

## The Gods 288

Chapter 288: Honesty and Old Fake

Cheng Shi looked at the crisp, new bills on the table and laughed.

"Old man, where'd you get that kind of money?"

Old Jia picked at his toes and scoffed: "What? Think your old man can't save? Pinched pennies my whole life for this — just enough to put you through school. Take it and buy the ticket."

His bluff was convincing — he genuinely didn't look like he was lying.

But Cheng Shi knew this wasn't his savings. The bills still carried a scent. Aunt Sun from next door's perfume.

He didn't call it out, though. Just took the money and nodded.

After that, Cheng Shi brought Old Jia along when he moved into university. Once Old Jia walked him through the gate, the man left. And Cheng Shi began his brilliant college career alone.

Perhaps university life was genuinely brilliant for Cheng Shi — at least ten thousand times more exciting than the urban village. But for a Dream Peeping Ranger, those testosterone-drenched college years were mind-numbingly dull.

The Sighing Forest's night was only half over, and this [Memory]-influenced dream still had plenty of runtime. But Jiang Wumei couldn't stand the boredom any longer. He decided to switch perspectives.

From observing Cheng Shi to observing his surprisingly interesting father.

But this dream belonged to Cheng Shi. Following Cheng Shi's viewpoint cost the Ranger nothing — it was a gift from his patron. Switching to another "channel," however, demanded a price.

Specifically: risk.

When using his talent to explore deeper layers of the dreamscape, Jiang Wumei could no longer drift unseen like a ghost. He needed a physical presence to move freely and witness memories Cheng Shi had never seen himself.

A physical presence could be detected. If the dreamer awoke and noticed him, whatever the dream-world's "Creator" chose to do with him would be his greatest threat.

Normally, after gleaning enough entertainment, he wouldn't take such a risk. But tonight he was too curious. He had a nagging feeling that Cheng Shi's father wasn't as... honest as he appeared.

So after "accompanying" Cheng Shi for one semester, Jiang Wumei decisively abandoned Cheng Shi's viewpoint, activated his talent, and became a passerby within the dream.

He traced the memories backward to a time before little Cheng Shi had been adopted.

There — outside the orphanage — through the fence, he spotted little Cheng Shi running around the playground. But he also saw someone else. The very person he'd manifested to find.

Old Jia.

The man who'd been stiff and self-conscious his entire life was leaning around the corner of the outer wall right now, head poking out, grinning ear to ear as he watched little Cheng Shi inside.

Jiang Wumei's interest surged back to life. Disguised as a passerby, he brushed past Old Jia — and heard the man's unceasing mutters of admiration:

"What a good seed. What a good seed. Can't let this one grow crooked. If only he were my son... but who am I kidding? My ancestors used up every last scrap of merit. I don't have that kind of luck."

Jiang Wumei raised an eyebrow, eyes gleaming.

'I knew it. This old man is not what he seems.'

He began tailing the man.

For a Ranger blessed by [Memory], discreetly following an old man from the pre-Faith-Game era was laughably easy.

He quickly discovered that Old Jia had been fascinated by little Cheng Shi for some time. During his odd jobs, he passed the orphanage more than once. Every glimpse of the boy brightened his mood for half the day. But he knew he didn't have the credentials to adopt this so-called "good seed."

Until one day, while chatting with neighbors on the street, he overheard that the orphanage director was looking for someone to take a troublemaking brat off his hands. Any unmarried bachelor without a kid would do — just pay, and the deal was done.

Old Jia had scoffed at this. But when he heard the child was called "Little Ten," he panicked.

"Son of a — such a good kid, and these bastards are going to ruin him."

He rushed home in a frenzy, dug a wad of cash from under his grimy quilt, and raced to the orphanage — snatching little Cheng Shi right out from under another bachelor just seconds before the deal could close.

That other bachelor had brought 2,000 yuan. Seeing himself outbid, he grudgingly offered 500 more. Old Jia gritted his teeth and put down 3,000.

