

GUARDIAN

Chapter: 90

Shen Wei, I cherish you, I don't want to be suspicious of you, and if I think too much on some things it'll wound our feelings.

Shen Wei uttered not a single sound. Zhao Yunlan slowly lowered his head to prop his chin in his hands, and caged the smile on his face. Though his gaze wasn't icy cold, it appeared a little helpless and desolate—no matter what, he was incapable of treating Shen Wei in an official manner like one put on trial.

“Look at me,” Zhao Yunlan said. “The things you've done—I want you to be honest with me about each and every one of them. I don't want to waste my brain cells now on wild guesses—Shen Wei, I cherish you, I don't want to be suspicious of you, and if I think too much on some things it'll wound our feelings, but I don't want to hear the truth from the mouths of others. For your sake I've crossed countless lines, and committed countless offenses, but if you're like this again...”

He paused slightly; and then he said, in an even tone: “Then I really will turn against you.”***

Zhao Yunlan's expression was placid; his tone was utterly unlike that of his bad temper in ordinary times, and lacked any sense of aggression. His lowered eyebrows were absent of all his usual restlessness. In an instant, Shen Wei's memory of the sage of the great wilderness and mountains, set far and high above the

masses, was miraculously, perfectly superimposed on him without a whit of difference, as if risen from the dead.

Intense fear suddenly surged within Shen Wei's heart. Ever since his birth he had disdained the world, and had not known what it meant to be afraid, but in this moment he trembled with fear from head to toe.

He knows, Shen Wei thought. Even though I've exhausted my mind with the ruse, he still knows.****

His fear peaked—and in that split second the Ghost King of ten thousand years past almost wanted to obey his instinct: to spring forward, kill this person on the spot, and like his fellow ghosts deal simply and crudely with the problem. Once he swallowed the enemy's flesh and blood, little by little, down into his stomach, their flesh and blood would henceforth mingle with his own. The world would no longer hold anything that could so threaten him, not even a trace of potential that could make him shiver.

Yet Shen Wei was no longer the young Ghost King all those thousands of years ago, with a heart as blank as white paper. By now he'd used certain harsh ways to suppress his instinct and innate nature, and break himself down into that which Kunlun had once described as... a gentle and proper figure.

Restraint had since become a routine near engraved in his bones.

Shen Wei stopped breathing; his already pale face became all the more like a snowdrift, without a trace of blood to be seen.

A current of nameless chill welled up from his heart, like a shining, silent spring: it was not violent, but in an instant it had suffused his whole body. When Shen Wei finally came to his senses, he found to his shock that his limbs had gone numb.

Yet Zhao Yunlan was simply waiting for him, with endless patience—he seemed as if he could give over all patience in his lifetime to Shen Wei.

Zhao Yunlan was running his fingers lightly through Shen Wei's hair, each stroke a caring caress, unable to summon up words for the feelings in his heart. Without realizing it, he'd wound Shen Wei's soft hair around his fingers, and suddenly he thought of the day he'd seen long hair spread out upon the bed.

That magnificent and matchless sight seemed like a lifetime ago.

Zhao Yunlan paused for a moment, unable to decipher what he was feeling. He knew, in his brain, that he was dealing with a serious matter, yet in his heart, did not want to even think about it.

Maybe when someone reaches the place that they can't step back or move forward, they would hope for time to just stop there. Then they wouldn't need to continue walking forward or

turning back. Just stay at that one point, unmoving; lying to
themselves, lying to others.

However, the clock's hands will always continue moving
forward. Time cannot stop for anybody.

Zhao Yunlan hesitated. He closed his eyes before opening them
again, moving the chair from the study desk to opposite Shen
Wei, and shifted the tea between them. Afterwards, he shuffled
to the kitchen and opened a cabinet that he didn't know how
long it was left unopened, pulling out a dusty tea set.

This person, who would normally eat from the bowl of instant
noodles just to save washing another bowl, had actually spent
twenty minutes meticulously washing a whole tea set.

It was like he had wanted to calm his thundering heart down in
doing a thing.

He put the tea set on the coffee table, silently turning on the
flames, cooking the water in the tea set. Pulling out a teapot
from under the coffee table, he lifted his head and asked Shen
Wei, "Is tie guanyin alright?"

Shen Wei didn't care if it was tie guanyin or ni pusa, he only
stared directly at Zhao Yunlan.

As Zhao Yunlan headed to the kitchen, Shen Wei's gaze would
follow him to the kitchen. If he was washing cups, Shen Wei's
gaze would follow and turn to the dishwasher; it was as if, if he
looked away for a second, Zhao Yunlan would disappear from
his sight.

