

The Gods 94

Chapter 94: The Past, the Present, the Future, and the Unknown

Reality, Unknown Province, Residential Area.

This was a modest two-bedroom apartment on the fourth floor of an old building. It wasn't large, but it was filled with the warmth of life.

The room was cluttered with all sorts of personal belongings. If you looked closely, you could find traces of someone's life, from childhood to adulthood.

Toys, doodles, textbooks, posters, figurines, suitcases...

Everything was still in its original place, just as it had been before the [Gods] descended. Not a single thing had been moved.

For over six months, there was not even a speck of dust on any of them.

The reason was obvious—someone had been cleaning regularly.

This was the old residence of the Cui family, where Cui Qiushi and his father, Cui Dingtian, had lived.

For eighteen long years, two people had called this place home.

Later, due to reasons we all know, the house changed hands. But before long, the elder Cui returned.

Though he had paid a price, he believed it was worth it.

As for why Qiushi, who had always been so attached to his home, never returned, the old man didn't know. He didn't try to guess, nor did he want to. He was too afraid to think about it.

In the past, Cheng Shi had once thought about asking Cui Dingtian why he hadn't participated in the "Wish Trial" to search for his son. But later, Cheng Shi understood.

It wasn't that Elder Cui didn't want to look—it was that he didn't dare.

But today, he had changed his mind.

Because he no longer had time to wait. He had only... three days left to live.

Cui Dingtian held a rag in his hand, carefully wiping down his son's favorite models. His mind drifted back to that scene from the trial—the ground littered with [Divinity].

If only... if only he had taken some of it, even hidden just a little...

No, Cheng Shi had promised it to him; that wouldn't have been stealing!

Just a piece—a single piece—and perhaps his life could have been extended.

But he had given it up.

He knew what human nature was, understood well the word "greed."

In the past, he might have resisted such temptation, but not now. Not with the end of his life so near. He feared he would lose control.

Once that gate was opened, he would plunge straight into the abyss.

But now, that choice left him with none.

Does he regret it?

Yes. He regrets it!

But if he could go back and choose again...

The old man would still choose to regret.

My father named me Cui Dingtian, so that I would live upright, to face the world with integrity!

The old man finished cleaning every corner of the house, washed the rag, tidied his clothes, and sat down in Qiushi's room. He gently touched Qiushi's suitcase one last time.

His clear, unclouded eyes were filled with infinite longing... and the anticipation of an imminent reunion.

"All things must decay, all life must perish.

Your faithful follower prays to You, asking to begin a trial..."

...

Reality, Unknown Province, Remote Mountain Garden.

Before Tao Yi even opened her eyes, she heard the phone ringing beside her.

"Ring—Ring—Ring—"

There were no telephone wires or network lines atop the mountain. As for what this rotary phone on the table was connected to—whether the void or something else—Tao Yi had no idea.

It was a gift from a friend, given to her on her last birthday, two months ago.

Tao Yi smiled, stood up, and ignored the phone's incessant ringing.

She walked toward the endless stepped terraces before her, pulling out a glowing wisp from her pocket space and carefully spreading it over the field beneath her.

Only after the "fertilizing" was done did she return to where she had woken up and finally pick up the still-ringing phone.

"Hello?"

"Dodging my calls, huh, Little Yi Yi? You've been unfaithful."

"Not at all, I was just fertilizing the garden. Didn't have a chance."

"Really? I doubt that, but since I'm in a good mood, I'll let it slide this time."

"And what's made you so happy?"

"I ran into that madman today. You wouldn't believe it—he may be crazy, but he's generous. The four of us split some [Divinity] fragments. We made a small profit."

"Oh, what a coincidence. I found some [Divinity] today too. I used it as fertilizer, just like you suggested."

"Did it work?"

"So far, nothing noticeable."

“Well, I just scraped that method out of the Tower of Logic’s biological experiment archives, so I can’t say for sure. You...”

The voice on the other end trailed off as Tao Yi suddenly interrupted.

