

## Resonance 151

### Chapter 0151: Special Training

From her spirited laughter, Li Luo knew his loan plan was not going to float.

But damn, he was a beggar when it came to school points.

The 5,000-point Royal Sap was still waiting for him. Now he needed the 3,000-point 12 Step Weave and a 300-point energy liquid?

"Mentor, you might as well not have said anything," he grumbled.

"Well, at least now you have a goal."

She laughed. "There's a monthly ranking battle coming up, right? If you can score well there, it's a nice injection of points."

Li Luo was immediately interested again. "How many points can I get?"

She addressed Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng as well. "The monthly tests are different from what you have experienced before. They are team battles, which means the three of you need to work together. Understand each other's abilities and styles. Only then can you bring out the best of your team.

"In the ranking battles, points are assigned based on the teams you beat. A Violet Vibrance team is worth 500 points, a Gold Gleam team is worth 100, and a Silver Spark team worth 20."

Li Luo could barely keep himself from drooling. Why did he feel a sudden urge to purge the entire newcomer population?

No, no. He had to have a conscience. He would let Zhao Kuo and the others go.

Qing'er could pass too. Although, she had an absolute abomination in her team by the name of Qin Zhulu; it wasn't really clear who was going to give the pass here.

The opposition team? No chance. Li Luo had privately dubbed Shen Jinxiao's team the opposition team.

But ultimately, the ranking battles were team battles. So far, Li Luo had never tried working with anyone in battle. During the Tianshu exams, he had worked with Yu Lang and Zhao Kuo, but they had not become closely synergizing teammates.

The dynamics of a team battle were definitely more advanced.

"There will be team battles for future school competitions as well. This is a necessary process to get used to your squads. Most importantly..."

She hesitated but pressed on. "If you need to fight the Others in the future, the chances of survival are higher in a squad."

They shuddered. Others... Although they had never encountered one before, ever since their first day at the Astral Sage College, they knew about the existence of a higher danger that was intertwined with their futures. They had to become prepared.

"As for the monthly ranking battles, I don't have too high a demand for you. If you want points, by all means go and fight for it as you naturally would. School points are the currency for cultivation resources, which means a step up over other students. So you can decide for yourselves how important the ranking is," she said simply.

Li Luo licked his lips, passion burning in his eyes. He had the greatest stake here.

If their cultivation was delayed, both Xin Fu and Bai Mengmeng could accept it, unpressured as they were. He, on the other hand, had a sword hanging over his head, which would drop when his five years were up. As easy-going as he might seem to those around him, deep down he wrestled with a hellish anxiety daily.

"Well, whether points are important or not, if our results were terrible, we would be letting you down, Esteemed Mentor! You said you have some sort of rivalry with Mentor Shen Jinxiao, didn't you? As your protégés, we feel compelled to help you win this rivalry!" Li Luo vowed sincerely.

"And if anybody doesn't work their butts off for this target, then they would be disrespecting you, Esteemed Mentor!"

Bai Mengmeng and Xin Fu were absolutely boggled, staring at Li Luo suspiciously. Why did it feel like they just had a huge burden placed on their shoulders?

Had they just been volunteered involuntarily?

But still, Li Luo's words were not without their own logic. They couldn't let Mentor Chi Chan down, could they?

The two eventually nodded assent.

"We are all excellent and filial students," Li Luo said with relief. "We will indeed repay our mentor for all her precious guidance."

He knew firsthand just how weak-willed his two squad mates were. The memory of them forfeiting the leadership was still fresh in his mind. He had been worried about the ranking battles. If they continued in that vein, he would be a one-man sitting-duck team against the opposition team.

It was not like he was giving them much choice anyway. He made it sound like they were tying their mentor to a stake and kicking down the graves of their ancestors if they said no. How could they not say yes?

Chi Chan stared hard at Li Luo. She had no idea what he was thinking, but she chose not to rumble with him. After all, it was quite a feat that he had managed to rally the likes of Bai Mengmeng and Xin Fu.

"In order to train your squad's synergy and familiarity, I'll give you special training."

Chi Chan lifted her hand, and her resonant power streamed forth, eventually becoming a blue tiger of light.

The glowing tiger gave a lifelike growl. They could sense how savage and strong it was.

"Three hours per day.

"If you beat it, you get to eat."

Her veil fluttered as she snorted in amusement.

"If you don't beat it, starve."

...

"Roar!"

A terrifying roar came from the tiger, and the training ground exploded into action.

The glowing tiger raked the air, shimmering with resonant power.

Ping, ping, ping!

In one graceful leap, it broke out of the three students' surround. One bat from its paw smothered their attacks in a flash and then them sent them flying to the edge of the arena.

The blue tiger paced within, staring at the three mouse-like students outside.

They sat up and stared at it in dismay.

"The tiger's really strong," Bai Mengmeng said, crestfallen. This was the third day they were fighting it.

For all three days, their combined efforts had failed to defeat the glowing tiger made from Mentor Chi Chan's resonant power.

Li Luo rubbed his face. "The tiger is about a 2nd-tier Resonant Master in power. It's a whole class stronger than us. Plus, it's made of resonant power, but it's sentient. If I'm not wrong, it even has battle experience from its time with mentor Chi Chan."

"Mentor Chi Chan's amazing," Bai Mengmeng said in admiration. It was a casually summoned resonant power tiger, and it had them in the dust. If not for the fact that it wasn't out to kill them, they would already be dead many times over.

Such was the power of a Duke Stage expert.

On the other side of the training field, Chi Chan enjoyed lunch on her short table. She took one look at her three miserable students, then flicked her hand, sending three flatbreads whizzing to their hands.

"Haven't beaten it yet? Continue the flatbread diet," she said mildly.

They bit down on their cold, tough flatbreads vengefully.

"We've eaten the flatbread for three days already," Li Luo complained through sore teeth. "It's stale flatbread."

"Leader, I'll make you guys some food after Mentor Chi Chan leaves," Bai Mengmeng said kindly.

Li Luo's teeth stopped moving, and this time it was not because of the flatbread's resemblance to baked leather. He shared a furtive look with Xin Fu, their panic mirrored in each other's eyes.

"Mengmeng," Li Luo said, drawing himself up, "although our mentor won't know, we can't let ourselves down like that. To become strong, we have to depend on ourselves and press on. Since we made a promise to our mentor, we will only eat these cold, hard flatbreads until we beat her stupid tiger.

"It's a test of our will."

Xin Fu nodded solemnly in agreement.

"I'm sorry. You're right, Leader," Bai Mengmeng said contritely.

"Being able to know one's wrongs is a great blessing." Li Luo nodded sagely. They had truly dodged a bullet there. Compared to Bai Mengmeng's food, he would rather eat the flatbread.

Still, he couldn't very well say that, or he would hurt her feelings. Plus, she had a demoness for a sister that wouldn't let them off.

Of course, he could always pin the blame on Xin Fu's head, but he still had his limits. He was the leader after all.

"Still, we can't keep eating flatbread forever. We have to get rid of that thing ASAP." Li Luo swallowed the rest of his flatbread in two huge bites since chewing didn't seem to improve its texture much. He stared at the relentlessly pacing blue tiger.

"In these three days, I realized that my speed drops a lot when I'm within five feet of the tiger. I think it might be the Heavywater Halo, a water-based resonance art. It slows the opponents' movements and attacks. That's why it can dodge us so easily," Li Luo explained.

Xin Fu also volunteered information. "Once, my attack landed, but didn't penetrate. There's a powerful defensive resonance art on it as well."

Li Luo frowned. This was impossible.

