

PROTEGE 276

Chapter 276: VESSEL REVERSAL: A MIRROR STRIKE

Ling Li stood amid the cracked courtyard stones, wind ghosting past her ceremonial robes. Moonlight glimmered faintly on the shards of broken talismans. Pharsa, visibly drained, leaned against Chatty as they turned away, robes trailing, steps slow but steady.

"You two, go back to your wedding chamber," Ling Li said softly. Her voice now held warmth, not command — the kind used to protect without hovering.

Pharsa managed a faint nod, her lips pale, eyes heavy with spent power. Chatty wrapped his arm more tightly around her waist and led her away in reverent silence.

"Make sure to do the deed tonight," Ling Li added.

Pharsa "...."

'Are you truly my sister? Do you not tell the extent of my exhaustion?' Pharsa mulled in dismay. Nevertheless, her ears are noticeably red.

Chatty's face darkened, as deep as ink. 'We already did, but it was disrupted,' he angrily thought. His desire to skin Enchanted Dale alive was strong. He even sent the Enfield to Rockie so it wouldn't disturb them tonight. 'Now, my wife is too tired after fighting... I'm so pitiful.' Chatty desperately wanted to cry, but no tears came.

"...."

Ling Li turned then, eyes narrowing as she watched the pale elemental mist still coiling through the garden, not dissipating, but lingering.

"Shinsei," she said, voice quieter now, laced with contemplation. "Pharsa unleashed a very powerful move tonight — something none of us expected."

The monk gave his long white beard a thoughtful stroke, gaze fixed on the ground where Enchanted Dale's etheric presence had once stood.

"I noticed," Shinsei murmured. "But that move... that wasn't learned. It wasn't taught. It was awakened."

Ling Li turned her face fully toward him, her mind racing.

"You mean... inherited."

Shinsei nodded solemnly. "Yes. What erupted from her wasn't cultivated — it came from a bloodline capable of merging elemental law with spiritual inversion. That kind of power doesn't just knock a man down... it unmakes his tether to reality."

Ling Li shivered slightly, remembering the moment — how Enchanted Dale had choked, not just on magic, but on a force he couldn't comprehend.

She looked toward the night sky.

"Pharsa's bloodline... It's not simple."

Shinsei met her gaze. "No. It's ancient. Forbidden in some sects. Revered in others."

His voice deepened. "What she cast tonight... was called Vessel Reversal. A type of energy pulse that doesn't merely attack — it turns the invoker's spiritual claim inside out. It's one thing to resist dark magic. It's another to use their own binding threads to unravel the sorcerer's essence."

Ling Li's eyes widened.

"A mirror strike..."

"Exactly. Only those born of dual elemental fusion and blessed astral lineage can cast it — and only once unless properly trained." Shinsei's gaze grew distant. "It's not just a gift. It's a warning sign. Pharsa is not only the prey in this story; she's also the predator. She may be its *fulcrum."

Ling Li's jaw clenched.

"Could it be... they placed her at your temple not to protect her, but to delay her awakening?"

Shinsei paused, silent for a long moment.

Then:

"Hm. Now that you mention it... It's possible."

The wind stirred again.

Ling Li stood with her arms folded across her chest, staring out at the moon-streaked garden, where the remnants of a magical collision still shimmered faintly in the air.

Shinsei's words hung heavy between them.

She turned back to face him.

"Sealed inheritance... awakened by proximity to corrupted convergence," Ling Li murmured. "A bloodline dormant for decades, now alive and exposed."

Shinsei gave a slow nod, his fingers stroking his beard again, eyes distant and burning with ancestral memory.

"Her parents must have sealed it," he repeated quietly. "But with Enchanted Dale's intrusion tonight — his ritual pull, his volatile intent — it must have triggered a deep resonance. That kind of power doesn't awaken softly. It surges."

Ling Li exhaled slowly, remembering how Pharsa had stood — spirit lit from within, energy erupting like ocean thunder, casting not only Enchanted Dale back but unbinding parts of reality itself.

