

Chinese Whispers

Peter May

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What starts out as a grisly case of serial killing quickly turns personal for Li Yan, head of the Beijing serious crime squad. As the bodies pile up, clues prove nearly impossible to collect, and the clues that do surface seem purposefully left to taunt. As frustration grows, Li's team discovers a horrifying truth: the murderer patterns his killings, down to every brutal detail, after Jack the Ripper. According to the classic book on the infamous killer, even more inhumane deaths loom just days away.

As Li scrambles to solve the public crime, he and his lover, Margaret Campbell, a former forensic pathologist, work to understand the murderer's personal vendetta. A web slowly closes around the detective as he races to solve the crimes. Letters and body parts mailed by the murderer provide little assistance. Then the web tightens, stripping Li of his crime-fighting resources one by one. Brutal murders occur daily, his family is in danger, and answers must be found within hours. But the only possible solution is unthinkable: "No matter how many times Li rearranged the events...the conclusion always remained the same. And it scared him."

Chinese Whispers, the sixth in author Peter May's China Thrillers series, offers a juicy treat for mystery lovers. May has earned critical acclaim around the world and is the only Westerner to receive an honorary membership into the Chinese Crime Writer's Association, Beijing Chapter. This book shows why he deserves the honor. Reminiscent of classic noir fiction, May's story combines elements of hard-core detective stories with modern forensics. Throughout the tale, the city of Beijing appears as a character in itself. Although descriptions of the city occasionally slow the pace, they provide a fascinating backdrop. And while some explanations of crime-fighting technology seem unnecessary and almost outdated in this era of *CSI*-style cutting-edge forensics, they do highlight the difference between Eastern and Western investigative techniques. Unfortunately, some seasoned readers may find certain clues point a little too soon to possible solutions. Nevertheless, mystery lovers will easily forgive what prove to be minor issues and enjoy the page-turning twists that heighten in the latter half of this delightful book.

DIANE GARDNER (September / October 2009)

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