

# Constellation Door

## Chapter 2: The Red Shadow

He will have to create the opportunity himself.

Li Hao had neatly made a pile of the folders he was sorting. He stood up, carried them and headed into the small cabin in the office. He knocked on the door.

“Come in,” said a voice from the inside.

Li Hao pushed open the door. “Chief.”

“Li Hao! Come on in,” said Wang Jie, smiling at him.

Wang Jie was a middle-aged man who liked Li Hao. Li Hao was always polite and willing to work. He had received higher education from Silver City Ancient Academy, after all. He had dropped out of school but he had a good record. It was not like he was expelled. He had made his own choice.

“Chief. I have something to report,” said Li Hao with a friendly smile.

“Of course! Take a seat.” Li Hao sat across from him. “Go on.”

Wang Jie knew that the tasks in this office weren't of high priority. The big matters were carried out by the law enforcement. The work here was usually of case filing and keeping a record. Simple and straightforward. As for Li Hao's 'report', Wang Jie assumed that this kid wanted to get familiar with him for a promotion, most likely.

Wang Jie couldn't do that even if he wanted to. This young man had dropped out of school and had been employed under him for only a year and a half. He could not promote him in such short duration.

Li Hao's face turned serious. “Chief, as you already know I handle the confidential files. I am mainly in charge of organizing the unsolved cases. I have done that for more than a year now. A year and a half, to be specific. I have reorganized some classified files from the past ten years...”

Wang Jie nodded enthusiastically. “A top student is indeed a top student!” He directed Li Hao a brilliant smile. “In the past, the files were practically abandoned. They were old and dusty, some even eaten by worms! I asked several people to sort them out but no one was found near those files when needed. You have done a good job! You have organized it so well that any file can be found in an instant.”

“Chief, I’m not here to show off,” said Li Hao hurriedly.

Wang Jie laughed it off. He wondered what else Li Hao was here to report. He gestured for him to continue.

Li Hao shuffled through the files and handed one to Wang Jie. He opened one of the files in front of him.

Although Li Hao was young and inexperienced, his voice was steady. “1720, September 16th. A self-immolation case occurred in the residence district of Silver City. People reported seeing sparks coming out of the victim’s body and burning her to death.”

Wang Jie looked at the file in his hand. He then looked at Li Hao. It was a case from ten years ago. The case was declared closed. It wasn’t a murder, or a premediated crime. It was classified as an accident. Wang Jie wondered why Li Hao was bringing up a case that was closed ten years ago.

“1723, September 22nd. Silver City Trade Center. A saleswoman’s hair suddenly caught on fire,” continued Li Hao. “Soon, her entire body was engulfed by it. She burned to death in public.”

Wang Jie nodded. “I know about that. I was the one who filed it. I even went to the scene personally. It was an accident. The static electricity in the Trade Center was too strong.”

Li Hao ignored it and kept reading. “1725, August 18th. Silver City’s Mingshen Hotel. A guest checked into the hotel and was found dead a day later. He also burnt to death.”

In the past ten years, three self-immolation cases had occurred, but they were all filed as accidents. There were many cases to deal with in Silver City every day, so three self-immolation cases in ten years were not given much importance. Not many people seemed to care.

But to Li Hao, who had organized the files for so long, the similar cases did not come off as simple coincidences.

There were countless files in the computer room. Wang Jie had not paid much attention to those but now he had a gnawing feeling in his stomach. He looked at Li Hao and frowned.

“1727, February 16th. Silver City’s East Main Street. Another person was killed by self-immolation due to the appearance of a ball of lightning nearby,” continued Li Hao. “It was suspected that the ball of lightning induced the fire. A year and a half after the last incident.”

Wang Jie's expression changed. There had been so many cases of self-immolation, one not so very long ago. All in the Silver City!

"1728, 12th of August. Silver City's suburbs Inspection Office reported that a person went missing in the country. After that, a burnt corpse was found by the river. It was suspected to be caused by lightning during a thunderstorm. The case was closed as an accident."

After another year and a half!

This was reported by a subordinate group. The Confidential Information Room was only in charge of organizing the files and did not participate directly in the case. Once the files were closed as accidents by the lower level, the higher-ups would need a strong reason to reopen the cases.

Wang Jie's expression turned somber. He had not really cared to look at the files individually. There were thousands of such files in the Confidential Information Room. Many of the old files got destroyed too.

"A year and a half..." he mumbled. He looked at Li Hao. "Two of those cases had a gap of one and a half year specifically. What about 1729? Were there any more self-immolation cases around August and September last year?"

Wang Jie thought for a moment, trying to recall if there had been any similar cases last year. If the time gap was a year and a half at most, it would mean that a total of six self-immolation cases might have occurred in the Silver City!

One self-immolation case every two years wouldn't raise any eyebrows. Besides, the Silver City was huge, and cases were handled by multiple branches. If a branch received only one case in five years, nobody would even notice!

Li Hao nodded. "Another such incident did occur in 1729, which was last year. It happened in the Silver City Ancient Academy. The victim was my classmate who lived in the dorm next door. That is why I left the Silver City Ancient Academy. I witnessed everything and I was afraid to be there. It was very strange. I want to know what caused it!"