"This power," Shinsei continued, "is not an art that others study. It's a blessing born of fusion... of celestial and elemental bloodlines. It allows her to invert spiritual claims — to mirror them and sever the caster's tether.

And that, Ling Li, is why it must remain hidden."

Ling Li's expression hardened.

"If word of it leaks, sects will scramble. Some will want to wield her, while others will want to destroy her. Every scholar will argue lineage. Every elder will offer 'protection.' But none will honor her choice."

Shinsei nodded grimly.

"To them, Pharsa will become an artifact, not a soul."

A gust of wind rustled the broken prayer flags above the courtyard. From the shadows of the upper walkway, Kim Kim and Chin Chin peeked again, wide-eyed, their eyes fixed, ears pressed forward to catch every word. They sensed tension too layered for their youth to unravel — but felt, instinctively, that Pharsa was more than kin now. She was a legacy.

Ling Li looked to the stars.

"We'll keep Pharsa safe," she said, voice like tempered steel. "And when the time is right... We'll help her reclaim it not as a burden, but as a birthright."

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Enchanted Dale: Backlash and Revelation

The chamber stank of scorched ash and betrayal.

Enchanted Dale lay sprawled across the shattered floor, blood smearing the runes beneath him as fractured soul chains spasmed like severed nerves. His breathing was shallow, erratic — each inhale a dagger, each exhale a curse. He had never felt recoil like this. Pharsa's sealing had ruptured not just his tether, but the core sigil that sustained his spiritual binding.

His fingertips twitched violently. The dagger in his grip was cracked — the firestone dulled. He coughed once, then again — a harsh, wet sound that stained his lips crimson with blood.

"You weren't supposed to have that power," he muttered, voice unraveling.

Flames guttered low around him, refusing to respond to his command. The mirror, once vibrant with scrying light, had dulled to obsidian. But Enchanted Dale wasn't done.

Gritting his teeth, he dragged himself across the fractured circle, his aura flickering like a dying star. Reaching the base of the scrying altar, he pressed his bloody palm against the polished onyx mirror.

"Show me what's hidden," he hissed.

The mirror hesitated — then shimmered.

Faint silhouettes swirled forth: rooms, robes, rituals. The Li estate, serene again under moonlight. And then, shadows of two small figures peeking behind ceremonial curtains — wide eyes glimmering, breath caught in awe.

----- *Fulcrum - means The Backbone —the Core, or the Foundation. -----

Chapter 277: ENCHANTED DALE: NEW TARGET, NEW PLANS

Twin souls.

One clutched a slingshot as if it were a talisman. The other stared unblinking, as though instinctively reading fate. Their auras pulsed in the mirror — not loudly, not fully formed.

But there was something unmistakable about them. Something ancient.

They weren't just curious children.

They weren't ordinary.

Enchanted Dale leaned in, eyes narrowing against pain.

"Dragons," he breathed, voice raw. Then, louder — a reverent whisper laced with amusement:

"They have two dragons. Ha ha ha ha!"

He grinned — a twisted thing cracking across his bloodied face.

Despite the pain, despite his broken tools and ruptured tether, he began to laugh.

"Pharsa wasn't the only vessel," Enchanted Dale whispered. "The stars have been busy."

Then, with a rasping breath, he reached for fresh parchment.

And began to write.

Enchanted Dale: New Targets, New Plans

The ritual chamber was dim and sweltering, lit only by oil lamps and the sickly glow of fractured wards stitched hastily into the cracked walls. Enchanted Dale sat in a jagged circle of bloodstone runes, his body still scorched and twitching from the backlash Pharsa had unleashed. But his smile — crooked, bruised, defiant — never faded.

His scrying mirror shimmered again, weaker than before, showing flashes of the Li Estate: silver-robed guardians repairing protective seals... monks chanting under lunar threads... and then, in perfect clarity—

Two little girls.

Kim Kim, balancing a crystal shard on her slingshot. Chin Chin, drawing protective circles in the dirt while whispering incantations she only half understood.

