

The Gods 1141

Chapter 1141: Koshna's Corpse Is Missing a Pair of Eyes!

That lord's mastery of Memory's authority was limited, meaning the Finger Bone could only conduct one effective Q&A per use.

So how to phrase the question to maximize the information gained was a problem Cheng Shi wrestled with every time he used the brooch.

Fortunately, he wasn't here to solve a case—he was here to find leads. So without hesitation, he asked the question that interested him most:

"What secret is hidden inside Redi Core's Fool-Hunting Statue?"

Green light flashed in the eye sockets of Kandert's corpse, driven by the Finger Bone. A raspy voice croaked:

"Ravings... the statue manifested divinity... bestowed upon Koshna... a divine gift..."

Its power spent, the corpse collapsed back to the ground. Both players present stared wide-eyed.

'A divine gift?!'

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened. 'Could Folly have actually cast His gaze upon this place?!'

It wasn't impossible. Object Worship was historically the most devout form of faith expression in the Land of Hope, and its ability to draw a god's attention had been proven—such as with the Mirror People and their mirrors...

But just because Memory would cast His gaze didn't mean Folly would. With His lofty disposition, would He really look here?

If Cheng Shi had to find a reason for Folly to turn His eyes this way, he was certain it wouldn't be the accumulation of faith. It would be because a grand foolish act was about to unfold here.

But whose foolish act? The people of Redi Core's, or the players'?

And what exactly had He bestowed?

The Prisoner was shocked too—but not about any divine gift. He was shocked that Cheng Shi could make a corpse talk!

He'd seen items like this before, but none were clearly reusable like Cheng Shi's. Even the most adept necromancers rarely had tools that could make corpses answer honestly, since that involved Memory's domain.

Memory's followers could utilize corpses, but they searched corpses' memories—they didn't interact with them.

Dealing with the dead was infinitely easier than dealing with the living, and Silence's followers loved secrets above all else. If this item were his, The Prisoner couldn't even imagine how much fun he'd have chatting with corpses.

'This is way too cool!'

He eyed Cheng Shi's brooch with transparent envy: "A treasure like this must come at a steep price, right?"

'Price?'

Cheng Shi blinked, suddenly realizing he hadn't made an offering to that lord in quite some time. Being a "premium depositor" truly did come with all sorts of perks.

But seeing The Prisoner's expression, Cheng Shi knew that if he didn't say something negative about the Finger Bone Brooch today, the memory-retrieving brooch would become the next topic the man wouldn't shut up about.

So he tossed out a casual deflection:

"You know why I only asked one question? Because any more and the corpse starts babbling nonsense. It's far harder to use than you'd think."

"?"

'How is that a downside? That's a feature!'

'Normal conversation doesn't excite me. What I want IS the babbling nonsense.'

The Prisoner's envy only intensified.

"..."

When he noticed The Prisoner's expression growing increasingly strange, Cheng Shi knew it was time to leave.

He stored Kandert's corpse in the Molten Coffin, then dodged the guards and slipped out.

The Prisoner followed close behind, whispering: "Is there anything I could trade you for that brooch?"

Even if Cheng Shi wanted to trade—which he didn't—he didn't dare give away an item bestowed by the lord of Death.

That lord wasn't exactly magnanimous. If He summoned Cheng Shi to the Bone Throne for permanent attendance, who would Cheng Shi complain to?

So Cheng Shi rolled his eyes: "Shut up."

The Prisoner's steps faltered. He caught up again, his expression tortured:

"Can't do that. Not speaking is blasphemy against my master."

"I can't trade my devotion for some little trinket."

"..."

'What devotion?'

'Doesn't your Benefactor find you annoying?'

Cheng Shi had gone completely numb. Apart from those moments when he used The Prisoner as a tool and couldn't help feeling a flash of appreciation, every other second of hearing the man speak made his head throb.

He said nothing more for the rest of the walk. He led The Prisoner back to the Folly Prohibition Office, and in the dying light of sunset, the two stood in the alley shadows beside the building, watching for an opening.

The Prisoner seemed to read Cheng Shi's mind. He rubbed his head: "You want to find Koshna's body?"

Cheng Shi nodded:

"Exactly. All the clues now point to the statue being strange, and the only person who ever investigated the statue was the Executioner, Koshna. His death is definitely connected to that divine gift."

"It's not dark yet and there are too many people in town to approach the statue safely. I can only clear the peripheral clues first and hope Koshna's body has something I need."

With that, he sent The Prisoner in first, and the two slipped back into the Folly Prohibition Office.

The complex was built into the mountainside—sprawling and spacious, capable of holding many people. But at the moment it was understaffed. Beyond the extra patrols added for the jailbreak, guards were scarce—most had been dispatched into town to hunt the escaped prisoners.

It didn't take long before they found Koshna's body in the morgue beside the prison.

But when Cheng Shi opened that coffin and saw the body inside, a jolt ran through him. He froze where he stood.

The Prisoner leaned over, curious:

"Huh? Someone removed his eyes?"

Indeed—both of Koshna's eyeballs were gone!

And that was precisely why Cheng Shi was stunned.

If he'd truly been here on vacation, he might not have connected the missing eyes to anything. But he was here searching for the Eye of Mockery!

And by a twist of fate, he knew the Eye of Mockery could be removed—because Scarred Cheng Shi had personally demonstrated it for him.

So this Koshna—who'd allegedly received a divine gift from the statue—could his gift have been the very eyes he'd lost? Could they be the Eye of Mockery that Cheng Shi was looking for?!

In that moment, Cheng Shi's expression turned serious, his eyes filled with gravity.

If this was truly the case, he had to unravel Folly's puzzle. Because the Eye of Mockery may very well have appeared right here!

He desperately wanted to ask the corpse directly what the divine gift was, but he couldn't find an excuse to do so out of The Prisoner's sight. So he could only feign an autopsy, carefully examining Koshna's body.

And the examination actually did reveal something.

Koshna had died from a knife wound to the neck. The cut was offset to the right—a single upward thrust that pierced clean through the throat, causing fatal blood loss.

To land such a precisely angled strike on an Executioner built even larger than The Prisoner, there was almost no way to do it without first pinning the victim down and killing him at close range.

Cheng Shi had never seen the original prisoners the players had replaced, but from the townsfolk's conversations, it was clear nobody believed those prisoners had the ability to kill the Executioner.

So in all likelihood, someone had used the chaos as cover to eliminate the Executioner—and that person's objective was clear: to take Koshna's eyes.

The question was: who? And had Koshna seen the killer before dying?

That determined how Cheng Shi should phrase his question.

Just as Cheng Shi was deep in thought, a figure was quietly approaching from the other side of the Folly Prohibition Office's outer wall.

Chapter 1142: Steal a Chicken, Lose the Rice

Ji Yue had come for the Torchbearers' God Creation Plan.

Though Sun Miao had already provided a direction, the path to seizing Decay's Divine Throne remained uncharted territory.

To smooth the way for the plan, Ji Yue had prayed for a trial to seek "inspiration for creating a god"—and then she'd run into the famous Fate Weaver from the 0221 Experiment Site.

Ji Yue's favorable impression of Cheng Shi didn't stem solely from that incident. In past discussions among the Torchbearers about the overall situation, the Fate Weaver's name came up regularly. Every Torchbearer who'd dealt with him had given him a decent review—"cunning lone wolf" at worst, and never a truly negative word.

On top of that, An Mingyu—who had stepped down from her Fire Seeker role—had also affirmed Cheng Shi's capabilities. Gradually, Ji Yue had become curious about this person.

She believed she was a fair judge of character, so the moment she met Cheng Shi in person, she felt he was worth inviting.

Unfortunately, the Fate Weaver had refused to join the torch-passing cause. There was nothing she could do.

After Cheng Shi left, she'd spent a long time investigating the statue without finding any clues about ascension. Then she turned her attention to Kandert, who was frantically hunting the escaped prisoners.

By then, Cheng Shi had already burned Kandert's house. When Ji Yue arrived at the scene, all she found was the blasted-open ground beneath the bedroom—whatever had been buried there was long gone.

She realized Kandert might be a lead too, but when she searched for him, the candidate Executioner was nowhere to be found. So she came to the Folly Prohibition Office to try her luck.

But before she could even climb over the wall, someone intercepted her.

The person's appearance caught her off guard. She raised an eyebrow and smiled: "What should I call you?"

"Zhao Xishi."

Zhao Xishi smiled, appraising Ji Yue up and down with a loaded look:

"I imagine you've already figured out the relationship between us and them. That's right—I'm helping the Scavenger hunt the Fate Weaver."

"All of Oblivion's followers are hunting him. A player who's angered a god won't live much longer."

"I noticed you approached him, but he... rejected you?"

Ji Yue tensed inwardly but kept her composure, tossing out a casual smile as noncommitment.

Zhao Xishi pointed at the Folly Prohibition Office behind her and continued:

"The Fate Weaver is inside right now."

"What I'm saying is: rather than cooperating with a dead man walking, why not cooperate with us?"

"Scholar, whatever you want—we can provide it."

"Victory in the trial, life-saving items, guidance for the road ahead... even divine secrets that ordinary people can't access. As long as you work with us, it's all yours."

"I know you have reservations—after all, this is a Fate Weaver who dealt with both 0221 and Zangier."

"But rest assured, you won't need to take any risks. All you need to do is set up some barrier formations around the perimeter to cut off their escape routes. Scholars are best at this, aren't they? In return, you'll receive the fullest goodwill from me and the Scavenger."

