

A dark, atmospheric street scene at night. A person is walking away from the viewer down a narrow, cobblestone street. The scene is illuminated by a strong red light, likely from a street lamp or a sign, creating a dramatic and mysterious mood. The person is silhouetted against the red light. The street is flanked by buildings with windows, and the overall atmosphere is dark and suspenseful.

The Dagger

Author's Name

Strain his ears as he might, Guilit was unable to hear any sounds within the building. The silence caused his own careful footsteps to sound unbearably loud. He frowned and adjusted his footfalls to compensate.

Where was the killer?

Trying his best to not make any noise that might alert Hien to his presence, he gently walked to the stairs. Using the elevator seemed risky. The silence was intense enough that any beeps or creaks emitted by the machine could carry through to Hien.

Intuitively, he climbed the stairs to the very rooftop, without bothering to check any of the floors for Hien's presence.

Some inner hunch was pointing to the roof.

The door was wide open and Hien was waiting for him.

He was perched on the railing, bare-chested despite the chill in the air. His hair was wild and floating eerily in the wind.

A large, strange scar crisscrossed his torso. Guilit couldn't tell what kind of weapon might have caused it.

A delighted smile was fixed on Hien's face.

"Hello, dear friend! I've been waiting for you for such a long time now!"

Warily, Guilit entered the space.

Hien's high and clear voice had taken him aback. He'd expected a deep, guttural sound to emerge from the body of this intimidating man. He sounded more like a university professor than he did a warrior, his tone clipped and precise; his manner almost that of a lecturer gently rebuking a tardy student.

"Have you?" he asked cautiously. Once he had stepped inside, he made no attempt to close the distance between them.

"Why? Have we met before, Mr. Hien?"

"Hien..." said the criminal musingly. "That's what this man is called then? Well, it makes no difference. And to answer your

question, my friend, yes we have, although neither of us quite recalls it.”

A madman.

Well, Guilit supposed most serial killers were madmen, but Hien’s tone had somehow lulled him into the impression that he was dealing with a somewhat sane personality.

“Yes,” Hien continued. “We’ve met, but neither one of us knows the other’s name now. What an unfortunate meeting, that left no space for a formal introduction.”

“You’re wrong,” said Guilit. “I just called you by your name. Hien. Everyone knows it. Especially the police. They’re looking for you, Hien.”

“Whatever happened to ‘mister’?” he asked chidingly. “But you’re wrong on that count, my friend. Hien is merely the name of the vessel I’ve appropriated for my own use.”

He finally jumped of the railing and stood facing him.

The smile never left his face.

“Tell you what,” he said. “I’ll tell you mine if you tell me yours.”

Guilit said nothing. Hien seemed to take his silence as tacit acquiescence.

“It’s Kaiser. Pleased to meet you...?”

“Guilit,” he said.

“Guilit,” said Hien or Kaiser or whoever he was. “A strong name.”

By now, however, Guilit was growing impatient. He’d been feeling wrong-footed the moment Hien had started speaking, and he wasn’t sure where the conversation was taking him at all.

“How do you know me?” he asked gruffly. “We’ve never met before.”

“And yet,” Hien said softly. “There’s a connection between us. Can’t you feel it? A buzzing. I could feel your presence in the crowd earlier today. I hadn’t even seen you.”

Guilit felt his skin prickle. He had felt that connection, hadn’t he...? He’d directly followed it all the way up to the rooftop...