Their auras shimmered in the mirror — uneven, unstable. But Enchanted Dale saw through the veil. They were awakening.

He leaned close, blood dripping from his temple, and whispered:

"Not just dragons. Twin vessels. Undivided essence. They don't even know what sleeps inside them."

His breath caught, half a wheeze, half a laugh.

He picked up a cracked bone quill and began to write, not in any language spoken, but in sigil-script used to mark chosen prey.

"Forget convergence," he muttered. "I will forge ascension through fusion.

If I cannot harvest power from the sealed... I will claim it from what is pure."

A twisted wind surged through the chamber as his corrupted aura began to reconstruct — not stable, not whole, but sharpened by obsession. Enchanted Dale called forth black butterflies, carriers of cursed omens, and released them into the night.

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Li Estate: Ling Li Feels the Shift

Ling Li returned to her room to find Four Eyes, whom she had given a medical bath, and asked him to stay for two hours. This is for him to recover from having his strength taken away and then restored all of a sudden, causing his internal energy to become chaotic.

Thus, he wasn't present during the ritual and wasn't aware of his twins' mischiefs.

"Are you done?" She asked.

"Yes, I just finished," Four Eyes replied, drying his hair with a towel.

"Alright, let me shower too," She said.

Later that night, Ling Li sat with her eyes closed, palms raised, absorbing the last whispers of elemental wind. Her immortal senses stretched far beyond stone walls — into rivers, into starlight, into echoes not yet spoken.

Then, Ling Li felt it.

A thread of spiritual focus is bending unnaturally.

Her daughters were no longer hidden. They were watched.

Ling Li opened her eyes sharply.

The protective sigils over Kim Kim and Chin Chin's sleeping quarters flared without her touch — a warning.

Ling Li vanished in a breath and reappeared beside the twins' door.

Four Eyes, startled, followed closely.

Inside, the twins slept peacefully, curled beside each other. But the air around them shimmered with residue — faint, like fingers brushing through silk.

Enchanted Dales had seen them.

Ling Li stepped into the room, her presence instantly waking Kim Kim."

"Mom."

Ling Li knelt beside her, voice low and fierce." "Tonight, someone watched you through mirrors no child should ever reflect in. I don't blame you for watching the rituals, but I didn't expect that you would be discovered."

Chin Chin stirred. Kim Kim clutched her crystal shard tighter." You're not ordinary," Ling Li whispered. "And it's time I start teaching you as if you were"

The twins didn't fully understand — but they recognized the power behind the words.

Ling Li stood and raised her hand.

She summoned a protective veil made of Phoenix silk and Spirit Ink, shielding their room from cursed gazes. Her aura flared — so sharp and vast, it made the stone beneath her feet tremble.

From the shadows, Shinsei entered, silently watching." He's shifted targets," he said.

Ling didn't look back. "Then let him. But if he thinks he can touch what I bore into this world," she said, voice laced with immortal thunder, "I will unravel him down to his forgotten birthmark."

"Ling, you mean our twins have been targeted, too?" Four Eyes nervously asked.

"Don't worry, I got this," Ling Li said and continued to chant with Shinsei.

Four Eyes felt so helpless that he couldn't do anything to help protect his twins.

Outside, the wind flared, scattering Dale's cursed butterflies before they reached the gates. They were all destroyed by Ling Li and Shinsei's chanting.

Sacred Beginnings: The Training of the Twin Dragons

Early the next day, at the edge of the eastern grove, bathed in the soft haze of pre-dawn mist, Ling Li stood atop the ritual stone platform, her robes cinched with obsidian cords, sleeves embroidered with guardian sigils. Her hair flowed behind her like ink in water, and her presence sparked a quiet stillness in the air, commanding reverence and attention.

The grove had been consecrated at midnight. Shinsei had layered the earth with moonflower salt and drawn a triple-ring protection seal at the perimeter. In its center, Ling Li's daughters — Kim Kim and Chin Chin — knelt with widened eyes, dressed in pale training tunics stitched by Madam Li.