“By the way, have you ever conducted human experiments?”

“Uh... huh? Too many to count. What kind are we talking about?”

“The kind where you seal [Divinity] inside someone else’s body.”

“Are you crazy? Why would I do that when I can’t even contain it myself? What’s up with that question?”

“When did you join the Logic Association?”

“Huh? What are you...”

Tao Yi interrupted again. “That thing you gave me... I’ve used it.”

“Wait, Little Yi Yi, you’re acting really strange today, I...”

“Oh, I forgot to water the plants. I’ve gotta go.”

With that, Tao Yi hung up without hesitation.

She stood atop the mountain slope, squinting into the sunlight, a sly smile spreading across her face.

She looked like a little fox that had just sniffed out a secret.

As for the person on the other end of the phone...

“Beep—Beep—Beep—”

“?”

...

Reality, Unknown Province, Apartment.

Gao Yu stood outside the hallway, taking a few deep breaths.

He adjusted his clothes, put on a new backpack, and knocked on the door.

“Knock—Knock—”

“Who is it? Coming.”

A man’s voice came from inside, and shortly after, the door opened.

A middle-aged man with a receding hairline stood in the doorway, hastily putting out his cigarette and offering a sheepish smile.

“Xiao Yu... How come you’re home so early? I just had one cigarette, really, you just caught me at the worst time.”

The man awkwardly tried to explain, but seeing the lie was going nowhere, he quickly tossed the cigarette butt outside the door.

Gao Yu gave the man a quick glance and walked inside.

“Cut back on the smoking, Dad.”

“I don’t smoke that much. It’s just that your mom...”

“What? What now? What did I do to stress you out so badly that you need to smoke, huh?”

A loud voice thundered from the kitchen, causing the man to shrink back, pointing toward the kitchen as he whispered to Gao Yu:

“You see? It’s because she scares me half to death.”

Despite the man’s convincing tone, if one looked closely, they would notice his movements were somewhat awkward, like someone with joint problems—every gesture was a little stiff and unnatural.

“You know, my mom spoils you too much.”

Gao Yu casually tossed his backpack onto the couch and shouted toward the kitchen:

“Mom, what’s for dinner?”

“I’m already full on anger, what do we need dinner for? Keep it down—Xiao Lin is resting in the bedroom, don’t wake her up.”

Gao Yu wanted to retort, “Who has a louder voice than you?” but decided against it. He exchanged an innocent glance with his father and then retreated to his room.

The bedroom wasn’t large, but it was cozy, not at all what you’d expect for a young man’s room.

Lying on the bed was a delicate-looking girl, breathing steadily as she napped.

Gao Yu didn't wake her. Instead, he quietly pulled out a chair and retrieved a...

Scalpel.

He lifted his shirt, glanced at his chest, and then made a straight cut across his skin.

Blood splattered onto the desk, staining the surface red.

Just as he was about to deepen the incision, a small but firm hand grabbed the scalpel.

"You're awake?"

"Mm, let me do it."

The girl's hand was steady, as if she had performed this operation a thousand times. She carefully cut through Gao Yu's chest, following the muscle fibers until she reached a metallic casing beneath the skin.

With great caution, she extracted a small, button-sized object from beside his heart, then began suturing the wound.

Gao Yu gritted his teeth, enduring the worst of the pain as he held the small metallic button in his hand, lost in thought.

"Whose story is it this time?"

"This time, it's not a story. It's a prophecy."

"?" The girl raised an eyebrow, smiling as she asked, "What kind of prophecy?"

“Hiss—”

“Sorry, I slipped a little. Let me check... It’s fine, just a small mistake, no big deal. My left-hand positioning tool must be broken again...”

“... It’s okay. I’ll make a new one.”

“Thanks. Aunt Qin’s leg extension unit is also acting up, and Uncle Gao’s artificial lung... You really should tell him to cut back on the smoking.”

“Sigh, let him be. It’s the one thing he enjoys in life. I’ll find some materials in the next trial and make him a new one.”