Zhao Yunlan silently heated the cups and washed the tea leaves, placing the first cup in front of Shen Wei.

A delicate aroma and steam rose from the cup, intertwining gently. It was a pity no one had the mind to care.

Shen Wei took it without realising. His hands were shaking to the point the small teacup had spilled out at least half of its contents.

Shen Wei only looked down, away from Zhao Yunlan, when he felt something scald his hands. He steadied his hands, maintaining the stiff position for a long time before delivering the cup to his mouth, taking a small sip and asking hoarsely, “How did you know?”

“The god’s memories were made very intricately... very intricately.” Zhao Yunlan tilted his head slightly, as if listening to the boiling water. “Intricate to the point that when linked up with almost everything I knew, it coincidentally gave me a completely different story. It could make my feelings rise up till I was unable to suppress myself, get could also leave enough pause in its logic, leaving me to realise instantly that something was wrong after I calmed down.”

Shen Wei was expressionless. When he was expressionless, his stable and unmoving eyes and eyebrows were beautiful to the point of being demonic, almost being able to pierce one’s soul.

“Actually, I should’ve realised earlier, if the (大神木) ‘s fake memories were created by someone else to misguide me, it would have been foolish. Because you were beside me then. Would I have not questioned you when I had suspicions? Once your words have any overlap with any of the incidents inside, who should I trust?” Zhao Yunlan lowered his gaze to look at him. After a while, he asked, “So you had assumed all these things from my talk with the ghost mask, am I right?”

Shen Wei was silent for a while, before admitting, “En.”

Things had already reached this stage. To mess things up or continue lying, was a disgrace; he would rather face it head on.

Zhao Yunlan said, unblinkingly staring at him, “To fabricate such an intricate and whole story in such a short time... how are you so unbelievable? Ghost Face even had the face to say that you were twins, both of your DNA has to be different; other than looking similar, I don’t see any other place that you are similar in, the intelligence is on a whole nother level.

Shen Wei didn’t make a single noise, and just sat there silently.

“Then, all had pointed towards Shennong. In your story, Shennong was a special role, and then intentionally used Shennong’s background to say the line about long, life and death. It was because your ability to guess so many things, once Shennong’s medicine bowl would definitely appear and use this type of method to remind me.” Zhao Yunlan laughed bitterly.

“Even this could be gambled and won. You aren’t just unbelievable, but your luck is also good.”

Shen Wei was silent for an even longer time, before admitting again, “Correct.”

“I really do like you, really... in this life, I have never liked another person like this.” When Zhao Yunlan spoke till then, there was a moment, where the expression on his face was sad, to the point it wasn’t able to be suppressed any more. However, it was just the time it took for the light to flicker before he returned to normal, as if it was someone else’s illusion. Yet, his voice had stopped for a second, and spoke with a rasp, “I am not willing to suspect you. When I try hard to shake those coincidentally perfect memories, guessing who was actually misleading me, I never even thought of you as one of the suspects.”

Shen Wei was still a portrait of immortal grace, sitting on the chair, yet veins burst from the back of his hands.

“The second time I felt that something was wrong, it was in front of Nüwa’s sealed stone.” Zhao Yunlan lowered his voice, “Inside was mostly what happened when both of us were together. Nüwa only appeared for that one moment, leaving two specious sentences. Those two sentences were very clever, every word was hinting that the incidents those times were a tragedy, and the tragedy’s source was Shennong. “

Zhao Yunlan gently exhaled. “But your luck this time wasn’t very good. I met Ghost Face, he accidentally said something. He said that ‘inside was all of Nüwa’s memories’. All of Nüwa’s memories, couldn’t be only two lines. I was confused then and didn’t react, even asking a question about the relationship

between my left shoulder's flame and Shennong. Ghost Mask's reaction... was like I should have known all along."

"After that, he started to laugh maniacally, starting to tell me something, but it was forcefully interrupted by you. Now that I think of it, he probably realised that even the stone's memories were changed by you... but I think that this time, you didn't fabricate anything, but erased some, and purposely left some."

Shen Wei didn't admit or deny. It was already almost dusk, the house hadn't turned on any lights, and so it slowly dimmed, and the man looked like a statue in a temple, not happy nor sad.

"Yet I lowered my guard and removed you from my list of suspects, even if my gut feeling had already pointed the direction clear for me. Do you think I'm a bit foolish?" Zhao Yunlan exhaled. "I always thought that 'idiot' was a nickname intelligent people gave themselves, and now I realise; I'm really a full idiot.

"I held suspicion and anger toward Shennong, seeing that old man... En, was that Shennong himself?"

"No, Shennong is already dead," Shen Wei said, "That was just an illusion of him from when he was alive."