Four Eyes, still bleary-eyed from dawn preparation, stood nearby holding twin practice blades no longer than his forearm. His aura flickered faintly beneath his worn collar — subtle, but no less formidable.

Ling Li turned toward the girls. Her gaze was solemn.

"You are not children in this rite. You are carriers of legacy. What sleeps inside you must be awakened carefully, with discipline and grace — or it will awaken chaotically, and consume you."

Kim Kim nodded, gripping the slingshot she had woven with phoenix string and jade beads. Chin Chin squinted at her blade's reflection.

----- *Sigil means a seal. -----

Chapter 278: TWINS' SPLIT POTENTIALS

Shinsei stepped forward and spoke in a low, even tone.

"We will begin with elemental sense. Wind and fire. Then barrier manipulation."

He placed a crystal orb between the twins. It pulsed faintly, attuned to their aura.

"Breathe," Ling Li instructed.

As they exhaled, the orb flickered — once with silver light, once with gold.

Ling Li's eyes narrowed.

"Split potential," she murmured. "Kim Kim carries dominion. Chin Chin carries chaos."

Four Eyes nearly dropped the blades.

"Chaos?"

Ling Li smirked faintly. "Untamed power, not corruption. But it must be honed quickly."

She turned to her daughters.

"From this day forward, you train at sunrise. Elemental invocation. Sword tracing. Sigil shielding. No excuses."

The girls looked at each other.

"Does that mean I get my crystal sword now?" Kim Kim asked.

Ling Li laughed softly. "Once you earn it."

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Dale's Dream Rites: A Sorcerer's Descent

Far away, deep in the subterrain of an abandoned monastery, Enchanted Dale descended into darker rites.

His injuries remained — bandaged in cursed cloth and smeared with soul glue — but his obsession burned hotter than ever. He stood before a shattered altar of dreamstone, powdered bone scattered like ash.

He raised his hands.

"You sealed their aura in waking," he hissed, voice low and cracked. "But dreams... dreams are mine."

Enchanted Dale slit his palm again, letting blood drip into a basin filled with sleeproot and dark lotus. The mixture hissed, burning smoke into the chamber, and Enchanted Dale whispered invocations older than war.

He summoned the Veil Eater — a forbidden dream serpent that slithered between the minds of the young and unguarded. It coiled above the basin, flickering between real and unreal.

"Find the twins. Enter their sleep. Press against their fear. I do not need their power yet — just a crack. Just curiosity."

The serpent hissed, then vanished into smoke — carried by dream winds toward the Li Estate.

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The First Night: Ling Li Senses the Infiltration

That night, as the twins slept beneath silken veils of protection, Kim Kim twitched once — her breath catching.

Inside her dream, a corridor twisted unnaturally. Shapes danced. A slingshot grew too heavy. A whisper curled around her ears.

"Do you want power?"

Kim Kim gasped — but Ling Li was already awake, kneeling in meditation outside the chamber, her spiritual threads attuned to their dreams.

Ling Li opened her eyes. Her immortal aura surged violently.

Inside the dream, the corridor shattered. A silver blade of wind pierced the air — cutting through Enchanted Dale's whisper and severing the serpent's tongue.

Kim Kim woke with a jolt, heart racing.

Ling Li entered the twins' room.

"Did he speak to you?"

Kim Kim nodded. "He said... 'power.'"

Ling Li brushed her daughter's hair, pressing a glowing sigil onto her forehead.

"Then it begins." Ling Li whispered.

Dawn Invocation: Twin Dragons Stir

In the eastern grove, the morning air was crisp with anticipation.

Kim Kim and Chin Chin knelt within twin circles of dragon salt and moonfire ash, their palms upturned as Shinsei adjusted the pulse orb between them. It flickered once in recognition, then steadied —each girl now casting her own wavelength into the ether.

Ling Li stood at the edge, her robe radiant with elemental glyphs drawn by her own immortal hand. Beside her, Four Eyes held a scroll containing training sequences layered for split affinity. Though he pretended to read stoically, his eyes flicked nervously between his daughters.

