

Star Gate 17

Chapter 17: A Maddened Liu Long

The law enforcement team naturally came up empty-handed after searching the Zhang family home. There was nothing of value here. However, Liu Long was aware that there must be something precious in the residence if someone had kept it under surveillance for so long. Or were they possibly waiting for someone?

Waiting to see who would come to the house?

But who would visit when there were no more Zhangs left? In the past year, only Li Hao came because he was vested in the case.

The towering deputy chief placed his hands behind his back and strode through the yard. Li Hao and the others followed behind—Panther hadn't run off either. It didn't dare approach Liu Long, like it was afraid of the man.

The deputy chief quickly reached the kitchen; its doors were open while people searched inside. They didn't find anything, of course.

Li Hao didn't look at the chimney, at where he'd replaced a certain stone. He'd done his best to restore it to its original condition, but some of the plaster had been shaken loose throughout the course of his exertions. There was nothing he could do to stick it back on.

But it also seemed normal to have some flaking plaster in a kitchen that'd long been neglected.

None of the enforcers lifted their heads or paid much attention to the chimney. Only Liu Long swept the entire layout with an exceedingly sharp gaze. He neither expected to find any clues nor hoped that there would be any treasure left to discover after the house was kept under watch for so long.

He paused, ever so slightly, at the end of his sweep when he reached the shifted stone.

The deputy chief quickly looked away and turned without a word. He looked at Li Hao measuredly and asked faintly, “Li Hao, did you find anything when you arrived?”

“No!” The young man shook his head and added, “Well, not entirely. Based on my observations, someone’s rifled through the entire complex and even dug up the old tree in the yard. They must’ve raised a large disturbance, but no one’s aware of it. They’re either very strong or they’re very good at covering up things!”

Liu Long inclined his head. “Do you think those behind the scenes will emerge if we tear down the house?” he suddenly asked.

“Probably not!” Li Hao opted for the truth. “The law enforcers will still be here after the complex is torn down. As strong as the enemy might be, they won’t dare show themselves because that would no longer be operating in the dark. That’d be setting themselves against all of Silver City!”

“Then do you think there’s a need to continue tearing down this residence? This is your good friend’s ancestral home, the only thing left of him.”

Li Hao mentally snapped to attention. Had Liu Long discovered something? Is he doubting me or suspecting that the scarlet shadow faction took something?

It’s very likely me!

The shadow’s faction was still watching the house to this day. There would be no need for them to stay if they’d retrieved something.

That left only Li Hao.

Man, he’s tough to shake off!

Why did he ever think that such a difficult character was a bumbling fool?

Ah, that would be due to the enforcement team failing to solve quite a few cases. Otherwise, he wouldn't think they were incompetent to the point of being unable to handle mere self-immolation.

"It's... best if we can keep it," Li Hao said slowly after thinking for a bit. "But if we can't, we'd still be avenging Zhang Yuan if we catch his killer. The house is a dead thing. We can tear it down or burn it, I don't mind either way!"

"Well said!" Liu Long nodded and abruptly punched out, smashing a hole in the kitchen wall.

Li Hao's heart jolted with shock. Although the kitchen wall wasn't made of metal, it was still formed of stacked brick. The deputy chief broke and caved them in with a single punch! Just that alone told Li Hao that if he suffered a blow, he'd be crippled at the very least, if not dead.

Plaster flew everywhere after the aged kitchen wall suffered a blow. Liu Long looked around coolly and commanded, "Stop wasting time since we haven't come up with anything. Tear it down! Dig three feet beneath the ground and burn it all if you don't find anything. If there's still nothing after that... pack it up!"

"Understood!" Enforcer shouts were swiftly punctuated by rumbling sounds.

Liu Long looked at Li Hao again. "Do you want to look around and save a few keepsakes?"

"No need, there's no point to that!" Li Hao shook his head with a morose sigh. "Bringing the killer's head to Zhang Yuan's grave would be much more meaningful!"

There was no way he'd dump oil over himself when fire burned in front of him! Whatever he took would be all that remained of the Zhangs. He'd never be able to explain himself; no one would believe that the mess on his pants was mud and not shit!

The scarlet shadow had been searching for the blade all this time. No matter what he took, they would think it was part of his keepsakes.

And ironically enough, he did have the blade!

Liu Long didn't necessarily have good intentions either. Perhaps he was testing Li Hao, or perhaps he wanted to kill via another's hand. Whatever it was, the young man wasn't going to take the bait.

An inscrutable smile flashed through the depths of Liu Long's eyes and he called out, "Don't ruin everything. Pick a few items to take back as evidence!"