"Um, Leader," Bai Mengmeng said meekly. "I realized that when we attack, it always turns a scale on its left breast away from us. Could that be its weak spot?"

Li Luo nodded. "I noticed that too. Let's give it a crack."

He conferred some more with the two, kneading his forehead with his fingers as they made plans.

"One more crack at it. If we win here, dinner's my treat at the canteen," Li Luo said.

"I can make dinner too." Bai Mengmeng enthusiastically spoke up.

Li Luo bit the inside of his cheek. Way to crush the morale, Mengmeng.

## **Chapter 0152: The Squad Shapes Up**

"Let's go!"

At Li Luo's whispered command, the three charged. Li Luo took the lead, his wood resonant power summoning green vines that held the blue light tiger down.

Swish! Swish!

It gave a growl. Its keen claws made quick work of the vines, as if they were made of shredded paper.

It then leaped at Li Luo.

"Waterlight Demon Mirror!"

His waterlight mirror shimmered into place. The mirror shattered, but he successfully repelled the tiger claw.

"Chaos Shadow Blade!"

A black light streaked past Li Luo's shoulder, a keen dagger headed straight at the tiger.

The blue glow around the tiger slowed the shadow blade down, and it cut down the attack with the other paw.

During this time, Li Luo had leaped high into the air, drawing his shortswords and combining them in one smooth move. He drew his bow, channeling his resonant power into an arrow of light.

Swoosh!

The arrow of light flew at the tiger.

As it neared, it slowed down in an unnatural manner.

"Mengmeng!" Li Luo yelled.

A crystalline resonant power appeared as she waved her tiny hands. A twinkling cloud of pollen started to fall over his arrow of light.

"Butterfly Powder!"

Her powder seemed to have a cleansing effect that removed the delaying effects on the arrow.

Shoosh!

Its speed now unhindered, the light arrow continued straight on its journey, towards a certain scale on the glowing tiger's left breast.

Ding!

It hit the scale, and Li Luo's eyes widened. Another layer of defense on the tiger fur was triggered, rippling out as it absorbed the impact.

The arrow strained against the defense and finally penetrated just as it split.

Chi Chan smiled into her teacup.

From within the light arrow, another concealed bolt of black light, a hidden arrow that punched straight through the weak spot that its shell of light had opened. It buried itself deeply in the scale.

"Roar!"

The glowing tiger froze, then it exploded into a shower of light.

The three looked at the drifting light specks with delight.

"Did we do it?" Bai Mengmeng cried. It was too good to believe.

Li Luo blew out his cheeks. Behind him, Xin Fu hunkered down in his shadow, a slight quirk on his lips.

Chi Chan walked on to the grounds. "Three days, and finally you show some semblance of basic cooperation. I feel like I'm teaching three little pigs."

They hung their heads in embarrassment.

"Still, you're not completely hopeless."

She turned to Li Luo. "As the leader, you should have a basic understanding of your teammates' strengths and traits. Only then can you orchestrate the perfect attack.

"The three of you need to find your own roles.

"Li Luo has water and wood resonances. His water resonance sustains him in the fight, so he isn't afraid to draw it out. His wood resonance helps him control the field, locking down the opponent. His offense is varied and decent.

"Xin Fu has the shadow resonance. He can only keep to the shadows and cannot execute head-on attacks. Only while Li Luo is attacking can he slip in through the shadows and deliver a critical strike.

"Bai Mengmeng's Nightmarish Water Butterfly resonance is not suited to offense, but it has cleansing properties and can induce slumber and drowsiness. It is also a special form of control.

"As for general tactics... If the three of you were to form a complete team, Li Luo would be your main offense, with Xin Fu waiting to strike, while Bai Mengmeng supports you from the back. You need to watch the situation and alert each other, or render aid when needed."

They absorbed this intently. Her analysis of their strengths and weaknesses was spot on.

Perhaps only when they could execute her vision could they reach their true prowess.

"Continue training like that when you have spare time outside of cultivation. I'm sure you know how strong the other squads are. How well you can synergize will determine your result in the competition.

"That's it for today. Go rest."

...

Astral Sage College, Bank of Points.

The hall was a popular place. There was a constant flow of people both in and out of it.

Jiang Qing'e and Yan Lingqing had just arrived.

Many pairs of eyes were trained on the pair, distracted by Jiang Qing'e. She walked to the exchange counter and pulled out a special badge.

The mentor accepted the badge. "What would you like to exchange it for, Student Jiang?"

"12 Step Weave," she said calmly.

"What are you doing with that?" Yan Lingqing asked, puzzled.

"For Li Luo. He only has a sixth-grade resonance, so he can't use Duke energy cultivation arts yet. The 12 Step Weave is one of the few Duke energy cultivation arts that don't need a seventh-grade resonance," she explained.

Yan Lingqing's eyebrows shot up. "So that's why you've been taking on so many missions in the last few days. You've been so busy, I've barely seen you around. You were earning points?"

Although Jiang Qing'e accumulated many points every year, she used them all up regularly. These two weeks had been particularly rough.

"It can't be helped. Li Luo's just entered the school, so he can't even take on missions. It'll be a huge time sink if he's the one to collect 3,000 points," she said.

"You're too nice to him," Yan Lingqing said almost sourly.

"Am I not nice enough to you?" Jiang Qing'e teased her. She was in a good mood as she waited for the 12 Step Weave to be handed over.

Yan Lingqing pushed her spectacles up. "Not nearly enough."

The mentor looked up from his checking. "Student Jiang, someone else has taken the 12 Step Weave," he said, shaking his head in apology. "If you need it, you might have to wait for quite some time."

She frowned. The 12 Step Weave was a niche item. There were not many people who would buy it. Who could have taken it so coincidentally at this time?

"Mentor, can you help me check which student bought it?" Jiang Qing'e asked.

He did not mind. A moment later, his eyes widened. "The 12 Step Weave was taken by mentor Shen Jinxiao for research," he said with surprise.

"He left a note in the records. If any student needs it, they can talk to him."

Yan Lingqing could feel cold anger rising from the girl beside her.

Jiang Qing'e took her badge back wordlessly and turned to leave.

Yan Lingqing hurried after her.

"You're not going to find Shen Jinxiao, are you?"

"Shen Jinxiao? As if. I'm going to Vice Principal Su Xin to impeach him."

Yan Lingqing's mouth fell open.

## **Chapter 0153: Impeachment**

Astral Sage College, Gilded Palace.

This was where the highest authorities of the school were, the Violet Vibrance mentors, and a few experienced Gold Gleam mentors. They alone could decide the major matters of the school.

Vice Principal Su Xin's office was within the Gilded Palace.

Vice Principal Su Xin was in a bit of a tough spot now that Jiang Qing'e was in her office and asking for Shen Jinxiao to be impeached.

Beside Jiang Qing'e was a middle-aged brunette with a severe face.

This was Jiang Qing'e's current mentor. Her name was Huo Xu, and she had a fiery temper to match her name.

"Su Xin, that maggot Shen Jinxiao is getting worse by the day. If you can't deal with him, leave him to me. I'll squeeze him until even his balls explode!" Huo Xu shouted.

Su Xin blanched at the coarseness. "Er, Mentor Huo Xu, calm down. Let's wait for Mentor Shen Jinxiao before we sort this out."

Huo Xu turned her nose up haughtily.

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Vice Principal," Jiang Qing'e said.

Su Xin waved it off, and the two shared a warm conversation until the door swung open. Shen Jinxiao walked in with a smug smile on his face.

"Vice Principal."

She inclined her head slightly and then went straight to the topic. "I think you have probably heard. Jiang Qing'e accuses you of... immoral, unfair treatment, and impeding a student's cultivation for selfish purposes."

