

The Gods 27

Chapter 27: The Duke of Brookes' Reputation

When he was inspecting the bodies of the slain dwarves earlier, Cheng Shi had noticed something peculiar about their wounds.

The cuts didn't appear to be made by the sharp, precise weapons typically favored by assassins, like daggers. Instead, they seemed to be made by blunt-edged blades.

For example...

Cheng Shi glanced around the room for a moment and kicked a bloodstained weapon out from under one of the beds.

Judging by the weapon's length and size, it seemed to be a dwarven weapon.

A dwarven warblade.

It appeared that someone had used the dwarves' own weapons to kill them. Whoever had done this must have been confident that no one would linger here long enough to notice the details, because the crime scene was carelessly staged, with little effort to clean it up.

The person clearly didn't care about covering their tracks.

"Interesting..." Cheng Shi muttered.

Replaying his conversation with Ah Ming in his head, Cheng Shi continued to examine the bodies.

It didn't take long for him to notice a few further details.

From the positioning of the six dwarves and the signs of struggle around them, it seemed they had all been targeting a single individual.

Perhaps Fang Shiqing had managed to pull Cheng Shi away just in time, leaving Ah Ming to deal with the unfortunate situation.

What puzzled Cheng Shi even more, though, was that the force behind the wounds varied greatly from one dwarf to the next.

It didn't seem like a single person had killed them all.

Instead, it felt as though six different people had been responsible for killing these dwarves.

Curiously, there were six killers—and six victims.

“Could it have been... a case of infighting?”

Cheng Shi frowned, pondering whether there was an assassin talent that could control people like this. As far as he knew, such talents were rare among [Order] followers.

“The scene is chaotic, but... there's something useful here.”

Cheng Shi picked up a ring from one of the dwarves' bodies and turned it over in his hand, squinting at it in the sunlight streaming through the window.

He clicked his tongue as he examined it and remarked:

“Such fine craftsmanship. I wonder what artisan could forge such a precise ring. Too bad... it's mine now.”

He grinned and pocketed the ring before leisurely strolling out of the servant's quarters.

He had only just stepped out when he was met by Bai Ling, who had a playful smile on her face, as if she had been waiting for him.

Cheng Shi's expression darkened as he groaned, "Have you latched onto me now?"

Bai Ling had somehow acquired a new dress from who knows where. She curtsied with the grace of a noble lady, giggling as she said:

"Clinging to a big shot—is that a problem?"

"You can cling, just don't get too touchy."

"Don't worry, big shot. I only touch where I'm told to," she replied with a mischievous grin.

"....."

Cheng Shi didn't bother with more banter and walked past her.

"Besides, I can pass as your attendant in this outfit. Anything new?"

"Since when do attendants walk ahead of their masters?"

Bai Ling quickly fell into step beside him and whispered:

"The manor is huge, and there are many guests. I just knocked out a noblewoman and got some info from her husband. Apparently, Duke Brookes hasn't made an appearance yet, and he's supposed to show up in less than half an hour."

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, thinking to himself that Bai Ling's methods—while unorthodox—were certainly efficient.

He followed her as they made their way into the main hall of the manor. Nobles surrounded them as they weaved through the crowd, and soon, Cheng Shi spotted the others, who were busy investigating in different areas.

Everyone had changed into new clothes and was conducting their own searches.

Taking in the scene of the main hall, Cheng Shi quickly decided to leave with Bai Ling.

“Big shot?”

“The answer isn’t here.”

“Oh,” Bai Ling replied quietly, following his lead as they walked elsewhere.

Noticing that she was silently walking ahead of him, Cheng Shi suddenly felt like something was missing. After a moment, he asked:

“Aren’t you going to ask me why?”

“I don’t need to know why. I just need to follow orders. But if you need someone to applaud you, I can pretend to be impressed,” she teased.

“.....”

What kind of person was this? She wasn’t even the least bit curious!

Even Song Yawen, with all his nonsense, was more entertaining than this. At least Chen Chong had given him a sense of accomplishment.

But some things just needed to be said.

“The dwarves’ ring is quite exquisite.”

“And?”

“The nobles don’t care about a dwarf’s ring.”

“So?”

“So, the target isn’t here.”

“I see. Big shot, you’re amazing.”

“..... You should just keep quiet.”

“Okay.” Bai Ling’s laughter was as light as her name. Her bubbly demeanor caught the attention of several guests as they passed by.

“So where are we going now, big shot?”

That was a good question.

Cheng Shi’s initial instinct had been to check on the lower-class individuals who frequently interacted with the dwarven refugees. But as he thought about it more, he realized that since the dwarves’ presence here was related to the duke, perhaps it was time to pay the Duke of Brookes a visit.

He gestured toward the staircase, indicating that Bai Ling should go up.

Bai Ling’s expression changed, and she whispered in alarm:

“There are guards up there. If we just walk up like this, we’ll be stopped for sure.”

Cheng Shi’s eyes gleamed mischievously as he replied:

“Use your assets.”

Bai Ling blinked in confusion before catching on.

She lifted her skirt and approached the stairway. As expected, two armored guards immediately stepped forward to block her path.