"I think this is a very cost-effective deal—especially given that the Fate Weaver already refused your cooperation."

"Give this ungrateful fool a taste of his own medicine. Show him that a Scholar has a temper too."

"What do you say?"

Zhao Xishi's tone was utterly confident. She seemed unable to imagine why a Scholar would refuse her.

Hearing all this, Ji Yue was actually relieved. So they'd mistakenly assumed she'd approached Cheng Shi for trial cooperation.

'No exposure. Good.'

But even though Cheng Shi hadn't agreed to join the Torchbearers, the Torchbearers would never betray a "candidate" who'd turned them down.

Not only that—the Torchbearers would protect these good-hearted people, because in their eyes, each one was a potential future kindling.

The methods of protection simply varied. City Defenders, being the conservative faction, would probably play along and tip off the target at the right moment.

But City Builders...

Ji Yue swept a hand through her hair. From the void behind her, she drew a long spear, raised the tip until it kissed the bridge of Zhao Xishi's nose, and burst out laughing:

"I thought a friend had come. Turns out it's a gutter rat."

"You want to use my hand to do your killing?"

"You. Are. Not. Worthy."

On the word "worthy," Ji Yue spat on the ground. The void behind her tore open with a roar, and countless spears and short swords came screaming out, riding a tide of War's might straight at Zhao Xishi.

"!!!"

Zhao Xishi had never imagined that a failed negotiation would lead to a fight, let alone that this Scholar—who practically reeked of Truth—was actually a Purgatory Bishop who'd merged with War!

When the blood river from the void battlefield poured into reality, the Historian's pupils contracted violently. She retreated at high speed, her expression darkening:

"Have you lost your mind?!"

Of course she thought Ji Yue had gone insane. Every strike was aimed to kill. The intent was clearly lethal—yet they had no grudge between them. At worst, the partnership had fallen through. Was that really worth trying to murder each other over?

Worse, the commotion was enormous. The Fate Weaver inside the Folly Prohibition Office had certainly noticed. After half a day of careful tracking, she'd been "treated" to an involuntary tip-off that startled the snake from the grass. How could Zhao Xishi not be furious?

She endured the pain and threw out several items to block an attack, then slipped away with a face dark enough to drip ink.

Zhao Xishi suddenly felt she'd been played. She whirled on Ji Yue and screamed:

"You're working with the Fate Weaver?"

"You were baiting us?!"

Ji Yue blinked, then let out a deeply meaningful laugh: "Don't tell me the 'foolish act' in this trial actually refers to you, Zhao... what was it again?"

"Fine! Fine! FINE!"

Zhao Xishi was apoplectic. Her expression went frigid in an instant. With a cold sneer, she tore a page apart. Truth's light surged from it—and Ji Yue immediately recognized that the woman had already laid numerous formations throughout the area. The cooperation offer had merely been an attempt to make things more convenient.

'They certainly took Cheng Shi seriously.'

But Ji Yue wasn't actually on Cheng Shi's side. Creating this much noise to warn him was already more than enough to live up to her name as a Torchbearer.

She couldn't waste time here. She certainly wasn't going to fight Zhao-whatever to the death. She needed to preserve herself for the Torchbearers' search for kindling. So when Zhao Xishi activated the formations, Ji Yue abruptly pulled back—and along with her endless arsenal, dove into the void and vanished.

"!!!!!"

No one could match a void-specialist Scholar's mastery of spatial energy—even a former Scholar.

So Zhao Xishi could only watch Ji Yue disappear.

Now her target had been alerted, her formations wasted, and half a day's setup had become a joke. She stood on the rooftop, staring at where Ji Yue had vanished, grinding her teeth so hard she could have bitten through steel.

Mo Shu detected the formation's fluctuation and appeared at Zhao Xishi's side in an instant, brow furrowed:

"Why didn't you notify me before attacking?"

Before Zhao Xishi's iron expression could form a reply, a bald head popped up from inside the Folly Prohibition Office.

The Prisoner gazed at the pair from below, never one to pass up a commotion. He rubbed his head and grinned:

"Ooh, fireworks?"

"What's the celebration—you two finally tied the knot?"

"..."

"..."

In that moment, Zhao Xishi's emotional defenses crumbled completely.

"KILL HIM! KILL THEM ALL!!!"

Face frozen, she began chanting buffs for the Scavenger. Enhanced, Mo Shu spotted Cheng Shi's figure appearing below and flashed forward to engage both men, two-against-one, with unstoppable ferocity.

But the instant he charged to the front line, his shadow seemed to peel away from him—splitting off into a dark figure that took his original position, standing beside Zhao Xishi.

Consumed by rage, Zhao Xishi hadn't even registered the switch when a pair of pitch-black hands clamped around her throat.

Shadow Cheng Shi locked her from behind, and into her ear he whispered without mercy:

"I heard what Ji Yue said. She was right—you're not worthy."

The words had barely faded when the sound of breaking bone followed.

The Historian fell into history.

Chapter 1143: History Cannot Bury a True Historian

But history could never truly bury a real Historian.

Because they were history's researchers and recorders—never its participants.

They were the ones who'd pieced together a land's past from scattered words and fragmented texts, assembling the tapestry of history. So even if a Historian truly died, they would only die within the history they themselves had composed.

The Zhao Xishi whose neck Shadow Cheng Shi had snapped was a stand-in.

Anyone who'd managed to tangle with Zhen Yi was no ordinary person—especially Zhao Xishi, who'd come from the History School.

The reason she'd been expelled wasn't a lack of talent. It was because she'd stubbornly insisted on using later generations' wisdom to fill in history's gaps. In short, she wanted to fabricate history!

But her fabricated history differed from the kind peddled by certain unscrupulous officials. She didn't consider what she wrote to be false. In her eyes, history was always a story written through the will of later generations. She was merely adding her own personal seasoning to these dull tales, making them more "flavorful."

Coupled with the History School's "authority," once these stories spread widely and became generally accepted, what wasn't true would effectively become true.

This way, history would become a resource under Zhao Xishi's control—not mere data—and the History School's power and prestige would soar even higher.

The History School had been doing exactly this all along. The disagreement between Zhao Xishi and the current School was merely a matter of how much water versus how much rice.

The current History School served a porridge called "history." Granted, it was mixed with dirt, blended with mud, and possibly even laced with filth—but at least it could fill the stomach.

Zhao Xishi, however, believed outsiders didn't need to eat their fill. So she wanted to eliminate all the rice entirely, feeding everyone nothing but mud and filth.

That was also why Zhen Yi had vetoed her.

Of course, history was biased. Whether the one who'd actually vetoed her was Zhen Yi—or whether the History School's true leader had actually awoken her sister before casting the deciding vote—that was another question entirely.

Regardless, all of the above proved Zhao Xishi was exceptionally talented at constructing historical narratives. So from the moment she'd left the Folly Prohibition Office at the start of the trial, she'd woven herself a false stand-in within Redi Core's history—a "Zhao Xishi" who existed in this era.

Thus, what had fallen to history wasn't the real Historian, but the Historian's fabricated history. Even though Cheng Shi, ever cautious, had driven his Flaying Bone Knife into her corpse, what failed to resurrect was still just the decoy.

When the historical Zhao Xishi collapsed, Mo Shu had already locked into combat with The Prisoner again.

You could disdain this Silence follower's chattering, but you couldn't deny his strength—otherwise he'd never have lived this long.

The same applied to Mo Shu. You could question his pastry-making skills, but you couldn't underestimate the capabilities of an Oblivion Chosen.

Even when Cheng Shi and Shadow Cheng Shi simultaneously closed in, Mo Shu was still able to obliterate the surrounding threats, managing a temporary one-against-three standoff.

Ever since Cheng Shi had tricked him and blown him up inside a house, Mo Shu had paid special attention to Cheng Shi's attack methods. He'd even developed a defensive technique against lightning: wrapping himself in Oblivion power to obliterate all projectile attacks.

But this defense drained mental energy at an alarming rate. Without Zhao Xishi's support, he couldn't sustain it for long.

So when he saw his teammate fall, Mo Shu had no choice but to retreat and seek another approach.

But Cheng Shi was done tolerating harassment. He had no intention of letting Mo Shu escape. The instant Mo Shu had appeared, Cheng Shi had already marked the pastry chef.

He felt Aph Ros's cook was subpar—the long table at the terrace banquet didn't have a single decent pastry. So he'd decided to send Aph Ros a new chef.

But to his surprise, just as he was about to activate Sinner Redemption, the mark on Mo Shu was obliterated by an unknown force!

The source of that power felt disturbingly familiar. Cheng Shi's pupils contracted. Something was wrong. He immediately turned and pulled back.

The Prisoner had been enjoying the fight. When he saw his brother-in-law suddenly withdraw, alarm bells sounded in his gut. He vanished right after.

Instinct told him that when it came to sensing danger, his brother-in-law's abilities far surpassed his own. He wasn't stupid—he wasn't about to risk his life just for a good brawl.

And so both sides disengaged on contact. Soon, the area outside the Folly Prohibition Office was left to nothing but a group of belatedly arriving guards standing in the alley, staring at the demolished buildings and cratered ground, exchanging bewildered looks.

"Someone dared attack the Folly Prohibition Office?"

"Report to Lord Kandert immediately!"

"Captain, Lord Kandert has gone missing."

"...Forget what I just said. As enforcers, we must not commit Knowing Folly."

"Too late, Captain. Allow me to address you as 'Captain' one final time. You are no longer fit to serve as an enforcer. Men—arrest him."

...

After retreating, Mo Shu arrived at a house on the outskirts of town.