"A heavy crime." He sneered. "However... since when could normal students directly accuse a Violet Vibrance mentor, and to the vice principal no less? I seem to recall that there is a process that goes through the Gilded Palace."

"Shen Jinxiao, as slippery as ever. Besides, Qing'e is no ordinary student anymore. She's already a candidate for the Seven Astral Pillars, and she will be formally appointed at the end of the year," Huo Xu snapped.

His eyebrows shot up. The Astral Sage College's Seven Astral Pillars were the highest positions that students could achieve. Once appointed, they were equal in status to Violet Vibrance mentors and could participate in administrative decisions. If Jiang Qing'e was already a candidate, then she was indeed not just an ordinary student.

However, one prerequisite to becoming a Seven Astral Pillar was becoming a Heavenly Dipper General. Could Jiang Qing'e really reach that this year? Ordinarily, students entered Four Star Hall before they contested for the honor.

"Exceptional. Able to contest for a position in the Seven Astral Pillars while being a mere Three Star Hall student!" Shen Jinxiao said insincerely.



"But still, I don't understand the reason for her accusation," he said, shaking his head sadly.

"Mentor Shen Jinxiao's actions during the Choosing of the Mentors can be seen as targeting Li Luo, and now you have taken away the 12 Step Weave, which is suspicious. Those are my reasons."

"I merely wanted to draw out Li Luo's abilities during the choosing. How could he have attracted four Violet Vibrance mentors otherwise?" he drawled lazily. "As for the 12 Step Weave, that is a coincidence. I am indeed conducting some research, so I took it. I had no intention of targeting anybody.

"Besides, I even took the trouble to leave a message that any student who needed it could come find me. Qing'e, doesn't it all seem like a bit of an overreaction to run to the Vice Principal immediately?"

"Shen Jinxiao, do you think we can't read you? You're just spiteful that Qing'e broke your relationship into pieces!" Huo Xu yelled.

"You chicken gizzard, you're not fit to be a mentor!"

Shen Jinxiao frowned at her insults. No wonder all the male mentors ducked away when they saw her coming.

Vice Principal Su Xin kneaded her brow. This was a delicate matter to deal with. She would rather have it settled privately than escalate it to a meeting.

Su Xin mediated. "Mentor Shen Jinxiao, the 12 Step Weave cannot possibly hold much research value for you. I suggest you return it for now. It won't take a long time to be restocked"

Shen Jinxiao smiled casually. "Since the Vice Principal orders it so, naturally your wish is my command.

"However... you know that the newcomers' first monthly tests are coming up. As one of the organizers, I intend to make the 12 Step Weave an additional prize for the team that takes first place.

"Keke, I even paid for it out of my own pocket."

Shen Jinxiao smiled apologetically. "Don't worry. If the winning team expresses that they do not need it, I will return it, then Qing'e can buy it."

Su Xin took a good, long look at him. It was a perfect counter move. Shen Jinxiao's plotting was more sophisticated than she had expected.

At this step, there was nothing else she could negotiate.

As the vice principal, she could not force a Violet Vibrance mentor's hand. Besides, his actions were, strictly speaking, within his authority, even though they smacked of foul play.

Both taking the 12 Step Weave and making it an additional test reward.

"Shen Jinxiao, check yourself," Huo Xu said in a quiet tone that Su Xin understood to be her deadliest.

Shen Jinxiao's smirk did not waver.

Huo Xu took a deep breath, but Jiang Qing'e grabbed her hand to stop the imminent outburst. "Let it be as it is, then," she said to Su Xin. "My thanks to the Vice Principal."

She turned and pulled Huo Xu out by the hand. Throughout this entire conversation, she had not looked at Shen Jinxiao once.

Su Xin fixed Shen Jinxiao with a stern eye. "Mentor Shen Jinxiao, my vision of the Astral Sage College is not limited by conservative views. If you truly like Jiang Qing'e, pursue her openly. Your plotting and subterfuge is quite ungentlemanly.

"Besides, it's not working, and it just makes her angry.

"You're a Duke now, true, but how long do you think Jiang Qing'e will take to reach your level? If she overtakes you one day, what will you do?"

Shen Jinxiao's eyelids fluttered, but his smirk remained.

"If there's nothing else, Vice Principal, I'll take my leave." He waved a casual hand and turned away.

She watched him go with apprehension.

Shen Jinxiao. What on earth are you up to?

#### **Chapter 0154: The Ultra Rich Woman**

After the day's training ended, Li Luo bathed and changed. He was entranced by the handsome youth in the mirror staring back at him, and he spaced out for a few minutes.

He shook himself from his reverie at last.

"Just a pretty face, hollow underneath." He sighed. He needed spirit liquids and purifying lights so badly.

He had been at the Astral Sage College for more than 20 days now, and his supply of spirit liquids and purifying lights had been exhausted. He had run out two days ago, and it felt strange. He had gotten so used to them.

That batch of spirit liquids and purifying lights had mostly helped his woodearth resonance, bringing it from the fourth grade to the fifth-grade.

However, his first resonance, the waterlight one, still remained at the sixth grade. Moreover, it was a long way away from the seventh-grade.

The main limiting factor was the steep price of sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. Although Jiang Qing'e had guaranteed him a continuous supply, it was not enough to keep pace with Li Luo's cultivation.

He understood, but he was unhappy nonetheless. The Suncreek Villa's profits were climbing steadily at headquarters thanks to his secret water source, but it wasn't going to make him a fortune overnight.

He had to take things slow.

"I'll just have to endure it."

Li Luo hung his head and walked out of the room.

He headed for the second level of the basement, a refining workshop. Chi Chan would give him and Bai Mengmeng refining advice here in their free time.

There was a crystal wall on one side of the workshop, where one could see within. Li Luo saw Chi Chan standing outside with her hands in her pockets and looking in.

He went to take a look.

Inside the refining workshop, a petite girl was on the refining platform. In front of her was an entire assembly of bottles and flasks. Her hands were a blur as she performed complex procedures, adding, distilling, and creating even more glowing liquids.

She turned briefly to look at the whiteboard behind her, which was already covered in a scrawling mass of numbers.

Li Luo stared at her. She looked like a completely different person, her usual, demure look gone. Instead, her face was almost like a robot as she worked on her calculations with calm and collected precision.

"That's Bai Mengmeng??"

Chi Chan heard the disbelief in his voice. "Mm. Rather, it's Bai Mengmeng in a dream state."

"What do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"It's a special place for her. Her Nightmarish Water Butterfly resonance has powerful hallucinatory effects. For some reason, she can use it on herself as well.

"She can induce a dream-state for herself, and when she does so, her ability to do research increases greatly. In this state, she can overcome many obstacles that she usually can't."

Li Luo was amazed. So she was... sleep-walking?

Sleep-researching?!

That was insane!

"So far, Bai Mengmeng has created more than 10 different spirit liquids and purifying lights. Although they are all fourth-grade and below, the best among them was rated a four-star spirit liquid."

Li Luo was even more impressed now.

In the Xia Kingdom, liquid and light formulas were classified into five grades, with one-star being the lowest and five-star being the highest. Four-star was already considered superb.

Even the best that the Suncreek Villa offered was only a three-star formula. Despite the vast amounts of money they had thrown into research, they had yet to come up with a four-star formula. And yet this little girl had already beaten their research headquarters.

Her formulas alone could probably fetch tens of millions of skygold.

She was a low-key ultra-rich woman!

Her net worth was probably higher than the entire Suncreek Villa.