Bai Ling lowered her head and leaned in close, whispering:

“The duke needs me.”

The guards’ faces were hidden beneath their helmets, but the way they gripped their spears revealed their shock.

It seemed they were pondering the full meaning of the word “needs.”

When they didn’t respond, Bai Ling raised her hand and made a gesture, linking her index fingers together in a way that was anything but innocent.

It was a gesture commonly seen in the more debauched areas of the Land of Hope, a signal often used to indicate willingness to please. No respectable lady would ever make such a gesture.

In fact, only a certain type of worker would even think to use it to advertise their services.

The two guards were even more shocked.

They looked Bai Ling up and down, taking in her delicate features, slender figure, and graceful demeanor. They couldn't reconcile this elegant-looking woman with the meaning of her gesture.

"You..."

"I told you, the duke needs me."

"But... the duke didn't notify us of—"

"Are you saying the duke needs to notify you when he has needs?"

"?" The guards were momentarily dumbfounded by her question.

Right... why would the duke need to notify us?

And besides, what harm was there in letting a woman in? The duchess frequently brought men back to the manor, didn't she?

The two guards exchanged a glance, silently convincing themselves, before quietly stepping aside.

Bai Ling's eyes sparkled with delight as she gave Cheng Shi a subtle signal.

Cheng Shi stifled a laugh, though he kept his face straight as he walked up after her.

The guards made to stop him, but Bai Ling's expression immediately darkened.

"Fools. Don't you know discretion? If you let me go up alone, what will happen to the duke's reputation?"

You already let her through—what reputation does the duke have left to protect?

The guards' brains short-circuited for a moment, but ultimately, they resigned themselves and let Cheng Shi pass as well.

Of course, it wasn't because they were concerned about the duke's reputation.

It was because the "attendant" behind Bai Ling was far too handsome. He didn't look like a servant at all.

In fact, he looked more like a pet that the noblewomen had brought along for entertainment.

So, after all, was it the duke who needed her, or the duchess who needed him?

Forget it. Probably both.

I'm just a guard. Why am I overthinking this?

Seeing that the guards had let them pass, Bai Ling skipped up the stairs with Cheng Shi in tow.

Just as they disappeared onto the second floor, Fang Shiqing and Xu Lu approached the guards at the base of the staircase.

"Hello, we'd like to request an audience with the duke," Fang Shiqing said politely, her tone so refined it didn't even sound like she was from Brookes Town.

An audience with the duke?

The duke was probably too busy for that.

Without hesitation, the guards refused, their icy demeanor impossible to ignore.

Fang Shiqing's expression darkened, and she frowned, wondering how Cheng Shi and Bai Ling had managed to get upstairs.

Xu Lu, on the other hand, was both furious and embarrassed. She shouted,

"Why won't you let us up? You just let those two go up!"

The guards, now gripping their spears, responded:

"Quiet! No one is allowed to go upstairs and disturb the duke. No one went up just now. Please leave."

Now, they suddenly remembered their duty to protect the duke's reputation.

As if the duke still had any reputation left.

"You..."

"We're leaving. They're enough upstairs," Fang Shiqing said, cutting Xu Lu off.

"But that Cheng guy is just a freeloader!"

Fang Shiqing felt a surge of satisfaction at Xu Lu's complaint, but she kept her thoughts to herself, silently thinking:

How can you say that with a straight face? You're even more of a freeloader than he is.

Not wanting to embarrass Xu Lu further, Fang Shiqing simply walked away.

Seeing that Big Sis was leaving, Xu Lu hurried after her.

Meanwhile, Cheng Shi had already entered the duke's room on the second floor.

But when he pushed open the door and saw the scene inside, his face instantly darkened.

In the large, opulent room, a middle-aged man dressed in extravagant clothing lay on the bed, a pool of blood spreading across his chest. He had long since stopped breathing.

Bai Ling's eyes widened as she gasped, covering her mouth.

"He's—!"

"Shhh! Someone's coming!" Cheng Shi hissed.

He quickly pulled Bai Ling into the room, gently closed the door, and dragged her behind the bed, where they hid in the wardrobe.

The wardrobe was cramped, filled to the brim with various clothes.

With no other choice, Cheng Shi squeezed inside.

But with limited space, Bai Ling had no choice but to crouch at his feet, barely managing to cover herself with the hems of the clothes.

To close the wardrobe door, she had to grip onto certain "supports."

"Sis, be gentle."

"Don't worry, I'm not touching anywhere inappropriate."

“.....”

Just like that, Bai Ling was now quite literally clinging to Cheng Shi.

Click.

The doorknob turned, and footsteps echoed through the room.

Before Cheng Shi could even make out how many people had entered, an enraged female voice rang out.

“I told you to knock him out, not kill him! Do you have any idea what this will lead to!?”

A low male voice responded:

“Dillar, you have to believe me. I didn’t kill him!”

Cheng Shi raised an eyebrow, recognizing the name.

Dillar, the Duchess of Brookes—the very woman whose backside the guard had been groping earlier. The highest-ranking lady in town.

But who was this man?