Zhao Xishi sat pale-faced at a table, working to collect herself.

Dying through a historical body wasn't without cost. She'd temporarily lost all combat ability. If Mo Shu turned on her now, she had no stand-in left to save her.

So from the moment Mo Shu walked in, her gaze was laden with suspicion.

Mo Shu glanced at her coldly and snorted: "If I wanted to obliterate you, you'd already be gone."

Zhao Xishi's expression shifted, though the wariness in her eyes lessened considerably. She said weakly:

"Of course I know you won't. Until we've verified the truth Jie Shu spoke of, we remain allies—don't we?"

'Allies?'

Mo Shu frowned, noncommittal.

"How long until you recover?"

Zhao Xishi's face darkened: "Nourishing my body with Time of History... it'll take a while."

"So we just sit here and wait?"

"We could skip the waiting—if you can handle both of them alone. I'll be happy to cheer your triumphant return from right here."

"..."

Mo Shu shot her a frigid look and casually obliterated the chair beneath her. Zhao Xishi's legs gave out and she crashed to the floor with a thud.

"You—?!" Her face flushed crimson, eyes blazing.

Mo Shu ignored her:

"Failed fighters should watch their tongues."

"I'm not here to play house with you. If you came just to prove how strong the Fate Weaver is, I'll consider finding Jie Shu a different ally."

"Put away your anger and your grievances. They're useless."

"And if you can't control them, I don't mind obliterating those for you, too."

"..."

In a world ruled by strength, everything the weak said was wrong.

Zhao Xishi knew this better than anyone. That's exactly why she wanted to grow stronger—to seize control of the narrative.

She fell silent. Then she pushed down every emotion and became icily calm.

"When I recover, I've already identified someone who can help us deal with the Fate Weaver."

Mo Shu frowned slightly: "Wei Mu?"

"No—Ji Yue!"

"My trump card tells me her memories have been contaminated. And the one who contaminated them was the Fate Weaver!"

"So her hostility toward us makes perfect sense."

"Once I've recovered and 'helped' her retrieve her memories, we may gain a cannon fodder willing to charge to her death."

"That Purgatory Bishop is formidable. When the two of them destroy each other, we'll naturally reap the benefits."

"Why didn't you use this earlier?"

"The wonders of Existence's gods are beyond what Descent can fathom. If Ji Yue hadn't attacked me, how would I have sensed the corruption in her memories?"

"But one sows and one reaps—such is destiny."

"She refused me once. I will not allow her to refuse me a second time."

The plan sounded solid, but Mo Shu felt something was off. He frowned: "How can you be certain Ji Yue will turn to our side?"

Hearing this, Zhao Xishi smiled.

"People erase others' memories to cover their own sins."

"Let me ask you: if you'd done something beneficial for me, would you want to erase my memory of it?"

"..."

'Why wouldn't I?'

'The little cakes I fed the world were helping them get closer to Oblivion—yet afterward, I made them forget me.'

But thinking was one thing. Mo Shu conceded he wasn't exactly a normal person, so he admitted Zhao Xishi had a point.

In this world, even a villain might leave behind a false kindness just to survive. How much more so a good person?

And the Fate Weaver was certainly the good one here.

Chapter 1144: The Man Behind Qin Xin

The golden cicada sheds its shell—disappearing right under everyone's watchful eyes.

Cheng Shi went all out this time. During his retreat, he swapped faiths with Shadow Cheng Shi, snapped his fingers to teleport himself back to an alley he'd passed earlier, and had Shadow Cheng Shi activate Chaos Acting to blend into the crowd as an ordinary passerby.

The reason for such caution was that he'd recognized the force that had erased the Sinner Redemption mark—it was Herobos's Oblivion power!

In the previous Corruption trial, Herobos had used this exact technique to dispel Golis's Grudge the moment it was summoned, catching him completely off guard.

So the instant he sensed danger, Cheng Shi bolted—and chose to split from The Prisoner.

This wasn't just about saving himself. It was about saving The Prisoner too.

As long as the chattering Torchbearer wasn't with him, the man shouldn't become Herobos's target.

He had to admit, an Oblivion Envoy executing his Benefactor's will this relentlessly was truly a headache.

He didn't know why Mo Shu hadn't summoned Herobos immediately, but running forever wouldn't solve anything. Cheng Shi was already thinking about whether there was a way to end this once and for all—to rid himself of this threat permanently.

The simplest method was obviously to kill Herobos. But a god—even a mere Servant God—how could a mortal possibly kill one?

But what if the one killing Him wasn't a mortal?

Cheng Shi's brow rose as a plan took shape. He suddenly felt he might be able to gamble big in this trial.

Big enough to drag a god off His pedestal!

While one side was scheming against an Envoy, the other side's Prisoner was already frantic.

He'd watched his brother-in-law vanish right beside him. His first instinct was that Mo Shu's group was genuinely dangerous, and his brother-in-law was using this method to separate from him!

It never even occurred to him that Cheng Shi might have disappeared just to ditch him.

After all, in his own eyes, he wasn't unlucky at all.

Of course, The Prisoner's worry over Cheng Shi went beyond some absurd "brother-in-law" title. He genuinely believed Cheng Shi held the key to the Torchbearers' plan.

Yu Xi was Deceit's Envoy, and among all the players present, the only one connected to Deceit was Cheng Shi. Factor in Cheng Shi's past assistance to the Torchbearers and his reactions—The Prisoner was convinced the link between the Torchbearers and Yu Xi almost certainly ran through this man. He couldn't let him fall into danger.

Call it loyalty, appreciation for Cheng Shi, belief in the torch-passing cause, a declaration of his own will, a desire to outdo the Scavenger—it was a bizarre cocktail of all these things stirred together.

So after searching for Cheng Shi in vain, he wrestled with himself briefly and decided to find someone else.

The Torchbearers' Fire Seeker—Ji Yue.

He would team up with Ji Yue to protect Cheng Shi. Not only would this push Cheng Shi toward the torch, it might also create an opportunity to uncover the Deceit Servant God, Yu Xi.

But Ji Yue wasn't easy to find either.

As a Purgatory Bishop, she knew she'd stirred up trouble. She'd slipped away silently, moving from the open into the shadows, and begun her low-profile investigation of ascension methods within the town.

Perhaps because everything revolved around the statue at the town center, on the first night—under the cover of darkness—several figures converged on the Fool-Hunting Statue from different directions.

The first to appear in the moonlight was a local.

Red-faced and reeking of alcohol, he crawled before the statue, mumbled a string of incoherent words, then promptly passed out face-down on the ground.

He didn't wake until an hour or so later, when the mountain night winds chilled him enough to shiver his way home.

Not long after, the second figure appeared.

A hooded, cloaked silhouette landed atop the statue's head, waved a hand across the stone—but the statue showed no reaction.

After a moment of surprise, the figure decisively erased their own presence.

More time passed before the third figure crept forward. This one moved far more lightly. The shadow circled the statue again and again, touching and examining its surface, even tracing various markings. But after pausing a moment, they too came up empty.

However, this person didn't leave. After confirming no one else was around, they tore open the void above and unleashed the ancient battlefield's torrent of blades and swords onto the statue in a full-force deluge!

Yes—this was Ji Yue.

When Truth's methods couldn't decode something, it was time for a different angle: try War.

War was always blunt, but in the wreckage it left behind, there were always useful fragments to find.

Ji Yue understood this deeply—hence her decisive strike.

What she hadn't expected was that the tidal wave of weapons never reached the statue. They lost all momentum midair and shattered in front of it.

Countless weapons clattered to the ground—yet eerily, they made no sound at all.

Seeing this, Ji Yue's pupils shrank. She immediately realized someone else was hiding nearby, and it could only be the Chosen of Silence—universally acknowledged as the second unluckiest person alive.

Ji Yue's face hardened. She promptly withdrew her attack and spoke in a cold voice: "Come out!"

No sooner had the words left her mouth than a bald head hopped down from the billowing cloak behind the statue. Who else could it be but The Prisoner?

The moment he landed, The Prisoner held a finger to his lips, then pointed toward an alley, gesturing for Ji Yue to take cover with him.

Ji Yue sensed no hostility. After a moment's deliberation, she followed.

The instant they entered the alley, The Prisoner whirled around and whispered conspiratorially:

"I knew you'd all show up here. Good thing I was smart enough to hide nearby early—otherwise, where would I have found you?"

"Found me? Who's looking for me?"

Ji Yue blinked, then frowned: "The Fate Weaver? Did he send you to find me?"

The Prisoner pouted: "Why is the Fate Weaver all you see? Can't I look for you on my own? He's the outsider—I'm the one who's actually on your side!"

"You?"

Ji Yue laughed in spite of herself, giving him a once-over:

"Sorry, but your lane is way too... specialized. I can't squeeze in."

"If he's changed his mind, tell him to come find me himself. Otherwise, I'm not getting involved in your squabble."

"..."

If not for wanting to make a good first impression on his new colleague, The Prisoner would've snapped long ago. Now, seeing Ji Yue turn to leave, he had no choice but to play his trump card:

"The spark may die, but the torch never goes out!"

The moment those words rang out, Ji Yue—mid-turn—thrust her spear backward in a single fluid motion. Her gaze was piercing as frost, as if she intended to pin The Prisoner to the Redi Core night right then and there.

She recognized the Torchbearers' code phrase—but the problem was, she knew every single Torchbearer. The Prisoner's name wasn't among them.

So her first instinct was to imagine a scenario where someone had tortured the information out of a Torchbearer and was now using it to expose her identity. She struck immediately, prepared to strangle the security leak in its cradle.