"Why do you think the Resonance Artificers Hall is drooling over her?" Chi Chan laughed, interrupting Li Luo's thoughts. "Many mentors have come to find me in the last half-month."

Li Luo wiped a tear from his eye and stared at her with such a hot intensity that it seemed like he could melt the glass. That was a treasure of a girl inside.

If he could just bluff—no, invite her to the Suncreek Villa, what heights could the combination of his secret water source and her research reach?

Of course, if he could also get an artificer like Mentor Chi Chan to anchor things there, the Suncreek Villa would immediately reach the top ten.

Millions of skygold a day. His waterlight resonance would reach the seventh-grade. The eighth-grade! For all three resonances, if he had them!

Li Luo was trembling with greed.

"I have no idea what you are thinking, but that vibrating is creeping me out. Stop it immediately, or I'll kick you out," Chi Chan warned the drooling Li Luo.

He stopped it immediately.

"You better not be thinking of taking advantage of her," Chi Chan warned him, displaying her uncanny ability to read his mind. "She might be a pure girl, but her sister and the Bai family aren't all harmless herbivores like her. You're asking for a world of pain."

"Mentor!" Li Luo burst indignantly. "How could I?!"

"I merely wanted to exchange skills with Mengmeng. As the leader, it's my responsibility to care for my members!"

She ignored his nonsense. "Another thing. There is an additional prize for the upcoming monthly test. Do you know what it is?"

He shook his head curiously.

"The 12 Step Weave."

He opened his mouth and no words came out. He closed them again. "Mentor," he sobbed, "I'm so touched. You go too far for me."

The 12 Step Weave's hefty price tag was a great worry for him. But now it was the monthly test's reward? Wasn't this an amazing chance for him?

Who else could be so nice to him, besides Mentor Chi Chan?

She shook her head. "Wasn't me. It was Shen Jinxiao. He even paid for the 12 Step Weave out of his own pocket to make it an additional prize."

Li Luo stared at her, blinking stupidly.

Shen Jinxiao?

Had that old bag found a conscience? Or lost his marbles?

### **Chapter 0155: Joss Sticks On The Grave**

"Shen Jinxiao..."

"Has he lost his mind?"

Li Luo decided to speak his thoughts out loud. Mentor Chi Chan was on his side.

Li Luo would sleep more soundly if Shen Jinxiao fell off a cliff. Although his actions were very strange, Li Luo was not about to assume any kindness.

"Not at all. But you're right—he's doing you no service either. Rather, he's delaying you from getting the 12 Step Weave."

"Huh?"

"I heard that Jiang Qing'e went to the Bank of Points yesterday. She also thought of getting you the 12 Step Weave and went to buy it.

"But she was a step too late. Shen Jinxiao had already taken it, and he left a note saying that anyone who needed it could look for him."

Well, that was a nasty move.

So Shen Jinxiao had planned it all. Take the 12 Step Weave away as hostage to force Jiang Qing'e to go to him?

"She did not go to him. Instead, she went to Vice Principal Su Xin to impeach him.

"Shen Jinxiao thought of a good reply to her mediation, which was to offer it up as a prize for the monthly battle. He is indeed allowed to do such a thing, and Vice Principal Su Xin could find no fault with his conduct.

"Which means that his hand was forced when he made it the prize. However, his goal was achieved—to deny you the 12 Step Weave for a while."

She shook her head in disapproval. "Shen Jinxiao is obsessed with Jiang Qing'e, the only one who can soothe his inner fire. And yet she doesn't care for anyone but you."

Li Luo's face was absent of his usual, light-hearted attitude, and Chi Chan sensed a dark anger bubbling within him.

Ffff.

Li Luo let out a long hissing breath. "I better start collecting mud and making joss sticks. The day Shen Jinxiao is buried, I'll stick a big one on his gravestone."

Chi Chan did not chastise him for his extremely insolent remark. Shen Jinxiao did not conduct himself as a mentor should, anyway. He deserved what he had coming.

Li Luo was currently in no position to do anything about Shen Jinxiao, but the enmity between them was rapidly deepening to the point of no return.

"Brazen, aren't you? I guess I shouldn't be surprised that the son of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan would declare a Duke expert as an enemy."

He grinned. "I'm just daydreaming. I can't really cross him now. I beg for Mentor to protect me."

There was a glint in her eyes and a flutter of her veil that he had come to recognize as an amused snort. She clapped him on the shoulder.

"Don't worry." She reassured him.

"I want to put a joss stick on his grave too."

Li Luo started. He recalled that she had mentioned having a history with Shen Jinxiao, but clearly it was more serious than he had thought.

But wasn't this just perfect?

"Mentor," he said as he grinned, "looks like I made an inspired choice during the Choosing."

"Well, before you grow some teeth, you had best hide your hate for Shen Jinxiao, no matter how deeply it runs. I quite like your style of hiding your light under a bushel. Stick to it," she told him.

He gave her a small nod.

"Oh, yes. Since Shen Jinxiao has so generously donated the 12 Step Weave, I feel like you should make a bid for it.

"If you can really get it, you will not only have saved a huge amount of school points... Shen Jinxiao will also be very embarrassed." She snickered.

Li Luo was tickled by the idea. But he had two pushovers with him. Did he really stand a chance...

Still, it would be sweet if he could get the 12 Step Weave just like that.

He started to rehearse a victory speech.

"Er, anyway, I'll do my best," he eventually said.

She nodded, her eyes flicking back to Bai Mengmeng. "She's almost ready to come out of the dream state."

Li Luo saw her straighten up, and the fey, blue glow in her eyes dimmed. A few moments later, she was normal again, her shy, demure look back at home on her cutesy features.

Winter was over, and spring had come again.

Li Luo found this hard to process. Could one person really have two personalities? What was this, roleplay? Quite exciting.

The post dream-state Bai Mengmeng did not look too surprised at the research that she had produced, but she did not continue it. She couldn't follow it very well when she was out of the dream state.

She carefully packed away her notes for her next dream-state session.

"If you're here to refine, go on in. The two of you could exchange skills," Chi Chan said, turning to leave.

Again, Li Luo had the distinct feeling that she could read his mind.

"Mentor Chi Chan is the best."

He sighed. Psychic or not, she had given him a chance to interact with Bai Mengmeng. How often did such nice teachers come along?

Shaking his head to himself, he swiped up a cup nearby and filled it with hot water. Donning his brightest smile, he walked in.

"Mengmeng, you've worked for quite some time. You must be tired, huh? Do you want some hot water?"

She looked up from her packing and flushed slightly at the sight of Li Luo offering the cup. "Um Leader," she said in a small voice, inspecting her nails.

"Your smile is very greasy."

#### **Chapter 0156: Leftovers**

Greasy. Li Luo was almost disgusted with himself. "Greasy" was a word that best fit mongrels like Shen Jinxiao. How could an urbane, righteous gentleman like himself be greasy?!

"Mengmeng, my heart was already breaking when I saw how hard you were cultivating. Your crushing words have brought it to the brink of completely shattering. Anyway, you must be tired. As your leader, I came to show concern out of the goodness of my heart! How could you attack me like that?!" he cried sorrowfully.

Bai Mengmeng was flustered by his accusations. "Sorry, Leader," she said, her head hanging. "I didn't mean to attack you. I just... spoke too casually from the heart."

"..."

This was like a second bolt to Li Luo's heart. So... you DID think that in your heart?

He shoved the cup unceremoniously over to her. "Drink it."

She hastily took it and began to carefully sip from it, sneaking glances up at him.

He shook his head. Looked like he had chosen the wrong approach. Clearly, there was not much point trying to butter up the butterfly girl. Perhaps a more direct approach was in order.

