

## The Gods 28

### Chapter 28: The Banquet Murder

“Feel for yourself—the blood is still warm. He’s only just died, and I’ve been with you this entire time. When would I have had the chance to kill him?”

“But he died in the room you arranged! It’s your fault all of this happened!!”

“I...” The man let out a heavy sigh before continuing, “Fine, even if I did kill him, isn’t that a good thing? Now that he’s dead, there’s nothing left standing between us.”

“He can die, but not like this! You’ve ruined everything!”

“Ruined what? Dillar, are you hiding something from me again? You’ve been distant lately, acting as if I’m a stranger. Who is it this time? Have you set your sights on someone else?”

“No!”

The woman’s voice was strained, like she was gritting her teeth, but she didn’t bother explaining any further. Instead, she continued in a panicked tone:

“The banquet is about to start! If anyone finds out he’s dead, we’re done for!”

“Done for? You’re the duchess, the victim in all this. I’m just a nephew of the duke without any inheritance rights, a mere guard. At most, they’ll punish me for failing to protect him. How would we be ruined?”

“..... I... I’m just too anxious. He can’t die like this. The matter of the law still hasn’t been resolved. The citizens will protest...”

“Dillar, that’s the duke’s concern. You’re just the duchess!”

“But he’s dead! DEAD!”

The duchess was visibly trying to suppress her voice, but her hysteria still bled through. It was clear that the duke's death had hit her hard.

"He's dead, so what? You inherit all his wealth. Isn't that enough? The fortune of the Brookes family could last us lifetimes."

"No... You don't understand. I may inherit his wealth, but I won't inherit his title. The administrative power of Brookes will revert to the royal court..."

"What? Do you want to be the duchess yourself?"

"No! It's not about that... it's about... the citizens of the town!"

"Dillar, you've changed. Why do you care about those peasants?"

"You don't understand! Listen to me. Stay here and don't let anyone inside. I'll figure something out. Just make sure no one finds out that he's dead!"

With that, the sound of anxious footsteps echoed through the room as the duchess hurried out.

Hearing this, Cheng Shi and Bai Ling exchanged a glance in the cramped wardrobe, both quietly letting out a breath of relief.

If that "simple guard" was supposed to stay and guard the room, logically, he'd stand outside the door. This meant they would have a chance to escape.

But to their surprise, the moment the duchess slammed the door behind her, the man—who had just called himself a "simple guard"—smirked and turned toward the wardrobe.

"Apologies for the drama you just witnessed, but don't worry—it's about to end."

He clapped his hands, grinning as he praised:

“I must thank you for killing Brookes. While I had made preparations, your methods were much cleaner. I must admit, your stealth skills are excellent too. Unfortunately, it seems you’ve run into me.”

“Come out now. Since you’ve done me a small favor, I’ll at least make your deaths quick.”

Cheng Shi and Bai Ling exchanged another glance, their hearts sinking.

They had been discovered.

“What now?” Bai Ling mouthed silently.

Cheng Shi thought for a moment and mouthed back, “Can you fight?”

Bai Ling shook her head at first but then, remembering that Cheng Shi was just a priest, nodded and wrote a number on his leg with her finger.

“1321.”

Cheng Shi immediately understood. That was her ladder score.

It was quite low.

To still be in that score range six months after the [Faith Game] began meant one of two things: either she had been barely scraping by in solo trials, or she had mostly been freeloading off others.

Bai Ling didn’t seem like either type, which made Cheng Shi wonder how she had such a low score.

Was she failing every trial but still managing to survive?

That would be harder than consistently scoring high.

Regardless, as a hunter, her offensive capabilities were still better than his as a priest.

“Don’t panic. Let’s take him down.”

Cheng Shi silently mouthed, then gave Bai Ling a pat on the shoulder to signal that he was about to open the door.

Bai Ling blinked, understanding his plan. She began counting down in her head.

“Three.”

“Two.”

“One!”

BAM!

Both of them burst out of the wardrobe simultaneously. Bai Ling immediately summoned her longbow while activating her Sensory Hunt talent, diving deep into the man’s sea of desires in an attempt to disrupt his movements.

Cheng Shi rolled across the floor, casting healing spells on both of them preemptively to ensure they had enough health buffer.

But when they emerged, they found the “guard” standing by the bed, far from them, grinning darkly.

The Sensory Hunt talent seemed to crash into an unyielding wall, completely blocked.

