

## Resonance 101

### Chapter 0101: Duze Beixuan

Lu Qing'er was the girl on the second floor, at a window in a posh, private suite. There were many others in there with her, other young people with eminent backgrounds. This was a reunion.

Only, Lu Qing'er was not too interested in this reunion.

When she spotted that familiar figure in the hall below, a small smile spread across her small face.

"Qing'er, what are you looking at? It's rare to see you smile."

A brawny youth laughed warmly from behind her.

Lu Qing'er turned to him. "Big Brother Ning Zhao."

"Aunt Yu asked me to take care of you and show you around Xia City, so I invited friends over today, but it seems I read you wrong. You don't like crowds, huh?" The youth called Ning Zhao gave a rueful smile.

He gestured at her. "You were just a small girl when I first met you all those years ago... And you're a beautiful young woman now."

Lu Qing'er gave him a dutiful smile back. Ning Zhao's father was the vice president of the Golden Dragon Bank's head office. He was an experienced man, and second in status to her own mother, Yu Hongxi.

Ning Zhao himself was also a student at the Astral Sage College. He would probably enter the Two Star Hall this year, and would be her senior in the future.

Still, she cut him off mid-speech. "I have a friend downstairs. I'll go meet them."

Turning, she bounced away quickly.

Ning Zhao watched her elegant figure leave, letting his feelings show in his eyes. He was honestly taken aback by her transformation. A few years ago, she was a refreshing little girl, but now she was an enigmatic beauty.

When she entered the Astral Sage College, there would be plenty of admirers drooling over her.

"Friend?"

But recalling the rare pleasure on her face, Ning Zhao frowned slightly, his gaze drifting downwards to the hall as well.

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On a crystal counter.

The pretty girl took out a few boxes made of jade, opening them carefully for Li Luo. Within were precious rare materials, deeply steeped in earth and wood energies.

"Great Sir, these are all 1,000-grade rare materials of wood and earth resonances."

Li Luo marveled over them. He had come to the right place indeed. The selection of 1,000-grade rare materials was extensive. Each one would be a rare find at the Tianshu Province's Golden Dragon Bank.

Li Luo carefully looked them over, feeling out their energy levels. After a long while, he regretfully put them down.

"Sir, are you not satisfied?" she asked with concern while showing no impatience at all. For one with such divine looks, even a frown was charming.

Exactly her cup of tea.

Li Luo shook his head. "It seems like 1,000-grade materials will not do. Do you have 10,000-grade rare materials?"

Her eyes lit up even brighter. 10,000-grade rare materials were worth tens of thousands of skygold. This young man was even richer than she had thought.

But just as she was about to speak, another voice came from the side. "I'll take care of this customer from here."

She looked up indignantly. Who was trying to steal her man away?

Whirling around, she saw a small and pretty face, and she almost lost her composure in fright. She quickly rearranged her irritated expression into a compliant one. "Young- Young Mistress... You're here?"

Of course she knew the daughter of the Golden Dragon Bank's President Yu.

"This is my friend. I'll see to his needs," Lu Qing'er said with a small smile.

Nodding hurriedly, the girl turned and left obediently, albeit regretfully.

"Qing'er?"

Li Luo was not too surprised to see her here, considering who she was.

"Young Lord, you have been dazzling our young girls nonstop since you set foot in the Golden Dragon Bank. If you became a frequent customer, would our business operations grind to a halt?" she teased.

"I am sorry," Li Luo said with a show of great regret. "It's my parents' fault. I had no say in the matter."

Lu Qing'er rolled her eyes at him. He was getting bold indeed.

"I came to Xia City earlier than you. My mother was pestering me to accompany her... Oh, and I heard about the Suncreek Villa. Are you alright there?" Lu Qing'er asked with frank concern, her earlier playfulness vanishing.

"I got played out by someone. It's normal, and definitely nothing new in these past few years." Li Luo shrugged.

"Good luck, then. Given your abilities, you will definitely be able to restore House Luolan to its former glory." She encouraged him.

"You think that highly of me, huh..."

He laughed and shook his head, changing the issue. "So," he said suggestively, "you said you would... see to my needs?"

"Any need. Just say the word," she answered his smile with her own, extending her arms and charging her ice silk gloves with frost energy until they gleamed dangerously.

"What service do you wish for?"

"Just look at that attitude..."

Li Luo scolded her piously. "Well? What are you still fooling about for?! Bring me your 10,000-grade rare materials."

She shot him a withering look. "10,000-grade rare materials are few and far between even for the Golden Dragon Bank. Especially wood and earth resonance ones. We normally keep them in the auction room. I can bring you in for a look."

"Well, then, woman. Less yapping, more walking." Li Luo waved her on imperiously.

Lu Qing'er was irritated at being treated so unceremoniously like a waiting woman, but she swallowed the impulse to trounce him soundly and led the way.

Still, her amusement was showing clearly on her fair features.

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On the second floor, Ning Zhao watched Li Luo and Lu Qing'er walk away, his thoughts melancholy as he nursed a wine cup.

He had seen the look of happiness on Lu Qing'er's face, one that he had not been able to bring out.

Who was that silver-haired youth?

"Keke, that's House Luolan's young lord, Li Luo..." a bright voice said from beside him.

Ning Zhao turned around and saw a suave, blue-haired youth by his side, grinning down at Li Luo.

"Young Lord Beixuan seems well acquainted with him," Ning Zhao replied with a smile. This was the young lord of House Duze, Duze Beixuan.

"We of House Duze are very concerned with every move that House Luolan makes. Our rivalry runs deep. Of course I know my enemies well," Duze Beixuan said with a wicked grin.

"House Duze has recently poached the Suncreek Villa's president and made the Suncreek Villa a laughing stock, I hear," Ning Zhao said.

"Of course, the bigger joke is Young Lord Li Luo taking up the role as a second-grade resonance artificer."

Duze Beixuan chuckled. "They couldn't very well give it to Pang Qianchi. He's Pei Hao's man."

"Oh, Brother Ning Zhao, can you help me find out what Young Lord Li Luo is doing at the Golden Dragon Bank?"

Ning Zhao looked down. "I'm afraid that's against the rules. Protecting customer secrecy is one of the Golden Dragon Bank's tenets."

Duze Beixuan smiled. "I hear that Lu Qing'er and Li Luo were very close back at Southwind Academy. He even saved her during the college entrance exams..."

Ning Zhao's look turned dark. Lifting a wine jug nearby, he filled his cup to the brim, then downed it in one go before striding away.

Duze Beixuan followed, still grinning.

### **Chapter 0102: A Little Monkey**

Li Luo and Lu Qing'er left the hall and entered another spacious gallery screened off with a pearl curtain. Walking close by, Li Luo could smell her faint, womanly scent.

"Your resonant power is much stronger already... Resonant Master?" Li Luo suddenly asked.

She nodded slightly. "A few days ago. You?"

"Perhaps a bit more time here." Li Luo winced. He had been at the Tenth Seal stage for a while now. It was time to prepare for the jump to the Resonant Master Stage.

"Good luck with that. School starts in less than half a month. Competition's going to be intense, you know," Lu Qing'er said.

Li Luo nodded. He was on the verge of a reply when a small boy suddenly burrowed past him, hiding behind him.

The boy looked to be about eight years old. He had jet-black eyes and was rather cute. Still, he had a suspicious look about him at the moment, skulking around.

"Hey, kid, go play somewhere else." Li Luo frowned.

He could see a few figures nearby weaving in and out of the crowd, craning their necks left and right as they searched for someone.

"Help me hide," the boy whispered.

Although his voice was tiny, there was a ring of command to it. Clearly, he was used to getting his way... Perhaps he was the heir to someone important.

Li Luo couldn't care less, shrugging him off and shooing him away.

"I'll give you 3,000 gold!" The boy hurriedly said.

"Do I look like someone who's in need of money?" Li Luo frowned, feeling offended. Did he look like Yu Lang, for crying out loud.

The little monkey was annoying.

Li Luo stretched out a hand sternly. "5,000."

Without a word, the boy handed over a golden dragon note worth 5,000 gold.

