

## The Gods 241

Chapter 241:

"I'll pass, scholar. I have claustrophobia — can't stand small rooms. Let's just talk out here."

"..."

Selius's original was bound by [Order] and physically incapable of leaving the room, which meant he couldn't see Cheng Shi frantically rubbing his nose on the other side.

Seeing that this stranger he'd never met still harbored wariness toward him, Selius took the initiative to ease the tension:

"Young man, you must have noticed I can't leave this workshop. Since I can't get out, how could I possibly help you obtain this once-in-a-century Germinating Divinity?"

"Oh? You want to help me obtain it?"

"Indeed. That is the trade I wish to propose. All you need to do is drag my slice in here. The moment I kill him, I'll become the final vessel for the Germinating Divinity.

Then, you simply drive this Concentric Dagger into my heart — and you can extract and permanently claim it!

Understand — this is the first wisp of Germinating Divinity born from human nature in centuries!

Don't you want it?"

Cheng Shi's eyes rolled so hard they nearly lifted the roof.

'Heh. If I hadn't already killed you once, I might actually believe that.'

"Let me ask you the same question, scholar. This is the first wisp of Germinating Divinity born from human nature in centuries. Don't you want it?"

"..."

Selius hadn't expected Cheng Shi to be so impervious. After a moment of silence, he tried again:

"I am a scholar — a scholar from the Tower of Logic. My entire life has been devoted to proving my research correct. I have no interest in Germinating Divinity."

'Oh, absolutely. I used to be a trickster but I never tricked anyone, either. Come to think of it, we're actually pretty similar.'

"Furthermore, I've grown disillusioned with this world that has strayed from [Truth]. What people pursue was never [Truth] itself, but what [Truth] could help them obtain.

This impure ideology has poisoned the entire continent. I've had enough of it all — I've long wished for death.

Yet fate has been kind enough to let me witness Germinating Divinity with my own eyes before I die — and upon my very own slice, no less.

Good. Good! Good!

I have no more regrets. Do it, young man. Let me kill the last 'me,' and then let me die by your hand.

You will receive this singular Germinating Divinity, and I... I will embrace [Truth] in another world, and attain true... freedom!"

'Heh. Right. Kill you, parasitize me, and you'll waltz off to some land beyond Montrani with your Germinating Divinity in hand, free from the Grand Tribunal's control at last.'

'Your abacus is clicking loud enough to wake the dead. Even louder than last time.'

'If not for that extrapolated trial, I'd be giving a standing ovation for your noble selflessness!'

Still, Cheng Shi didn't refuse.

Because he had no reason to refuse. Selius's hidden move was nothing to him. Besides, he wanted to know whether the passenger who'd stirred awake in the "dream" last time would wake up again.

So he agreed. He simply tossed Selius's last slice into the workshop, waited for the satisfied scholar to finish the kill, then strolled over and stood before him once more.

The red-eyed scholar smiled with contentment, spreading his arms wide toward Cheng Shi. Excitement — barely restrained — glimmered in his gaze.

"Do it. I will fulfill my promise."

"Actually... hold on. I remember you have a Tomb End Stone that's quite useful. Since you're about to die anyway, how about giving it to me?"

"..." Selius's expression turned strange. "He told you about it?"

'Who? Your slice?'

"Ah, yes. It was part of his trade offer." Cheng Shi rubbed his nose.

"Fine. It's in the experiment desk drawer. Go ahead and take it."

Cheng Shi walked to the desk and pulled out the same distinctive mineral — eroded by [Decay]'s faith over centuries — from the drawer.

'Tsk, tsk, tsk. Lost and found. This too is fate.'

He pocketed the stone and picked up the Concentric Dagger Selius had prepared for him.

"Since you're dying anyway, this dagger — wouldn't it also be..."

"...Yours too."

"Well, I'd be rude to refuse." Cheng Shi grinned ear to ear, running his fingers along the dagger's edge.  
"Good. Now then — any last words?"

"Last words? None. Nor do I need any. Because I am already... without regret."

'I hope that's genuinely true.'