"Begin," Ling Li commanded.

Chin Chin inhaled sharply and whispered the sigil of directional fire. Her breath turned into a flame ribbon that coiled mid-air before flickering out.

Kim Kim raised her hand. The wind curled through her fingers like silk, lifting a handful of magnolia petals that danced in suspended motion before falling.

Shinsei hummed softly.

"They respond like twins in song —harmonies blooming from different tones."

Four Eyes muttered under his breath.

"Just as long as they don't burn down the grove."

Ling Li allowed herself the briefest smile.

Then her face turned serious. She knelt beside Kim Kim and pressed two fingers to her forehead.

"Do you feel anyone watching?"

Kim Kim blinked.

"Not in the room... but in the dream."

Chin Chin nodded.

"Mine too. Last night, there was a voice behind a mirror that didn't reflect me."

Shinsei stepped forward, alarm flickering in his expression.

"They're pushing through the veil again."

Ling Li rose, voice steel-bound.

"Tonight, we erect the dream fortress. And tomorrow, I begin their astral defense rites. If Enchanted Dale attempts another breach, he'll enter not innocence —but war."

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Dale's Descent: Ritual of the Dream Harvest

Inside his ruined sanctum, Dale's body convulsed, veins bulging with poisons harvested from the Veil Eater's failed invasion. The serpent had returned broken, severed mid-thought by an immortal force. It hissed once before disintegrating in front of his feet.

Enchanted Dale staggered to his altar, panting.

"She severed it," Enchanted Dale growled. "She severed me."

His fingers plunged into a basin of bloodroot and mirrorleaf. New runes pulsed beneath the liquid's surface.

"Then I won't speak through mirrors. I'll become them."

He raised his hands and began a forbidden spell: Dream Binding Through Ancestral Regret. It created spectral clones of himself drawn from old grief —projected into the dreams of those with dormant bloodlines.

Not to harm.

Not yet.

But to seduce, deceive, and twist the threads of identity from within.

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Nightfall: Ling Li Prepares the Fortress

That evening, Ling Li spread the scroll of Dream Warding across the rooftop shrine. With Four Eyes on her left and Shinsei opposite, they invoked the ancient glyphs passed down only through immortal whisper.

Eight spirit candles were lit.

The wind bent unnaturally.

And through the mist, shadows flinched and retreated.

Kim Kim and Chin Chin slept beneath the newly woven veil, their foreheads glowing faintly. Within their dreams, paths began to form —no longer corridors of confusion, but gardens of memory protected by sigils in their handwriting.

Ling Li turned to Shinsei.

"Tomorrow, they begin astral walk."

Shinsei nodded.

"And soon... they will meet themselves."

First Astral Defense Rite: When Innocence Faces the Beyond

The astral chamber was nothing like the grove.

Carved deep beneath the Li Estate, it was an ancient sanctum veined with flickering soulstone and celestial quartz. The air buzzed with dormant power, its silence broken only by breath and intention.

Kim Kim and Chin Chin stood in the center of the circular platform, both barefoot, clad in layered ceremonial tunics woven with phoenix silk and reinforced with light-binding threads. The twin sigils on their foreheads shimmered faintly, the ink still fresh from Ling Li's midnight inscription.

Chapter 279: THE RITE OF SPIRIT-ECHO

Around them, spectators gathered.

Old Master Li and Madam Li, together with Mr. and Mrs. Xu, stood quietly beside a lantern, their fingers intertwined in prayer. Despite layers of silk and ceremonial grace, their faces betrayed a sense of anxiety. These were their grandchildren, after all — and no amount of magical aptitude could dull the ache of worry.

Pharsa stood beside Chatty, her heart aching as she watched the twins endure strict training. She felt guilty and frustrated, knowing the twins were targeted because of her.

Ling Li approached the twins, her tone gentle but resonant.

"Today, you do not fight. You face. Illusions may lie, but fear always tells the truth."

Four Eyes stood at her side, arms crossed tightly. He wasn't just watching — he was calculating. Every gesture from the girls was measured against every nightmare he had ever had about losing them.

