

7 Killers – Chapter 8

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Chapter 8 – Heaven's net is wide meshed, nothing escapes it

Part 1

The rain was cold, light and thin.

Long thin strands of rain fluttered amongst the parasol trees in the courtyard. The rain entangled parasol leaves and gloomy hearts alike. [1]

Dragon Fifth had reached the end of the long outer corridor, but he didn't walk out. He, too, was reluctant to get wet.

Liu Changjie walked up and stood behind him.

Dragon Fifth knew Liu Changjie was there, but he said nothing. Neither did Liu Changjie.

They stood there quietly at the end of the corridor, watching the rain fall on the parasol trees in. They stood there for a long time.

"Power of Hu really is cruel." Dragon Fifth let out a long sigh. "He is not only cruel to others, he is cruel to himself."

"Perhaps because he is at the end of his road," said Liu Changjie indifferently.

"And because he is at the end of the road, you're going to let him go?"

"I'm also a cruel person."

"No you're not."

Liu Changjie laughed, but it wasn't a happy laugh.

Dragon Fifth looked back at him. "At the least, you will let him maintain his reputation."

"Because his reputation wasn't stolen. He earned it through suffering and hard work."

"I can see that."

"I don't have any personal animosity toward him. I don't want to see his reputation ruined."

"But you're not bringing him to justice. You're not making him return the things he stole."

"No. I don't need to."

"Don't need to?"

"He is a very intelligent person. I don't need to make him. He should come to me himself to resolve the issue."

"And so you're waiting here for him to come."

Liu Changjie nodded.

"And the case is still not closed."

"Not yet."

Dragon Fifth muttered to himself for a moment, then said, "If he's willing to return the stolen property, willing to solve all the problems himself, then the case will be closed."

"No."

"Why?"

"You should know why."

Dragon Fifth turned his head and gazed at the distant, dark clouds. After a long time he quietly said, "You can't let Qiu

Hengbo go.”

“I can’t.” His face suddenly was filled with a very solemn look. “No one can violate the law, or universal truths. Anyone who breaks the law must be punished.”

Dragon Fifth looked back and stared at him. “Who are you, really? Why are you investigating this matter?”

Liu Changjie didn’t reply.

“You obviously are not who you say you are,” said Dragon Fifth. “But you also don’t want to sell yourself out.”

Liu Changjie said nothing.

“Both Power of Hu and I investigated your background, yet neither of us found anything to indicate you were lying.”

“You really don’t understand?”

“I really don’t.”

Liu Changjie laughed. “When I encounter something I don’t understand, I use a special method to deal with it.”

“What method?”

“When I don’t understand something, I don’t think about it. At least temporarily.”

“And afterwards?”

“Whatever the secret it is, it will be revealed eventually. You just have to wait patiently, and eventually you will figure it out.”

Dragon Fifth said nothing.

Maybe he couldn’t stop thinking about it, but he could stop asking.

The rain fell in sheets, twilight grew deeper and deeper.

Light footsteps could be heard.

Then a hand was visible, carrying a lantern, walking slowly down the gloomy corridor.

The lamplight revealed a head of white hair, and the face of Power of Hu’s faithful follower, the old doorman.

His face was expressionless.

He had long ago mastered the ability to conceal sorrow within his heart.

“The two guests have not left yet?”

“We haven’t.”

The old man nodded his head. “Of course the two guests aren’t gone. However, the master is gone.”

“He’s gone?”

The old man stared at the curtains of falling rain. “A storm may arise from a clear sky. People have mornings and evenings, disaster and happiness. I never thought that the master’s sickness would flare up again so suddenly.”

“He died of sickness?”

The old man nodded his head. “His rheumatism had long since seeped into his marrow. He’s been a cripple for a long time, and to keep living down to this day hasn’t been easy.”

His face was completely expressionless, but within his eyes could be seen a strange expression. It was hard to say if he was grieving for Power of Hu, or begging Liu Changjie not to reveal his master’s secret.

Liu Changjie looked at him, and finally nodded his head. “Very well. So he died of sickness. I saw long ago that the disease was getting very serious.”

An expression of gratitude filled his eyes, and he sighed. “Thank you. You really are a good person. The master did not misjudge you.”

Sighing again, he slowly turned and walked away down the corridor.

"Where are you going?" asked Liu Changjie.

"To announce the master's death."

"Where will you make the announcement?"