"Ahem..."

"I heard Mentor Chi Chan say that you researched many formulas before, even a 4-star formula."

She nodded a little shyly. "It's nothing much. They're all fourth-grade or below."

"That's already fabulous. You're still so young; there's so much room to grow. You'll definitely be able to make even better formulas in the future," he said heartily.

"Yes! Thank you, Leader," she said, her sunny smile as sweet as a spoonful of honey.

"And what happens," Li Luo said, so casually that he could have been yawning, "with those formulas?"

"My house takes them," she told him earnestly. "Most are sold to the villas. Our Bai family doesn't really hold any stake in the spirit liquids and purifying lights market."

Li Luo felt his stomach plunge with anxiety at missed opportunities. Regardless, he had expected this. Clearly, Bai Mengmeng did not know the worth of those formulas, but the Bai family behind her did.

"Leader, are you interested in spirit liquids as well?" she asked him with wide, guileless eyes.

"Er... nope. Just asking."

He had originally intended to weasel some high-star grade formula out of Bai Mengmeng so he could use it for the Suncreek Villa. It would definitely be worth a fortune, a fortune that the Suncreek Villa could not afford otherwise.

But abusing the relationship with Bai Mengmeng to get such an unfair deal would feel like bullying. He couldn't bring himself to swindle such a gentle creature.

Ultimately, neither he nor the Suncreek Villa could offer anything of value.

His enthusiasm cooled as his thinking crystallized. Bringing the conversation to a smooth end, he walked over to a refining platform and gathered some ingredients to refine spirit liquids.

Li Luo could already refine second-grade spirit liquids. Given how much stronger he had grown recently, he decided to attempt third-grade spirit liquids.

However, his failures were thorough. Third-grade liquids were a whole scale harder than second-grade liquids.

He was going to need a lot more practice.

The 12 Step Weave and spirit liquid formulas were weighing heavily on his mind today, and his practice went even worse than usual because of this. He even failed at the first step a few times, causing the entire refining to fail.

Boom!

A stray surge of energy shattered the crystal flask in his hand, the spilled liquid's glow rapidly fading to a disappointing dark-green. A merge failure.

Li Luo put it aside, shaking his head in frustration. Today was not a good day for practice.

He said goodbye to Bai Mengmeng and prepared to leave.

"Leader, I'll help you tidy up the refining platform," she said with concern, seeing that his workstation was a mess.

"Thanks." He accepted. He wondered what Yu Lang would say if he knew how kind-hearted and demure this girl was. His eyes would probably get as round as a rabbit's.



Too bad he was enjoying none of Bai Mengmeng's kindness. Instead, he lived daily under Bai Doudou's iron fist.

As Li Luo relished the mental image, Bai Mengmeng finished up the cleaning. She took his failed refining product and was about to throw it down with the wastewater.

But as the viscous liquid flowed to the edge, a pungent odor filled her nostrils.

Any ordinary person would probably have done everything in their power to avoid it, but Bai Mengmeng stared at it. She hesitated, then brought the crystal vial up and pressed it against her lips.

Pa!

The crystal vial slipped out of her hand, shattering on the refining platform.

Li Luo paused, the refining workshop door half-open. He turned back hurriedly, looking at her with alarm. Her eyes were quivering, as though she were about to cry.

There was a smear of dark-green liquid on her lip.

The failed product he had made just now.

He almost fell over with fright. Was this girl's brain addled? Who on earth would drink failed chemical experiments? Who do you think you are?!

What do you think is going to happen to me if Bai Doudou finds out about this?!

He hurried back over. "Are you alright?" he asked urgently.

He took a clean handkerchief, ready to press it against her mouth.

She ducked away, darting towards the table. Desperately, she tried to scoop up the remaining liquid. Frantically, she pawed among the glass shards on the table, oblivious to the blood running down her hands.

Li Luo hurriedly grabbed her hand. "Bai Mengmeng, are you crazy?!"

He was really worried now. She didn't seem normal at all.

She struggled ineffectually against his grip. "It- it's bitter! Bitter!"

"Bitter?"

Li Luo glanced at the spilled liquid and hesitated. He reached out a finger and dabbed it cautiously into the liquid, then transferred a drop into his mouth. Immediately after, his entire face scrunched up. It felt like the taste of a beast's liver had just exploded in his mouth.

"Eurgh!"

He dry-retched a few times. "Disgusting! What are you talking about?"

She reached out a slim finger and dipped it into the dark green liquid, then brought it trembling to her mouth. Not only did she not retch, but instead she flushed, overcome by emotion.

"It's bitter! This... taste. It's been so many years, but I remember!" Bai Mengmeng stared at Li Luo, eyes wide and beseeching.

Right. Bai Mengmeng had lost her sense of taste, right? Then how would she know that this liquid was bitter?

Which meant...

He turned back to the dark-green liquid.

This nonsense he had cooked up—had it awakened her sense of taste?

Could there really be such a miracle?

Li Luo had no idea what to think.

### **Chapter 0157: Bai Mengmeng's Request**

In the refining workshop.

Li Luo and Bai Mengmeng's hands were still clasped as they stared at each other. Disbelief against desperation.

"This thing... makes you taste bitterness?"

She nodded so vigorously that she looked like she was in danger of getting whiplash.

He felt like the taste was the height of nausea, but for Bai Mengmeng, who had tasted nothing for many years, it was a delicacy.

If Li Luo hadn't stopped her, she would probably have licked the entire table clean!

"Hey, calm down. Get a hold of yourself!" he said nervously, seeing a fervor in her eyes that bordered on madness.

He cast around and found some fruit on the table, which he handed over to her.

"Here, try this."

She took a big and eager bite, then she shook her head in disappointment. "Nothing."

It seemed like his failed mixture had allowed her to taste bitterness temporarily, but not enough to heal her taste loss entirely.

"That's not very useful, then," he said glumly. As if some random mess could have healed her.

"No, Leader, it's very useful!" she said in a high-pitched voice.

"You let me taste bitterness for a moment," she said tearfully. "Maybe something in your failed product can stimulate my sense of taste!"

"If we can find it, I might be cured!"

"Leader, please, I'm begging you! Please help me!"

She clutched his clothing desperately, her usual shyness completely gone as her voice rose steadily in both pitch and volume.

Li Luo felt a little embarrassed to see Bai Mengmeng of all people throwing herself at him. He tried to speak, but he was interrupted by the door opening. A shadow filled the doorway, and Xin Fu's face popped in.

Li Luo and Bai Mengmeng were practically intertwined.

A long silence.

"Sorry, I thought I heard voices, so I came to check it out. I checked nothing out. Carry on," Xin Fu mumbled, then he shut the door behind him.

He leaned against the door on the other side, breathing heavily. "They wouldn't kill me to keep the secret, right?"

"Leader's unbelievable. Making a move on Bai Mengmeng already?"

"I wonder if Senior Qing'e knows? Or perhaps she agreed to this? Leader's already gotten her under his belt?"

"Damn, truly a paragon, this leader," Xin Fu thought to himself. He helpfully locked the door behind him as he left.

"He wouldn't have misunderstood, would he?"

Li Luo wondered aloud after the door slammed. Xin Fu had looked at him as though he were a beast. It was an uncomfortable feeling.

Bai Mengmeng did not care. "Leader, please!"

Li Luo pried her off him. "It's not that I don't want to help you," he said, straightening his clothes with some irritation. "But I don't know how I made it either. How am I going to cure you?"

"It might have been sheer luck, but there must be a way to replicate it. If we try, we might succeed!"