The blow packed serious force—enough that even The Prisoner had to take it seriously. He tilted his head, clamping the spearhead between his neck and shoulder, and uttered four more words:

"God Creation Plan!"

"!!??"

Ji Yue's eyes flew wide with shock. Her forward thrust lost all power as she stared at The Prisoner, completely stunned.

She was floored. The God Creation Plan was currently known to only a handful of Torchbearers. The fact that he could say those four words meant his identity was far more significant than a mere informant or leaker.

So who had told him everything? And what was this Chosen of Silence's relationship with the Torchbearers?

Could he be some hidden card Qin Xin had kept secret?

The Prisoner read the confusion on Ji Yue's face. He removed the spear from his shoulder, straightened his expression with utmost gravity, and declared in a tone of absolute solemnity:

"You guessed right. I am the man behind Qin Xin!"

"...?"

Chapter 1145: I'm Fired Up!

"You're saying Qin Xin and An Mingyu recruited you together?"

Ji Yue studied The Prisoner with a furrowed brow. Some doubt remained, but she'd largely accepted his identity.

After all, someone who knew both Qin Xin's name and the former Fire Seeker An Mingyu couldn't possibly not be a Torchbearer.

The Prisoner nodded vigorously: "The moment they laid eyes on me, they declared me a genius. They practically begged me to join the torch-passing cause. Kindhearted soul that I am, after some pushing and shoving, I gave in."

"..."

'Am I supposed to believe that?'

Ji Yue rolled her eyes in disdain:

"What, you've been famous in the peak circle for ages—and those two are only just now seeing you for the first time?"

"If not, why the sudden 'genius' declaration?"

"And honestly, aside from that forehead of yours being reflective enough to bounce sunlight, what exactly about you screams 'torch-passer'?"

Ji Yue's real question wasn't about Qin Xin's judgment—it was about Qin Xin's intentions. This was her first time learning the Torchbearers truly had hidden cards.

Then besides The Prisoner, were there others?

Like... that Fate Weaver who was so desperately trying to distance himself from the Torchbearers.

Could he also be some kind of hidden card?

The Prisoner hadn't expected to be mocked by a colleague for his appearance. He pointed at himself indignantly:

"I carry gasoline on me. How am I not suited for passing the torch?"

"?"

A chicken talking to a duck. Casting pearls before swine.

Ji Yue took a deep breath and decided to save time: "If you have something to say, say it fast. No nonsense—only business!"

"The business is that Cheng Shi has disappeared, and we have to find him!"

Ji Yue was stunned, then laughed in frustration:

"You risked blowing your cover to make contact with me—just so I'd help you find the Fate Weaver?!"

"The Prisoner, have you ever done any self-reflection? If you'd just talked a little less, maybe the Fate Weaver wouldn't have ditched you!"

"I reflected on it. That's not why." The Prisoner said with absolute certainty.

"..."

"You—" Ji Yue wanted to leave. She had no desire to become a piece of whatever inexplicable game these two were playing.

But then The Prisoner dropped all pretense and said with dead seriousness:

"He's connected to Yu Xi."

Ji Yue's footsteps halted. She frowned: "Who is Yu Xi?"

"Qin Xin says Yu Xi is the key to the Torchbearers' God Creation Plan. He specifically assigned me to investigate. Now I've found out: Cheng Shi knows Yu Xi."

"!!!"

Ji Yue finally took this seriously. She seemed to connect several loose threads and nodded: "So that explains why my prayer matched me with him."

She turned to The Prisoner with newfound appreciation: "My apologies. War ruined my temper. I shouldn't have questioned a Torchbearer's professional judgment. Tell me—how did you find this out?"

"Intuition."

"...?"

Ji Yue's expression reverted instantly. She blinked, needing several seconds to confirm she hadn't misheard.

"You... based this entirely on a guess?"

The Prisoner shook his head with absolute gravity: "Not a guess. Intuition."

"...Fine. I suppose that's not entirely unacceptable. A peak player's intuition is a legitimate ability." Ji Yue sighed, then thought carefully: "So what we need to do now is find Cheng Shi, learn about Yu Xi from him—maybe even make contact with Yu Xi. Correct?"

"Right! And ideally, pull him into the Torchbearers!"

"But how do you know he isn't already one?" Ji Yue raised an eyebrow.

"?" The Prisoner blinked, rubbed his head, and mused: "Could it be that when I doused him with gasoline, he was already initiated?"

"..."

Helpless. Completely helpless.

Ji Yue hadn't felt this powerless even on the day the world ended and the Faith Game descended.

For a moment she suspected Qin Xin's only purpose in recruiting The Prisoner was to keep this outrageous weapon of bad luck from being aimed at the Torchbearers. But reality proved that weapons like this were AOE—they hit friend and foe alike.

Ji Yue was at a loss. She sighed: "What's your plan?"

"My plan was to find you first."

"And then?"

"Then find him."

"How?"

"That's your department."

"..." Ji Yue's fists clenched. "What exactly is inside your head?"

The Prisoner sheepishly pointed at his gleaming scalp and declared with sacred reverence: "A torch waiting to be passed. And a brilliant light."

"..."

'Why does Fang Jue suddenly seem kind of adorable by comparison...'

Ji Yue wasted no more words and spun on her heel. The Prisoner followed in quick little steps, chattering: "As expected of a Scholar—already thought of a plan! Where are we going to find my brother-in-law?"

"We're not going to find your brother—the Fate Weaver!"

The Prisoner rubbed his head, confused: "Then what are we going to do?"

"Eliminate the problem."

Ji Yue swung her spear with surging battle intent:

"You said it yourself—the biggest danger to the Fate Weaver comes from the Scavenger and the Historian."

"So why not remove the danger first?"

"Take those two out. With the external threat gone, the Fate Weaver can be found anytime—or maybe he'll show himself on his own once it's safe."

The Prisoner's pupils contracted. He saw the logic, but still had reservations.

"The Historian's nothing special, but the Scavenger is dangerous. This won't be easy."

Ji Yue walked into the moonlight, laughing heartily:

"No matter how hard..."

"Can it be harder than passing the torch?"

"!!!"

War's indomitable spirit ignited something in The Prisoner at that very moment. He nodded fervently, deeply inspired:

"Right! Can anything be harder than passing the torch?!"

"Truly worthy of a Torchbearer's Fire Seeker—a few words and I'm fired up!"

"Let's go! Take them down!!"

It should have been a moment of surging heroism—War's will made manifest in reality's finest hour. But Ji Yue froze mid-stride, the color draining from her face as her eye twitched violently:

"PUT OUT THE FIRE ON YOURSELF!"

"It's pitch dark and you set yourself on fire—WHAT FOR?!"

"Do you WANT them to see us?!"

"I'd rather not have my teammate turn into a charred corpse before we even find the enemy!"

"The Prisoner! PUT IT OUT! NOW!!!"

In that moment, The Prisoner looked like a scolded schoolboy being called out by the teacher.

"You're the one who fired me up in the first place..."

"..."

'Can this torch really be passed on?'

Ji Yue, who had never once wavered, now felt a flicker of doubt.

...

Meanwhile, on the other side.

While two Torchbearers danced with fire, a sudden scream erupted from a quiet alley on the opposite side of the plaza.

But the scream had barely surfaced before it was smothered. What followed was a quiet, sinister chuckle from the alley's depths.

"Tsk tsk tsk. I knew tonight would be productive—just didn't expect the harvest to come so fast."

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

Shadow Cheng Shi gripped the drunk by his hair while covering his mouth. Cheng Shi held a scalpel, its edge kissing the bulging vein on the man's neck, and spoke with enigmatic menace:

"Don't even think about lying. I can tell you were faking sleep."

"Interesting—a man who pretends to pass out drunk at the foot of the statue... If I said you knew nothing about the statue's ravings, even you wouldn't believe that, would you?"

The instant the words "statue ravings" left his mouth, the drunk sobered completely, cold sweat pouring from his scalp.

Seeing this, Cheng Shi's smile widened.

"It seems you're ready to talk?"

Chapter 1146: We Go Way Back

The drunk's eyes were wild with terror. He nodded frantically.

Shadow Cheng Shi eased his grip slightly and released the man. The drunk immediately blurted:

"Spare me—spare my life! I'll tell you everything! Just please don't kill me!"

"I really did come for that thing, but I swear I don't know where it is!"

'That thing!'

A gleam flashed in Cheng Shi's eyes. He uttered two words: "The divine gift."

"Yes! The divine gift!"

"Have you seen it? What is it?"

"Never seen it!" The drunk shook his head faster than a rattle drum. "I only saw Kandert kill Koshna to steal it. I—"

"Wait—who? Kandert killed Koshna?"

Cheng Shi blinked. "Wasn't Koshna killed by a group of jealousy-crazed citizens of Redi Core?"

"Yes, that's also true—but those people were sent by Kandert! He bought emotion-manipulating potions on the black market, dosed them, and then—while they were out of their minds—secretly restrained Koshna and let the poor fools stab their daggers into Koshna's throat."

"So the mastermind behind everything was him!"

Hearing this, Cheng Shi had an epiphany: "Then the one who killed Kandert and impersonated him... was you?!"

The drunk's pupils contracted violently. His eyes went wide and the words flew out: "No!"

But under Cheng Shi's piercing stare, he quickly crumbled, hanging his head in defeat:

"...It was me."

"I didn't mean to kill him. I just wanted a glimpse of the god's gift. But he wouldn't give me a single chance—even threatened me with a blasphemy charge. I had no choice but to fight back."