"At Madam Autumn's." The man's voice was filled with resentment. "If it wasn't for her, the master's illness might not have been so bad. Now that the master is gone, I will definitely make sure she knows."

Liu Changjie's eyes shone. "Don't tell me she will come here to pay her respects?"

"She will come." He spoke one word at a time. "She must come."

The rain outside the corridor grew thicker and thicker.

The old man walked out of the corridor, and the lantern in his hand was instantly extinguished by the rain.

It seemed he didn't notice. Carrying the extinguished lantern, he slowly walked off into the darkness.

Night had fallen, enveloping everything in blackness.

After his crooked, emaciated frame disappeared into the night, Dragon Fifth let out a sigh. "It seems you were correct. Power of Hu didn't disappoint."

Liu Changjie also sighed.

"But," Dragon Fifth said, "I still don't understand why Qiu Hengbo 'must' come."

"I don't know either."

"So you're not going to think about it?"

Liu Changjie laughed. "Because I believe that in the end, all secrets will be revealed."

He turned and stared at Dragon Fifth. "There's an expression I think you should never forget."

"What expression?"

"Heaven's net is wide meshed, nothing escapes it. The way of Heaven is fair, but the guilty will not escape." His eyes shone in the darkness. "Whoever commits crimes, they should each and every one forget about escaping justice."

Part 2

Dusk.

There is dusk every day, but every dusk is different.

Similarly, every person dies, and yet there are many types of death. Some people die bravely and with honor, others die in an ordinary and humble way.

Power of Hu's death was neither ordinary nor humble.

Many had come to his mourning hall to pay respects. [2] Some were his disciples and friends, others merely came to because of his reputation. There was one person missing.

Madam Lovesickness had not arrived.

Liu Changjie wasn't anxious. He hadn't even asked about her.

And he hadn't stopped Dragon Fifth from leaving. He'd known all along that Dragon Fifth would leave, the same as he knew Qiu Hengbo would arrive.

Dragon Fifth seeing her would only complicate matters. [3]

Qiu Hengbo would come, so Dragon Fifth had no choice but to leave.

When seeing Dragon Fifth off, he'd taken him to the end of the corridor and said, "I'll definitely come looking for you."

"When? When will you come?"

Liu Changjie laughed. "When it's time to drink, of course."

Dragon Fifth laughed. "I always drink at Heavenly Fragrance."

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The mourning hall had been set up in the spacious, ancient main hall.

Liu Changjie was nowhere to be seen, only the white-haired old servant, along with effigies of a virgin boy and a virgin girl, keeping vigil over the coffin.

The night was deep.

Eerie lamplight shone onto the exhausted face of the old servant. He himself looked like an effigy.

Mourning couplets, written on strips of white cloth, were hung all about, and there were piles of paper effigies of houses, horses, ships, and other lucky objects.

These things had been gathered in preparation to be burned on the nights of "Receiving the Third" and "Accompanying Night." [4]

The effigy of the horse cart was remarkably true to life. It had a man leading the horses, a man driving the cart, even extra helpers, horse tackle and whips. Their livery and their faces were all extremely lifelike. It was unfortunate that Power of Hu couldn't see them.

The night wind was dull and desolate, the lamplight flickered, and then the shadow of a visitor floated into the room.

The visitor was wearing mourning clothes on top, and underneath, the dark clothes of someone who wishes to remain hidden at night.

The old servant raised his head and glanced at him. The man knelt down, and the old servant knelt alongside. He kowtowed, and the old servant kowtowed with him.

When a famous hero of the martial world like Power of Hu passes away, it's relatively common for unknown figures of the Jianghu world to come in the dead of night to pay respects.

It wasn't an unusual thing, and was nothing to be shocked about or to even ask questions about.

And yet, this night visitor asked, "Master Hu is really dead?"

The old servant nodded his head.

"But the old man was fine just a few days ago. How could he suddenly pass away?"

"A storm may arise from a clear sky," said the old servant gloomily. "People have mornings and evenings, disaster and happiness. These matters, no one can predict."

"How did the old man pass?" It seemed this passing visitor was very interested in Power of Hu's death.

"He died of sickness. He had a very serious disease."

The visitor let out a long sigh. "I didn't see the old man for such a long time. I had no idea I would never see him again."

"Sadly, you were just a bit too late."

"Would it be possible for me to pay homage to his remains?" It seemed this visitor couldn't let go of the idea of seeing Power of Hu.

"No." The old servant's response was very direct. "Others can. You can't."