Li Luo was a little doubtful. Did she know how much work the experimentation would be?

"Leader, if you can cure me of my taste loss, I'll... You can have my body for four years!" she burst out, desperate as she also knew the improbability of what she was asking.

Li Luo stared at her in horror.

Bai Mengmeng recovered a little, flushing. "No, I mean, I'll give my four years of research of spirit liquid formulas to you! Leader, I can see that you're interested in them!"

Li Luo felt his heart start beating again. In fact, this was a much more exciting proposition than the former. The little girl had shrewdly gone to the heart of his interests. There was clearly a good brain working in that dainty little skull.

Given her unique research methods, four years of results would be worth a gigantic fortune. It might even be more than the Suncreek Villa's entire net worth.

"Silly girl, don't you know how much you're worth?" he said with a dry chuckle.

Her doe-like eyes were clear. "I do," she said seriously. "But... I really want to experience flavors again. I don't want to be eating candle-wax everyday. Leader, you've never lost your sense of taste, so you don't know how horrible it is. You don't know how sweet that repulsive bitterness was for me."

He looked at her imploring eyes. Perhaps it was as she had said. Those that had never experienced such things before wouldn't be able to understand the misery.

"Mengmeng, you're correct. I do need high-grade spirit liquid formulas. I find it hard to refuse your trade. But," he said sternly, "there's no need to sell your body to me. The greed of Li Luo is not without its boundaries."

"I'll do my best to see if I can help you regain your sense of taste. If I succeed, I just ask that you can sell any high-grade formulas to me with priority."

"In terms of price, I'll match the market rate. Although, given House Luolan's situation, I can't cough up that much immediately. I'll take it out of the proceeds each year. I think in the long term, it's a fair price."

"Really? Leader, will you really help me?" She jumped up and down, ecstatic and grateful.

"I feel like you've listened to exactly none of my conditions," Li Luo said pointedly.

"Yes! Yay! I agree completely, Leader! I'll do anything you say!" she babbled.

Er. Still, he understood that she was a little overwhelmed, so he kindly passed over it. "In that case, let's analyze the leftover product. See if we can identify the ingredients and the changes."

He collected the remaining liquid on the table, and the two bent over it for examination.

Immersed, hours passed before they realized it.

In the end, they had managed to ascertain the ingredients, which were not particularly rare, nor did they have any curious properties. They had no clue as to how it had stimulated her senses.

"Let's leave it here for now. We'll come back to it," Li Luo suggested.

Her heavily fatigued eyes still looked at the liquid longingly, but she felt bad making Li Luo accompany her like this. She nodded.

Creak.

The door to the refining workshop opened again, and this time it was Chi Chan who walked in. She eyed the two of them suspiciously. "Were you two planning to spend the night here?"

She jiggled the chain on the door. "It was very well locked. What exactly were you two up to?" Bai Mengmeng blushed and ran away.

Li Luo swore. "That Xin Fu!"

He turned to Chi Chan with his most sincere face. "Mentor, we didn't do anything!"

She leaned against the door, a hint of amusement in her eyes. "Trying to dazzle the girl, Li Luo? I've underestimated you."

"I'm INNOCENT!" Li Luo wailed angrily.

### **Chapter 0158: A Tough Life**

The next morning.

When Li Luo went down to the second floor, he saw Xin Fu again engrossed in his painting. Remembering how he had locked the door on them, Li Luo stalked over, glowering.

This guy. He looked like a bored guy, or actually, a bad guy.

He was just about to drop an impassioned sermon when he was distracted by the canvas. It was no longer chickens being drawn. Today, it was the refining workshop.

There were two people roughly brushed in. Li Luo stared at it.

"Leader," Xin Fu called out proudly, "how's my drawing? I was inspired by you and Mengmeng in the refining workshop yesterday. I call it 'Taking Root.'"

Li Luo could not believe his eyes. "Damn, locking the door yesterday wasn't enough? You had to draw it as well?!"

"Taking Root?! I'll pull your teeth out by the roots!"

"And those two wispy brushstrokes are supposed to be me and Bai Mengmeng?"

"Who the hell could tell?!"

In any case, Li Luo felt that it would be best to nip this problem in the bud as soon as possible. He clapped Xin Fu on the shoulder with a bit more force than necessary. "Look here, Xin Fu. It looks like I'll have to get in a good sparring session with you over the refining workshop affair."

Xin Fu faltered for only a moment. "Well, if Leader is inviting me to spar, I don't dare to refuse."

"But."

"I'm the kind of guy who babbles nonsense when I'm beaten up. I'm afraid I might just run off to Bai Doudou and tell her that you and Bai Mengmeng spent the night in the refining workshop."

Li Luo's eyes widened. He pointed at Xin Fu with a trembling finger, his mouth opening and closing soundlessly. This morose, little man seemed unremarkable, but he sure had a mean streak hidden deep down.

Although he hadn't actually spent the night with Bai Mengmeng in the refining workshop, they had spent a considerable amount of time alone. If Bai Doudou learned about it, she would definitely get agitated enough to knock his head off his neck before she calmed down enough to start asking questions.

Xin Fu, straight to the nerve. No wonder this guy was built to be an assassin.

Still, Li Luo wasn't about to back down. "Well," he said slowly, "I guess I'll have Mengmeng make you all three meals a day from now on."

The brush froze mid-stroke, pooling black ink on the same spot. Xin Fu stared at Li Luo in dismay, aghast at his vicious imagination.

"Alright, Leader, you win.

"I'll erase this painting!"

Li Luo patted him on the back with a satisfied smile. "Well, get on it later. Breakfast."

The two of them descended the stairs to see Bai Mengmeng busying around. She flitted around like a graceful butterfly, a real joy to look at.

The pair sighed and sat at the table with an air of resignation.

Dimpling at them, Bai Mengmeng set out two breakfast plates that were clearly not made by her. The two looked at her in surprise.

"I bought these from the canteen," she explained.

"I... I don't really know what my food tastes like, so... I feel like... you might not like it," she said hesitantly.

Both guys felt a little guilty seeing her abase herself, and immediately shook their heads. "Oh, we like it very much!"

"Really?" Her face lit back up.

The two guys smiled and nodded.

Very soon after, they were not smiling anymore. Bai Mengmeng had rushed back from the kitchen with two more servings of her cooking. "Well, since you like it, it's a good thing I also made some."

Li Luo and Xin Fu stared yearningly at the replaced breakfasts. Why couldn't they have kept their fat mouths shut?

Their hellish mornings looked like they were on the verge of ending. Why did they have to bring it back?

"What a disaster of astronomical proportions," Xin Fu muttered under his breath.

It was unclear who exactly he was blaming.

Li Luo shook his head. Life was tough, but he hadn't expected it to be this tough.

The two lowered their heads and ate.

They hadn't made much headway into their meal when a knocking interrupted the gloomy atmosphere.

Bai Mengmeng went to open the door. Li Luo looked up when he heard her exclaim, and he was surprised to see that it was Yu Lang and Lu Qing'er.

Yu Lang's smile was as bright as the sun when Bai Mengmeng opened the door. Lu Qing'er's smile was a little more reserved as she looked at the cute little girl.

"Best of mornings to you. I'm Yu Lang, a brother so close to Li Luo that we're practically the same person." He stretched out a hand as he introduced himself.

"I'm Lu Qing'er. We're both friends of Li Luo here to see him." Lu Qing'er also stretched out a gloved hand.

Bai Mengmeng seized Lu Qing'er's hand. "Sister Qing'er's hand is beautiful."