Shinsei stepped forward and opened the scroll.

"The Rite of Spirit-Echo. You will each walk alone into a field of conjured memory and projected dread. You will not be harmed, but you will be tested."

He tapped his staff against the floor.

The chamber darkened.

Then pulsed with light.

The stone floor spiraled outward, revealing the Astral Wells beneath — glittering voids laced with interwoven energy and dream-mist.

Kim Kim stepped into hers first.

Her vision blurred, then cleared inside the projection:

A temple corridor. Broken pillars. A wounded Ling Li is fading in and out of light.

From the shadows, a twisted spirit rose — its face wearing Ling Li's voice, but hissing.

"You were never ready. You were born to watch others burn."

Kim Kim clenched her fists, trembling.

But then she whispered her sigil aloud — and the illusion cracked. The spirit shrieked, and the corridor collapsed into starlight.

Across the room, Chin Chin screamed once inside her well, facing an illusion of Dale reaching for Pharsa while the family crumbled into ash. But she didn't run.

She stepped forward and said:

"You can't touch what I protect."

She drew her blade — not real, but summoned in spirit — and slashed through the hallucination. It shattered.

The chamber pulsed once.

Then calmed.

Kim Kim and Chin Chin collapsed into one another, breathing hard.

Ling Li rushed forward, holding them close.

Madam Li wept openly, while Old Master Li bowed his head and whispered thanks.

Shinsei closed the scroll.

"They will be ready."

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Dale's New Descent: The Genealogy Ritual Begins

Far away, deep within his hidden sanctum, now wrapped in necrotic sigils and void-stone pillars, Enchanted Dale carved into the skin of reality with a blade etched from ancestral bone.

He no longer wanted aura.

He wanted the origin.

He began the Genealogy Rites — a forbidden series of spiritual forensics that traced bloodlines not forward, but backward, bypassing protective naming seals and uncovering untethered ancestral links.

He spilled ink mixed with memory dust and soul fragments stolen from failed rituals.

Images twisted forth: not faces, but threads — spiritual veins reaching toward the Li daughters.

"Their blood comes from fire-born ancestors and dragon-bonded matriarchs," he muttered. "If I harvest even one of these threads... I can corrupt the root."

He conjured a mirror.

But instead of a reflection, it showed a tree — ancient, cracked, its roots glimmering. Two of the origins flickered with gold and white.

He smiled.

"Forget the fruit. I'll poison the tree."

Dale's Desperation: Rewriting the Ancestral Thread

Enchanted Dale knelt before an obsidian altar inscribed with the names of ancient priestesses, many of whom had been erased from the record.

The air was heavy with the scent of fermented root smoke and bone powder. His hands trembled —not with weakness, but with maddened purpose —his obsession.

Before him lay an artifact: a Memory Bloom, a cursed relic capable of stitching through time by binding ancestral spirits to corrupted intention.

He had studied Ling Li's lineage through forbidden genealogical rites, and one thread pulsed with what he needed —her maternal ancestor, known only in temple scripture as Yue Qiren, a celestial tactician who carried the Dragon's Whisper seal.

She was dead.

But through corrupted remembrance, Dale could force a moment of contact — bend the echo, whisper lies, and unravel inherited clarity.

He offered blood. His own memories. A segment of Pharsa's broken aura.

Then he spoke:

"Yue Qiren... matron of wind and mother of the protector... your descendant has deviated from fate. Help me restore the thread. Help me shape her daughters."

The altar pulsed.

Then cracked.

A glimmer formed — faint, translucent.

But it wasn't Yue Qiren.

It was Ling Li's immortal echo, sent as an ancestral defense —triggered the moment Dale touched her bloodline with deceit.

The vision smirked.

"You invoked the wrong spirit."

Before Enchanted Dale could respond, a blade of ancestral wind surged from the altar, slashing his arm open and flinging him against the wall.

Enchanted Dale screamed.

But it was only beginning.

