

Constellation Door

Chapter 5: The Li Family's Swordsmanship (3)

How was that possible?

Li Hao had spent his time, months at end, looking at these files. And Chen Na had only been at it for a few minutes. He felt like she was lying about finding something.

Li Hao frowned but quickly put on a smile. "What did you find?"

Chen Na had seen Li Hao's fleeting frown and felt a little embarrassed. She realized that he was very serious about this matter and did not take it lightly. "I... uh... I haven't finished reading everything. There is just too much information here."

Li Hao was calm. He had guessed right. He had not really expected anything from her.

"But... the cases do seem to be related. I am not entirely sure but..."

She raised the file she had been reading. "I have a habit of doodling when I read. When I was going through the documents, I realized I had jotted down some names involved."

Li Hao glanced at the file and nodded, urging her on. He had already played around with the names of the people many times and had found nothing. None of them shared similar names or surnames. Some had two names, some three. There was nothing common in the names.

"Zhou Qing, Hong Jiao, Wang Haoming, Liu Yunsheng, Zhao Shihao, and Zhang Yuan are the names of these six people, right?" said Chen Na, reciting their names in chronological order.

Li Hao nodded. Chen Na looked at the names on the files and suddenly felt uncertain. If she told him what she thought about it, he might take her for a fool.

Feeling a little awkward, Chen Na pretended to clear her throat to gather her confidence. "Never mind. Forget I said anything. I will take a closer look. Something doesn't seem right. I am still missing two more."

"What?" asked Li Hao, puzzled. "Two more?"

Chen Na felt even more embarrassed. "Um... if there was one more person with the surname Zheng or Li, it would make more sense. But... there is no one like that here in the case files. I am just throwing ideas out. Don't take me seriously. I know it sounds silly."

Li Hao thought it wasn't silly at all. In fact, he was shocked. His surname was Li!

Someone with the surname Zheng was still missing. Li Hao had managed to find cases from only ten years ago. The files from before that would have been destroyed. The cases that were closed were usually burned after ten years. The archives couldn't keep all of them. There were just too many files.

Li Hao was stunned but he managed to appear calm as always. He smiled at Chen Na again. "It's not silly. You can say whatever is in your mind without hesitation. Why are you searching for two more names?"

Chen Na looked at Li Hao. "You aren't originally from Silver City?" she asked.

"No."

"Oh...," she said thoughtfully. "Does your family have any elders?"

"My grandparents passed away early." Li Hao was getting even more curious now. Why did she want to know about old people from his family?

Seeing Li Hao now attentive towards her, Chen Na was no longer embarrassed to share her findings.

"Elderly people like to speak in their own local dialect. My grandmother was the same. There was a local song that was very popular in Silver City. I remember only some words from the song." Chen Na cleared her throat. "It goes something like this: Li clan's sword, Zhang clan's saber, Zhao clan's fist, Liu clan's leg, and Zheng clan's young master is a burden..."

After singing a short stanza, Chen Na was self-conscious. She laughed awkwardly. "It doesn't sound very nice in the standard language. My grandmother used to sing it in the native language of the Silver City. It is sometimes sung in the local opera. If you have never heard it before, it might sound a little old-fashioned."

Li Hao's eyes twinkled. The Li family's sword, the Zhang family's saber...

There were eight clans in this song! Li, Zhang, Zhao, Liu, Wang, Hong, Zhou, and Zheng!

He snatched the files from Chen Na and looked at the names on the files. Zhou Qing! That had been the very first death ten years ago. Then it was the saleswoman, Hong Jiao, and then Wang Haoming...

Li Hao wondered what if Zhou Qing was the second to die. What if there was someone else with the surname of Zheng who had died more than ten years ago?

In the Silver City's folk song, the order of the eight clans were reversed. It matched the names of the people who had died! Which meant there was only one person left with the surname of Li...

Li Hao was frantic. "This song... when did it originate and when did it start spreading in the city?"

Chen Na was distressed by the look in his eyes. But she calmed herself. "I don't know. Old and the elderly know of this song but I don't think young people now know of it at all. If you are interested, we could find out more about it. Don't worry."

Li Hao took a deep breath and tried to suppress his excitement and anxiety. 'I shouldn't rush,' he said to himself.

He had never imagined that Chen Na would provide him with the most important clue in the case. Li Hao had never heard the song and maybe most people hadn't, too.

With the popularization of the official language, the local village dialects had faded along with their folk songs. Li Hao's grandfather had died before he had known him, so he had never had anyone sing the song to him.

'Stay calm!' he said to himself. He had a clue, finally!

The most important thing for him to do now was to find out if the first person to die had the surname of Zheng.

Some of the files from before ten years had been destroyed, but there were still places where he could dig up the information. He didn't need all the details. He only had to confirm whether any person from the Zheng family had died ten to fifteen years ago.

Li Hao felt thrilled at the discovery but also terrified of the future. If this was correct, the next target was him! Zhang Yuan must have known about it when he had told him to run.

'The Li family's sword ...,' thought Li Hao. His eyes widened. The Li family did have a sword!