"Ah, no wonder, I was wondering why he could laugh so heartily even after being cut into half from head to toe." Zhao Yunlan murmured, reaching out to Shen Wei with a hand. "The

water dragon pearl—I'm talking about the scale, can you return it to me now?"

Shen Wei hesitated for half a second, before taking out the scale the pearl had become and put it beside the tea set.

Zhao Yunlan picked it up with two fingers, flipping it over and around to observe for a while. "It looks like a snake's scale... is it Fuxi's or Nüwa's?"

Shen Wei seemed to have been transformed into an automatic robot, answering any queries he had. "It's Nüwa's."

"The water dragon pearl brought me back to eleven years ago, I followed Shennong's medicine bowl down the yellow spring, and then I saw you. You were interacting with the medicine bowl in my father's body, even just looking made me think you strange, and I had thought then that you were practically a stranger.

"I refused to believe that was real, yet also felt that it was real, so I went to the Ghost City to buy a book—the one I had investigated and found the location of two days ago. The lady boss of the Ghost City's bookstore had told me that I myself had bought the book eleven years ago. As expected, the book's existence, would be able to determine that everything I saw had happened before."

Shen Wei furrowed his eyebrows.

"The book was called "Ancient Confidential Records", I had seen it before I went to Kunlun Mountain's moutaintop. If it wasn't it, I probably wouldn't have even gone to Kunlun." Zhao

Yunlan slowed his speaking pace. Suddenly, he had an urge to smoke, and thus quietened, using the lighter and knocking it against the table gently.

Small sparks jumped up. The moment it had caught on fire, the flames consuming paper's sound was distinct.

“The book was on my body, but when I was brought back to eleven years ago by the water dragon pearl, it became a scroll of blank paper. Because in that time, there was an identical “Ancient Confidential Records”, and when I had been brought back you, it had disappeared—right, I hadn't asked yet, how did you bring me back?”

“The Ghost Slayer Blade can slice apart anything.” Shen Wei gently touched the middle of his brows with his fingers. Zhao Yunlan saw from Shen Wei's eyes, the reflection of his own forehead having a golden light flash, and heard Shen Wei say, “Your soul has my mark. If I have enough time, I can find you. That book... “Ancient Confidential Records”, what happened to it?”

“The words in it disappeared when it was eleven years ago, becoming a white piece of paper, and I threw it into the eleven years ago's Wangchuan (Forget Water) river.

Shen Wei watched Zhao Yunlan. With his intelligence, he should have understood what Shennong did.

“Shennong had reminded me to be cautious of you, but had also told me one thing—it was not what he intended his last words to be, but when I was brought away by the water dragon pearl, he started to hint me about ‘reincarnation’.”

Shen Wei was silent, and Zhao Yunlan continued, “You see, I bought a book, if I found years later, after finishing it and suspecting something, and chasing it’s source, finding that the buyer was actually myself, before being transported back to eleven years ago, confirming I had actually bought the book—this is just a smooth loop. And when I leave this loop, the “Ancient Confidential Records” would disappear; it would forever stay in the loop. Humans living on on a giant sphere would be unable to walk to the edge of the world, the reincarnation’s life and death does not have any difference in itself, and there isn’t a real meaning to “death”. This also fits Fuxi’s gossipy logic.”

Shen Wei suddenly lowered his head, unable to stop himself from laughing self-mockingly. “There is no need to continue; I understand.”

Zhao Yunlan looked up to exhale smoke, staying quiet.

“So you knew then, the holy tree’s crudely made fake memories weren’t of Shennong’s making—being the first meant being the first, knowing the first five thousand years, knowing the last five thousand years, the illusion left behind then, Nüwa’s snake scale and the audio version of the records, had probably already known that this would happen—linked together, echoing from start to end; this is truly the head of the three Emperor’s

writing,” Shen Wei said softly, “Indeed, I cannot compare to him.”

Zhao Yunlan squinted in a cloud of white smoke, lifting the teapot and pouring Shen Wei another cup of tea. “No, you are just different people, standing on different grounds. Actually, the ‘me’ in the holy tree, when raising the flag and causing rebellion, the anger and pain in my heart, weren’t mine, but yours, am I right?”

Shen Wei lifted the tiny cup without realising, placing it beneath his nose and smelling it. Afterwards, he laughed bitterly. “I can only hate myself for not being born early and matured earlier; in the end, I was still unable to chase away that war between gods and ghosts.”

Zhao Yunlan picked up the teapot, pouring hot water into it. “After lying to me so much, you can tell me the truth now, right?”

Shen Wei asked in a low voice, “You truly want to listen?”

Zhao Yunlan stared at him. “If you say it yourself, no matter what, I will not hate you.”