Cheng Shi chuckled softly. Just as in the fantasy, he delivered a crushing blow that shattered Selius's heart.

And just as the light faded from Selius's eyes, that familiar wisp of soul-force surged through the blade's tip toward him.

Cheng Shi didn't resist. He let it rush into his body.

And then...

His lips moved on their own for the second time — smacking together softly...

"...Sour. Tastes bad."

Ha. Hahaha. Hahahahahaha!

Cheng Shi burst into laughter again, laughing until tears nearly spilled.

'This time it has to be real, right?'

"Brother Mouth, you've finally spoken. I thought you'd run off with my shadow."

Cheng Shi repeated the same dialogue from last time, testing whether Fool's Lips was putting on an act and whether it had already woken up once before.

But Fool's Lips remained silent: "..."

Cheng Shi's eyes darted, and he pressed on: "Why so quiet lately? Did you convert to [Silence]?"

This time, however, he didn't wait for Fool's Lips to answer. He answered for it himself.

"Don't say ridiculous things. I just woke up."

"..."

Then he rubbed his own nose, dripping with sarcasm:

"Fate cannot be defied."

"..."

This smooth combo-attack rendered Fool's Lips utterly speechless.

Cheng Shi felt his lips twitch open twice, but not a sound escaped before they snapped shut again.

"Brother Mouth, why'd you go silent again? Run out of things to say?"

"Brother Mouth, do you think I'm right?"

"Brother Mouth, anything to add?"

"Hello?"

Cheng Shi was now certain — Brother Mouth had indeed converted to [Silence].

'Hilarious. I've finally beaten it for once.'

'Today's script shall be titled "A Second Chance: How I Left Brother Mouth Speechless." I absolutely need to jot this down in a little notebook after the trial, so next time I get tricked I can pull it out for some psychological comfort.'

Now that he knew Brother Mouth was truly still there, Cheng Shi felt inexplicably reassured. He looked down at Selius's corpse and slowly took the wisp of Germinating Divinity — swirling with red and black — into his hand.

But just as he was puzzling over how to store this divinity, Fool's Lips finally renounced its oath to [Silence] and returned.

"...Wrong."

"?"

The cryptic utterance left Cheng Shi completely baffled.

"What's wrong? Where's wrong? Who's wrong?"

"...Everything's wrong."

"Oh, I get it. Brother Mouth, you didn't convert to [Silence] — you converted to [Fate]. So you've also become a..."

Cheng Shi reflexively rubbed his nose, implying that Brother Mouth had become a clown too. But right at that moment, Fool's Lips seized the opportunity to slip in another line:

"...If I were you, I'd throw it away."

"..."

'Great. Just great.'

Throw it away?

'I slaughtered my way through an army for this one tiny prize, and you want me to throw it away?'

'Got it — rubbing my nose means I'm lying. So a liar's words need to be heard in reverse. This thing absolutely must not be thrown away!'

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow and rummaged through his personal space for a container that could hold this wisp of Germinating Divinity. After searching in vain, his gaze fell upon the ring on his hand.

Bone Servant Le Le'er's Ring.

[Corruption], fear, divinity... all the elements were present. It had every single one.

So why couldn't Le Le'er hold onto this Germinating Divinity for him?

After all, workhorses existed to carry burdens for others.

'Perfectly reasonable. Too reasonable.'

And so Cheng Shi caressed his ring, slowly brought it close to the Germinating Divinity, and then — "whoosh" — the Germinating Divinity vanished into thin air.

"..."

Cheng Shi blinked in bewilderment. He could no longer sense the Germinating Divinity's existence.

'Wait, what...'

'Surely I didn't just... lose it?'

"Brother Mouth? What just happened?"

"...6!"

Fool's Lips' sudden "compliment" genuinely startled Cheng Shi. He held his breath and focused, scanning for any changes in his surroundings. Finding nothing unusual, he swallowed hard and asked with palpable anxiety:

"Brother Mouth, did I just screw up?"

Brother Mouth, say something — you're making me really nervous right now.

Hello? Are you still there, Brother Mouth?"