Li Luo's jaw dropped at his straightforwardness. Still, he stuffed the golden dragon note into his sleeve and said mildly, "Well, a man like me can't stand the strong bullying the weak."

He placed a hand on the boy's shoulder and used the Water Shadow Art, causing him to fade away to a mere faint presence.

The boy felt himself all over, fascinated.

Nearby, the searchers turned away after finding nothing.

Li Luo followed Lu Qing'er, pushing the boy from his mind. Since she had not stopped him from helping the boy, he was probably the heir to some important family, while those searching for him were his bodyguards. Still, there was not much harm that could come to him if he remained in the Golden Dragon Bank.

The two continued on. Lu Qing'er led them into an oval auction room, where there were many others seated.

They found empty seats and had just settled back when they discovered someone to their left.

Li Luo saw that it was the boy from before. He frowned sternly. "Are you following me? Trying to get the money back, are you? Look, kid, you might be young, but I see a lot of character flaws already."

The boy screwed up his face, but his retort was interrupted by a cough. His face turned a little pale, his energy evaporating.

Seemed like he was quite a frail child.

Li Luo was a little concerned. Was the little monkey trying to trick him?

Lu Qing'er smiled. "Oh, let him stay."

Since Li Luo had hidden him before, they were a little responsible if he was running amok. Keep him here for now, and she would get someone to pick him up later. And also check which family he belonged to.

Li Luo nodded. Seeing the boy cough repeatedly, he pulled out a small bottle containing the watersource he had refined, tossing it to him.  $n/(o(/V-.e.-\ell-(b))l--n$

"If you wanna feel better, drink it."

He did not know why the little monkey was so frail, but his watersource had healing properties thanks to his waterlight resonance, so it should be able to help the boy feel better.

The boy caught the bottle but stared at him wide-eyed. Was the man a fool? He wasn't about to drink some unknown liquid from a stranger.

But it didn't seem too polite to throw it away. He stuffed it away in a pocket and turned back curiously to the auction.

Seeing the kid spurn his goodwill, Li Luo rolled his eyes. Forget it. Do as you will. He turned back to the auction, ignoring him.

During this time, Duze Beixuan and Ning Zhao had entered and seated themselves as well.

Duze Beixuan smiled maliciously in Li Luo's direction. "What's the Young Lord going to do with wood and earth rare materials?"

Ning Zhao shook his head. He looked a little uneasy as he looked over at Li Luo, seated with Lu Qing'er.

Duze Beixuan wasn't paying attention to him. He had wanted to mess with Li Luo when he arrived at Xia City, but House Jinque's Si Qiuying had stopped him then. It was about time he had his fun.

House Duze had a long-standing feud with House Luolan. Any trouble to Li Luo was welcome to him.

Although he couldn't really cause Li Luo much harm here, there were other ways of being nasty.

He settled down to wait in anticipation. About half an hour later, a bell rang.

The auction was beginning.

An auctioneer appeared on stage. The middle-aged man bowed, opened the stage, and then began to call the auction.

The auction here was not held one item at a time. Instead, multiple items were laid out at the same time, and a simultaneous bidding war would ensue.

As a result, things got very lively immediately.

"Material number one, an embersnake fruit, 800 years old, and a fine 10,000-grade rare material. Starting bid 11,000 gold, do I hear 12,000!"

"Material number two, zephyrock, another beautiful 10,000-grade rare material. This one's going at 16,000—thank you, I see 17,000!"

"Material number three..."

The auctioneer's crisp, business-like voice rattled off bids and introductions, cutting himself off time and again as the bidders raised their signs.

The atmosphere grew livelier and livelier, but Li Luo sat back, uninterested.

As the fierce bidding proceeded, 10,000-grade rare materials were snatched up one after another. About 10 minutes later, Li Luo finally spotted something he wanted.

There were four materials laid up here, two wood and two earth. Each was marked at around 15,000 gold.

These four were all 10,000-grade rare materials that Li Luo needed.

"Millennial Greenwood Core, a 10,000-grade rare material. Starting bid 15,000!"

"Essence of Dragonsbed, 10,000-grade rare material. Starting bid 15,000!"

"..."

Li Luo jumped right in, raising the bid for both to 20,000 immediately. From his observations before, he knew that most of the bids ended at roughly 20,000. He wanted to skip right past the bickering and kill the competition.

It should be enough to give the other interested bidders pause.

Just as he predicted, the quick raise to 20,000 was enough to discourage all the other bidders after a moment's hesitation.

After all, that was roughly the price for 10,000-grade materials. It was not worth it to go beyond that, and there were other items still up for sale today, tomorrow, and every day after that. There was no rush.

"Any more bidders, going once?"

The auctioneer surveyed the crowd, raising his voice with a dramatically hopeful tone.

"Going twice, these four excellent rare materials..."

Just as his hammer was about to land, a sign shot up, and a mocking voice called out, "25,000"

The sudden increase in bid made Li Luo inhale sharply in shock. Auctions were auctions after all. So a challenger had appeared.

### **Chapter 0103: The Prodigal Son**

Li Luo looked over to the raised sign and saw a blue-haired youth looking in his direction. He threw a friendly smile Li Luo's way.

Li Luo saw nothing but sharp teeth in that smile.

"Who's that?" he asked.

Lu Qing'er's well-trimmed brow creased a little. She hesitated. "The young lord of House Duze, Duze Beixuan.

"Li Luo, he's targeting you. He's trying to inflate your bid."

"So that's Duze Beixuan, eh."

Li Luo was taken aback. Sizing up the blue-haired youth, he breathed out. "Well, in terms of looks, the young lord of House Luolan has House Duze beat, in spades. That's one battle won."

The little kid beside him rolled his eyes. Was a war between two houses all about looks?

Lu Qing'er did not smile. She knew that Li Luo's wisecrack meant that he had marked Duze Beixuan well.

Li Luo looked at him for a moment more, then raised his own plaque. "26,000."

Duze Beixuan coughed lightly, raising his own sign without hesitation. "30,000."

There was a slight mutter in the auction room now, and people were starting to recognize Duze Beixuan. "It's the young lord of House Duze! Duze Beixuan!"

"Whose price is he inflating?"

"I don't know, never seen him around before..."

"That's the young lord of House Luolan, Li Luo. He's too easy to recognize. Keke, no wonder Duze Beixuan's upping the bid. He's found an enemy."

"Haha, I heard that House Luolan's young lord had his Sun creek Villa president headhunted by House Duze. A real blow for the Luolan young lord..."

"It's hard to avoid a fight when those two meet."

The entire auction house was interested now, watching a bidding war break out between two historical rivals.

Lu Qing'er was very worried now. 30,000 for a 10,000-grade rare material was pricey. Plus, four of them meant a staggering 120,000. That was no small sum.

Li Luo still looked calm. Neither did he look in the mood to talk to Duze Beixuan. He raised his sign again. "32,000."

Duze Beixuan gleefully raised his own. "35,000."

"37,000."

"40,000."

With this raise from Duze Beixuan, the muttering had grown much louder now. Such was the financial power of House Duze's young lord. Hundreds of thousands of skygold could be thrown away without batting an eyelid.

Li Luo smiled at the price and then gave Duze Beixuan a thumbs-up from afar.

He was not intending to bid further. The price was too high, and far beyond reason.

"This Li Luo is quite a composed one, eh?" Ning Zhao chuckled. He had thought a last-minute outbid would tilt him off the edge.

Duze Beixuan nodded with a wry smile. "A little harder to deal with than I imagined. I'm afraid I'll get scolded for bringing these four rare materials back at that price."

Still, he had a satisfied expression.

After all, House Duze had been successful for many years now, accruing an unstoppable financial momentum. House Luolan was on the way down. How could Li Luo hope to compete against him?

"43,000!"

Just then, a reedy, little voice piped up.



All heads turned to the voice. It was the little boy beside Li Luo, raising his plaque with boyish excitement.

Li Luo's eyes bulged. He looked over with a mixture of disbelief and respect. "Which family are you the prodigal son of?"

"You're the prodigal son." The boy squabbled right back.