“Alright... All done. Can I hear the prophecy now?”

“Mm, sure.”

Gao Yu walked over to the wall, took down a small box, and placed the button inside. Immediately, the room came alive with sound.

“This isn’t a joke, Zhao... Oh right, Zhao Qian.

It seems you don’t believe me. Fine, in that case, I’ll give you a reason to die.

Don’t be angry. By the time you know everything, you won’t just willingly die—you’ll even thank me.

Do you know how I found out about you Torchbearers?

At the first meeting with Him, a beastmaster shared the story of how he had declined the Torchbearer's offer, hoping to gain His favor...

And then, that poor beastmaster was killed by Cheng Shi.

Don't be surprised—you heard me right. Yes, Cheng Shi, the very one who died before your eyes.

I know he's not dead. I didn't want to kill him, nor could I.

At that time, he was ranked tenth on the Ladder of Ascent, barely holding on, but when he acted, it was with such decisiveness—like... like he was a Torchbearer himself.

Are you curious about his identity now?

Sadly, he's not one of you.

He told us that the reason the gods don't know about the Torchbearers is because He is helping to hide you. Hahaha, Zhao Qian, I love the look on your face right now.

This isn't a lie, even though Cheng Shi and I both follow Him...

I was shocked too back then. And from that moment on, everyone present made it a point to forget everything they had heard.

Because exposing you would displease Him.

He's taken a liking to you. No, perhaps it's more accurate to say He's taken a liking to the grand performance that's about to unfold, and His followers, to ensure the show goes on, had no choice but to keep it a secret.

Much later, we learned... well, never mind—it's not a history to be proud of.

So, the point is:

If I don't bring a corpse back today, Cheng Shi will still die. He'll continue to be hunted by those who sent me back.

But if he truly dies, the fate of the Torchbearers...

It's obvious, isn't it?

So, what do you think, Mr. Fortress Builder?"

"....."

"....."

"To borrow power from the gods, and build a new nation!

For the continuation of mankind!

For a new world!

Goodbye, cruel world!"

"Boom—"

The last sound was that of flames roaring.

“What is...?” The girl’s usually calm eyes didn’t show much shock, but her body’s subtle movements betrayed her mind’s temporary shutdown.

“Mm, a piece of history that should have been buried in the past... but is actually about the future.”

Gao Yu placed the button back into the case and carefully set it on the shelf.

As he looked up, he saw the wall was filled with hundreds of identical metal buttons, each one meticulously arranged.

History is only known to future generations because there are always devout recorders.

...

Unknown Space, Unknown Time, Unknown Location.

“Click.”

A hand pushed open an ordinary wooden door.

Outside, four people opened their eyes in response, each with a different expression as they looked at the man dragging a charred corpse into the room.

Upon sensing the faint flicker of extinguished flames on the body, their faces all revealed a change.

The man on the far left sighed:

“Seems like bad news.”

The woman on the far right scoffed and immediately turned to leave.

The two in the middle stared at the man who had entered, then spoke in unison:

“Who’s handling it?”

“You?”

The man on the left chuckled again. “I’ll do it. I’ll take care of it.”

The two in the middle nodded and disappeared in an instant.

The man who had dragged in the charred corpse had been so overwhelmed by the oppressive atmosphere from the moment he entered that he hadn’t managed to say a single word. He hadn’t even had a chance to deliver his carefully rehearsed explanation before his vision began to darken as a giant hand reached for him.

In the final moment of his life, he saw that the hand was wrapped in two intertwining forces of faith, their contrasting currents flowing together in a dazzling, mesmerizing dance.

Unfortunately, he never had the chance to admire it for long.

“What a shame. I knew he wouldn’t die, sigh...

But brother, you’re really something—why’d you bring back a Torchbearer?

Damn, I should’ve never taken on this mess.

Now how are we supposed to play?”

The man casually tossed the two bodies off the tall building, whistling as he walked away from the scene.