Li Hao's face had turned grave. "That is part of the reason why I joined the Inspection Office. Outsiders couldn't access these files, but now I can! I went through the cases of self-immolation that happened in the past ten years and realized that the cases might not be just coincidences."

Wang Jie flipped through the files. He looked at Li Hao after a while. "Tell me your thoughts."

“Ten years. There have been six cases in ten years. Actually, nine years to be exact. We haven’t received any such case file this year.”

“Chief, I take this matter very seriously because of my classmate’s demise,” explained Li Hao. “It’s already July. If these cases aren’t a coincidence, then similar case might come to pass very soon. The gap between each self-immolation keeps shortening. It is very likely that it will happen again.”

Wang Jie flipped through the files and went over the documents again. He had been a patrol officer himself. He was only transferred to the Confidential Information Room after he had worked for many years.

If Li Hao hadn’t sorted through the cases and put them together, nobody would have even noticed. However, when six self-immolation cases had happened at intervals throughout these ten years, anybody could sense that something was indeed wrong.

Wang Jie sighed. “Based on the current situation, we can’t be sure that these cases were premeditated. However, there are just too many of them to be brushed off as mere coincidences.”

“I will inform the other departments, especially the law enforcement teams to keep an eye out. The Confidential Information Room isn’t directly involved in the cases but these frequent self-immolations need to be taken seriously,” said Wang Jie. “If it happens again...”

Wang Jie’s face turned solemn. “It will mean your judgement is correct. These might not be just simple accidents.”

He glanced up at Li Hao and his face relaxed. “Of course, there is no need to be worried!” he said with a smile. “Even this is a real murder case, we have been through much worse. But Li Hao, you did very well!”

Wang Jie’s grave demeanor had now disappeared. He had seen too much and heard too much in his own time. So, nothing made him uneasy anymore. He was pleased with Li Hao’s dedication and attention to detail regarding the cases. He also understood now why Li Hao had dropped out of the academy.

Classmate. Maybe close friends. Otherwise, Li Hao wouldn’t have dropped out of school for it.

...

Li Hao did not say much. A murder case Wang Jie had said. If it was just murder, Li Hao would not have dropped out of Silver City Ancient Academy to escape.

Perhaps it would have been better to see it as a simple murder. But the red blood shadow? Self-Immolations?

He could not just brush these things off as simple murder or accidents. The immolation was caused by the blood shadow, he was sure of it. But the students who had witnessed the self-immolation of his classmate had not seen the blood shadow that he had seen.

Were they lying? No, there had been no need for a lie.

Li Hao realized that he had been the only one who had seen the shadow. The others didn't see it at all. Maybe they couldn't see it.

He had felt it again recently. Something sinister just around the corner. He had even seen the blood shadow vaguely last night. Maybe it wasn't just one shadow. Maybe there were more!

'It's fine if no one wants to admit it. Once the Inspector General notices it, and realizes that these cases weren't just accidents, he will definitely report it to the Night Patrollers,' thought Li Hao, trying to convince himself. 'The Night Patrollers will solve it!'

Wang Jie stood up interrupting Li Hao's thoughts. "Then I will take my leave now and discuss with the law enforcement team. I might need your help explaining the situation to them. After all, you were the one who compiled these case files and will have far more information to contribute."

Li Hao heaved a sigh of relief and nodded. That was what he had wanted to hear. He had intended to get involved in this, if not directly, then as someone who had discovered a pattern. If the Night Patrollers got involved in this, Li Hao would likely be in contact with them.

Of course, it did not mean Li Hao would be allowed to contribute to the investigation. At least not directly. Li Hao would not dare to do that even if it was allowed. He had seen too many gruesome case files in the past year to even think about getting involved directly.

Some things in the files had to be read between the lines. He wasn't the only one who could see the red shadow. Some case files of the Silver City reported something similar.

However, all those who had seen the shadow were either dead or missing. No one was spared!

Li Hao didn't tell anyone about this because it was extremely dangerous. He did not dare mention that he could see the shadow. He could not trust anyone. Even the Night Patrollers might not be entirely reliable.

'No matter what ... I must use some normal channels to get in touch with this mysterious power!' Li Hao took a deep breath and left the office.

His goal was not just to uncover the truth, he cared for his own safety as well. Those who had been able to see the red shadow either dead or missing.

'I can't put myself in danger. I didn't leave the Silver City's Ancient Academy to come to the inspection Office to disappear,' Li Hao resolved. He sighed then put on a bright smile as he walked out of the office.

The best outcome would be for the Night Patrollers to solve this problem briskly. It wouldn't hurt for him to be recognized for his efforts a little bit too. He hoped to join the Night Patrollers as a civilian staff, if possible.

As for the law enforcement team, Li Hao didn't feel that he was competent enough. The job was fraught with danger. A few days ago, when he had gone to Professor Yuan's place for dinner, he had dug around a bit to find that the Night Patrollers suffered many casualties as part of their job.

'One step at a time,' said Li Hao to himself and watched Wang Jie leave in a hurry. He had finally set this into motion.

'The red shadow....' The thought bugged Li Hao. 'What exactly is it? Why am I the only one who can see it?'