

7 Killers – Chapter 4

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Chapter 4 – Inhuman people

Part 1

It was very late at night.

Liu Changjie sat in the simple living room. A very long time had passed already, and not a sound could be heard in the night.

He had taken the body of the woman and put it on the bed. Then he had taken all the quilts in the house and placed them on top of her, as if she was afraid of catching cold.

After that, he went around and lit all the lamps in the house, even the lamps in the kitchen.

He wasn't afraid of death, and he wasn't afraid of the dark. But in his heart he carried an indescribable hatred for both of them, and always wished to push them as far away as possible.

Now he sat thinking, trying to wrap his mind around the whole matter, from head to tail.

He was a quiet person, not very well known, to the point that even he was unsure of the extent of his own strength and ability.

He had never tested himself, had never even thought to.

But "Power of Hu" Patriarch Hu had discovered him, the same way one might discover a pearl inside of a clam.

Patriarch Hu not only had sharp eyes, he had a mind with no equal.

He never misjudged people, never misjudged anything—in fact he had never made a single error in judgment.

Even though he had never worn the official headdress of a government official, had never eaten a meal provided by the government, he was without a doubt the most famous investigator alive. The chief constables of every administrative district and every prefecture virtually worshipped him.

There was not a case in the world that he couldn't crack; as long as he was alive, there was not a single underworld criminal who could evade justice.

But sadly, even the fastest sword will eventually become dull; no matter how powerful the person, they will eventually become sick and old.

He had finally grown old and contracted rheumatism, could barely walk without the support of others.

In the two or three years after becoming ill, he had stayed in Beijing. In that time, several hundred serious crimes had been committed—three hundred thirty-two to be exact.

Among those over three hundred serious cases, not one had been solved.

But leaving these cases unsolved was unacceptable. Among the victims were members of the nobility and high government officials, famous figures of the martial world, well-known and aristocratic families, and even the royal family itself.

Patriarch Hu's legs were crippled, but he was not blind.

He knew that all of these crimes were committed by one person, and he also knew that only one person could solve them.

The criminal was none other than Dragon Fifth, and the hero could be none other than Liu Changjie.

Everyone trusted his judgment in this matter.

And it was in this way that the quiet and unassuming Liu Changjie suddenly became a legend.

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Currently, Liu Changjie wasn't sure if he had gotten lucky, or extremely unlucky.

Even now, he still didn't completely understand what Patriarch Hu really thought of him.

It seemed that he would never be able to understand that crafty old fox, and he would never understand his daughter, either.

He thought back to a year or so before, when he'd become friends with a man named Wang Nan. One day, Wang Nan had suddenly suggested that they go visit Patriarch Hu. Three months later, Patriarch Hu gave him this task, this burden. It wasn't until this very night that he realized how heavy the burden really was.

So what now?

Was it really possible for him, in only one hour, to kill Tang Qing, Shan Yifei, Soul Enticing Lao Zhao, Iron Monk, Li the Mastiff and the woman? Could he really reach the mysterious wooden box? Could he really get his hands on Dragon Fifth?

Only if he knew the answers to these questions, could he be truly confident.

But lately, what really caused him anxiety was Hu Yue'er.

What kind of woman was she? How did she actually treat him?

Only he knew the answer to that question. After all, he was just a person, made of flesh and blood like everyone else. He wasn't an emotionless rock.

It was very, very late, but sunrise was still a long way off.

What would tomorrow bring? What type of person would Dragon Fifth send to accompany him?

He sighed, wishing that he could just sit in the chair for the rest of the night and forget about all these troublesome thoughts.

But at that moment, he suddenly heard a strange sound, like a light rain hitting the roof.

Then there was a boom, and the entire house burst into flames. It was as if house were made of paper; it was clearly impossible to extinguish the fire.

There was no way Liu Changjie would be killed by a fire.

If you put him in an actual furnace, he still might be able to get out.

Even though the house was not a furnace, it burned like one. Everything was on fire, and nothing was visible other than the flames.