The visitor seemed shocked. "Why not?"

The old servant lowered his head. "Because he didn't know you."

The visitor seemed more shocked. "How do you know that he didn't know me?"

"Because I don't know you," replied the servant coldly.

"So you know everyone he knew?"

The old servant nodded.

The visitor also lowered his head. "And if I'm set on seeing him?"

"I know that you don't want to see him," was the cold response. "The person who wants to see him is someone else."

The visitor frowned. "Do you know who does want to see him?"

The old servant nodded again. With a cold laugh, he said, "I'm only confused about one thing."

"What's that?"

"Madam Autumn doesn't think the master is dead, so she wants to see his corpse. Why didn't she come herself, instead of sending a Five Gates thief like you to harass his spirit?"

The visitor's face changed. His hands flipped out to reveal a pair of poison-coated deerskin gloves.

The old servant refused to look at him.

The visitor laughed. "Even if I'm just a Five Gates thief, I can still take your life."

It seemed he really was ready to spring to action, but at that exact moment, a cold laugh could be heard. "Shut your mouth and get out of here. Get the hell out!"

**

The voice was mesmerizing, as mesmerizing as if it had emanated from heaven.

A third person could not be seen in the mourning hall, and it was impossible to tell where the voice came from.

The old servant did not seem shocked at all. His face was completely expressionless. "So you finally came," he said coldly. "I knew you would come."

Part 3

The visitor backed up step by step, until he was gone from the mourning hall.

Left behind was only the white-haired, haggard old servant, illuminated by the desolate, eerie lamp.

And then, the entire mourning hall was filled with a voice.

"Justice of Hu." She was addressing the old servant by name. "Since you knew I sent him here, why wouldn't you let him see the master's remains?"

Justice of Hu's reply was just as clear-cut. "Because he's not worthy."

"And me? Am I worthy?"

"The master predicted that you wouldn't believe he was really dead."

"Oh?"

"Therefore, he instructed me to wait for your arrival before sealing the coffin."

"Don't tell me he wants to see me one more time, too?" She was laughing.

Her laughter was both beautiful and sinister.

As the laughter was ringing out, the paper effigies suddenly shattered into millions of pieces. [5]

Countless shreds of paper flitted about the mourning hall like colorful butterflies.

And within the flying butterflies, a person floated down, looking like a beautiful white flower that had just bloomed.

She wore a long, snow-white robe, and her face was covered with a white gauze veil. Her body looked like a white cloud that in an instant alighted in front of Justice of Hu.

His face was still completely expressionless—he'd known Madam Lovesickness would arrive.

He'd known long ago, and had been waiting for her for a long time.

"Can I look at the master's remains now?"

"Of course you can," said Justice of Hu calmly. "Who knows, perhaps the master really did want to see you one more time."

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The coffin was not sealed.

Power of Hu lay quietly within, seeming more serene and peaceful than he had in life.

Perhaps it was because he knew that no one in the world would ever again be able to force him to do things against his will.

Madam Lovesickness finally let out a soft sigh. "It seems he really is gone."

"It seems you're happy he went first."

"Because I know that dead people can't take anything with them when they go."

"He's definitely not taking anything with him."

"If he's not taking anything with him, then he should leave those things for me."

"What should be given to you has already been given."

"Where?"

"Right here."

"And why don't I see anything?"

"Because what you promised to bring to him, is not here."

"Even if I brought it, he couldn't see it."

"I could see it."

"Unfortunately, I didn't promise you. Hu Yue'er isn't your daughter!"

Justice of Hu said nothing.

"Where are the items?"

"Right here."

"I still don't see anything."

"Because I don't see Hu Yue'er."

Madam Lovesickness laughed coldly. "I'm afraid you'll never see her again."

Justice of Hu also laughed coldly. "In that case, you'll never see the things you want."

"At the least, I can see one more thing."

"Oh?"

"At the least," she said coldly, "I can see your head fall to the ground."

"Sadly, my head isn't worth even one coin."

"Worthless things are sometimes very desirable."

"In that case, come get it whenever you want."

Madam Lovesickness laughed. "You know very well that I'm not going to kill you."

“Oh?”

“As long as you have at least one breath left, there’s still a way for me to get you to tell the truth.”

Her hand suddenly flicked out like an orchid.

Justice of Hu didn’t move.

Another hand suddenly shot out like lightning to meet hers.

There was no third person in the hall, so where did the hand come from. Could it be that it came from within the coffin?