Cheng Shi hadn't expected his stakeout—an unintentional gamble—to reel in such a big fish. He said with great interest:

"Talk. From the beginning. Tell me everything."

"If you don't lie, I might consider letting you live."

Under the threat of death, the drunk held nothing back and spilled every last detail.

The drunk's name was Max—a black market merchant who drifted between the undergrounds of several cities. Kandert's potion had come from him.

"Folly's followers rarely buy potions from me. My customers are usually non-devout multi-believers."

"So when I recognized the man doing secret deals with me as Kandert from the Folly Prohibition Office, I kept my eye on him."

"I knew that when people like them risked embracing a foolish act, enormous profit had to be involved."

"I've always been interested in profit. So I followed him in secret."

"Until one day, he used the potions he'd bought from me to poison several citizens' judgment—drove them insane—and used the confusion to secretly pin Koshna down, letting those poor wretches plunge their blades into Koshna's throat... That's when I knew I'd bet right. I was holding this town's biggest secret!"

"After witnessing it, I spent a long time debating whether to use it as leverage to extort some treasure from him. But curiosity won out in the end. I wanted to know why a Folly Prohibition deputy would murder his own superior."

"Jockeying for rank isn't exactly a secret, but Folly's followers rarely use such unconvincing methods to prove themselves. As you must know, they're impossibly proud—they can't accept embracing foolishness themselves."

"So the night Koshna died, I snuck into Kandert's home. I found Koshna's body and the report on the desk."

"That's when I learned the statue could produce ravings, and that Koshna's investigation had yielded results—the statue had bestowed a divine gift upon Koshna one night!"

"Kandert killed Koshna for that divine gift. He wanted to keep the god's blessing all to himself!"

"I made a slight noise from the shock, and Kandert discovered me. But since I wasn't a local and had no direct conflict of interest with him, I wasn't worried."

"I only wanted a peek at what the divine gift was. But Kandert refused repeatedly—even tried to kill me. I had no choice but to fight back."

"I killed him, but still couldn't find where the divine gift was."

"So I decided to impersonate Kandert, retrace his daily routine—hoping I'd discover where he'd hidden it."

"But on my very first day on the job, I discovered someone had dug up Kandert's body..."

"That person... was you, wasn't it?"

"..."

'Sharp enough.'

'But... the divine gift is gone?'

Cheng Shi's expression darkened. He hadn't expected he'd done something stupid.

He'd assumed Kandert's killer was the mastermind who knew everything. Instead, the murderer had stumbled into the role and knew nothing.

If he'd known, he should've asked Kandert's corpse where the divine gift was hidden. Now his one-and-only question had been wasted.

'Sigh, if only Dragon King were here. At least a Memory follower would have a way.'

There was technically a Memory follower in this trial, but unfortunately he'd killed her. And even alive, with her attitude, she'd never have cooperated.

Cheng Shi frowned and asked: "Were you the one who tore pages from Koshna's report?"

Max blinked and immediately shook his head:

"No! I deliberately left it in the most conspicuous spot, hoping that someone close to Kandert would notice and react—so I could observe and find new leads."

"But everyone respected him. Nobody committed Knowing Folly."

'Not him?'

Now Cheng Shi was stumped. 'Could there be a fourth player in all this?'

"What did the last few pages of the report say?"

Max recalled carefully:

"It was about Koshna's methods of verifying the ravings..."

"He replicated every behavior of every person who'd heard the ravings, but found nothing unusual. Until finally, fed up, he drank a bottle of wine and truly passed out drunk before the statue—that's when the statue bestowed its divine gift upon him."

"I was pretending to sleep in front of the statue just now to replicate his behavior—clinging to a one-in-a-million hope that I might receive another divine gift..."

"But the statue didn't react at all. I haven't even heard the ravings. Probably because I'm not a local believer."

'The statue protects believers. Non-followers can't feel its gaze. That makes sense.'

Cheng Shi nodded and asked offhandedly: "Who do you worship?"

At this question, Max instantly sobered. He bowed his head and intoned:

"Fabricated laws, the universe's punchline. My lord... Chaos!"

"?"

Though he'd suspected as much, the moment he confirmed that this black market merchant stirring up chaos in Redi Core was "one of his own," Cheng Shi felt a bizarre wave of absurdity.

'What is this?'

'Chaos's underling in a trial, making a mess on behalf of Chaos's big brother?'

'But you've made such a mess I can't even find the divine gift anymore.'

Cheng Shi pursed his lips and continued:

"So your manhunt for the escaped prisoners was also about finding clues?"

"Yes, I was grasping at straws—anyone who'd been in contact with Koshna or Kandert was a potential lead."

"I hadn't been thinking about those unfortunate prisoners, but when I heard that half-dead fugitives had broken out, I assumed the divine gift had activated. So I sent men to—"

'Reasonably thorough thinking. As expected from one of Chaos's own.'

But it was all useless information. After listening this long, Cheng Shi had the full picture of the incident—except for the most critical part.

Was the divine gift the Eye of Mockery? And where had Kandert hidden it?

He thought briefly, then asked: "What happened to Koshna's eyes?"

"I don't know. When I saw his body at Kandert's place, the eyes were already gone. I figured Kandert was afraid someone would extract information from the residual data in the eyes and trace it back to him—so he destroyed the evidence..."

"You know how it is. Folly followers—their eyes are always a little... odd."

"..."

'I have a feeling you're throwing shade at Folly's followers. But I like it.'

Cheng Shi snorted, then released Max.

"You can go."

Max's eyes lit up with joy: "Really?"

"Really."

"But you can't leave Redi Core. At least not until I find where the divine gift is. Stay here and be ready when I call."

"Of course, I won't restrict what you do. If you manage to find it before me and bring it to me..."

"I wouldn't mind putting in a good word for you with Lord Ultraman."

"!!!"

At the mention of that lord's name, Max trembled from head to toe: "You... you know Him?"

Cheng Shi curled his lips into a deeply meaningful smile.

"Know Him? We go way back."

Chapter 1147: The Statue Standing Atop the Fool Hunter's Grave

"You're from the Afterglow Church?"

Max's eyes widened, brimming with anticipation.

During the Civilization Lonely Tower era, Folly's will reigned supreme while Chaos's influence waned. The Afterglow Church had lost its power and declined to near irrelevance. Yet even so, it remained a pilgrimage site for Chaos followers.

But the Afterglow Church was beneath his station. Cheng Shi adopted an air of mystery:

"The Afterglow Church is a relic of the past. It doesn't deserve to be mentioned in the same breath as me."

"You don't need to know more than this: I too am a follower of Chaos."

"Enough talk. I have more questions for you. Besides the ravings, what else do you know about this statue?"

Max turned out to know quite a lot. Under the warm glow of shared faith, he dumped every bit of information he had.

Most of it Cheng Shi already knew from passersby. But one detail was entirely new.

"You're saying the Fool-Hunting Statue was built directly on top of the first Fool Hunter's grave?"

Max nodded:

"Yes, my lord."

"Skart—the very first Fool Hunter in history—was the one who proposed the supreme principle that 'Folly equals a capital offense.' He further distilled the Civilization Lonely Tower's concentration of Folly, giving Folly's armies greater combat power and sweeping away the remnants of Truth's attempted restorations and the Afterglow Church's provocations..."

At this point, Max stole a cautious glance at Cheng Shi.

"After his death, he was buried here. In his honor, the Civilization Lonely Tower erected a statue atop his grave, making it a convergence point for the masses' faith—so that he could draw nearer to their Benefactor, Folly."

"There are even rumors that Skart was elevated to Envoy long ago. People claim to have witnessed it firsthand: when criminals guilty of Knowing Folly were punished before the statue, strange waves would surge from within, drawing something out of those sinners."

"The townsfolk believe it's the merciful Skart stripping the folly from the guilty. But this sort of thing is hard to verify, and it hasn't happened for a very long time."

Cheng Shi had little interest in Redi Core's history. What he really wanted to know was whether this so-called Folly Envoy actually existed.

Folly had His nose so high in the air that He looked down on every living thing in the universe. If He ever did take notice of something, it would probably only be That lofty Creator of the Real Universe.

Come to think of it, an interesting thought: had Cheng Shi ever wondered whether Folly disdained Origin? Did He consider Origin's Universe Slice Experiment yet another foolish act?

No one could answer that question. After pondering, Cheng Shi concluded that a true Envoy probably didn't exist—but the absence of an Envoy didn't mean there were no Servant-God-level creations.

According to Dragon King's theory, since Truth had the Ritual of Truth, then logically, Folly should have a similar creation.

And every mysterious aspect of the Fool-Hunting Statue pointed to it being extraordinarily close to Folly.

So was it possible that a clue to His creation was hidden here?

If so, then even if this trial didn't yield the Eye of Mockery, finding clues about Folly's creation would be a tremendous gain. After all, a creation was the crystallization of an authority's power. Finding it might bring him one step closer to that authority.

Cheng Shi's heart burned with anticipation. His gaze toward the statue brimmed with eager... greed.

He patted Max on the shoulder, secretly slipping a die into the corner of the man's garment. Then, true to his word, he let Max go.

After Max reluctantly departed, Cheng Shi quietly changed positions, ducking into an alley's shadows while Shadow Cheng Shi darted through the darkness toward the statue.

The night was still, the wind calm, passersby long gone. Cheng Shi wasn't about to waste this perfect opportunity. He intended to study the statue up close and determine whether it hid a secret even greater than the Eye of Mockery.