And yet, Liu Changjie was able to escape.

He dashed into the kitchen, grabbed an enormous jar of water, and poured it over his body. Almost before the water could soak his clothes, he was outside.

His reaction time was faster than most people could fathom, and fewer people could imagine how fast his body moved.

Other than the burning building, the night was peaceful.

In the courtyard grew several patches of yellow-flowering plants. In the flickering light of the flames, the flowers seemed especially tender and beautiful.

Standing there was a young woman in yellow clothing, holding a yellow flower in her hand. She looked at Liu Changjie and chuckled.

Outside the courtyard was a horse and carriage. The horse's eyes were covered, so it was unaffected by the frightening inferno.

The yellow-robed girl flew like a swallow to the carriage and opened the door. She looked back at him and smiled.

She didn't say a single word.

Liu Changjie also said nothing.

He entered the carriage and sat.

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The flames burned unceasingly, but Liu Changjie was further and further away from them.

The carriage sped along urgently, having long disappeared into the deep night.

It was a dark night.

Liu Changjie wasn't afraid of the dark, but in his heart he carried an indescribable hatred and disgust for it...

Part 2

New. From socks to inner garment to outer robe, everything was brand new.

Even the bathtub was brand new.

The carriage had just stopped inside the courtyard of a house, and Liu Changjie had followed the young woman inside. Waiting inside a room was a bathtub.

The water was neither cold nor hot.

The young woman pointed at the basin; Liu Changjie stripped off his clothes and climbed in.

She didn't say a single word.

Neither did he ask a single question.

After he was finished washing, scrubbed dry, and ready to don fresh clothes, the young woman suddenly returned. She was followed by two people carrying another brand new wooden wash basin. It was full of water, the temperature of which was neither hot nor cold.

The young woman pointed at it, and Liu Changjie looked into her eyes. After a moment, he climbed in, and began washing himself thoroughly, as if he hadn't bathed in the past three months.

He was not the type of man who believed that water would sap his vitality. In actuality, he really enjoyed bathing.

He also wasn't the type of man who spoke out of turn. If others weren't willing to talk, he usually didn't ask questions.

But after the woman for a fourth time called in attendants with new water to bathe in, he couldn't suppress his frustration any longer.

His body had been scrubbed until it was as bright as a freshly peeled carrot.

The young woman once again pointed at the water, indicating for him to wash again.

He looked at her and then suddenly laughed.

She laughed with him for a while.

"Is there dog shit on my body?" asked Liu Changjie.

She laughed loudly. "No."

"Is there cat shit?"

"Not that either."

"Then what is there?"

She rolled her eyes, her round face reddening.

There was absolutely nothing on his body.

"I've already bathed three times," said Liu Changjie. "Even if there was dog shit on my body, it's long gone."

The young woman nodded, her face red. She was old enough to be embarrassed by a naked man.

"Why do I have to bathe again?"

"I don't know."

Shocked, he replied, "You don't know?"

"All I know," she responded, "Is that whoever meets the lady of this house, they must thoroughly wash from head to toe. Five times."

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So, Liu Changjie bathed five times.

He donned a fresh set of clothes, and as he followed the young woman to meet “the lady,” he suddenly realized that bathing five times in a row wasn’t that bad after all.

His whole body felt relaxed, and walking down the long, glass-like corridor, it felt like he was gliding through the clouds.

At the end of the corridor was a doorway, over which hung a curtain fashioned from pearls.

The narrow door itself was unlocked, and on the other side was a spacious room with white walls and glossy wooden floors. The only decorations were a table, a chair, and a bronze mirror.

Standing in front of the mirror admiring herself was a tall, slender woman wearing apricot-colored robes.

Liu Changjie could see the reflection of her face in the mirror.

It was impossible to deny that her face was beautiful, so beautiful that it could only be described as perfect.

This level of beauty was otherworldly, like that of a celestial being in a painting.

It was a level of beauty that most people would not be willing to approach, only admire from afar.

So Liu Changjie stood as far away as possible.