Duze Beixuan was looking at the boy with uncertainty. "Who's that?" he asked Ning Zhao sharply.

Ning Zhao shook his head. "I don't recognize him, but he seems to be familiar with Li Luo. Is he intending to use a kid to play with you?"

Duze Beixuan snorted, irritated. "This Li Luo is really an interesting one." He raised his plaque. "45,000."

The boy had spotted Duze Beixuan eying him as well. "What is he saying?" he asked, craning his head indignantly as he tried to peer over his high-backed chair.

Li Luo stroked his chin. "He's saying that little monkeys like yourself should go home and drink their milk to grow into strong apes."

The little boy flushed in anger. "50,000!" he yelled.

There was a shocked silence in the auction house as they all looked over at the furious boy. 50,000 apiece for four 10,000-grade rare materials meant a total of 200,000. It was a princely sum.

Even Duze Beixuan was staggered by this. His gaze wavered and then, with a sudden smile, he threw down his sign in surrender.

Although he did not mind spending 200,000 on four rare materials, he did not wish to blow money unnecessarily.

Since someone was willing to let him out of this one, he was going to take it. His mission to cause trouble for Li Luo had already succeeded.

Finally, the four rare materials were awarded to the boy. There was a huge commotion over the messy conclusion. It was a little bit of a letdown.

Li Luo turned to the boy, still lost in the thrill of winning a bid for the first time in his life. "Are you going to get a beating when you get home?" he asked with concern.

The boy shook his head. "Nope."

Li Luo was flabbergasted. How rich was his family?

"But I don't carry that much money around with me." He gave Li Luo a bright and innocent smile. "Can you lend me some?"

"My little friend, you are still very young. Beatings will do you good once in a while."

At this time Duze Beixuan had made his way over, throwing another warm smile Li Luo's way. "Li Luo, finally we meet."

Li Luo's eyes flicked up, taking in the blue ponytail neatly tied up behind him. A rather respectable impression, although there was slyness in his manner.

"Hello." Li Luo nodded back affably. "I hear your dad was beaten 18 times by mine back in the day."

Duze Beixuan's eyes narrowed and he forced a bitter smile that looked more like a grimace. "Young Lord Li Luo, still basking in the glory of yesteryear, I see. That only makes you look weak. Let's wait and see. Perhaps in a year, House Luolan will have to change its name.

"Besides, what does 18 losses even count for? At the Astral Sage College, you'll go through tenfold that."

"Are you threatening me?" Li Luo said.

"Perhaps I am..."

Duze Beixuan said with a sly smile. He turned to the boy. "Pretty clever, I must say. You used a kid to avoid being cast as a wastrel. Nice scapegoating.

"Still, you're going to have to pay up." He inclined his head to the auction staff making their way over with Ning Zhao.

Another staff member was bearing the four rare materials that the little boy had won, beaming. "My Young Master, we graciously await your payment."

The boy blinked and then pulled out 20,000 in golden dragon notes from his pocket. "That's all I have with me."

The staff member's smile froze on his face. "Young Master, please stop pulling my leg."

Duze Beixuan was mocking Li Luo openly now. "Come now, you can't be such an ungracious loser. Cough it up." *nove)l&-1n*

The boy frowned. "I won the bid. What does this have to do with him? How about you just wait a while, and I'll send someone to get the money."

Lu Qing'er spoke up now as well. "Li Luo and the young gentleman do not know each other."

Ning Zhao gave an impatient laugh. "Qing'er, people saw them enter together. And from the way they talk, it does not seem like they do not know each other."

"According to the rules of the auction house, those under 10 years old are not to be given an auction plaque," Lu Qing'er countered coolly. "And yet he was allowed to bid. Is this not the fault of the auction house?"

It was the staff member's turn to sweat profusely.

"Seems to me like there are many problems surrounding this bid," she continued. "Perhaps we should take the items back and re-auction them tomorrow."

"Miss Qing'er," Duze Beixuan protested, "surely you are being too biased towards them."

This was unheard of. Bidding was all about the atmosphere and flow of the room. No one would stand for it.

Ning Zhao agreed with a troubled expression. "Qing'er, that's not really in the rules."

"It was the auction house's mistake to begin with," she stated calmly.

Things were getting tense, and Duze Beixuan reached out a hand to grab the small boy. "If we do not sort this out today, none of you will leave."

Li Luo marked his move with disapproval and was about to intervene, stretching out his hand.

Just as he did so, another hand beat him there, flashing out like an eagle's claw to clamp Duze Beixuan's own wrist in a vice-like grip.

"Who dares?!" Duze Beixuan roared.

He looked up to see a gaunt, pale man standing behind the boy. He looked at Duze Beixuan emotionlessly, his dead eyes sending a chill down Duze Beixuan's spine.

"We were talking... but you had to resort to violence. Did the House Lord of Duze not teach you manners?"

#### **Chapter 0104: The First Princess**

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The gaunt man who had appeared behind the boy was enough to send a chill down Duze Beixuan's spine. He could sense that this grip was deadly. The man was like a viper poised to strike, his entire body's resonant power lurking right under his palm on Duze Beixuan's wrist.

This was definitely an incredibly strong opponent.

At least a Heavenly Dipper General.

Could this be the boy's bodyguard? What on earth was his status?

Any Heavenly Dipper General expert would be highly esteemed even within House Duze. They would serve his father directly and were beyond even Duze Beixuan's own protection. And this little boy had such a mighty protector?

While he was still shaking in fear, the pale man let go of him. "If my young master has bid for something, of course it will be paid for," he said calmly.

Li Luo was a little wide-eyed himself. There were really many crouching tigers and hidden dragons here in Xia City. A casual stroll, and already he had snarled up one.

The pale man seemed to possess an uncanny ability to make himself unremarkable, but Li Luo remembered him. This man had been sitting nearby for a while. He had been with them from the start...

Clearly, those bodyguards from before were just for show. This was the real protector—an ever-present shadow. He had not appeared before to avoid hindering the boy's fun.

Perhaps the entire Water Shadow Art exchange had also been witnessed by this man.

Li Luo coughed in embarrassment.

Duze Beixuan hastily stepped back, an uneasy look on his face. Beside him, Ning Zhao had sensed danger from this man as well.

From behind, a Golden Dragon Bank staff member rushed out breathlessly. "I'm sorry for interrupting you, your eminences. President Yu has just said that these ingredients will not be charged. She just hopes that everyone can have a good time."

A staff member respectfully offered the four materials to the kid.

He blinked twice and then shook his head disinterestedly. "But Sis said we can't take others' things for free."

"I don't want them anymore. You can have them," he said to Li Luo before dissolving into another fit of coughing. His face grew even paler.

"Young Master, let us return." The pale man bowed.

The boy could only nod regretfully, turning to follow him out.

After they left, the tension in the atmosphere eased. Li Luo looked at the rare materials and turned to Lu Qing'er. "What should we do with these?"

"My mom said they're free." Lu Qing'er smiled.

Li Luo shook his head. He did not like handouts.

"Go with the base price, then." She nodded, understanding.

"Well then, I won't stand on ceremony." Li Luo nodded after a moment's pause. These rare materials were too important to him to pass up.

Duze Beixuan watched all this with a grim face. "Li Luo, we will meet again, many times, in the Astral Sage College. I hope you are as lucky each time," he said casually.

He turned and left.

Li Luo sighed. Another troublemaker in his way.

The last person that forced his hand was having trouble even getting into the Astral Sage College now.

Oblivious to those below, there were two people watching them from behind a glass screen on a higher level of the Golden Dragon Bank.

They were two richly dressed women.

One was a matron in a red skirt, her long hair neatly arranged and held together with a fish-shaped hairpin. She was a strong, beautiful woman with a charismatic air about her.

She resembled Lu Qing'er in many ways, although with a more mature depth to her beauty.

She was Lu Qing'er's mother, the president of the Xia Kingdom Golden Dragon Bank, Yu Hongxi.

"A messy squabble. We've embarrassed ourselves before the First Princess," Yu Hongxi said with an apologetic smile.

