

THE ANCIENT GODS' WHISPER

Chapter 5 - 3: The Tomb of the Ancient God

At 8:30 in the morning, Gu Jianlin walked past the locust tree in the alley and returned to that old neighborhood.

These were buildings constructed in the 90s, their white walls long since mottled and yellowed. Outside the windows of each household hung clothes-drying racks, while a few kids downstairs splashed in puddles, the faint sound of their laughter drifting up.

Thinking back now, his father could be considered a good man in a sense. Knowing he owed his wife, he showed a rare bit of resolve during the divorce, selling the mortgaged house they had bought together. After paying off the loan, he handed all the remaining money to the mother and walked away completely empty-handed, moving into this neighborhood and renting a small room.

Probably, it was all just to let his mother live a better life.

To this day, his mother still believes her son was disappointed with her decision to divorce, which is why he didn't choose to live with her.

But that wasn't the reason.

Gu Jianlin's thoughts were the same as his father's: he only wanted her to live a better life.

For Gu Jianlin, this neighborhood carried too many memories.

The chirping of cicadas and soft breezes of summer, the snow and chill of winter, the moonlight in the darkness, and the sky full of stars.

Countless nights in the past, the boy would lean out of the window in a daze, constantly wondering when the family could reunite.

"Three months, that'll be five yuan in late fees."

Lao Zhang at the delivery center handed him a package: "Speaking of which, haven't seen your dad in a while. On another business trip?"

Gu Jianlin scanned the QR code to pay, took the package, and said softly, "Hmm, probably went somewhere far away again."

Actually, Gu Jianlin hated the words "business trip."

Because in his life, his father was always on a business trip. One trip after another, and then he simply never came back one day.

He weighed the package in his hand. It was light, with his father's name and phone number written on it, but no sender information.

Not even a shipping address.

"How was this package sent?"

Gu Jianlin found it odd. Then he walked through the building's entrance, climbed to the second floor, took out his keys, and unlocked the door.

This old apartment had only one month left on its lease, and he wouldn't be renewing it.

The room was clean but had clearly been unoccupied for some time, containing only clothes and some books and materials.

And his father's old laptop.

Gu Jianlin thought it was a good opportunity to tidy everything up before moving out.

He sat on the sofa and opened the package first.

The next moment, he fell into a silent daze, his mind filled with questions.

Inside was a white box reminiscent of those used to package luxury items. When opened, it revealed a mask.

It looked somewhat like the half-face masks worn at masquerade balls, yet carried an ancient and majestic aura. It was entirely black, like it had been forged from inkstone jade, adorned with solemn, archaic carvings, hollowed patterns, and angular edges. Even veins-like protrusions made it resemble something alive, evoking an inexplicable and eerie feeling.

Eerie was definitely the word.

The design of this mask fell somewhere between a sheep and a deer, with dragon-scale-like patterns and a pair of horns at the top.

He wasn't unfamiliar with such a creature—Qilin.

An auspicious beast from ancient Hua Country.

Initially, Gu Jianlin thought this was merely a craft item, but as he examined it closely, he changed his mind.

His intuition was sharper than most, his observations more meticulous.

From the mask, he detected a faint yet unmistakable historical presence, as if it were some kind of ancient artifact.

"An antique, perhaps?"

Gu Jianlin ran his fingers over the mask's carvings, certain that this wasn't just a regular craft item. Something this exquisite was unlikely to be found in the open market and had a high probability of being an antique.

He couldn't fathom why someone would send such a thing to his father, nor how the sender's information had been concealed.

"The shipping date on the delivery slip is December 15th—the very day my father and I were in a car accident... That day, my father had just returned from investigating a case and hurriedly planned to take me back to our hometown for the Lunar New Year. It was unusual, and this inexplicable package is also unusual. Coincidence?" Gu Jianlin muttered as he fiddled with the mask.

Hesitating briefly, he opened his father's old laptop, connected his phone's hotspot, and pulled up a search engine.

Gu Jianlin typed four words into the search box:

Qilin Mask.

A flood of entries appeared, mostly irrelevant ads and videos about craft items.

Patiently, he scrolled through them one by one, looking for entries related to antiques and cultural relics.

He flipped through dozens of pages but found nothing of value.

Just as he was about to give up, he spotted a post on a forum.

"Prehistoric Invasion! New game version beta on 12.4—Qilin Immortal Palace!"

It turned out to be a post about a game.

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Gu Jianlin froze.

Amid the sea of irrelevant advertisements, this title stood out like a needle, inexplicably eye-catching despite its position buried so deep.

Curious, he clicked without thinking.

"Qingren Qiu Qionshan once wrote in the 'Comprehensive Records': After Emperor Qin Shi Huang conquered the six kingdoms, there was nothing he ever desired that he could not attain, except for one thing: longevity. In 219 BC, Xu Fu was ordered by Emperor Qin Shi Huang to lead three thousand children across the seas to Ying Province in search of the Elixir of Immortality. Twice he sailed east but failed to find the elixir. On his third voyage, he vanished..."

"Later generations widely believed the Immortal Elixir to be nothing but an elusive lie, and Xu Fu merely a lowly alchemist. The supposed voyages east were, in truth, excuses fabricated by Xu Fu to escape disaster. Yet few know that during Xu Fu's third journey, before he reached Ying Province, he stumbled upon a secret involving the Ancient God!"