She looked at him in the mirror, but she didn’t turn her head. She just coldly asked, “You are Liu Changjie?”

“I am.”

“I am Kong. Kong Lanjun.” [1]

Her voice was beautiful, but carried a feeling of indescribable indifference and conceit. It was as if she had long decided that whoever heard her voice would be unable to hold back their shock upon hearing her name.

Liu Changjie did not appear to be the least bit shocked.

Kong Lanjun laughed coldly. “I’ve never laid eyes on you before, but I already know what kind of person you are.”

“Oh?”

“Dragon Fifth said that you are very interesting, as are your money-spending methods.”

“He spoke correctly.”

“Lan Tianmeng said your bones are strong, that you can take a beating.”

“He also spoke correctly.”

“But all the women who’ve met you used the same word to describe you.”

“Oh? What word?”

“Inhuman.”

“They also spoke correctly.”

“An inhuman man who lays eyes on me should die!”

“I didn’t ask to come see you,” replied Liu Changjie. “You sent for me!”

Kong Lanjun’s face whitened. “I sent for you only because I made a promise to Dragon Fifth. Otherwise you would already be dead.”

“What was your promise to Dragon Fifth?”

“I promised him to take you to see someone. Other than that, you and I have absolutely no relationship. So, you had better behave yourself. I know your reputation with women. If you treat me the way you treat other women, you’ll meet a quick end.”

"I understand."

She laughed coldly. "You'd better understand."

"But there are two things I hope you understand."

"What?"

"First, I have no desire at all to have any sort of relationship with you."

Kong Lanjun's face was as white as death.

"Second," he continued, "even though I've never laid eyes on you before, I already know what kind of person you are."

"What kind of person am I?" she asked, unable to hold back her words.

"You think you are a beautiful peacock, and that everyone in the world should admire you; but the only person you admire is yourself."

Kong Lanjun's face couldn't become any whiter. She spun around and stared at him, her eyes flaming.

Liu Changjie calmly went on, "You sent for me because of Dragon Fifth. I was willing to come because of Dragon Fifth. There is absolutely no other relationship between us. Except ..."

"Except what?"

"You really shouldn't have started that fire!"

"I shouldn't have?"

"If the fire had killed me, how could you take me to meet who I'm supposed to meet?"

She laughed. "If the fire had killed you, then you clearly wouldn't have deserved to meet her."

"Who is this person?"

"Qiu Hengbo."

"Madam Autumn?"

She nodded. "Autumn Lovesickness."

"You're going to take me to see her?"

"I'm her friend. And only I can enter the Autumn Mansion." [2]

"You're her friend, and she is yours, but you're helping Dragon Fifth?"

"Among women," she said coldly, "there is no such thing as true friendship."

"Actually, considering the type of person you are, you only have one real friend; yourself."

This time Kong Lanjun didn't appear to be angry. "In any case, I'm better than her," she said calmly.

"Oh?"

"She even views herself as an enemy."

"And yet, she allows you to visit the Autumn Mansion?"

A venomous look suddenly sprang into her eyes. "She lets me visit because she enjoys watching me suffer. She loves to torment me."

Words like hatred or enmity could not begin to describe the look on her face.

Between these two mysterious, beautiful and callous women, there appeared to be some unimaginable relationship.

Liu Changjie looked at her, and suddenly laughed. "Ok, you go, then."

"You..."

"I don't feel like accompanying you, and I don't really need to see her, anyway."

"Unfortunately, you must."

"Why?"

"Because I don't know the location of her secret cave. I can only get you into the Autumn Mansion. The cave, you'll have to find yourself."

Liu Changjie's heart sank.

Hearing this news, he suddenly realized that the whole matter was going to be even more difficult and complicated than he thought.

Kong Lanjun's eyes lit up.

Only when seeing people suffer would her eyes light up. She loved seeing people suffer.

Liu Changjie finally let out a long breath. "Madam Autumn allows you to visit, but only because she likes to torment you. How do you know that she'll allow me to be there?"