Lu Qing'er's eyes softened. Bai Mengmeng was just too adorable. No wonder few guys could resist her charm. nOVe(lb-In

"Mengmeng, I'm here too," Yu Lang said, wriggling his own hand expectantly to catch her attention.

Bai Mengmeng glanced furtively up at him. "I know you," she said meekly. "Sis told me not to have any contact with you, or I'll catch a foul disease."

Yu Lang's hand withered. "Bai Doudou, how dare you slander me like this!"

"Come in, guys," Li Luo said from behind. Bai Mengmeng ushered them in.

They saw Li Luo and Xin Fu at the breakfast table, and Yu Lang immediately let out a strangled cry. "Could that have been made by Mengmeng?!" Both guys nodded.

Yu Lang's jealousy shot through the roof. In a flash, he planted his ass right beside Li Luo. "I want to taste Mengmeng's breakfast too!" he cried.

He took a bite.

The chirping birds outside were silent for a moment.

Gulp.

Yu Lang's enthusiasm was evaporating very quickly. He swallowed with great difficulty and then carefully set the utensils down. "Hehe, I almost forgot. Actually, I ate breakfast before I came. Hehe," he said to Li Luo.

"No matter," Li Luo said casually. "It's only two breakfasts, your stomach will be fine."

He noted the despair in Yu Lang's eyes. Chase Bai Mengmeng? Who was the one who said he could eat three big bowls of shit?!

Oh, hubris.

Luckily he didn't spit out that mouthful, or Bai Doudou would've pulverized the shit out of him.

Yu Lang threw Li Luo a defeated look. "Well, it's a pity because Qing'er went to buy breakfast for you as well. But you already ate."

Li Luo looked over to see food in Lu Qing'er's hands.

Lu Qing'er's faint smile was still in place. "No matter. How can my canteen breakfast compare to Mengmeng's handiwork?"

"If no one eats it, I'll just throw it into the lake to feed the fishes."

Li Luo spotted the danger signs. She had bought it specially for him after all. It would be too churlish not to accept it.

He smiled. "No worries, I have a big appetite. Give it here, I'll finish it all."

"Really?" Lu Qing'er's smile was a little more genuine now.

He smiled and nodded, taking the packet and eating.

"Leader, you're really blessed. People are buying you breakfast every day." Xin Fu said quietly.

Li Luo grimaced. "Little brother, could you stop creating trouble for me for just one moment!?"

"Is this your rebellious phase?!"

### **Chapter 0159: The Squads Train**

"Oh? Who else is delivering breakfast to Li Luo?"

Xin Fu's words had caught Lu Qing'er's interest, and her very sweet smile was suddenly back.

"Senior Qing'e," Xin Fu answered gravely.

Lu Qing'er's eyelids flickered. "Senior Qing'e and Li Luo have a special relationship. There's nothing odd about her buying him breakfast."

She turned her smile to Xin Fu. "Xin Fu, you're really special as well. I'm sure many girls are lining up to buy you breakfast."

Xin Fu squirmed a little under his hood. Lu Qing'er was actually the second girl to talk to him since he had entered the Astral Sage College, besides Bai Mengmeng.

Also, her kind words somehow seemed to cut a different way.

He snuck a look at Li Luo. Was this some sort of counterattack against the leader? Had he ended up burning himself with the hint he had dropped?

Something felt off. *nOVe(lb)-ln*

By right, the leader should be the one in trouble now. A girl as wonderful as Lu Qing'er should be feeling jealous, right?

But... she was attacking him together with the leader?

Was Lu Qing'er's brain too big for him? Or were the leader's moves too high-level?

In any case, Xin Fu felt like he had lost somehow. His respect for Li Luo increased further. "Sir, you truly are a role model of our generation."



Li Luo snickered to himself at Xin Fu's confusion. "You bad boy, trying to trip me up? Right back at you, kid."

Feeling good, he shot an appreciative glance Lu Qing'er's way.

She replied with a cool look, eyebrows raised as if in challenge. There was something off about it.

Li Luo gave up. This girl was hard to understand. He bent over and focused on his food.

"Oh," Yu Lang said as they ate. "Mentor Mi Er and Mentor Chi Chan plan for our squads to fight a practice match today."

Li Luo and Xin Fu looked up in surprise. "Our teams?"

Mentor Mi Er's team was Bai Doudou, Qiu Luo, and Yu Lang.

"I heard Mentor Chi Chan mention it yesterday. She said that the sparring training will help us understand each other, and help each other improve," Bai Mengmeng offered helpfully.

Li Luo nodded. "I guess I'm matched against Yu Lang."

"No fair!" Yu Lang shouted. "You're picking on the shortest straw here! I'm going to fight Bai Mengmeng today. I want her to beat her tiny fists against my chest."

"Leader, you had best take on my sister." Bai Mengmeng smiled at him.

"Bai Doudou is their leader, and you're our leader. You wouldn't put us up against her, right?" Xin Fu rolled his eyes at Li Luo.

Li Luo felt sweat start to prickle on his brow. Bai Doudou was no easy target. He was going to have to go all out against her.

"How strong is Bai Doudou now?" he asked.

Yu Lang answered candidly, "She's already at the Pattern Genesis Tier, the second tier of the Resonant Master Stage. Should be a First Pattern."

"Ah, second tier..." Li Luo sighed. Still, it was to be expected. He himself was only a Lower Clear during the Choosing of the Mentors. In less than a month, he was already a Lower Flowering. Although the resonant luminescence had helped, his progress had been swift.

Bai Doudou was an Upper Flowering during the Choosing. It stood to reason that she had progressed to the second tier.

The Upper Flowering Tier and the Pattern Genesis Tier were only one level apart, but it was a marked difference. The Pattern Genesis Tier meant that the resonance seed had hit a certain milestone of completion in which the resonant power was strong enough to manifest on the surface of the seed.

The Pattern Genesis Tier had five different ranks. Each was a new resonance pattern on the resonance seed, which was why it was also called the Five Pattern Tier.

It seemed like he would have to pay attention in the fight against Bai Doudou. If he was thrashed, his dignity as leader would suffer.

After breakfast was over, Li Luo brought Lu Qing'er and Yu Lang around on a tour of the premises.

He intended to skip the second floor, but the two caught sight of Xin Fu's painting.

"Li Luo, you bastard!" Yu Lang yelled immediately. "What were you doing with Mengmeng here?!"

Lu Qing'er was looking unfriendly as well. "A man and woman alone in a room, and you even left a memento? Charming. Young Lord, I never knew you were such a romantic."

Li Luo was speechless. How the hell could you tell it was him and Bai Mengmeng? It was just two wispy brush strokes!

"Xin Fu just casually drew this. What on earth are y'all seeing in it?" he protested.

Yu Lang pointed at the wispy line. "That." His finger jabbed pointedly with each word. "Is. The. Two. Of. You. He might as well have spelled your names out on it, for goodness' sake. How on earth could I not see it?!"

Lu Qing'er folded her arms and stared at him scathingly.

Li Luo suddenly felt tired. Could there be something wrong with his aesthetic sense? It still looked like a scraggly stroke to him. How on earth could they see it so clearly?

Something was wrong with the world.

Xin Fu mysteriously appeared by his side. "Leader, when one person accuses you, they might be the problem. But when everyone is accusing you, you might be the problem!"

Li Luo was seized by a sudden urge to strangle Xin Fu with his hood. He shook his head and stomped off, finishing the tour in a bothered state of mind.

Next up was the squad battles, and so Yu Lang was staying. Lu Qing'er was returning to her training, however, and she left with irritation obvious in her mood.