Beside her was a world-class beauty. She was dressed in white, her long hair intricately dressed into a phoenix-shaped knot. She had a regal look about her that extended to her piercing eyes. Her stunning allure exuded from her every feature, from her elegant nose bridge to her lush, dark lashes and sexy lips.

A woman on the tall side, her swan-like neckline could captivate one for ages, if one was not already distracted by her ample chest. If Li Luo were present, he would admit that he had finally found someone who could compare to Cai Wei.

However, while Cai Wei had a more friendly presence, this woman had an air of icy authority about her that demanded respect.

This woman was no common person either. Her name was Gong Luanyu, and she was the eldest princess of the Xia Kingdom's royal court, and also sister by kin to the current king.

The old king had been on the decline for the last few years, while the new king was still too young to ascend to the throne. Kingdom matters were being attended to by the regent prince, and the eldest princess held responsibilities too. She was perhaps the most powerful woman in Xia Kingdom at the moment.

Besides that, she was also a Four Star Hall student at the Astral Sage College, a level higher than Jiang Qing'e.

"It was my younger brother being a nuisance. We've inconvenienced President Yu." The First Princess smiled back apologetically as well.

"His Majesty is at that boisterous age. Playfulness is to be expected," Yu Hongxi replied lightly.

The two continued chatting for a while. After some time, the First Princess decided it was time to take her leave.

Yu Hongxi saw her off and then looked down through the glass panel to see Li Luo and Lu Qing'er standing close together, shoulder to shoulder. She frowned a little.

"That kid... he looks eerily like that bastard Li Taixuan."

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At the back door of the Golden Dragon Bank, bodyguards had already cordoned off the entire area. A golden carriage rolled to a stop, thronged by a platoon of bodyguards.

The First Princess stepped in to see the little boy, who was tugging away at his cheek. He pulled off an entire layer of plaster, and his face changed dramatically.

Underneath, his skin was even paler, making his jet black eyes shine even more brightly than before.

"Sis!" he exclaimed happily when she entered.

The First Princess regarded him sternly. "You're the emperor of the Xia Kingdom, but you're still so playful. There are bodyguards around, but what if something happens to you?"

This little kid was the current emperor of the Xia Kingdom, Gong Jingyao.

He swallowed nervously, tugging at his ear. "Sis, I'm sorry."

Only then did her expression soften. "What happened today?"

His bright smile returned, and he happily told her everything.

"Haha, that Li Luo is fun. He purposely goaded me into bidding against Duze Beixuan. I pretended to be fooled and played along."

The First Princess laughed gaily at that as well. "Duze Beixuan is a chip off the old block. A small mind that houses little else besides revenge..."

"That Li Luo is quite the surprise. I thought he was direct and overbearing like Jiang Qing'e, but now it seems that he was born into intrigue and cunning."

"Sneaky fellow. He even swindled me out of 5,000 skygold," the little emperor grumbled.

The First Princess was about to reply when she saw the boy's face suddenly turn a shade paler, his breathing becoming ragged. Bloody lines started to surface on his cheeks.

Her heart raced, knowing that his old illness had triggered again. She hurriedly pulled out a bottle stowed in the carriage, looking for his medicine. It was empty.

"All used up?" A flicker of despair arose in her phoenix-like eyes. She recalled ordering her servants to always have the medicine on hand. How useless were they?!

"Back to the palace. Immediately!" she cried out.

The carriage picked up speed.

She desperately held on to his hand, sending pulses of resonant power into his body to help him ease the pain.

The little emperor's illness had struck him when young. Each episode was a painful and miserable experience. With no medicine on hand, he could only take the fit in full force.

The bloody lines on his face began to thicken. Finally, he pulled out a bottle from his pocket in his pain. The First Princess was not looking, and he started to gulp desperately.

She noticed quickly and snatched the bottle out of his hands. "What is this!?" she cried. "How can you be drinking some unknown liquid!?"

But her anger quickly evaporated. She could see that the bloody lines were already subsiding.

More importantly, the little emperor's face had been scrunched tight from the pain, but it was now much more relaxed.

Even the well-seasoned princess was stunned by the transformation before her.

1. TN: Lu Qing'er's mother's surname literally means fish.

### **Chapter 0105: Jiang Qing'e's Warning**

Within a charging carriage.

The little emperor's face was much healthier already, the blood lines receding. He seemed to be breathing easier as well.

The little emperor took a labored breath, then delight flooded his face. "So he didn't lie to me."

The First Princess was still looking quite cross. "What is this? Who gave it to you?"

"Li Luo... he saw that I was looking sickly and then gave this to me. He said it would ease things if I was feeling bad," the little emperor told her honestly.

"Sis, I didn't want to take it either, but that episode was really bad. I couldn't help it."

"Li Luo?"

She examined the bottle carefully and then poured out a drop onto her hand. She tested it. "Strange, it seems to be a watersource from water resonance power. But with an uncommon purity."

Water resonance power indeed had healing properties; this was nothing strange. But in all these years, she had hired many water resonance experts to treat the little emperor, but to no avail.

Why was Li Luo's watersource effective?

Of course, it had only eased the little emperor's pain a little. It was about as effective as the medicine that the little emperor was taking.

"No more taking unknown substances. Remember, you are the emperor of the Xia Kingdom now. We only have each other in the royal court now, sister and brother. You can't come to any harm." She stowed away the bottle.

He nodded obediently and then laid down to rest.

Only after he fell asleep did the First Princess pull out the bottle again, regarding it with glistening eyes.

"Li Luo..."

"That young lord from House Luolan is something special."

...

Back at House Luolan's headquarters, there was a comfortable silence in the night.

In a tower.

Li Luo pulled out the four rare materials that he had purchased. He prepared to begin tempering them into his Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel. Suddenly, he spotted a figure flitting by the window.

He smiled and pushed the window open. Jiang Qing'e was perched on a window beam, looking out at House Luolan.

The two of them shared neighboring buildings, and there was a window beam that joined them. He paused, then he flipped through the window and joined her on the beam.

He saw that she was clad in pajamas. The slightly loose-fitting top was not at all dowdy when she wore it.

She seemed to have just finished showering, and her long hair was still damp, her eyes relaxed. She looked softer than usual, having shed some of her usual heroine demeanor.

Li Luo drank it in, her figure and womanly scent. He turned to look out at the expanse of House Luolan's headquarters as well.

"Cute pajamas," he said.

There was a slightly plump swan patterned across her pajamas, a jarring contrast that ended up being cute.

She smiled softly. "The Mistress made it for me," she said with a hint of pride.

"My mother's skills are lacking indeed," Li Luo said dryly.

She put a warning hand on the back of his neck, ready to chop. "No insulting the Mistress."

Li Luo laughed. He looked up to the bright moon. "Qing'e, what's the Noble's War?"

She shuddered a little and then slumped down a bit. "You will know when you enter the Astral Sage College," she finally said. "There's no need for me to tell you now."

Li Luo accepted that. "And my parents. They're okay, right?"

She nodded firmly. "They must be alright."

"I think so too." He smiled.

She looked at him. "Don't worry," she said softly. "Even without the Master and Mistress around, I won't let anyone bully you."

"Do you think I'm a little kid?" Li Luo grumbled.

She laughed and tousled his hair. "Aww, you're not a widdle kiddie no more."

Li Luo sulked a little, but he told her about the day's events as she continued to play with his hair.

"Oh?"

She was a little shaken by his tale. "According to what you say, the boy's bodyguard must at least be a Heavenly Dipper General... And even the Golden Dragon Bank gave him face. For President Yu Hongxi to personally declare the materials free... not even the young lords of the five Great Houses would warrant that.

"There's only one person in the whole Xia Kingdom who fits.

"It's the little emperor of the royal court."

Li Luo almost fell off the beam. "That little monkey is the little emperor?"

As the young lord of House Luolan, Li Luo was not about to fall over worshipping the royal court. Still, he was rather envious of them. Now knowing that the boy was the little emperor, his heart shrank a little.



"The old emperor has been on the decline for the last few years, but the new emperor's too young to take the throne. Affairs of the state have fallen to the regent and First Princess..."

