

## The Gods 267

### Chapter 267: A Druid's Friend Is a Wood Elf

In an instant, his skin began to age. His hair turned ashen. The skin on his face seemed to lose all elasticity, collapsing into countless sagging folds — melting downward like candle wax.

Watching Cheng Shi genuinely give up resistance, Hong Lin the Big Cat stared with perfectly round eyes, her face a canvas of shock. Something flashed through her mind. Her four legs coiled and launched — "WHOOSH" — she dove straight back into the mist, scooped up the rapidly decaying Cheng Shi with her thick tail, slung him onto her back, and blasted out the other side like a gale.

Big Cat's speed was terrifying — so fast that the wind peeled at Cheng Shi's drooping skin until it stung.

But he didn't care. In fact, he clutched Big Cat's spine obediently and laughed, weak as he was.

"What the hell are you laughing at!"

Hearing him cackle like that, Hong Lin realized immediately that she'd been counter-tested — and tested down to the bone.

This Fate Weaver had clearly seen through her lack of genuine hostility. Only then had he dared use his own life as bait to hook her right back.

Unfortunately, she'd figured it out a beat too late. She'd already been reeled in.

And indeed, Cheng Shi had won his gamble. He'd sensed that this [Prosperity] Chosen One's attitude toward him was peculiar.

Obviously wary, yet never going for the kill. Perfectly capable of going solo, yet choosing to bring him along.

She'd even turned around to ask him questions during the Sorrow Tide eruption. Ostensibly a test, but no normal test required going that far — she could have simply run without warning and observed from hiding.

This half-transparent, half-concealed behavior told Cheng Shi that Hong Lin's interest in him went beyond the Zhen Yi connection. There had to be other factors — most likely she'd learned his name from a former teammate.

And that former teammate probably wasn't on bad terms with him. Otherwise, Big Cat wouldn't behave like this.

So Cheng Shi had run a little test of his own. He'd bet that Hong Lin meant no harm. More than that — he'd bet she was a good person. At least, a good person toward her friends' friends.

And he'd guessed right. Again.

"So... cough cough... Big Cat, whose friend are you, exactly?"

It was supposed to be a perfectly innocent question, devoid of any teasing. But Cheng Shi never expected that one word — "Big Cat" — would completely wreck his winning position.

Because the instant Hong Lin heard "Big Cat," she bristled like every hair was standing on end. Nobody had ever called her that. Nobody except Zhen Yi!

And so—

The "Big Cat Rider" who'd been lounging on Big Cat's back was suddenly whipped off by her tail, launched into the air, and then dragged flat along the ground — demoted from "rescued friend" to "criminal undergoing corporal punishment."

Thank heavens the Sighing Forest's floor was entirely rotting leaves — relatively soft. Combine that with the Hero of Today's sturdy build, and Cheng Shi survived. In his current loose-skinned state, two more meters of dragging might have rendered him exactly the way [Death] liked people best.

But just to be safe, Cheng Shi struggled to fish out a bottle of Prosperity of Yesteryear and downed it.

The instant the potion hit his stomach, he suddenly felt that being dragged for a bit wasn't so bad after all. It was rather like a forest-edition sled ride. Minus the snow. Minus the sled...

Just a "husky" pulling the cord.

The Sighing Sorrow Tide wasn't a blanket fog that covered the entire forest. Its eruptions followed no pattern, and its range varied wildly.

When the sprinting Big Cat saw the mist falling behind, she slammed on the brakes. A flick of her tail sent Cheng Shi crashing into a nearby tree.

Cheng Shi grunted in pain but didn't move. He let himself drop to the ground and played dead.

Big Cat "AWOOO'd" once, rapidly shrinking from the massive Dense Forest Spotted Leopard back into human form. Her bandeau and shorts were completely unaffected, still hugging her fiery figure.

Seeing Cheng Shi lying motionless on the ground, Hong Lin snorted, casually uprooted another Twisted Night Python, stripped it into a spear, and pressed the tip against his heart.

"Playing dead?"

And you still say you're not Zhen Yi!"

Hong Lin's brows were inverted, her eyes pure fury. By now, even she was unsure. This Fate Weaver kept bouncing back and forth across the line between "is" and "isn't" Zhen Yi, dancing with death as he poked at her nerves. If she hadn't heard this name from a trusted friend, this infuriating Fate Weaver would have been a corpse beneath her spear long ago.

Cheng Shi lay pinned to the ground, covered in grime, spitting out bits of rotten leaf between retorts:

"All right, sis. Since you know who I am, I'll be straight with you:

I am the Cheng Shi you've heard about. And I really am a Fate Weaver. If you truly learned about me from a friend, you'd know the Fate Weaver part isn't a lie.

I've grafted many people's fates. And through their fates, I've helped quite a few."

Hong Lin's expression soured: "Fate Weavers can't run that fast."

"How do I put this — before the Gods descended, I was a sprinter. Very good record too. Nearly made it to the provincial team.

But to be fair, I've got speed but no endurance. So when I stopped back there, it wasn't self-destruction — I was genuinely out of gas."

"Sprinting on all fours?"

"Absolutely. Latest breakthrough in sports science. Researched by yours truly.

When you shifted into that big Dense Forest Spotted Leopard, didn't you run on four legs too?"

"..."

Hong Lin was speechless. She'd never met anyone who could deliver outright lies as complete gibberish with such a straight face.

But this exchange finally convinced her — one hundred percent — that Cheng Shi was not Zhen Yi.

Zhen Yi was witty, yes — but not absurdly witty.

She never said anything meaningless, because every word out of her mouth was a trap designed to turn someone into entertainment.

Seeing Hong Lin's attitude soften, Cheng Shi immediately repeated the earlier question: "So who told you about me?"

But Hong Lin didn't answer. Instead, she picked up the stolen bottle of Prosperity of Yesteryear, sniffed it carefully, arched an eyebrow, and asked: "Genuine?"

Cheng Shi blinked. He knew this was Hong Lin's answer.

'Genuine or fake?'

His mind raced through everything related to Prosperity of Yesteryear. Before long, he remembered the bottle of "Sudden Flashback" he'd once created — and with it, that [Oblivion] trial in the wilderness and everyone who'd been part of it.

After systematically ruling out Grandpa Cui, Zhao Qian, Su Yida, and Gao Yu, a familiar, beautiful face surfaced in his mind.

'Tao Yi!'

'Hong Lin is Tao Yi's friend!'

Cheng Shi's eyes widened with realization, and he burst into a full, open laugh:

"A Druid's friend is a Wood Elf — of course! That makes perfect sense. Ha — I should've figured it out sooner. So, how's Tao Yi doing these days?"

At the mention of Tao Yi's name, Hong Lin's expression eased slightly. She regarded Cheng Shi with an appraising eye, then gave a small nod.

"She's fine. Other than constantly pining after some random man, nothing wrong with her."

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'I sense a loaded implication, but I'm choosing not to pursue it.'