"Because she understands me, and she knows what I like. She knows that I especially like to be waited upon by men. So every time I go, I bring a manservant with me."

"I'm not your servant."

"Yes, you are."

She stared at him, a strange expression filling her eyes.

Liu Changjie stared back at her.

They stared at each other for a long time, until finally Liu Changjie let out a long breath and said, "Yes, I am."

"You are my servant?"

"Yes."

"From today on, you will follow me like a dog. If I call you, you will come."

"Yes."

"If I want you to do something, you will do it."

"Yes."

"Whatever you do for me, you must be very careful. Don't let your dirty hands touch me. If your right hand touches me, I'll cut it off. If your arm brushes against me, I'll cut the whole arm off."

"Yes." His face was expressionless, devoid of anger or pain.

Kong Lanjun stared at him for a long time. Then she sighed lightly. "It seems you really aren't human."

Part 3

Qixia Mountain. [3]

The mountain was beautiful. The mountain's name was also beautiful.

After passing the stately Wind Forest Temple, and crossing the Rainbow Spanning Bridge, under which floated a host of lotus plants, one could catch sight of the beauty of Qixia Mountain.

In the evening wind, the faint sound of singing could be heard:

"Those evading the heat of summer return from the cool spring,

"The cool evening sky is filled with boundless brocaded clouds,

"A fragrant breeze blows through the amorous canal,

"They stroll across the soaring bridge, on their way to purchase a boat."

The voice was mysterious and beautiful, and the lotuses were even more beautiful, but neither could compare to the beauty of the sun as it slowly sank over the mountains.

On the other side of the mountain, about halfway up, past the languid nests of clouds, the mountain topography became treacherous. Travelers rarely came to this area, and yet there could be seen a magnificent, newly-constructed inn.

The inn was not very large, but was splendidly constructed. The paint had just dried, and two carpenters were just now hanging a sign above the main entrance, the name of the inn written in golden characters. Opposite of the inn were two peaks that towered up at opposing angles like crossed swords, the most dangerous area on the mountain.

Standing beneath an ancient cypress tree on the mountain peak, wearing a thin, long-sleeved silk garment, was Kong Lanjun. She stood there for a long time and then pointed at the inn. "What do you think of it?" she asked.

"The building was built wrong," said Liu Changjie. "The location is wrong."

"Oh?"

"How can an inn in this area attract customers? It will probably go out of business within three months."

"Your worry is unnecessary. I guarantee you that by daybreak tomorrow, the inn won't be here."

"Can it fly?"

"No."

"If it can't fly, how can it disappear?"

"If people build an inn, people can tear it down."

"Don't tell me that someone is going to tear down the inn by tomorrow morning..."

"That's correct."

Liu Changjie was mystified. "Why tear down a brand new inn?"

"Because this inn was especially built just to be torn down."

Liu Changjie was even more confused.

People buy property to construct buildings. They construct buildings to live in, to do business, to keep mistresses. All these things were normal.

But he had never heard of someone constructing a building specifically to be torn down.

"You don't understand?" asked Kong Lanjun.

"I definitely don't understand."

She laughed coldly. "So it turns out there are things you don't understand."

She obviously didn't want to explain the mystery, so Liu Changjie refrained from asking further questions.

He only knew that Kong Lanjun had brought him here for a reason other than irritating him.

She definitely had a purpose.

So there was little point in asking questions, sooner or later she would tell him.

Liu Changjie had faith in his own judgement.

As the sun set in the west, the dim light of night slowly enveloped the mountains.

The brilliant lights in the inn had long since been lit. On the rugged mountain road, there suddenly could be seen a group of people.

The group contained both men and women. The men were dressed as waiters or kitchen staff; the women were young and pretty, wearing seductive garments.

Kong Lanjun said, "Do you know what these people are here for?"

"To tear down the building?"

"These kind of people couldn't tear down a building if they had three days and three nights."

Liu Changjie had to admit that even though tearing down a building was easier than building one, it did require a certain level of skill.

"Can you tell what these women do?" asked Kong Lanjun.