"The First Princess' name is Gong Luanyu. She's a Four Star Hall student at the Astral Sage College, and one of the strongest in the school," Jiang Qing'e said.

"How do you compare?" Li Luo asked curiously.

"The Astral Sage College is divided into four star halls. Each year, when you pass the exams, you will be promoted to the next hall. I'm currently in the Three Star Hall, one lower than the First Princess. Besides, in terms of strength, she's definitely better. Although that might not be the case in a year's time," Jiang Qing'e said with a hint of smugness.

Li Luo gave her a big thumbs up.

"Oh, and school starts in less than 10 days' time. The most important thing for newcomers will be the Choosing of the Mentors. Basically, streaming the students."

"The Astral Sage College is divided into three streams. The strongest are the Violet Vibrance mentors, followed by Gold Gleam, and finally Silver Spark mentors," she continued.

"You must remember that mentor choice is very important. The stronger one's mentor, the more resources you get. And in the Astral Sage College, the resources are unmatched in the Xia Kingdom. So you must secure a high-ranking mentor to take you under their wing."

Li Luo nodded seriously. The Astral Sage College was really something else, even sorting mentors with students. But the Violet Vibrance mentors were said to be Duke Stage experts!

"As for how to choose a mentor, you will know in time. But let me warn you. This time there are five Violet Vibrance mentors, and there is one amongst them that you should never attach to. You cannot choose him as your mentor," she said very seriously.

"Who?" Li Luo was astonished.

"That Violet Vibrance mentor is called Shen Jinxiao..." Jiang Qing'e's loathing for the person was extremely plain to see on her face.

"Why?" Li Luo asked, sensing that something was up.

"Back when I entered the Astral Sage College, he was my mentor. And then he eventually confessed his feelings to me..."

"I hated that, and sought out the headmaster of the Astral Sage College to change mentors."

Li Luo's jaw dropped. "Dear Sister Qing'e, just how far do your charms extend? Even a Violet Vibrance mentor stands no chance?"

"He might be a Violet Vibrance mentor, but I was born with a 9th-grade light resonance," she said loftily.

"It gives me an acute sense of a person's goodness or evil. I know that person's heart. Best keep a respectful distance. Got it?" she warned him soberly.

Li Luo nodded.

I mean, shouldn't love rivals be other excellent students? How had he managed to face off against a Violet Vibrance mentor straightaway?

This House Luolan plump swan...

Truly a terror.

### **Chapter 0106: Forging the Woodearth Resonance**

After the late night talk with Jiang Qing'e, they both returned to their rooms.

But Li Luo did not retire yet. He still had an extremely important task tonight: to temper his second acquired resonance.

He pulled out the jade-tablet scroll and gave it a light shake to call forth the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel. *novE.lB)1n*

It was currently shining brightly from its many filled holes, lighting up like a night sky of stars.

Li Luo had spent blood and sweat to bring it to where it was, tirelessly experimenting with hundreds of wood and earth rare materials. Now he was down to the final two holes which he was about to plug.

Li Luo first took out a wood element 10,000-grade rare material. He could sense the vital power of the wood element within, wafting forth.

It was definitely much stronger than the other materials he had tempered.

Li Luo first divided it into several parts and then conjured up his Acquired Resonance Flame to temper it.

The first two parts were burned away by accident, but the third one succeeded, melting down into jade-green liquid energy.

Li Luo took a deep breath and carefully tipped it into one of the holes on the wheel.

As the energy entered, the entire wheel began to vibrate slightly. Finally, with Li Luo watching anxiously, a thread of light extended from the hole, linking with the surrounding holes.

This one had succeeded!

Li Luo was exultant. He had gone to great lengths to secure this 10,000-grade rare material, and it had lived up to his expectations.

One last energy hole left.

Li Luo snatched up an earth 10,000-grade rare material and continued tempering.

This one was much harder to fill. He wasted a full 10,000-grade rare material, but luckily he had a second one ready. After more than half an hour, Li Luo managed to produce an ochrous, yellow liquid energy and successfully fill the last hole.

And now the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel was finally complete.

Twang!

Finally, the entire wheel was shining resplendently, the network of light threads forming a complete pattern.

Li Luo allowed himself a brief smile. But there was one final step.

He bit his finger, drawing blood. Forming a complex pattern, he pressed his finger into the indent.

Weng!

Li Luo could sense his blood rapidly being sucked out of him. More importantly, there was a blinding pain that shot through his skull; it was his spirit soul being torn apart!

To create an acquired resonance of one's own, one had to use their own spirit soul and blood essence as catalysts. There was no other way.

The drain continued for a long time, until Li Luo felt like he was on the verge of collapsing. Suddenly, the pull vanished.

Li Luo fell on his ass, his face pale and his eyes watery.

He sat there for many long minutes before he finally got a grip on himself. He beat his forehead with his palm. It felt like someone had been hammering nails into his skull.

"Fuck," he groaned.

He slowly got to his feet and saw the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel before him. In the center, a viridescent light danced.

Deep within it, however, he could see a ruddy, yellow light in the green.

It was pulsing with life, overflowing in visible waves.

Li Luo could not take his eyes off it.

After a long time, he finally stretched out a trembling hand, picking up the ball of light. The moment he touched it, he could feel it resonate with his being in a blissful and smooth chord.

Perfect harmony.

Li Luo's second acquired resonance was a woodearth resonance.

A rush of ecstasy flooded his body. He wanted to whoop, to bellow his joy and triumph.

Just as he was standing there grinning ear to ear, the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel began to shudder. The shaking got stronger and stronger, until cracks started to appear. And then, with a final bang, it exploded into a shower of light.

"What the fuck?"

The grinning Li Luo leaped back as he cursed. Why had the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel exploded?

He reached out desperately, fruitlessly trying to hold on to some of the light bits. They winked out of existence.

He was distraught. Was this his hubris?

But he managed to calm down after a bit. This had nothing to do with pride. But the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel could only work once...

"My parents' specters said that the method to get the third acquired resonance out of the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art was in Xia City's Golden Dragon Bank headquarters..."

He gave an exasperated sigh. He would have to find time to go take a look, but there was no rush. He had a long road of cultivation ahead of him before he would need the third acquired resonance. Besides, the thing was probably safer in the Golden Dragon Bank headquarters than anywhere else.

Li Luo pulled out a jade box and then carefully put this acquired resonance inside. He could not use it yet—he would have to reach the Resonant Master Stage before he could temper it.

But suddenly, a thought occurred to him. Back when he tempered his first acquired resonance, he had lost a great deal of lifespan and blood essence. Would the second tempering subject him to the same?

Li Luo was very worried about this. It seemed like his parents... had not mentioned it? Or perhaps... they did not know either?

"Logically, acquired resonances should exact a heavy toll on one's essence. The first time, my resonant power was weak, and so I had to pay a heavy price. Now that I have some measure of power, perhaps the toll will not be as heavy."

Li Luo reasoned it out in his mind. He was sort of convinced. Good, this thing should not send him straight to the grave... hopefully.

Now he just had to wait for the day of his breakthrough.

He had a feeling that it would be very soon.

...

In the next few days, Li Luo did not leave his house, cultivating hard within House Luolan's headquarters.

And although Jiang Qing'e had warned him that she would not be able to buy him all 100 in one go, a modest and consistent supply of sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights was making its way to him, helping him improve his sixth-grade waterlight resonance. Although it was still a ways away from reaching the seventh-grade, it was only a matter of time.

Time ticked on, and Xia City was growing livelier by the day.

Because the Astral Sage College was about to start a new year.

### **Chapter 0107: Resonant Master Stage**

When there were still three days remaining until the start of the school year, Li Luo finally managed a breakthrough.

However, his first attempt at consolidating his resonance seed failed.

This was nothing surprising. It was a difficult process, and Li Luo had approached it with a "just-try" attitude.

He had not even used the Bitter Lotus Pill that the old dean had given him.

But the next day, Li Luo decided to rev himself up and go for it!

He entered the skygold room.

He lit some sandalwood incense, which would deepen one's connection with heaven and earth. It would help with breakthroughs.

He gulped down the Bitter Lotus Pill in one go.