Li Hao remained silent, quickly deciphering Liu Long's intentions. Did he want to lure the scarlet shadow out of hiding? He didn't think lightly of the enforcement team or Liu Long anymore. Every word that the deputy chief said was worthy of deeper analysis.

"Everyone, spread out! Li Hao, you're with me." Liu Long dismissed the enforcers around him.

Carrying out his orders with alacrity, the young man didn't question anything. Liu Long didn't explain anything as he strode outside. Li Hao trotted in his wake to keep up.

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Outside the Zhang front doors.

People were everywhere on the street; there were law enforcers intermixed with startled residents. Although many had moved away, there was a fair number left.

Liu Long marched forward without a word, stopping when he reached a water tower in the middle of the street. He set foot onto its staircase and continued upward.

Once more, Li Hao followed the deputy chief. He didn't understand what the man wanted and why they were here. To make use of a high vantage point? This was the tallest building in the street and could easily see in all four directions. Did he want to observe where the enemy was?

The wooden staircase creaked as they climbed up, reaching the top before long. The old street stretched out in front of them and Liu Long's black trench coat flapped in the wind, revealing the numerous weapons hidden within. Contrary to Li Hao's expectations, he saw the glint of metal instead of guns.

There was a dirk, an exquisitely crafted silver ax, and some throwing daggers.

"Li Hao, you're an inspector from Classified Affairs." Liu Long looked up at the sky instead of the bustling street below. "Tell me, what is your impression of the enforcement team after a year at the Inspectorate?"

"Highly competent!" Li Hao answered without hesitation.

"Heh," came a cold snort as derision crossed Liu Long's face. "Hypocrite! All literati are hypocrites!"

...I have nothing to say to that.

"You mean highly incompetent!" Liu Long continued coldly. "We can handle some minor, insignificant cases, but we fail almost all of the big ones!"

“But we’ve turned this way only in the last few years. In the past, the Inspectorate was the anchor of Silver City! As a long term resident, surely you recall that the city’s security was the best out of all neighboring cities. You didn’t even need to shut your doors at night!”

Li Hao nodded after thinking for a bit. Silver City had indeed seemed very safe when he was young. Of course, that could also be because he’d been a blissfully unaware child, so he’d thought that there was no danger in the city.

Liu Long didn’t care what he was thinking. “Do you know why I want you to join the enforcement team?”

“I don—”

“Because of Zhang Yuan!”

Li Hao frowned. What did he mean by that?

“I’ve captained the team for ten years,” Liu Long said calmly. “My ties to the team run deep, just like your friendship with Zhang Yuan. The team feels like my brother and I don’t want a brother to slowly die like this!

“I wanted to save it once, but found that I cannot see the wood for the trees. I am no longer able to use reason and rationale to manage emotion. I know everyone very well, but it is because of this that I don’t think any of them would do anything against me.

“I don’t want to doubt anyone. I’m not willing to believe that the brothers that have been through life and death with me would betray the core of who we are for the sake of money or other baubles!

“We took an oath the moment we joined the Inspectorate and the enforcement team that we would enforce justice! We would enforce the law in what was unfair! We would not fear power or sacrifice!

“Justice always prevails! It never flinches and it never compromises!” Liu Long declared solemnly, then sneered self-deprecatingly at himself. “Such was our oath that year, but it seems that very few can remain faithful and always keep it in mind!”

Li Hao listened silently. He wasn’t close to this man, but perhaps the unfamiliarity was why Liu Long was willing to speak so candidly.

“Zhang Yuan’s case is not a simple one, and it might involve supernaturals!” Liu Long changed the topic.

Li Hao found his voice again and nodded. “I think so too! The six cases seem very normal, even the one I witnessed with my own eyes. It’d be very difficult for ordinary people to commit them.”

“And you still dare to keep going with the investigation?” Liu Long smiled—his first of the night, but it was a smile that made one uncomfortable.

Li Hao didn’t know if this person was connected to the scarlet shadow, but he had no other choice or ideas anymore.

“Zhang Yuan was my only friend!”

“So you’d put your life on the line for him?” Liu Long asked faintly. “We are all hot-blooded and impulsive in our youth, but feelings change when we grow older!

“Regardless, that’s not important! You’re in a bit of danger right now. One, you’re involved in the last self-immolation case. Two, you uncovered the connection between multiple cases and brought it

to our attention. Three, you alarmed the enemy ahead of time with your visit tonight. This is one of your sources of danger.

“Don’t expect too much from Professor Yuan. We have to rely on ourselves. Depending on others always proves to be unreliable!

“Professor Yuan is just an ordinary person. The Night Watchers might give him some face, or they might not. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking that they’ll always get involved if a case involves the extraordinary.

“What are six dead people to the Night Watchers?”