That was everything he had. Truly. Not a single extra cent.

And just like that, little Cheng Shi was sold — and became Old Jia's son.

As for Old Jia's 3,000 yuan? That very night, the director stuffed it into a hostess's cleavage at a karaoke bar.

Whether the director or the hostess was happier remained anyone's guess. But at least Old Jia was happy.

He'd led little Cheng Shi home with a beaming smile. The shirt and trousers were borrowed from the Sun woman next door. When he returned them, she gave him a disgusted look and told him to keep them.

But Jiang Wumei could see the truth: the clothes weren't discarded. The wealthy Aunt Sun had gifted them.

On their first day home, little Cheng Shi immediately faked sleep. Old Jia didn't call him out — he simply walked outside. He didn't go far. Just sat on the curb by the doorstep, smoking.

The wealthy Aunt Sun stood behind him. "What made you suddenly want a son?"

Old Jia smacked his lips. "He's good stock. Like me."

Then he stubbed out the cigarette.

"Can't smoke with a kid around. This is the last one. Sigh... gotta start saving for school fees."

Aunt Sun stared at him for a long time, then laughed in disbelief: "I spent a lifetime trying to get you to quit smoking. In the end, all it took was dragging home some stray kid."

It was only then that Jiang Wumei realized these two knew each other. Had always known each other.

But from Cheng Shi's perspective, he'd never noticed — even with the Ranger's sharp eye, he hadn't caught a single telling glance between them.

'These two... what's their story?'

Old Jia pursed his lips and ignored her. He rummaged through his pockets, scraping out a few coins.

"Lend me fifty. I'll pay you back tomorrow."

"For what?"

"Buy the kid some meat."

"..." Aunt Sun let out a scornful laugh, glared daggers at Old Jia, and furiously threw down a hundred-yuan bill before storming off.

Old Jia picked up the money and ambled to the village entrance. Then he squatted down.

He kept glancing at the clock inside the supermarket. As if he was timing something.

Jiang Wumei was puzzled. 'Timing what?'

But it became clear fast. Just as little Cheng Shi was about to reach the village entrance — seconds from escaping the urban village — Old Jia stepped into the shop one beat ahead and bought the ham sausage.

Then, every word he said to the shopkeeper traveled to little Cheng Shi's ears without a syllable missing.

Little Cheng Shi heard it. He turned around. Old Jia caught his eye at the entrance, chuckled, and followed the boy back. Walking along, he murmured:

"The kid's got a brain. Just a little... green."

Jiang Wumei stood at the village entrance playing passerby. When Old Jia walked past him, the Ranger gave an involuntary shudder — nearly tearing the newspaper in his hands.

'This... this might be a master.'

'Should I be more careful?'

He was a cautious man. From that day on, he began tracking Old Jia with the power of [Memory].

It was almost laughable — a Ranger, deploying the blessings of the Gods against an ordinary old man.

Then came the bottle-cap incident. After tailing Old Jia for days, Jiang Wumei discovered that the bottle cap at the doorstep had been planted by Old Jia himself.

He'd apparently noticed early on that Cheng Shi liked cola. So to teach the boy a lesson about lying, he'd preemptively dropped a bottle cap at the door — and even polished the broom handle smooth, for a better grip when swinging.

Sure enough, little Cheng Shi fell into the trap and got walloped.

The next day, Old Jia left home early, strolled to the park, beat some old-timers at chess for fifty yuan, then used the money to buy a case of cola and a takeout meal — and sauntered home at a leisurely pace.

Near the doorstep, he stopped. He chugged two bottles of ice water, splashed some on himself to fake looking sweaty, then walked in — first soothing little Cheng Shi. Right on cue, his stomach growled.

Under little Cheng Shi's stunned gaze, he clutched his belly, ran outside — then headed straight to the park for another round of chess.

The entire performance left Jiang Wumei's jaw on the floor. Meanwhile, oblivious little Cheng Shi was still at home, eating his meal and quietly shedding tears.