Let the breakthrough begin.

This time around, it went without hiccups. In fact, it went so smoothly that there was actually little to get excited about.

A few hours later, Li Luo succeeded.

He was now at the Sprouting Seed Tier, the first tier of the Resonant Master Stage.

"Easy enough." Li Luo congratulated himself.

On a whim, he decided to check the resonant palaces within him.

He saw that in his waterlight resonant palace, there was a little globe of light floating. And at its core, there was a little sphere of light, about the size of his thumb.

The sphere of light was azure-blue in color, and sounds of rushing water could be heard from it. It was not real water, but the flow of Li Luo's resonant power.

And within the watery resonant power in the light sphere, there was yet another strange light, pure and brilliant.

This was the resonance seed that he had consolidated. It was a waterlight seed.

The first tier of Resonant Master Stage was called the Sprouting Seed Tier.

It was further divided into two sub-tiers. The first sub-tier was called the Clear Seed Sub-tier, while the second was the Flowering Seed Sub-tier. Each sub-tier was further divided into lower and upper classes.

The Clear Seed Tier referenced how the resonance seed would appear translucent. Because the resonant power within it was faint, it could not leave a mark on the surface of the resonance seed.

These marks would dot the surface of the resonance seed. The more resonant power marks left on the seed, the stronger one's resonant power was.

And when one's resonant power more or less covered the whole surface, the petal-like pattern that would appear would mark one's achievement as a Flowering Seed cultivator.

After a certain time, the petal-like marks on the resonance seed surface would merge into an arcane pattern.

This was the second tier of the Resonant Master Stage, the Pattern Genesis Tier.

However, there was no need to think that far ahead. Li Luo had just reached the first tier of the Resonant Master Stage, the Sprouting Seed Tier, the Clear Seed Sub-tier, and a lower class. He was a Lower Clear, for short. If he wanted to make it to the second tier, there was a long way to go.

"My resonant power is so much stronger."

Li Luo stood up and tested his water resonance power. It was far stronger than when he was at the Ten Seals Stage.

Evidently, there was a huge leap between the two major stages.

Li Luo stretched out a hand, calling forth a sphere of water with light within. With a flick of his finger, his Waterlight Bullet shot out against the shiny wall of the skygold room, bursting in a flash that lit up the room as bright as day.

His Waterlight Bullet was many times stronger than before. If someone took it head on, they would probably be blinded for some time.

"Not bad. With this much power, I should be able to cope with the watersource demands from headquarters." The Suncreek Villa had been breathing down his neck recently, and if he didn't hand over some watersource soon, the resonance artificers would likely start wondering if he had lied.

Curbing his elation, Li Luo now turned to the treasure box on his table. It was his second acquired resonance, the woodearth resonance.

Now that he was at the Resonant Master Stage, it was time to fill his second blank palace.

He could not wait. He knew that the first acquired resonance merely helped him to stand on the same level as his peers, closing the gap between himself and the geniuses of his generation. Only the second acquired resonance would really help him pull away.

His hand closed around the verdant, green sphere of light. It shimmered softly, the emerald glow reflected in his eyes.

He had been worried about this, unsure of the price he would have to pay for this second acquired resonance.

The first time, he had cut his lifespan down to five years. What about this time? What if he cut his lifespan down to nothing at all? Wouldn't he be screwed?  $n \cdot \frac{1}{e^{(L/b-1)}} n$

The odds seemed slim, but he still had to prepare himself.

He closed his eyes, holding the woodearth resonance for a long time. Finally, he opened them again, his resolve set. He had already committed to this from the moment he had taken the first acquired resonance.

There were many things that he had to do, and to do them required power.

He wanted to maintain House Luolan on behalf of his parents. He wanted to tell Jiang Qing'e that he would be the one protecting her, and that she could rest easy. Damn, that would be seriously cool of him. Surely the plump swan would be moved by that?

Plus, hadn't that plump swan just warned him two days ago that even Violet Vibrance mentors were chasing her? If he wasn't at least that strong, how was he going to protect his fat, white bird?

And of course, he still had to go find his parents.

No risk, no reward.

A resigned smile on his face, Li Luo hesitated no longer, shoving the emerald light into his mouth.

Boom!

Li Luo could feel it enter his body, then a roaring response of resonant power erupted within him. It was trying to repel the second acquired resonance.

His first acquired resonance had sensed a foreign presence.

Li Luo curbed it as much as he could, trying to guide the woodearth resonance as best as he could to his second resonant palace.

The process took a full hour.

Li Luo's face was flushed and his sweat was pouring down his forehead. But he did not slack off one inch. Through sheer determination, he crammed the woodearth resonance into his second resonant palace.

After it entered the resonant palace, the resisting resonant power within him settled down immediately, as though it had lost its target.

Before he could even sigh in relief, he suddenly sensed a powerful suction from his second resonant palace.

It was sucking up his blood essence. Rapidly.

An indescribable pain seized him. The second acquired resonance was ferociously devouring everything within him, and he felt himself fading away.

His consciousness slipping away from him, Li Luo was completely unable to resist.

As his vision slowly faded away, his body keeled over and fell to the floor.

A final thought crept into his mind.

"Damn, am I really going to die?"

### **Chapter 0108: Problems**

Li Luo struggled to open his eyes. Were his eyelids made out of lead? When he finally managed to crack them open an inch, he spotted a familiar bedframe. He breathed again. He inched his neck to the side, looking around.

He spotted a Jiang Qing'e.

She was leaning against the bedpost, eyes shut in rest. Still, the light was hitting her just right, making her nose bridge extra charming. Even in sleep she was beautiful.

And she must have been watching over him for goodness knows how long.

She seemed to sense the change in his breathing, and her eyes flew open, her golden eyes staring into Li Luo's own.

Their eyes met for a long while.

Jiang Qing'e broke the silence with a faint smile. "Awake?"

Li Luo nodded, struggling to sit up. Jiang Qing'e propped him up with a pillow, her hair caressing his face as she leaned past him. It tickled. Both his face and his heart.

"You fainted in the skygold room last night. Someone found you when they were cleaning." She searched his face. "Ran into trouble when cultivating?"

Li Luo gave her an uneasy smile and then searched within his body. He could sense that his lifespan had not been further diminished, but there was a sense of hollowness that he could not explain.

He must have lost something.

Again he dived, this time into his second resonant palace. He could sense the green within, charged with life.

In the heart of the green there was dark yellow, and the two supported each other to further sustain the energy.

Li Luo knew that he had successfully tempered his second acquired resonance.

However, his woodearth resonance was extremely low quality. It was the poorest first-grade resonance possible. Still, it was normal. The fact that Li Luo could even acquire it was thanks to Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's tireless research. His success was already a miracle, and beggars could not be choosers.

In any case, he could improve it endlessly with spirit liquids and purifying lights. With his current finances, he could easily raise it to a fourth or fifth-grade resonance.

Besides, Li Luo was pleasantly surprised to find a leafy-green resonance seed in his second resonant palace as well.

However, this one was only the size of a green bean, much smaller than the one in his first resonant palace. It was due to a lack of resonant power.

But as Li Luo grew stronger, his second resonance seed would also grow.

Li Luo marveled at it. He was liking it more and more.

In this instant, he finally understood why it was said that his advantage would only truly shine once his second resonance was acquired.

A resonance seed's advantage was that it could absorb energy from the cultivator's surroundings. This was a clear advantage over Ten Seals Stage cultivators.



As for Li Luo, these dual-resonances would enable him to absorb worldly natural energy much faster than anyone else.

It was basically cultivation at double speed.

The resonant palaces were also used to store resonant power. They served as vessels, and they had a maximum capacity. Once filled, it was hard to deliver power beyond that saturation point. At that time, the only options were to aim for a breakthrough to the next tier, or try to grind and improve that capacity through a long and arduous process.

With a second resonant palace, Li Luo's maximum resonant power capacity far exceeded others of his level.

Of course, the grade of one's resonance determined the quality of the resonance seed as well. The higher the resonance grade, the better the resonance seed consolidated. Whether in terms of energy absorption or maximum resonant power capacity, quality mattered for the resonance seed.