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Ling Li's Retaliation: Fury of the Dragon Matron

Back at the Li Estate, Ling Li gasped sharply from meditation. Her vision flared — she felt the tremor, saw the violation. Enchanted Dale had tried to rewrite the thread. Not merely steal power — but twist her bloodline.

Ling Li stood.

In her chamber, sacred blades and celestial cords drifted into motion on their own. Her immortal aura surged from her spine in waves, pressing against the walls. The ground whispered.

She didn't need a gate.

She became the gate.

Final Strike: When Immortality Calls the Storm

Enchanted Dale staggered into his upper sanctum, bleeding, fractured, gasping. He reached for his final scrying mirror.

He saw them.

Kim Kim and Chin Chin sparring under a protective veil, practicing dream sigils. Pharsa is watching from the balcony. Four Eyes is adjusting the twins' posture. Shinsei is chanting softly nearby.

Enchanted Dale raised his hand.

He cast a shatter spell into the mirror — designed to splinter the barrier and drag the twins into his ether domain.

But before the spell landed—

Ling Li appeared in complete immortal form — no robe, no veil, only energy woven into divine threads of wind, flame, and judgment.

She raised one hand.

The mirror imploded.

Dale screamed — shards piercing his body, sigils backfiring.

"You touched my bloodline," Ling Li said, voice echoing across the dimensions.

"You tried to shape my daughters."

Ling Li stepped forward. With each motion, reality warped around her.

Dale summoned every remaining talisman. They burned in his palms.

He cast six chains.

Ling Li sliced through them without blinking.

She spoke a single word in the ancestral tongue — "Return."

A typhoon of soulstorm magic surged forward, imbued with all her lineage: Yue Qiren, dragon whispers, phoenix threads, sealed rites.

Chapter 280: TWINS' FIRST GIFT: THE SEAL OF TWIN GUARDIANS

All six chains of talisman struck Enchanted Dale full force.

His aura combusted.

The altar cracked in seven places.

He dropped to his knees, weeping blood, aura flickering.

Ling Li turned without speaking further.

Enchanted Dale collapsed — not dead, but nullified. His spiritual thread severed, his corrupted rites dissolved.

Back at the Li Estate, the twins awoke from sleep, both feeling it.

Kim Kim whispered, "Mom was loud in the stars tonight."

Chin Chin nodded, tracing a wind glyph in the air.

Pharsa smiled and said, "Good."

Ling Li and Yue Qiren: The Mirror of Blood and Wind

That night, long after the twin dragons had gone to sleep beneath the veiled moon, Ling Li stepped into the ancestral shrine. No guards. No fanfare. Only the muted echo of silk brushing stone and a bowl of candlelight cradled in jade.

Before her hung a suspended mirror, its glass not made of silver but spirit quartz — a relic only accessible to immortals trained in lineage communion. Ling Li lit three sticks of incense, pressed her palm to the frame, and murmured her ancestor's name:

"Yue Qiren... Mother of the Whispered Seal, I call upon your echo."

The mirror shimmered.

A soft breeze swept through the chamber, though no window stood open.

Then, Yue Qiren appeared.

Not in complete form, but as a silhouette stitched from cloud and lightning, her face veiled, her voice like rustling pages.

"Descendant," the echo said, eyes reflecting infinite memory.

Ling Li knelt without hesitation.

"They touched our blood and tried to bind you through me."

Yue Qiren's spirit swayed, shimmering faintly.

"But I was never asleep," she whispered. "You carry what they could never reach. And now... so do your daughters."

Ling Li's throat tightened.

"Are they ready?"

A pause. The echo leaned closer, pressing translucent fingers to the mirror's edge.

"No. But they're listening. And when the world demands roar... they will answer."

The mirror faded.

Ling Li bowed once more, her heart steady.

Twin Awakening: The First Gift

At sunrise, Kim Kim and Chin Chin were summoned to the grove again.

This time, the circle was woven in golden fire salt and blue leaf strands, symbols of convergence and duality. They held hands as they stood in the center, watched by Pharsa, Four Eyes, and Shinsei, with Madam Li and Old Master Li observing from behind a prayer tree — nervously clutching prayer beads, eyes misty.

