wanted to join in with their opinion.

Behind Li Hao, Chen Na had just entered the office. “That’s right, Li Hao,” she pitched in. “Why did you drop out? Look at us, we don’t even have a chance to get into Silver City Ancient Academy! You are only two years away from your graduation. For us, we won’t have any chance of reaching the first rank from third unless we serve at least five years. It will be a privilege to be able to reach Level 1 and work for the rest of our lives!”

There was a hint of envy in her voice. She had always been a little jealous of those who got to graduate from the Silver City Ancient Academy. It was indeed a pity that Li Hao, who had only two years left to complete his graduation, dropped out of the academy and joined the Inspection Office.

When Li Hao had joined here, even the chief of the Silver City’s Inspection Division had personally asked him the reason. He had advised Li Hao to consider going back to the academy to complete his studies assuring him that he could always apply to the Inspection Division after graduation.

Unfortunately, Li Hao had politely refused. Although he was young, polite and amiable, he could be very stubborn especially considering the matter at hand. He refused to go back to the academy and continue with his studies.

Chen Na knew that Li Hao's tutor at the Silver City Academy had tried to convince him to stay put and complete his graduation. He still had a bright future ahead of him.

Li Hao smiled and listened patiently to everyone. He then walked to the corner to boil a kettle of water. "Isn't it good to start from the third rank anyway?" he said with a friendly smile. "If I were to graduate and join here, I would have two years less to get to know you all. Now, that would be a pity!"

Everyone laughed heartily. Those words were comforting to hear. Li Hao was a sweet talker. He had just turned twenty this year. He was the youngest Inspector in the Silver City Division. He had been a top student at the academy. Everyone liked listening to him as he flattered them enough.

The office was filled with laughter and good mood. They didn't say anything more to Li Hao about his withdrawal from the academy. Li Hao did not seem to care very much about that. For them, the prospect of dropping out of such a prestigious university looked regretful.

As for Li Hao, only he knew the reason for his withdrawal. Nobody seemed to want to know why he took such a decision. He wanted to earn money. The academy's tuition fees were too high and he had no money left to pay it.

But it was a thing to wonder if that was the only reason.

The laughter gradually died down as the leaders of the Inspection Division arrived.

The Silver City's Inspection Office served as the headquarter for the Silver City's law enforcement agency. Apart from the headquarter, the Inspection Division had four other offices in the Silver City.

The headquarter itself had many departments. The office where Li Hao worked was mainly in charge of sorting case files, reopening old cases, reviewing the present cases and recording meetings for further developments.

The department where he worked was not top-tier and rarely participated directly in law enforcement. But if the other departments and branches were short on workforce, Li Hao's group would be temporarily transferred to the needful departments for help. In general, Li Hao's department fulfilled a civilian's job.

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With the arrival of the leaders at the office, the day's work began.

Li Hao didn't have his own cabin. A Level 3 patrol officer who had only been in the office for a year and a half wasn't given his own office. Sister Yu, Brother Zhou and the others who were Level 2 didn't get a personal office either.

Li Hao's desk was near the bathroom door. Thankfully, there was no strange smell wafting out but it could get pretty noisy when people continuously used the washroom. The people who had worked here for quite a while did not prefer this place.

Li Hao's desk was across Chen Na's. They faced each other while working. She had arrived only a year earlier than Li Hao so she was still treated like a newbie. Neither of them had much experience in office work.

The Inspection Office would soon recruit more newcomers. Hopefully, they could then get rid of the newbie status.

Li Hao was sorting through some documents when he heard a soft tap. He looked up to see Chen Na lightly leaning over and tapping his table. As he looked up at her, she smiled.

"Li Hao, there is an out-of-town mission at the Inspection Office that can last almost a month," she whispered. "Do you want to apply for it? We could go together. The task is so easy. It will be fun."

He was dazed at the offer. He considered it and then shook his head. "I don't want to. Nothing good comes from going out of town these days. It might not be safe."

"It's very safe!" Chen Na insisted. She looked dismayed at his refusal. "I am just accompanying the Silver City Ancient Academy..."

She looked up at him as if she suddenly realized something else. "Oh... I almost forgot!" she said apologetically. "You might not want to see your former classmates and instructors. I think Professor Yuan Shuo is leading the team this time..."

Chen Na cursed herself inwardly. She had forgotten that Yuan Shuo had taught Li Hao at the academy. It was rumored that the professor had thought very highly of Li Hao and tried to advise him not to drop out but Li Hao had refused. Rumor also had it that he had tried to beat up Li Hao to make him see some sense. It had caused quite a stir in the Silver City Ancient Academy. Many students disliked Li Hao for refusing his teacher who favored him.

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Yuan Shuo was one of the top lecturers in the academy. Many students yearned to be his disciple but he rarely chose any of them. No wonder everyone was jealous of Li Hao.

Li Hao smiled but didn't refute. The rumors had been vastly exaggerated. Professor Yuan had felt sorry for his behavior. In fact, Li Hao had met him a few days ago and had dinner with him. The 'beating up' part had been blown out of proportion.

Some things weren't given time to settle. The rumors spread like wildfire outside. The more people added their own version to it, the more troublesome it became.

'Teacher Yuan is leading the team ...,' the thought stuck with him. Professor Yuan was one of the most talented and powerful staff of the academy. If he was leading the team, the security would be tight. Whether it was the Inspection Office or the academy itself, they would all take every necessary precaution.

He didn't have to worry about anything if that was the case. Besides, the Inspection Office would just be there to accompany them. The ones really responsible for security would not be from here. They would be hired from the Night Patrollers.

The Night Patrollers were similar to law enforcement agencies, much like the Inspection Division.

However, unlike the Inspection Division which solved open cases, the Night Patrollers were given the charge of those cases which remained unsolved. The Inspector General usually handed over the more elusive and dangerous cases to the Night Patrollers.

Many outsiders were not privy to this information. Most in the Inspection Office didn't know about it either. However, Li Hao was mainly in charge of filing away confidential cases and tracking down the pending ones. So, he put two and two together and understood the bigger picture.

'Night Patrollers!' he exclaimed in his heart. His decision to drop out of the academy to become a Level 3 patrol officer had a lot to do with Night Patrollers. His purpose was connected to them.

He had never told anyone about it. The organization was so mysterious and covert that he had never even heard anyone in the Inspection Office talk about them. The first to tell him about it was Yuan Shuo who had mentioned that ordinary people didn't even know about the organization's existence.

Before he dropped out of the academy, Li Hao had found out that the Inspection Office worked as a direct subordinate to the Night Patrollers. Li Hao had heard from Yuan that some people with potential were seldom recruited from the Inspection Office by them.

'It has been a year and a half since I have worked here. I have the required background now. I wonder if I will have the opportunity to meet the Night Patrollers,' thought Li Hao. He was getting a little anxious. He tried to remain calm and maintain a blank expression.

'It should be soon!'

He knew that there were a lot of issues in the Silver City that the Inspection Office couldn't handle or didn't want to. He realized that he could only rely on the Night Patrollers for such things. He just needed an opportunity!