Liu Changjie could obviously tell. "What they do is not very noble, but has a very long history."

It was definitely an ancient profession, one of womankind's earliest methods of earning money.

Kong Lanjun laughed coldly. "I know you like to look at these type of women, so you'd better take a look now."

"Are you saying that by tomorrow morning, these people will all disappear?"

"A building is constructed to be torn down. People live in preparation to die."

"You brought me here to see this building destroyed, and these people die?"

"I brought you here to see the people who will tear down the building."

"Who are they?"

"Seven people who will die by your hand."

Liu Changjie finally understood. "They're all coming here tonight?"

"Yes."

"So the building was constructed by Madam Autumn, specifically for them to destroy?"

"Yes."

Even though he now understood, he couldn't help but ask, "Why?"

"Because Qiu Hengbo understands men, and especially these type of men. If you lock men like this up in a cave for a long time, they'll eventually lose it and go crazy. So every once in a while, she lets them go out to blow off some steam."

Liu Changjie couldn't help but let out a sigh.

He could imagine what things would look like after they came. He didn't even need to see it with his own eyes.

He felt sorry for the women. He would rather face seven ravenous wild beasts than have dealings with those seven people.

Kong Lanjun looked at him out of the corner of her eye. "Don't feel compassion for them," she said coldly. "One bit of carelessness, you will die much more miserably than them."

Liu Changjie was quiet for a long time. Finally, he asked, "If they are coming here, who is protecting the cave?"

"Qiu Hengbo herself."

"Qiu Hengbo by herself is more frightening than the seven of them all together?"

"I really don't know exactly what her martial arts are like. I just know that I don't ever want to find out. So I can only watch from here, not take any action to alert them. Even if I killed them all right now, it would be useless."

Kong Lanjun nodded. "You need to watch very carefully. When people are blowing off steam, especially when tearing down a building, they will definitely use all of their most powerful kung fu."

"And afterwards?"

"Afterwards we go back and wait."

"Wait for what?"

"Wait until tomorrow afternoon. Then we head towards the Autumn Mansion."

"And after we get to the Autumn Mansion, I have to think of a way to find the secret room."

"Yes. And you must do it within half a day."

"Can't we just follow the seven when they go back?"

"No."

Liu Changjie didn't say anything more.

He was the type of person who never said something that didn't need to be said.

The mountains were illuminated with bright lamplight, but where Liu Changjie and Kong Lanjun stood it was dark. Above them in the darkness of the heavens, a few stars had begun to peek out.

The dim starlight shone on Kong Lanjun's face.

She really was a beautiful woman.

The color of the night was also beautiful.

Liu Changjie found a rock and sat down, then gazed at her, seemingly entranced.

"Did I tell you to sit down?" said Kong Lanjun.

"No."

"If I didn't tell you to sit, then you should be standing."

He stood up again.

"The food box I told you to bring. Do you have it?" [4]

"Yes."

"Bring it out."

The box was square, and built from fine lacquered wood from Fuzhou. It was extremely delicate.

"Open it for me," said Kong Lanjun.

The interior of the box was decorated with white silk padding. Inside were four appetizer dishes, a tray of bamboo shoot mantou, and a pot of wine. [5]

The wine was the famous Hang Zhou "Virtuous Distillery" wine, and the four dishes were fish with vinegar, pickled chicken, Wuxi duck with soy sauce, and pork on the bone.

"Pour me some wine," said Kong Lanjun.

Liu Changjie lifted the wine pot with both hands and poured a cup. He suddenly realized that he himself was quite hungry.

Unfortunately, there was only one cup and one set of chopsticks. He could only stand by her side and watch her eat.

Kong Lanjun drank two cups of wine, and took a bite from each dish. Then she frowned and put down the chopsticks. "Throw it out."

"Throw it out? Throw what out?"

"All of it."

"But, why?"

"Because I'm done eating."

"I'm still hungry."

"Someone like you, you can go three or four days without eating. You won't die."

"If there are still things to eat, why go hungry?"