Just as Cheng Shi began his examination, Max—now several blocks away—suddenly stopped in the middle of the road.

His expression vanished in an instant, becoming utterly blank—no joy, no sorrow. He slowly retrieved the die from his shoulder seam, examined it for a long moment, then tucked it back into place exactly as before.

Then he turned his head toward the towering statue. His eyes were unreadable.

...

On the other side.

The Torchbearer Threat Elimination Plan had collapsed.

Ji Yue genuinely could not fathom how the Fate Weaver had managed to coexist with this never-silent Silence follower for an entire day.

After barely half an hour of searching with The Prisoner, she used the edge of her spear to metaphorically "cut ties," sending him off to search in a different direction with orders to signal via fire message if he found anything.

She'd even torn open the void for him to travel through—terrified he wouldn't get far enough away fast enough.

Initially, The Prisoner objected. He worried that if they split too far apart and Ji Yue encountered both enemies, he wouldn't make it back in time to support her, leaving the Torchbearers' Fire Seeker in danger.

But his concern was expressed in the wrong way. To a War follower's ears, his nonstop chattering translated to:

'Can you handle it? Can you handle it? Can you handle it?'

He'd forgotten that War and Silence were rival faiths. A single doubt from an opposing faith's believer ignited Ji Yue's fury. If not for one last thread of restraint, her spear would've run him through for the second time that night.

But the butt of her spear did send him tumbling into the void.

With no other choice, The Prisoner compromised. Before leaving, he still managed to squeeze in a parting compliment:

"No wonder you can pass the torch—your fire's burning strong."

"...Get lost!"

Ji Yue didn't even know how she'd forced that word out of her throat. All she knew was that her battle spirit blazed so intensely she wanted to find someone—anyone—and unleash the fury building inside her.

And as luck would have it, shortly after The Prisoner left, a figure appeared in her line of sight.

Zhao Xishi!

The Historian wore a cold smirk, studying Ji Yue with an amused gaze:

"Bishop. When you refused me, you should have expected this moment would come."

"Ready to receive news of your own death?"

"War has winners and losers. His followers don't win every time."

"So—how would you like to die?"

Before the last word had faded, an iron fist came hurtling straight at the Torchbearer's face. Ji Yue's eyes sharpened—she raised her spear to block—only to discover the weapon in her hands had already been obliterated without a trace.

Her pupils contracted. She ducked, but how could a mage stop a warrior at point-blank range—especially when that warrior was ranked number one on the Chosen leaderboard?

The punch caught the side of Ji Yue's face and sent her flying. But this War follower didn't choose defense even after being hit—she tore open the void and summoned countless ancient battlefield weapons back into the light of day.

Only the void didn't tear open behind her as usual. It opened behind Mo Shu—at the exact spot where she'd first encountered the enemy.

The positioning was subtle. It was far from Mo Shu but very close to Zhao Xishi.

Distant water couldn't save a nearby fire. Even if the deluge of weapons could hold Zhao Xishi, it certainly couldn't stop Mo Shu. And compared to a support Historian, the Scavenger was obviously the real lethal threat.

By all appearances, Ji Yue had made a wrong decision under the shock of being struck.

But had she really?

Not at all!

War wasn't just about fighting technique—it was about tactical deployment.

When Zhao Xishi steeled her expression to defend against a Purgatory Bishop's wrath, she spotted something within that storm of spears and swords: a gleaming bald head, plummeting toward her like a meteor.

Her pupils shrank. She cried out in shock and fury: "The Prisoner! You didn't leave?!"

"If I left, how would I make my way into your heart?"

The Prisoner roared with laughter and cannonballed straight into Zhao Xishi's midsection.

Behind her, Ji Yue coughed blood as Oblivion's infinite power forced her steadily backward. But she looked at Mo Shu and sneered:

"Like Tian Ji racing horses—which inferior horse do you think dies first?"

Chapter 1148: You're Gambling with Your Life

Mo Shu was decisive. He wasn't distracted by The Prisoner's appearance and continued pressing forward, crushing Ji Yue's space to survive.

While obliterating her counterattacks with one hand, he looked down and sneered:

"How do you know it won't be you?"

Ji Yue was coughing blood, yet she laughed uproariously:

"Because I'm not the inferior horse!"

"Every drop of blood a War follower spills counts for something. You think constantly obliterating my vitality will kill me?"

"But you've forgotten..."

"How does one survive?"

"Through blood! And fire!!"

The instant those words faded, boundless flames erupted—racing along Ji Yue's blood trail, blazing tongues of fire that swallowed Mo Shu whole. The inferno towered like the dawn sun, chasing away Redi Core's night for a single breathtaking instant.

For one moment, night became day!

Yet even under that apocalyptic blast of flame, Mo Shu emerged with nothing more than a few singed hairs. He pulled back from Ji Yue with a dark expression, never imagining the defensive technique he'd prepared for Cheng Shi's lightning would be needed here.

But he wasn't concerned. He could tell Ji Yue was a spent force. The Purgatory Bishop was genuinely formidable—if they'd squared off from scratch, he might've needed more time and resources to deal with her.

But there were no second chances. She was gravely wounded. Once the flames' momentum died, the only fate awaiting the Purgatory Bishop was obliteration.

So Mo Shu held back, content to let the storm pass.

But time waits for no one—and certainly not for him. Just as the worldburning fire lit up the night sky, The Prisoner had already flash-stepped to Zhao Xishi's front. Looking into her eyes—rage contracted to a pinpoint, firelight dancing in her pupils—he threw a single devastating punch and shook his head:

"Your eyes don't deserve to hold fire."

BOOM—

The titanic blow shattered Zhao Xishi's skull—but the expected spray of blood and brain never came. Her body disintegrated, dissolving into motes of azure light that vanished into the flame-lit brilliance.

The Prisoner landed, killing his momentum, eyes wide.

"Past Reflection?!"

"Heh. The Bishop was right—an inferior horse always dies first. But which one do you think that'll be?"

Zhao Xishi reappeared at the edge of a rooftop. Arms crossed, bathed in moonlight, she gazed down at the battlefield with amusement, then extended a hand toward Ji Yue below.

Countless threads of azure light shot out like strands of hair, piercing into Ji Yue's skull. Even when Ji Yue "set herself ablaze," the flames couldn't burn through these foreign objects.

Watching Ji Yue struggle on death's doorstep, it was Zhao Xishi's turn to sneer.

"Useless. It may only be a quasi-divine artifact, but its effects rival a Servant God's relic."

"This was prepared for the Fate Weaver. Using it on you is giving you more credit than you deserve!"

"Now tell me—who's the inferior horse?"

With a flick of her wrist, she severed the threads. Countless broken strands burrowed back into Ji Yue's body like parasites.

Watching his comrade about to die, The Prisoner felt neither grief nor rage. He simply let every expression drain from his face in a single instant. With solemn gravity, he raised a fist and slammed it into the ground, bellowing:

"All things return to silence. The universe... goes mute!"

WOOOOM—

A heart-shaking soundwave swept outward in concentric rings. Everything around them froze.

Ji Yue's struggle. Mo Shu's advance. The flames' wild dance. The threads' writhing. Everything visible, everything audible—form and sound alike, silenced!

In that razor-thin window—practically equivalent to Silence's own descent—The Prisoner launched himself up, ripped the azure threads from Ji Yue's body before they could fully burrow in, scooped her up, and vanished from the lost battlefield in the blink of an eye.

Moments later, the "silence" departed and the world came alive again. But the flames had died, the light was gone, and endless night rolled back in.

Mo Shu watched the direction they'd fled but didn't pursue. Instead, he hopped onto the rooftop and stood beside Zhao Xishi with a furrowed brow:

"You were gambling with your life."

"If The Prisoner had chosen to kill you instead of saving her, you'd already be dead."

Despite her palms being drenched in sweat, Zhao Xishi allowed herself a small smirk:

"But I bet correctly, didn't I?"

"History is a mirror—look into it and you see the person."

"The Prisoner I've studied may be insufferable, but he's never once abandoned a companion."

"Counterintuitive, isn't it?"

"But that's the fact. Even though his companions are few, even though everyone rejects his company—he's always been this way."

"Of course, there's a prerequisite: it only works if he chose you. Not if you chose him."

Mo Shu heard this and was briefly taken aback, then nodded.

Zhao Xishi caught his reaction from the corner of her eye and sneered:

"Don't tell me you think that's some kind of admirable quality."

"It's stupidity. Naked, undeniable stupidity!"

"In this world, all sincerity is dead weight. It only drags you into the abyss."

"Hmph."

Mo Shu returned her look with cold eyes, feeling that the "sincerity" on her lips was really meant to be "Zhen Xin."

Zhao Xishi didn't notice Mo Shu's subtle expression and continued:

"What a pity. His sincerity will become the blade that kills him."

"Just wait. He won't give up trying to save her. He'll go find the Fate Weaver. And the moment the Fate Weaver heals the Purgatory Bishop, they'll have dug their own grave. Recovered memories will turn War's flames into our weapon—burning away every last defense our enemies have."

...

The Prisoner sprinted with Ji Yue in his arms. Seeing the blood she coughed increasing with every step, he set his jaw, emptied every potion from his personal storage, and poured them into Ji Yue's mouth one by one.

But the Oblivion power saturating her body was overwhelming. He himself hadn't been able to withstand it—let alone a mage.

And beyond the Oblivion force, the threads in Ji Yue's brain were the real problem. They were bottomless pits, greedily devouring every drop of external healing energy while writhing and thrashing chaotically through her mind.