For example, Li Luo estimated that he would have to raise both his acquired resonances to the seventh-grade before he could compete against Jiang Qing'e's ninth-grade light resonance.

Still, it was already an overwhelming advantage. Given enough time and improvement, Li Luo's acquired resonances would come into their full awesome power.

"What are you drooling about?" Jiang Qing'e asked impatiently. The corner of Li Luo's mouth had fallen open in a silly smile.

He gave her a mysterious smile, then he reached out to take her hand in his own. Not waiting for her response, he channeled green resonant power through his palm.

Her golden eyes widened, her lips parting in surprise.

"This is.... wood resonance power?! How did this happen? Didn't you have a water resonance?" she croaked hoarsely.

Li Luo grinned. "Guess."

Her eyes lit up. "You managed a breakthrough. You opened your second resonant palace?"

Li Luo pretended to think it over. "Hmm, sounds good."

He did not tell her about his last blank palace. Perhaps she wasn't ready for it yet.

She stared at him in wonder. "This is my first time seeing someone with two resonant palaces before the Duke Stage."

"Li Luo, I knew you were something special. You might have been a blank palace cultivator, but your rare talent cannot be denied. No one will dare say you've let down your parents now."

She broke out into a blissful smile. Li Luo forgot how to breathe for a moment.

"Sister Qing'e, I'm so touched," Li Luo said.

Jiang Qing'e smiled. "Li Luo, touched is touched, but if you touch my hand again, I'll beat you up."

He hurriedly retracted his hand from hers. "Can't the patient get a little benefit?"

She shot him a look. She had been here the whole night watching over him. Benefits?

Just then, the door was pushed open, and Li Luo saw Ox Biaobiao and his shiny head rush in. He was holding a bowl of piping hot soup.

"Young Lord, you're awake!" he exclaimed happily.

Li Luo nodded. "Sorry to make you worry, Uncle Biao."

Ox Biaobiao offered the soup with a flourish. "Young Lord, you are too frail. Fainting while cultivating! You should eat more."

Li Luo dug in heartily. From the first bite, he could feel a wave of heat flush through him.

Evidently, Ox Biaobiao had made this especially for him.

"Thanks, Uncle Biao," he said gratefully, turning back to the soup.

The nourishing ingredients helped him feel a little stronger.

Ox Biaobiao bobbed his head smilingly. He reached out a greasy hand and took hold of Li Luo's wrist. "Let Uncle Biao see what's wrong with you."

"Sure." Li Luo shrugged.

Ox Biaobiao held his hand seriously, seemingly searching for something. After a while, the smile he always wore fell off his face.

Both youngsters were shocked by that.

There was a moment of quiet surprise, then Ox Biaobiao let go of his hand. He spoke gravely.

"Young Lord, this is no small matter."

### **Chapter 0109: Royal Sap**

Li Luo felt like his heart had stopped beating for a moment when he heard Ox Biaobiao. "Uncle Biao," he forced a smile. "Whatever are you talking about?"

Beside him, Jiang Qing'e's own hands were clenched anxiously as they waited for his answer.

"Young lord, do you feel a strange sense of hollowness?"

"It's no misperception. Young lord, you've indeed lost something very important this time round."

Li Luo frowned. It was as Ox Biaobiao had said, and yet there had been no change to his lifespan. Had he lost something else?

"What you've lost is your foundation, the basis of what gives you potential." Ox Biaobiao explained patiently.

"Young lord, given your current physical state, it's almost impossible for you to improve no matter how hard you cultivate." This was akin to a death sentence, and Li Luo paled. Instead of his lifespan, he had paid for his second acquired resonance with his potential?.

With his foundation sundered, did it mean he could not reach the next breakthrough?

In that case, then all he had was 5 years of life! If he could not reach the Duke stage in 5 years, all his efforts would be for naught.

Li Luo would not believe it. He could not believe it. Ox Biaobiao might think it was true, but it could not be that bad. Li Luo still had his waterlight resonance and his woodearth resonance. Both specialized in recovery. With time, surely he could make up for the lost foundation.

Perhaps this was why Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan had urged him to choose a waterlight, followed by a wood resonance.

These two acquired resonances together would give him the best mitigation to the debilitating aftereffects.

But this was still terrible news to Li Luo. He was racing against time to cultivate. This impediment would further hold him back. He would end up paying the price in time.

"Uncle Biao, is there any solution?" Jiang Qing'e broke the silence.

Ox Biaobiao rubbed his bald head. "Perhaps not for others, but maybe I can do something."

Li Luo looked at Ox Biaobiao with delighted surprise.

"I know a way to nourish one's foundation. It's called the When The World Shatters Miracle Paste. It is made of many rare materials, and it can heal one's core. It's only useful for those below the General Stage," Ox Biaobiao said.

Almost as though it was made especially for him! Although, the Miracle Paste name sounded a little dodgy...

Li Luo thought about it. "Uncle Biao," he said with deep feeling, "my future depends on you now."

"Say no more," Ox Biaobiao replied heartily. "This old ox here will do everything in my power to help you."

"When will you start refining it?" Jiang Qing'e asked.

Ox Biaobiao scratched his rough cheek. "The miracle paste needs many rare ingredients. They will take some time to gather."

"Uncle Biao, just leave them up to me. I will summon all of House Luolan to hunt them down at once," Jiang Qing'e said.

He nodded. "But there is one main ingredient that is impossible to search for."

"What is it?" Li Luo asked quickly.

"Royal Sap is a very rare treasure indeed. It only appears at energy confluences. If ingested, it's as powerful as an eighth-grade spirit liquid. It's also a necessary ingredient for refining ninth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights," Ox Biaobiao explained.

Li Luo was amazed. He had never heard of this amazing thing before, but he instantly knew it would be extremely rare and expensive. Could it really be found?

"Haha, Royal Sap is hard to find for anyone else, but not for the Young Lord and Mistress. You should have a chance to get it," Ox Biaobiao said.

"And why's that?" Li Luo asked curiously.

It was Jiang Qing'e who answered softly. "Because Royal Sap is produced by the Astral Sage College. I received some before, but I've already used it all."

Li Luo swallowed. The Astral Sage College was truly something special. They even had such rare resources?

Jiang Qing'e looked at him. "You're familiar with Trees of Resonant Power, I trust? There was one at Southwind Academy as well. But compared to the Tree of Resonant Power at the Astral Sage College, Southwind Academy's looks like a tiny sprout.

"The Tree of Resonant Power at the Astral Sage College will surpass your imagination. Its canopy extends over much of the sky above the school. It is possibly where the worldly natural energy is densest in the entire Xia Kingdom. That is why it produces Royal Sap on a frequent basis.

"Important missions and competitions at the Astral Sage College often offer Royal Sap as a reward.

"When you enter the Astral Sage College, those chances will be open to you as well. You cannot pass them up.

"I will be trying to win some for you too, so we can brew the Miracle Paste."

Li Luo sighed. "Sister Qing'e, you treat me too well. I would dedicate my life to you, but I guess we're already engaged."

She clobbered him over the head with her fist. "Less of the buttering up."

Ox Biaobiao smiled at their banter, then he turned to leave, taking Li Luo's empty bowl and chopsticks with him.

Li Luo watched him go. "Our Uncle Biao really knows a lot."

Ox Biaobiao had instantly told him about a miracle paste the moment his hollow being had been identified. It was a coincidence too good to be true.

Jiang Qing'e nodded slightly. "A hidden flag that the House Lords left behind. But he has never asked a word about House Luolan's matters before."

Li Luo started to wonder if he was wrong about his parents not knowing about the aftereffects of the second acquired resonance...

"Don't worry too much about Uncle Biao. Not even I know if he truly has power, or if he is just a slightly more knowledgeable chef," Jiang Qing'e said.

"Why worry about those things when I can worry about myself? I would rather depend on myself than anyone else to protect House Luolan." Li Luo agreed with a smile.

"Rest well, then. School opens in a few days. Remember my warning, and acquit yourself well," she said with a warm smile

Li Luo breathed out. "Finally, the Astral Sage College."