"Because you're not allowed to touch things that have been eaten by me," she responded coldly.

He looked at her for a long time. "I can't touch your body either, correct?"

"Correct."

"Has anyone ever touched your body?"

Her face darkened. "That's my business. You have no right to ask."

"But you have the right to ask about my business?"

"Correct."

"You tell me to stand, I stand. You tell me to look, I look."

"Correct."

"You tell me not to follow someone, I don't follow them. You tell me not to touch you, I don't touch you."

"Correct."

Liu Changjie looked at her for a while. Then he laughed.

"When I tell you not to laugh," said Kong Lanjun coldly, "You don't laugh."

"Because I'm your servant?"

"It seems you finally understand."

"Unfortunately, there's something I still don't understand."

"What's that?"

"I'm also a person. And when I do things, I like to do it my way. For example..."

"For example, what?"

"If I feel like drinking wine, I drink wine."

He suddenly grabbed the pot of wine, tilted his head back and drank.

Kong Lanjun's face was pale, and she laughed harshly. "It seems you really do want to die."

Liu Changjie laughed. "I definitely don't want to die. What I do want to do is touch you."

"You wouldn't dare!" she cried furiously.

"I wouldn't?"

His hand suddenly shot out toward her body.

Kong Lanjun's reaction wasn't slow. After all, the "Peacock Immortal" was one of the most famous female masters in the martial world.

She certainly had justification to be so arrogant.

As soon as Liu Changjie's hands moved, her own arms tilted up, ten fingers extended like razor-sharp swords. They shot like lightning toward Liu Changjie's wrists.

Her movement was quick, and the stance flexible. Hidden within the move were countless variations.

Sadly, she didn't have the chance to use even one variation.

In a single moment, Liu Changjie's movement seemed to change countless times. His hands twisted and turned from unimaginable directions, and suddenly Kong Lanjun's wrists were pinned down.

Kong Lanjun had never imagined that someone's hands could move in this way. Increasingly alarmed, she tried to think of a

way out. Suddenly, she felt her body being flipped into the air, and the next thing she knew, she was being pressed down onto the rock by Liu Changjie.

With a leisurely tone in his voice, he said, "Can you guess what I'm thinking of doing right now?"

She couldn't guess.

In her wildest dreams she couldn't guess.

"Right now," he said, "I really want to pull your pants down and spank your ass."

Her voice was hoarse and filled with fear. "You ... you wouldn't dare."

She really didn't think he would dare do such a thing. She never dreamed that a man would really dare to treat her in such a way."

But unfortunately, she had forgotten the words she herself had uttered: "This man is really inhuman."

Three slapping sounds rang out as Liu Changjie spanked her butt three times.

He didn't strike hard, but Kong Lanjun felt like she couldn't move.

He laughed. "Actually, there's a few other things I could do right now, but I've already lost interest."

He raised his head to the heavens and laughed heartily, then swaggered off, not even giving her a second glance.

Kong Lanjun ground her teeth. Tears streaming down her face, she suddenly jumped to her feet and cried, "Liu Changjie, you beast, I will kill you one day! You ... you are simply inhuman."

He didn't turn his head. "I really am inhuman," he said calmly.

(1) The character Kong 孔 in Kong Lanjun 孔兰君 is the same character as from the word peacock 孔雀, so Liu Changjie's peacock metaphor is very apt.

(2) What I'm translating as Autumn Mansion implies a building located in the mountains.

(3) The Chinese name of the mountains is 栖霞山. 栖 qi means to perch or sit on something. 霞 xia means red evening clouds. So the literal translation would be something like Perching Red Evening Clouds Mountains. In any case, the name sounds nice in Chinese. And it seems to be a real place. <http://goo.gl/bQVPpx>

(4) This type of box has multiple tiers to contain different foods. Here's some pictures of the type of box: <http://goo.gl/AOZLYL>

(5) The word I'm translating as appetizer is 下酒菜 xia jiu cai. It literally means "dishes that go with alcohol." I think appetizer is an appropriate translation.

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