Ji Yue was dizzy and drained. She couldn't fight anymore. She managed to tap The Prisoner's arm and give him a look that said: slow down.

Her body couldn't handle this violent jostling anymore.

The Prisoner's eyes darkened. All trace of his usual chatter evaporated. He ducked into an alley, picked a random house, kicked in the door, knocked out the sleeping resident, and gently laid Ji Yue on the bed.

He poured the last potion down her throat, his voice low and grave: "I'm going to find brother-in-law. He's a Priest—he'll know what to do."

He turned to leave.

Ji Yue used her last ounce of strength to catch one of his fingers. She turned her head, coughed up a mouthful of blood, and with a ghastly pale face managed a smile:

"You shouldn't have saved me... cough cough... Battle opportunities vanish in a flash. You should've killed Zhao Xishi."

The Prisoner paused. He turned and looked at Ji Yue, shaking his head:

"Then you'd die."

Ji Yue laughed out loud:

"Cough cough cough... Everyone dies. But as long as my death means something, I can accept it."

"What meaning?"

"Just to kill a Historian that even Zhen Yi didn't think was worth her time?"

The Prisoner seemed genuinely angry. He jabbed a finger toward where Zhao Xishi had been and cursed:
"She's not worthy!"

Ji Yue smiled. For the first time, she found this so-called second unluckiest Silence follower almost endearing.

"No wonder Qin Xin recruited you."

"He really does have an eye for people..."

"Though it's a shame—another City Defender. That Fang Shiqing girl sure is lucky."

The Prisoner patted Ji Yue's hand: "Stop talking. I'm going to find him. There's still time."

"There's no time left..."

"I know my own body. The ancient battlefield's corrosion already has me running at maximum capacity year-round. Add this tidal wave of Oblivion power, plus whatever those Memory threads are doing..."

"Don't say—"

"Let me say it. Let me finish."

"War followers aren't brainless. City Builders aren't impulsive."

"Everything I did wasn't reckless bravado. I just wanted the Fate Weaver—the one you called the Torchbearers' answer—to draw closer to us."

"Mo Shu is too hard to kill. Killing Zhao Xishi was a golden opportunity, but... it didn't work out."

"I know that using emotion to manipulate someone isn't noble. But for a greater light, I'm willing to shoulder a moment of darkness."

"City Builders never fear death. We only fear dying without meaning. If my death could advance the God Creation Plan... then I can face all those City Builder predecessors hanging on that wall..."

"Cough cough... The Prisoner. As fellow Torchbearers—promise me one thing."

"Burn my body. Let me return to the embrace of flames."

"I don't know what the Historian planted in me, but I don't want to become your enemy after I'm gone..."

"Why are you crying... cough cough... Promise me. Please?"

"..."

In that moment, every trace of the second unluckiest man alive vanished from The Prisoner's face. His fists clenched white-knuckled, veins bulging, as he choked back fury and grief. He stepped forward, planted his foot on his own fallen tear, seized Ji Yue's hand, and nodded—hard.

"I... promise."

The words had barely died when the door behind him was kicked clean off its hinges. Before any figure could be seen, a healing spell of staggering density crashed down on both of them like a tidal wave.

At the same time, a scoffing voice drifted in from outside:

"Tch—"

"I don't."

"No Priest would tolerate a teammate dying in front of them."

"You want to die? Did you ask me first?"

Chapter 1149: Even a Mosquito Leg Is Still Meat

"You cried?"

"I did not!"

"Then what's this?" Cheng Shi nudged The Prisoner's foot aside and pointed at the wet spot on the floor beneath it.

"Gasoline."

"?"

"Ji Yue said she wanted to die in fire. I was getting ready to burn her."

"..."

There was no possible response to that, because Cheng Shi could actually see The Prisoner holding a barrel of gasoline.

'Dude—?!'

'How did you manage to cry and pull out a gasoline barrel at the same time?'

'And where do you keep getting all these gasoline barrels?!'

'Did you rob a gas station?!'

Cheng Shi had expected to encounter a different side of The Prisoner. But reality proved he'd overthought it.

The Prisoner was still The Prisoner—just with a little less of the chatty camouflage.

He shoved The Prisoner aside with an irritated huff, sat at the bedside, and carefully examined Ji Yue's injuries. Hidden from The Prisoner's view, he quietly traced an Order symbol on Ji Yue's back.

Her wounds were genuinely severe. Any Priest would take one look and shake their head. Healing alone couldn't save this Torchbearer—not unless a Gravekeeper personally sustained her life force.

But Mi Laozhang hadn't been matched into this trial, and Cheng Shi wasn't a Gravekeeper today. So he could only use another method to share her burden.

Justice Official!

An Order Priest could balance vitality between two people—functioning just like the Symbiotic Ribbon Mi Laozhang had once used. And as luck would have it, Cheng Shi had conned an Order follower in his previous session. So the moment Shadow Cheng Shi relayed news of Ji Yue's critical condition, Cheng Shi already had a plan.

He blasphemed a certain Benefactor once more, borrowing temporary Order power. Then, using his Endless Life ability, he slowly eroded the threats within Ji Yue's body. After relentless effort, he finally pulled her back from the brink, and she fell into a peaceful sleep.

Drenched in sweat, Cheng Shi exhaled deeply and gave The Prisoner a nod.

Seeing Ji Yue saved, The Prisoner's tension drained out of him. He collapsed onto the floor.

Cheng Shi shot him a half-amused glance, stood up, and casually surveyed the room:

"What were you two trying to do?"

"The commotion was a bit much, don't you think? Since when is night brighter than day?"

"You... didn't hear everything?"

"Hear what? I'm just a Priest. Getting here already took everything I had—you think I had time to eavesdrop on your deathbed drama?"

The Prisoner's expression turned peculiar. He stared at Cheng Shi and blurted: "If you didn't hear anything, how do you know it was dramatic?"

"I guessed." Cheng Shi held back a grin, but sighed inwardly.

This was exactly why he preferred City Defenders over City Builders. You couldn't say the Builders were wrong, but they truly would "stop at nothing" for their goals.

It reminded him of Zhao Qian.

When City Builders believed hope lay within themselves, they could disregard everything else in the world. But the moment they learned hope rested in someone else, they'd sacrifice every last thing they had—like Ji Yue just now.

Qin Xin commanded both the City Defenders and the City Builders. Two conflicting wills clashing daily—did the man never get a splitting headache?

Cheng Shi's thoughts wandered, and the room fell silent.

After a while, he smiled, shook off the tangent, and continued:

"I know you were looking for me."

"I suspect even people not in Redi Core could see the sky change color over here, let alone me—the person she was trying to signal with her flames..."

"Tch. The Scholar plays a mean game. Creative way to find someone, I'll give her that."

"But those methods were too aggressive. Use them less from now on, or it'll end badly."

"So what did you need me for?"

"Wait—before that, Ji Yue's house call fee. You Torchbearers should settle that first, shouldn't you?"

"House... call fee?"

The Prisoner blinked, staring at Cheng Shi: "You charge your own teammates for healing?"

"Hey now, who said anything about money?"

The Prisoner's eyes flickered. He thought maybe he'd misjudged after all.

But then Cheng Shi added:

"Equivalent items work too."

"..."

The Prisoner's expression became exquisitely complex. He stared at Cheng Shi for a long, long time—long enough to make Cheng Shi avert his eyes in mild embarrassment—before finally drawling:

"Fine. I'll pay."

Cheng Shi's eyes lit up. But suspicion crept in as he looked at The Prisoner: "Pay with what?"

"I'll owe you."

"???"

'Running a tab?!'

Cheng Shi said disdainfully: "How is that different from not paying? Do I owe you something?"

The Prisoner shook his head vigorously: "No, brother-in-law. I owe you."

"..."

One sentence silenced Cheng Shi completely.

Bad news: freeloaded again.

Good news: The Prisoner seemed to have snapped out of his earlier mood.

Then again, the latter might not actually count as good news either.

Cheng Shi dragged over a chair, sat down, and rolled his eyes:

"Go on then. Tell me what two broke Torchbearers accomplished during this earth-shattering night. Let me—the Priest who'll never see his payment—have my eyes opened."

"..."

For a fleeting moment, The Prisoner felt his brother-in-law had been infected by this Folly town's atmosphere—everything he said reeked of sarcasm.

But he still laid out everything he and Ji Yue had done, and at the end fixed Cheng Shi with a burning gaze:

"You know Yu Xi. Don't you?"

Cheng Shi blinked. His smile was unreadable.

'Know Him? I even know what underwear He's wearing today.'

But no matter how much he knew, he wasn't about to be freeloaded a third time. Did they think the intel he'd risked his life gathering outside was free?

He needed to earn a margin.

Cheng Shi's current smile was peculiar—so peculiar that The Prisoner read his "needs" at a single glance. After a moment's hesitation, as if steeling himself, The Prisoner pulled a palm-sized wooden puppet from his personal storage. He didn't hand it over immediately, but cautiously tested:

"Family discount?"

"Sorry. I don't have family."

"That's too cruel, brother-in-law. Just this afternoon, wasn't Oblivion your family?"

"..." Cheng Shi choked, then laughed despite himself: "Fine, fine, fine. Family discount it is. Outsiders get face value. Family gets 110%. Now what you're holding isn't enough."

"?"

The Prisoner's eyes went wide. A second later, he lobbed the wooden puppet into Cheng Shi's lap and immediately distanced himself:

"Zhen Yi and I don't have any kinship. We're outsiders. This is more than enough."

"Brother-in-law, hurry up and talk."

"..."

