

Constellation Door

Chapter 8: The Fog Gradually Dissipates (3)

She handed him the yellowed file. "Little Hao, what do you need this for?" she asked out of curiosity. "From 1715 to 1719, there are many people with the name Zheng in the Silver City. Few hundreds in total, actually. Most of them have been dead for so long."

Li Hao gave her an innocent smile. "Sister Zhao, there are some files in the Confidential Information Room that involves a person from here. But the files are all jumbled. I can't file them away without the correction so I had to trouble you. When I am done with those, I will treat you to a meal."

"That's alright," she said. "Little Hao... you are already twenty. You are an adult now. My daughter will turn twenty-two this year. Just two years older than you..."

1

Little Hao knew what was coming. He kept his sweet smile on. "Sister Zhao, I am still too young for that. Let's talk later. I have to finish up with the work."

He thanked her and quickly left the archives. The aunties at the Inspection Office were friendly and kind, much too friendly at times. That wasn't good for him. They liked to introduce their daughters, or nieces, or some girl from some other family.

It was tiring and annoying. Sometimes he wondered why he had ever gone to the Silver City Ancient Academy. Even though he had dropped out of the academy, his popularity of being associated with the academy didn't seem to diminish.

Li Hao flipped through the list of names. The list was several hundreds of names long. The cause of death was usually mentioned at the side of the names. Li Hao would have to eliminate a lot of names before he could find the Zheng family he was looking for.

Of course, it would be far easier if the cause of death was directly mentioned as self-immolation. But that was just wishful thinking.

The red shadow killed people who were the direct descendants of the eight families in the song. It would be a pain to find the name in this sea of names. Fortunately, Li Hao at least had some inkling of an idea about what he was looking for. Otherwise, it would be difficult for him to find just one person among these many.

'There was a self-immolation case in 1720, followed by one in 1723, so the time before that should be equal or longer. The biggest possibility is that the death might have happened before 1717,' speculated Li Hao.

Li Hao flipped through the lists. He had to confirm whether the Zheng family members were dead or not. If anyone from Zheng family had died, his guesses would be correct.

But if that wasn't the case, then he could still try to contact someone from the Zheng family. They might be able to help Li Hao find more clues. They would know about the red shadow.

'In the song, Zheng family's young master is called a burden. It's different from the other families. No weapons were mentioned. Maybe Zheng family is different...,' thought Li Hao as he read through the names. As he turned the page, a name jumped out at him:

Zheng Yunqi, died on September 12, 1715. Cause of death: Gas explosion

Li Hao stared at it. 'A gas explosion?' he probed.

A gas explosion would mean the victim would be burned entirely. It was similar to self-immolation. It would be filed under 'accident' because it would not attract too much attention.

"Is this him?" mumbled Li Hao. A gas explosion would be massive, it would have killed several people. And, if it happened at the Zheng family residence, the entire Zheng family would be wiped out.

This name matched the situation from the song.

'Maybe I can pay a visit...,' thought Li Hao. The address was written in the file. It was an entirely different matter whether the house would still be there after fifteen years.

Chen Na's song had indeed offered many clues! Li Hao felt that he was gradually beginning to understand the self-immolation cases.

If Zheng Yunqi was the Zheng family member Li Hao was looking for, then Li Hao would be the only one alive from the eight families.

'What is the red shadow after?' wondered Li Hao. 'Revenge? Is the red shadow a man-made thing or some kind of special power? Or, is it just a smokescreen for something else?'

Li Hao touched his jade pendant. He wondered if this was just a jade family heirloom or if it had other uses...

'The people from the seven families are all dead. Next will be me. How does the red shadow know where to find us?' pondered Li Hao anxiously. He was scared that his death was slowly approaching.

Li Hao felt that a storm was coming. He checked the communicator on his hand. He wanted to know if there was any stormy or rainy day forecast in the near future. The red shadow would most likely appear then.

'18th of July, Cloudy!' read the communicator.

Li Hao's eyes widened. 'Today is the 12th...'

The weather would be good for the next few days until the 18th and then there would be a period of rainy days.

'The red shadow will appear in six days, or beyond...,' Li Hao's mind was filled with distress. He was sure that he was its next target.

'Zhang Yuan hadn't been wrong. He told me to run! Had he already guessed as he burned to death that I would be the next to be killed?' thought Li Hao. 'But then why did the red shadow wait? Why didn't it kill me right then? Why did it wait for a year?'

'Is there a limit to how many people it can kill at a time? Or, maybe the self-immolation can be used only once in a year...'

Li Hao sighed and tried to calm himself. The fear of the unknown had been greater than the immediate danger. At least now he knew something about the red shadow.

He had felt lost and scared before when he was unsure of the red shadow and what the deaths meant. He had come a long way. He had clues! And he now knew when the red shadow would strike. He didn't feel as scared anymore.

He only felt anger and hatred towards this thing that had turned his life upside down. It had killed his friend and perhaps his parents!

This time it will be blood for blood.

He would go to the Night Patrollers and tell them all about the red shadow. If he could kill it, even his death would be worth it!

'Just you wait Zhang Yuan. Mom and dad! I will avenge you all!' vowed Li Hao. He clenched his fists in anger and his usually gentle face turned ferocious.