The hand did not shoot out from the coffin.

It was neither a dead hand, nor a hand made from paper.

The effigies were already shattered into the countless shreds that still fluttered about like butterflies.

“I was also waiting for your arrival.” From within the fluttering butterflies appeared a smiling face.

Liu Changjie laughed.

But within his laughter could be heard an unspeakable pain.

Because, the energy of his palm strike had already lifted up Madam Lovesickness’s gauze veil. He could finally lay eyes on her face.

From the very beginning, he would never have been able to guess that this gloomy, mysterious woman, was actually Hu Yue’er.

Part 4

Dragon Fifth was wrapped up in a marten coat, reclining on the long, narrow couch. He stared at the deadwoods outside the window and muttered, “How come it hasn’t snowed at all this year?”

No one responded to him, and he didn’t expect anyone to.

Qin Huhua didn’t speak very often.

When a person begins to talk to oneself, it indicates that they are beginning to grow old.

Dragon Fifth had heard this saying before, but forgot who said it.

“Don’t tell me I really am growing old?”

He felt at the wrinkles in the corners of his eyes, and suddenly an indescribable feeling of loneliness welled up from his heart.

Qin Huhua was warming wine for him.

He seldom drank wine, but lately he had been drinking two cups every day.

—When will you come?

—When it’s time to drink, of course.

Suddenly, the light sound of footfalls could be heard from outside. A waiter appeared, wearing dark green clothes and a small cap. He carried a small platter, upon which was a soup bowl, covered.

Dragon Fifth turned his head and suddenly laughed. “Are there three hands in the soup bowl this time?”

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It was Liu Changjie.

Smiling, he lifted the lid of the soup bowl and said, “There’s only one hand in here, a left hand.”

Inside the soup bowl was the paw of a bear, which Dragon Fifth had ordered earlier, and had been slowly cooked for an entire day.

The wine was warmed.

"I knew you would come," laughed Dragon Fifth. "You came just at the right time."

Qin Huhua had already filled two cups.

"You're not drinking?" Liu Changjie asked him.

Qin Huhua shook his head.

He glanced at Liu Changjie and then turned his head, his face expressionless.

Liu Changjie gazed at him and suddenly thought of the white-haired, haggard old servant, the man with a face like a dead tree, Justice of Hu.

Every time he looked at Justice of Hu, he couldn't help but think of Qin Huhua.

Could it be because they were the same type of person? Anyone who tried to guess their thoughts from the expressions on their faces, would never succeed.

What was Liu Changjie thinking now?

He was smiling, but the smile was dim, just like the overcast weather outside.

"This really is good weather for drinking."

Dragon Fifth looked back at him, smiling. "So I prepared a pot of wine, especially for you."

Liu Changjie drank a cup. "And it's good wine."

He sat down, and his smile brightened a bit. A cup of quality wine will always brighten the spirits.

Dragon Fifth stared at him. "You just arrived?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I thought you would arrive a few days ago."

"I ... I arrived late."

Dragon Fifth laughed. "Arriving late is better than not arriving at all."

Liu Changjie sat silently for a long time, thinking.

"You're wrong," he said suddenly. "Sometimes not arriving at all is actually better."

He obviously was not talking about himself.

"Who are you talking about?" asked Dragon Fifth.

Liu Changjie drank another cup. "You should know who I'm talking about."

"She really appeared?"

"Yes."

"You saw her?"

"Yes."

"And you recognized her?"

"Yes."

"Don't tell me she really was Hu Yue'er?"

Liu Changjie downed his fifth cup. "She obviously wasn't the real Hu Yue'er."

"You've never seen the real Hu Yue'er, have you?"

Liu Changjie nodded, and finished his sixth cup.

Dragon Fifth continued, "She abducted the real Hu Yue'er and used her to blackmail Power of Hu, then impersonated her to meet with you."

Liu Changjie downed the seventh cup. "Do you want to know what happened to her in the end?" he asked suddenly.

"Not really." He was smiling, but the smile was even more gloomy than the weather outside. "I knew a long time ago what kind of person she is."

"But you don't know what happened to her in the end."

"I don't need to know. A person's nature will dictate their end." He forced out a laugh. "Heaven's net is wide meshed, nothing escapes it. The way of Heaven is fair, but the guilty will not escape. I haven't forgotten this."

Liu Changjie wanted to laugh, but couldn't. He had drunk all the wine in the jug.

Dragon Fifth drank a cup. "I never could figure out what kind of person that old man was."