Leaving the building, Lu Qing'er took the path by the lake. The morning mist had yet to lift, and the misty lake was quite a magical sight.

Her thin outer wrap and short skirt brought out the best of her charms, and the mist gently cloaked her.

Many students stopped to stare at the mysterious beauty.

But she was not interested in them. She picked up a branch and absently tore the leaves off one by one. The feelings of a young girl were complex indeed.

Soon enough, the branch was bare, and she sighed to herself. She tossed it aside, preparing to head back. She turned around and felt a jolt of surprise run through her.

She saw two people on the path in front of her, looking at her.

She knew them well—Jiang Qing'e and Yan Lingqing.

Lu Qing'er's eyes met Jiang Qing'e's. In that moment, a spark of tension sizzled. She hesitated, then turned to meet them, approaching with a steady smile.

"Senior Qing'e."

### **Chapter 0160: The Girls Face Off**

The morning mist lingered, honey-gold rays bathing the lake with a warm light.

Three beautiful women stood by the lake, looking like angels in the fantasy-like lighting.

Yan Lingqing regarded the approaching Lu Qing'er with faint interest. This girl had clearly been interested in Li Luo since their time together in the Tianshu Province.

Still, it was not unexpected. Considering what Li Luo brought to the table, it would be stranger if girls were uninterested in him.

This Lu Qing'er was something special. She had not backed down upon seeing Jiang Qing'e, instead coming up to them. It spoke of inner pride and self-confidence.

Enough to consider herself worthy of taking on Jiang Qing'e and the legacy she had.

Besides, Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo were engaged. If Lu Qing'er had feelings for him, she should be feeling guilty right about now, so coming up to them was a surprising move indeed.

Yan Lingqing could feel a slight stirring of excitement. Another entertaining show was about to begin.

"Qing'er, were you at Li Luo's?" Jiang Qing'e asked neutrally.

Lu Qing'er inclined her head. This meeting was no coincidence. Jiang Qing'e might have seen her and Yu Lang headed for Li Luo's earlier.

"We went to meet Li Luo and his squad," she replied.

"You don't look too happy," Jiang Qing'e said with a faint smile. "Is that because Li Luo is as responsive as a fish carved out of wood? It's very normal. He's still young, and you two have been close for a while. If the topic isn't breached directly, I'm afraid he won't make the leap to realize that you have romantic feelings for him."

Yan Lingqing's eyebrows shot up. Jiang Qing'e's opening move was insanely daring, cutting straight to the heart of the matter.

A lower-born opponent might have fainted from that statement.

Lu Qing'er was indeed a little ruffled, but she still looked like she was in control. She gave a small nod of confirmation. It looked like she indeed had the mettle to take on a queen.

"What are you trying to say, Senior Qing'e?" Lu Qing'er asked slowly.

Jiang Qing'e's golden eyes regarded Lu Qing'er in turn. "I think it was you who had something to say?"

Lu Qing'er shook her head. "I don't, really. If Senior Qing'e is trying to tell me to back down because you are engaged to Li Luo, then I'm sorry to say that I can't oblige."

Yan Lingqing's fingers curled in anticipation. Lu Qing'er was even better than she had expected. A counter attack against the wife-to-be?

Hoo!

"Oh? Why is that?" Jiang Qing'e asked, interest piqued.

Lu Qing'er fearlessly looked into her golden eyes. "Because your engagement is a loveless one. Perhaps Senior Qing'e knows best just how much of it was born of gratitude to Li Luo's parents.

"I'm not saying that you have no feelings for Li Luo. Conversely, perhaps he holds an important place in your heart. A place more important than romance.

"You are not blood-related, and yet maybe you think of him as an irreplaceable part of your family. For him, you would do anything. Perhaps even more so than I."

Lu Qing'er paused. "But... that is not what marriage is about. Senior Qing'e, you like Li Luo. But you also do not like Li Luo. At least not right now."

Masterful!

Yan Lingqing whooped inwardly. This Lu Qing'er was no slouch, delivering an incisive emotional riposte straight to Jiang Qing'e's heart. As Jiang Qing'e's best friend, she knew best that Jiang Qing'e valued Li Luo more than her own life. But... she had yet to really be romantically moved.

This was not Jiang Qing'e's fault. And perhaps she had never taken romantic relationships seriously.

After all, what more could even be done to strengthen the bond between her and Li Luo?

Still, emotions were complicated, and it was clear that Jiang Qing'e had not fully sorted out the complexities of her relationship with Li Luo.

Jiang Qing'e's eyes widened at Lu Qing'er's words. "And so?" she said mildly.

"And so you should take the lead and annul the engagement, if you truly care about Li Luo."

"That seems very ideal for you. I'll annul the engagement, which gives you free rein to pursue him openly?"

Lu Qing'er did not deny it. "That is the best outcome for Li Luo."

Jiang Qing'e inclined her head. "Well, from a certain perspective, what you say makes sense."

Lu Qing'er's eyes widened with a cautious delight. Had Jiang Qing'e really been swayed?

It was quickly quelled. "Canceling the engagement is impossible..." Jiang Qing'e said, bringing down a metaphorical bucket of cold water over Lu Qing'er's head.

"The marriage was approved by the House Lords, my mentors. Rest assured that no matter how complicated the feelings between Li Luo and I, this engagement will not change."

Lu Qing'er clenched her fists. "Senior Qing'e, you're being selfish!" she burst out. "You don't care about Li Luo's feelings at all! What if... what if he really likes someone else in the future? Will you rather he be sad? For you?"

Yan Lingqing nodded. It was a valid question.

What's your reply, Jiang Qing'e?

Jiang Qing'e cocked her head slightly, then broke into a smile. "You wouldn't be talking about yourself, would you? Are you that confident?"

Lu Qing'er flushed, but she met her eyes. "Can't I be?"

"Well, it's not that you can't..."

Jiang Qing'e leaned against a stone railing, tilting her chin up in a queenly manner. "...but House Luolan is a big place. I don't mind another woman in the house."

Not only Lu Qing'er, even Yan Lingqing was speechless at that.

Jiang Qing'e, have you lost your mind?!

Lu Qing'er reeled for a good while. "Jiang Qing'e," she whispered in an almost mortified tone. "Wh-what are you saying!?"

"Must I really spell it out? If you're that capable, I really don't mind," Jiang Qing'e said mildly.

"But I do mind!" Lu Qing'er cried in her heart. Jiang Qing'e had pitched a real curveball. It had blown all of her prepared thoughts away.

But she backed down, shaking her head as she turned and fled.

Thoroughly intimidated.

"A little too forward, don't you think?" Yan Lingqing said, watching the fleeing Lu Qing'er.

Jiang Qing'e did not reply.

"You... weren't for real, right?" Yan Lingqing asked carefully.

"You think?"

"I don't know..." Yan Lingqing shook her head. "But if you were for real, all I can say is-"

"-to include you as well?" Jiang Qing'e teased.

Yan Lingqing punched her in outrage. "Do you want to die?!" She turned serious. "Jiang Qing'e, your attitude just now was not that of a girl talking about her fiancé. Rather... It was like an older sister choosing a bride for her younger brother.

"Li Luo... might not like that. Jiang Qing'e, I know that your feelings for Li Luo are complex, perhaps so much so that no one besides you can understand them. But I think that if you keep this up... a time might come when you will regret it."

Jiang Qing'e remained silent for a long while.

"Are we still going to Li Luo's place for a meal?" Yan Lingqing broke the silence eventually.

Jiang Qing'e carelessly pressed down against a stone on the railing, crushing it to powder.

She turned and started walking away.

"We are not. I'm afraid I might treat his head like that stone if I see him now."