Hearing this, Cheng Shi snarled through gritted teeth: "Then why are you STILL calling me brother-in-law?!"

"You don't want me to call you Cheng Jie either."

"..."

"Besides, even if she's not my biological sister, we can call it honorary kinship. By that logic, you're still my brother-in-law. Perfectly reasonable."

'Reasonable my *!'

Cheng Shi wanted to call off the whole deal, but when he squeezed the little puppet in his arms, he couldn't bear to let go.

After all, it was for spreading Yu Xi's divine name. A little humiliation... he could endure it.

"What is this?" Before opening the Yu Xi lecture series, Cheng Shi asked one more question.

For once, The Prisoner explained with genuine seriousness:

"Descending Silent Puppet. S-class Sacred Artifact. I received it as a blessing from my Benefactor through personal prayer. Think of it as Him sealing my 'All Things Return to Silence' punch inside this little puppet. When you shatter it, it silences everything around you."

'Good stuff!'

Cheng Shi's eyes lit up—then immediately narrowed with suspicion: "Including myself?"

The Prisoner nodded: "Naturally. You're not a Silence follower, so you can't avoid it."

"..."

'How is this good stuff?!'

Cheng Shi's face went dark. But he rubbed the puppet again and thought:

'Even a mosquito leg is still meat. I'll endure it. At least it beats being freeloader.'

Chapter 1150: Have We Met Before?

"I can tell you everything I know about Yu Xi. But first—you tell me why you're looking for Him."

Cheng Shi sat upright, asking with deadly seriousness.

At this point, there was no need for secrecy. The Prisoner laid out everything Qin Xin had told him, only substituting the God Creation Plan with "a prophecy about the path forward," saying Yu Xi was the answer for the Torchbearers.

"If you truly know Him, please help the Torchbearers once more."

"For the sake of..." The Prisoner glanced at Ji Yue lying on the bed, rubbed his head, and finished: "...the Descending Silent Puppet."

"..."

'You really do know how to read people.'

Cheng Shi naturally knew that this so-called "prophecy" was just the Flame of Hope's method of spreading Yu Xi's divine name within the Torchbearers. He could also guess these two had likely come for the God Creation Plan.

Only, by happy coincidence, his own ideas aligned perfectly with the suggestion Sun Miao had given the Torchbearers. Decay's container had already been transferred through this Vice President's hands to the Torchbearers. So when Sun Miao brought the container back to the Fire Passing Hall, the name of Yu Xi would spread from there.

He had to admit: Fate did have something going for it. His casual actions from not long ago had inadvertently lent credibility to Yu Xi's cover story.

So he trotted out the same tale that had fooled countless people—with a few updates and iterations on the original version.

"...He's different from every other god we know."

"He shows no respect for the sixteen gods sitting on their Divine Thrones. He may even be plotting something."

"I can't fathom a god's mind, but I can see His ambition is enormous—at least bigger than yours."

The Prisoner frowned at this. The Torchbearers' will was to protect what was beautiful and resist the gods. If Yu Xi's ambition exceeded even that, then this Yu Xi couldn't possibly be trying to...

"His target is the one above all gods?!" The Prisoner blurted, stunned.

"!!??"

'He knows about Origin?!'

Cheng Shi was floored. He raised an eyebrow at The Prisoner: "You certainly know a lot."

"There really IS one?!"

The Prisoner was equally shocked, pawing at his bald head in bewilderment.

Now Cheng Shi was thoroughly confused.

'Wait—dude, what?'

'Don't tell me you just guessed your way into knowing about Origin's existence?'

Cheng Shi's brain started buffering. The Prisoner scratched his head and explained:

"I wasn't sure..."

"When I had my audience with my Benefactor, I asked Him: 'Why do You look like a puppet? Is it because there's a higher being above You pulling the strings?'"

"He didn't respond. So I took that as confirmation."

"..."

'This man is beyond mortal!'

Once again, a single remark left Cheng Shi totally speechless.

He didn't even know how to respond. 'How is that any different from a wild guess?'

'Though, to be fair, the gods really are marionettes...'

The air grew awkward again. Of course, it was only awkward for Cheng Shi; The Prisoner didn't care and pressed on:

"So how can we find this Yu Xi?"

"He's rebelling, we're rebelling—logically, we're family."

"..."

'Like hell you're family.'

"A god isn't exactly easy to find," Cheng Shi deflected. He wasn't ready to have too much direct contact with the Torchbearers as Yu Xi. "If He doesn't want to see you, your only option is to wait for a summons."

"True enough..."

The Prisoner nodded, thought for a moment, then suddenly brightened: "You said He harbors rebellious intent. Does His Benefactor, Deceit, know about this?"

'?'

Cheng Shi's gaze immediately turned strange. 'Should I tell him that the Fun God is actually the biggest rebel leader in the entire world?'

He feigned curiosity: "What does Deceit have to do with it?"

The Prisoner slapped his thigh:

"Everything!"

"Think about it—if Deceit doesn't know, then I just report Yu Xi to Him. That gives us a chance to meet Yu Xi!"

"???"

"Hmm, though getting to Deceit is also a problem... Oh wait—brother-in-law, you ARE a Deceit follower!"

"See? I told you you're Cheng Jie and you didn't believe me! It all connects! You help us request an audience with Deceit, then we report Yu Xi, and we get to meet Him!"

"And under Deceit's interrogation, as fellow rebels, we'd naturally get even closer to Yu Xi!"

"I mean, it'd require you to take the heat as a snitch, but no worries—just blame your sister-in-law!"

"She's got so many lice already, one more won't itch!"

"This way, you help pass the torch, we find Yu Xi, Zhen Yi gets her kicks—three birds with one stone! The whole family wins, brother-in-law!"

"..."

Cheng Shi's scalp went numb.

In that moment, he was suddenly certain that if The Prisoner died, Birth's Life Marker Board would sprout a brand-new entry.

Because there was no way this creature was human!

'Seriously...'

'Is it physically possible for a carbon-based lifeform to come up with something this deranged?'

'Is this how Silence teaches you to exploit people's secrets?'

'Report myself to myself. Wonderful...'

His fists itched.

Cheng Shi's lip twitched. He let out two cold laughs and said nothing more.

Seeing Cheng Shi had zero intention of agreeing, The Prisoner sighed regretfully:

"Yeah, I suppose it would affect your relationship with my sister."

BOOM—

The roof went flying. A second moon rose over Redi Core's sky—just slightly smaller than the real one.

"Ku... cough cough... ku ku..."

A sound—half cough, half laugh—drifted from the bed. Cheng Shi darkened his face and snapped:

"Having fun pretending to sleep?"

"What's so funny?"

"Don't forget—this man is one of your Torchbearers. Still laughing?"

"..."

Dr. Cheng's medical skills were truly exceptional. One sentence instantly calmed the patient.

The only side effect was that her eyelid wouldn't stop twitching.

Ji Yue took a deep breath and weakly opened her eyes. She turned her head toward Cheng Shi and said: "Thank you."

Cheng Shi grunted and ignored her.

Ji Yue forced a pained smile and added: "...I'll pay the house call fee."

"Anything else bothering you?"

Cheng Shi sat back at the bedside and flicked another healing spell her way.

"..."

Ji Yue had been feeling somewhat recovered, but now her vision seemed to be malfunctioning—because the man with hair sitting at her bedside looked an awful lot like the bald Prisoner who'd just been launched through the roof.

She coughed twice more, then addressed Cheng Shi:

"I know my methods might not sit well with you, but—"

"Don't bother." Cheng Shi shook his head, cutting her off. "The world doesn't revolve around anyone. Everyone has their own agenda."

"When it comes down to it, no matter how many times our paths cross, I'm just a passing stranger to you Torchbearers."

"You act according to your torch-passing goals. That's your prerogative—I don't care."

"After all, none of this affected me. Your fee is paid, and this was just a transaction."

"But next time..."

Cheng Shi's gaze sharpened, his voice dropping three degrees.

"Scholar, you'd better pray it doesn't affect me. Otherwise, this business relationship might not survive."

Ji Yue wasn't the least bit surprised by his attitude. She smiled: "I look forward to our next transaction."

Cheng Shi rolled his eyes and asked offhandedly:

"How are you feeling? The Oblivion force is dissipating. You're out of danger."

"I feel good. And even if I didn't, I brought it on myself. I'm just curious—why do I sense traces of Order on my body?"

"Probably because Torchbearers are too orderly?"

"I expect The Prisoner will be back soon. Since you're awake, I should get going."

"I still haven't found the statue's secret, and I don't have time to play attending physician."

"But I thought you were here on vacation?"

"..." Cheng Shi's expression darkened. "You're Torchbearers, not infection-bearers. One Prisoner and you've already been infected?"

Ji Yue stiffened, then laughed helplessly: "Sorry. Truth's logical framework always drives me to dig deeper. I said too much."

"Good to know. Goodbye—no need to see me off."

Cheng Shi moved to leave. But Ji Yue's voice drifted after him:

"Um... Dr. Cheng? I'm curious—before today, have we ever met?"

"!!!"

Cheng Shi's footsteps froze. His answer was absolute: "No. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, it's nothing. I just had a strange dream."

"Bits and pieces of many people... and you were among them."

"Today's events were so bizarre that my thoughts must have gotten jumbled. I'm sure it'll pass once I've recovered."

"Mm."

Cheng Shi's expression was peculiar. He said nothing more and strode out of the house.

The moment he crossed the threshold, he broke into a full sprint. The moonlit alley returned to silence, with only a murmured question lingering from within the room.

"Have we really never met?"