"You mean Justice of Hu?"

Dragon Fifth nodded. "I actually suspected that he was the real Power of Hu."

"Ah?"

"In fact, I even suspected that they were the same person."

"I don't understand."

"Did you ever hear the story of a person in Jianghu called 'the Ouyang Brothers?'"

"I have heard."

"The Ouyang brothers weren't actually two people. He was a man whose name was 'the Ouyang Brothers.'"

"Yes, I remember."

"The Ouyang Brothers was actually one person. Couldn't it be possible that Power of Hu was actually two people?"

Liu Changjie finally caught on.

"Did you ever think of that possibility?" asked Dragon Fifth.

"Never. The relationship between two people can rarely be understood by a third party."

He couldn't help but glance once more at Qin Huhua. What exactly was the relationship between him and Dragon Fifth? Was there something more than met the eye?

He sighed. "In any case, we will never know the answer to the mystery."

"Why?"

"Because Justice of Hu also didn't leave the mourning hall alive."

Justice of Hu "also" was gone.

Did the word "also" contain another meaning? Were there other people who "also" died in the mourning hall?

Dragon Fifth didn't ask.

He didn't want to ask, and couldn't bear to ask.

"In any case, the case is finally closed," he said. He extended the wine jug, which had just been replenished, and refilled Liu Changjie's cup.

Liu Changjie downed another. "I never could have imagined that the case would be closed in this way."

"How did you think it would end? Did you really suspect me from the beginning?"

Liu Changjie didn't answer his question. Instead, he said, "You're fundamentally a very suspicious person."

"Why?"

"Because down to this very moment, I can't see through you."

"And what about you? Who can see through you?" Dragon Fifth laughed. "I always thought it was strange. Why could Power of Hu and all his people not learn the truth about you?"

Liu Changjie laughed. "Because there's no truth to learn."

Dragon Fifth stared at him. One word at a time, he said, "Can you finally tell me... Who are you?"

"You and Power of Hu both went to that little town," said Liu Changjie coolly. "You both investigated me."

"And we both found out nothing."

"Of course you didn't." He smiled. "It's because I was born in that little town, and I lived a very normal life."

"And now?"

"Now I'm just a local constable there."

A look of shock covered Dragon Fifth's face.

"A person like you, just a local constable from a small town?"

Liu Changjie nodded. "You couldn't learn anything about my history because you never imagined that I really was just a small-town constable."

Dragon Fifth let out a long sigh, and then laughed bitterly. "I definitely never imagined."

"You both only met me because my superiors ordered me to get involved with the case. Otherwise you would never have known that there was a person like me in the world."

"Are you telling the truth?"

"You don't believe me?"

"I believe you. But there's still something I don't understand."

"What's that?"

"A person like you, why would you choose to be a local constable?"

"I've always done whatever I feel like doing."

"You always wanted to be a constable?"

Liu Changjie nodded.

Dragon Fifth laughed bitterly. "Some people want to be famous heroes. Some people want to have a high position and a handsome salary. Some people seek fame and some people seek riches. I've seen all these types of people before."

"But you've never seen a person who wanted to be a constable?"

"There are definitely not very many people like you."

"There are plenty of famous heroes in the world, so there should definitely be some people like me, people who are willing to do that which other's won't do, or aren't willing to do." He smiled, and this time it was a happy smile. "In the end, there have to be constables. And if a person can do what they want to do in life, shouldn't they be happy?" [6]

(1) This is a type of tree you see mentioned in literature a lot apparently. <http://goo.gl/7Cc8PJ>

(2) What I'm translating as "paying respects" literally means to offer sacrifices to the dead. I'm sure most of you know that in Chinese culture this involves kowtowing, burning incense or money, etc.

(3) The Chinese here is (in my opinion) really vague (a key characteristic of Chinese sometimes). The direct translation would be "to see something bothersome, is not as good as not seeing it." The underlying meaning is my translation...

(4) These are names of different days associated with traditional funeral customs. I couldn't find any information about official English translations, so these are my personal translations.

(5) There is an additional line that I'm leaving out. It describes the paper effigies shattering, "as if there were an invisible fire that just exploded." It just sounds weird in English...

(6) The literal translation of his final line of dialogue is: "No matter what, being a constable is a job that people do, if a person lives in this world, and they do what they want to do, shouldn't they be content?" It seems pretty eloquent in Chinese, and I wanted the English to carry that same flavor.

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