“Damn, he has psychic defense abilities!” Bai Ling cursed.

“Oh? A servant of [Corruption]? Perfect. Your clean execution left no trace. I was wondering how I could pin this on the refugees, but now you’ve made it easy for me,” the guard sneered, his eyes scanning them cautiously even as he continued his monologue.

“[Corruption] followers among the refugee dwarves infiltrated the duke’s manor and assassinated him on the eve of the law’s announcement. What a perfect explanation. This clears me of all suspicion. I really must thank you.”

Cheng Shi’s sharp gaze swept over the room and the guard, quickly noting something familiar.

A ring.

The guard was wearing a ring, identical to the one Cheng Shi had taken from the dwarf’s body.

Cheng Shi hadn’t expected things to line up so perfectly. Without wasting a moment, he pulled the ring from his pocket and held it up.

Sometimes, saying too much could be a mistake. It was better to remain silent and let the other party make assumptions.

As expected, the guard froze for a moment upon seeing the ring, then burst out laughing in disbelief.

“What? I only paid the broker 300 gold coins, and he said he hired a group of dwarves for the job. Are you telling me the dwarves outsourced the work to you?”

“Hahahaha! You’re hilarious! So, who are you? How much did those dwarves pay you?”

Cheng Shi instantly pieced things together. So, the dwarves had been hired by this guy to assassinate the duke.

But they had killed the dwarves and then stumbled upon the duke's corpse.

Damn, now there was no way to explain themselves out of this.

It was also clear that the guard wasn't going to let them off just because they were "hired help."

Watching the guard laugh mockingly, Cheng Shi's expression darkened as he replied:

"Thirty gold coins."

"What? Hahaha, how much did you say?" the guard howled with laughter.

"Twenty would've been fine."

"?" The guard's smile faltered, his brow furrowing in confusion.

"Let's call it even!" Cheng Shi suddenly shouted.

In an instant, he cast Accelerated Metabolism on the guard, targeting the man's leg injury.

The spell would accelerate the metabolism of the guard's legs, causing an unfamiliar sensation as his legs regained strength, but also creating a delay in his reflexes.

In that brief moment of hesitation, they would have an opening.

Bai Ling caught on immediately. As soon as Cheng Shi finished speaking, she fired an arrow imbued with [Corruption]'s power directly at the guard.

Their coordination was flawless. Just as the guard's legs buckled slightly, the arrow struck him in the arm.

The power of [Corruption] clawed at his mind like tendrils, pulling at his reason and tearing at his emotions.

But the guard didn't panic. Instead, his lips curled into a cold smile as he chanted:

"In this place, resistance is forbidden!"

"Buzz—"

A wave of holy light erupted from the guard, spreading rapidly and bathing the room in a golden hue.

Bai Ling's bow slipped from her fingers as if pulled by an invisible force, clattering to the ground. The arrow embedded in the guard's arm also fell harmlessly to the floor.

Cheng Shi's eyes widened in shock.

This was the power of [Order]!

The guard was a Lawbringer!

An [Order] bard!

How were bards becoming bodyguards these days?

Before Cheng Shi could wrap his head around this revelation, the high-ranking Lawbringer began to sing, his voice resonating with authority:

“The Executioner stands ready, the time for judgment has come.

Chains bind the cries of the condemned, shackles break the pride of the guilty.

They shall face justice and be cleansed by the holy flame, bathed in the glory of the Lord.

And then!

Under the gaze of [Order]...

Become ash!”

With each verse, Cheng Shi could feel his body weakening, his strength rapidly draining.

“Silence,” “Confinement,” “Burning,” “Repentance”...

These debuffs stacked one after another, oppressing him like a physical weight.

Soon, both Cheng Shi and Bai Ling were pinned to the ground, gasping for breath.

Bai Ling was faring even worse than Cheng Shi. It felt as if an invisible foot was pressing down on her back, crushing her into the floor, contorting her body and face with the pressure.

Blood streamed from her eyes, nose, and mouth, and her vision began to blur.

As she looked at Cheng Shi, who was also in a terrible state, there was no fear of death in her eyes—just a bitter smile as she mouthed an apology:

“I’m sorry... big shot... I’m too weak...”

But with the Silence debuff in effect, her voice never escaped her throat.

Cheng Shi only saw Bai Ling’s lips move before she smiled and closed her eyes.

“Weakness is a sin, isn’t it?”

The guard sneered, drawing his sword as he slowly approached Cheng Shi.