He had been looking forward to entering the most elite institution in the Xia Kingdom for a while now.

"Oh yes, I heard that you're super popular everywhere in the Astral Sage College. Will I be treated unfairly?" Li Luo mused glumly.

Jiang Qing'e's lips twitched slightly. "He who wears the crown must bear the weight. You're engaged to me. Of course you have to endure your trials."

"I already offered to annul the engagement," Li Luo said very sincerely.

"You're still a long way away from that," she said, amused, reaching out to tussle his hair.

"Don't worry.

"If anyone bullies you in school...

"I'll beat him up."

A ray of sunlight found its way through the window, lighting up her face. Li Luo's heart skipped a beat. Oh Qing'e, you're a cruel one.

How could he not respond?

### **Chapter 0110: Heaven and Earth, Dragons and Tigers**

Now that Li Luo had reached the Resonant Master Stage and also tempered his second acquired resonance, he spent his next few days feebly throwing his sick body into what resonance arts research he could.

Ordinarily, talented individuals who reached the Resonant Master Stage could start to access General Stage resonance arts. These were far better than the entry-level resonance arts.

There was a saying that Generals were divided into heaven and earth, but also dragons and tigers.

Heaven and earth, because Generals were divided into Heavenly Dipper and Earth Fiend Generals. As for tigers and dragons, they referred to the class of resonance arts.

Dragon-tier resonance arts were stronger, while tiger-tier resonance arts were weaker.

They were often abbreviated to dragon-general resonance arts and tiger-general resonance arts.

In the entry Resonant Master Stage, one would normally work with tiger-general resonance arts, while dragon-general resonance arts were usually used when one had fully entered the General Stage.

By Li Luo's estimation, the Dewlight Skystream Arrow that he had used to defeat Shi Huang had a penetrative power that roughly matched the average tiger-general resonance art.

Plus, his Dewlight Skystream Arrow had the unique advantage of being a combination of two entry-level resonance arts. This meant that it would cost less resonant power to use than tiger-general resonance arts.

Still, Li Luo knew that his fusion of entry-level resonance arts would ramp up in resonant power cost as well, if he were to deliver something effective against stronger opponents. It was time to advance to tiger-general resonance arts.

Back at House Luolan's headquarters, there were many resonance arts, manuals, and archives stocked.

Li Luo sat near the window, enjoying the warm sunlight. He sipped a steaming ginseng tea that perked him up.

The ginseng tea was made for him by Ox Biaobiao, and it would also nourish him.

"Sheesh. What kind of youngster am I..." Li Luo sighed at his cup. Ginseng tea and sun? It felt like he was living a retiree's life.

Li Luo soon turned to the tiger-general resonance arts displayed before him. These were all water and wood resonance arts. Although he had four resonances to play with now, water and wood were his main resonances, while light and earth were supports. For now, they could only augment his main strengths.

For example, Li Luo might be able to use some water or wood tiger-general resonance arts, but a light or earth tiger-general resonance art would be far more than he could handle.

Besides, although he had filled his second resonant palace and now had a woodearth resonance, he was still far from reaching complete mastery over all four to the point where he could meld them at will.

Forget four, he couldn't even meld three of them together.

In fact, he was only scratching the surface of melding two resonances. Usually, only those at the Duke Stage would begin to truly use double resonance powers.

The reason for that was simple: 99 percent of people would only fill their second resonant palace at the Duke Stage.

As for a true blend of three resonances, that was usually the mark of a King Stage expert.

Of course, at that time it would be the combined strength of three King-level resonances. Perhaps Li Luo could give it a try once he filled his third blank palace.

He pored over one tiger-general resonance art after another, getting more and more immersed in his research.

These tiger-general resonance arts were far more complex than the entry-level resonance arts that he had been working with so far. They were more intricate and complicated by tenfold at least.

He could already tell that they would demand a lot of time and energy to cultivate successfully.

Their individual complexity meant that it would be even harder for Li Luo to merge two of them—the difficulty would be compounded.

However, Li Luo had a natural advantage in resonance arts over his peers. Besides, he had done much prior preparation and homework. These tiger-general resonance arts were difficult, but he wouldn't be stumbling around in the dark.

Although they would still require a lot of time and experimentation, it was not a hopeless process.

"Combining two tiger-general resonance arts is something I must work up to slowly. I wonder if I can use a tiger-general resonance art as the anchor and then augment it with an entry-level resonance art. That's more manageable," he mused. Finally, he made his choices and began working on his master plan.

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Time passed, and the Astral Sage College's opening drew nearer.

Before school opened, Li Luo received a message sent by Lu Qing'er. Apparently, Yu Lang, Zhao Kuo, and the others had arrived at Xia City, and they were inviting him out to hang.

Li Luo snorted. Those louts had finally dawdled their way to the city. Still, it would be nice to see them after so long.

He sent his agreement.

The next day, they met at an inn alongside Kaijiang Street in the city. Li Luo was surprised to see that Yu Lang and Zhao Kuo were not alone. With them were Zong Fu, Chi Su, and Xiang Liang.

"Hello, Brother Luo!" The three immediately leaped to their feet.

Li Luo nodded at them. "They are...?" he asked while looking at Lu Qing'er.

"Forgiven. We'll be peers from now on as well. I won't hold it against them," she said cheerfully.

"Besides, we're all from the Tianshu Province. We have the same home!"

"Yes, yes! Sister Qing is so kind!"

Zong Fu hurriedly nodded. "Brother Luo, we were too full of ourselves before. We will take on any favor that Brother Luo asks of us in the future."

Xiang Liang chimed in very honestly. "We just want to follow Brother Luo to greatness."

Li Luo found this funny, but in truth he bore no ill feelings against the three of them. Otherwise, he would not have let them pass the exams so easily.

"Let bygones be bygones. We're all students from the same homeland. Let's look out for each other," he said, sitting down.

All three looked extremely relieved.

"Brother Luo, a few days ago the Tianshu Province's governor, Shi Qing, was transferred to the Nanman Province. He must have pulled some strings, but Shi Huang got an entrance slot to the Astral Sage College there," Zong Fu reported very earnestly.

"Governor Shi is truly a capable man." Li Luo smiled, but he did not mind it too much. Shi Huang was competent. With a powerful father, it was not too hard to get him admitted.

He had expected something of the sort to happen. Still, he didn't fear him before, and there was nothing to fear now either.

He quickly pushed Shi Huang from his mind, exchanging wine and tales with Yu Lang, Zhao Kuo, and the others.

A few cups in, Yu Lang's face was flushed like a beetroot. "Actually, I arrived in Xia City long ago, but I only met Zhao Kuo a few days ago. I've been up to plenty in Xia City," he said smugly.

"What now?" Li Luo asked, amused.

"I'll show you something good," Yu Lang said proudly in a dreamy tone. "I'm sure you could use the information."

He pulled out a book, which he handed over to Li Luo.

Li Luo looked at it. "The Astral Sage College, Newcomers' Ranking!"

He was amazed. "You researched the new students at the Astral Sage College? How did you get their information?"

The others looked awed as well. After all, these newcomers had come to Xia City from all over the kingdom. Information did not flow easily over such great distances. Compiling all their information was a feat that not just anyone could accomplish.

Yu Lang waved a modest hand. "There's a student administration in the Xia Kingdom, right? They deal specifically in such matters."

"That's confidential information though, right?" Lu Qing'er asked.

Yu Lang nodded. "I eyed this administrator. The man likes to inn-hop in his free time, so I made friends with him. I asked him to help me get the information."

Li Luo stared at him. "Is he mad? He gave you confidential information so easily?"

"Going out on a limb for friends is natural, isn't it?" Yu Lang said piously.

"More like crippling him by stealing his limbs." Zhao Kuo snorted.

"Tell the truth," Li Luo demanded.

Looking at them, Yu Lang confessed sheepishly, "All I did was record him when he went upstairs with a wench. And then I told him that my good conscience demanded I tell his wife. And... then he gave me a copy of the Astral Sage College newcomers' information."

The table was silent for a long time, then Li Luo sighed.



"Yu Lang, you're a dirty bastard."