Ling Li raised her hands.

"Repeat your names. Not as daughters, but as defenders."

Kim Kim stood tall.

"I am the First Storm."

Chin Chin followed.

"I am the Second Flame."

The orb between them pulsed.

And split.

Two streaks of light spiraled upward — one silver, one gold — and fused into a shimmering crest that hovered above their heads.

A dragon sigil, formed from wind and fire, etched itself in mid-air and branded the grove wall behind them. Their legacy had now become visible.

Everyone gasped.

Ling Li whispered, almost inaudible:

"The seal of twin guardians."

The Journey Back to Russia: Reunion in the North

Three days later, Ling Li's family stepped aboard the elegant silk-cloaked aircraft, its glossy exterior glinting in the sunlight as it prepared to whisk them back to Russia. They had originally anticipated a brief visit, a mere pause in their busy lives for the traditional tea ceremony. Yet, much to their surprise, their time in Naga had unfurled into an unexpected incident, one that extended far beyond their initial plans.

As the aircraft touched down, shimmering with runic light, the doors opened, revealing Ling Li, gracefully descending first — followed by Four Eyes, Pharsa, Chatty, and the twins with Mushu, who were already squabbling over whose dragon sigil glowed brighter.

Shi Min laughed and pulled Ling Li into an embrace.

Ren and Shun offered a quiet bow to Four Eyes, whose aura was now stabilized but more intense, almost regal from all the practices he had with Shinsei.

Lily pulled Chin Chin into a spin.

"You smell like spells and sass."

Shi Min stepped forward with a scroll.

"We received new intelligence. Enchanted Dale wasn't acting alone. His tether reached into the Volkov Sect. They've moved east."

Ling Li exhaled deeply.

"Then we move quickly. The twins must not just train now — they must prepare to lead."

Kim Kim clutched her slingshot tighter.

"I'm ready. For Russia. For ghosts. And for soup."

Chin Chin nodded.

"Also for witches. Maybe sword witches."

Everyone laughed.

Ling Li's lips twitched as she asked in silence, 'Where did these twins get their idea to fight ghosts and witches?' She couldn't help but shake her head and wonder.

But the wind whispered between the trees.

The next storm wasn't far.

The Trial of the Frost Sigils

Within the secluded grounds of the Russian estate, a grove stretched into a snow-draped forest where time felt suspended and the trees whispered in old dialects.

Shi Min, dressed in white combat robes stitched with moonstone beads, led Kim Kim and Chin Chin through a labyrinth of frozen pathways — no map, no guardians, just the biting wind and the weight of expectation.

The girls followed in matching cloaks, their dragon sigils hidden beneath layers of wool, their faces silent with excitement.

"This is not a game," Shi Min said, halting before a frozen altar marked with five fractured emblems. "This grove was once used to test the children of the Celestial Sect — those who bore elemental gifts but had not yet forged resolve."

He brushed aside snow to reveal the first challenge — a set of puzzle stones inscribed with shifting runes.

"These sigils change based on the emotion of the solver. The wrong combination triggers a cold trap that turns confusion into frost."

Kim Kim cracked her tiny knuckles.

Chin Chin narrowed her eyes.

"What kind of frost?"

Shi Min smirked.

"The biting kind. The kind that makes fear permanent."

Ling Li and Four Eyes, and even Fatty in a wheelchair, watched from a distance, perched atop snowy stones with warm thermoses and worried brows. Pharsa stood in silence, her gaze focused and protective, Chatty beside her with his hand already wrapped around a flask of warm rice milk.

Kim Kim stepped forward.

She touched the first stone.

It hissed.

Then shifted, revealing a riddle carved in glowing blue:

"What stands still but moves all things — and breaks without a sound?"

Kim Kim frowned.

"A little dramatic."

Chin Chin whispered, "Time?"

The stone glowed.

Then cracked open, revealing a glowing orb encased in ice.

Shi Min grinned.

"One correct. Four to go."