

PROTEGE 471

Chapter 471: THE TRIPLETS HAS ARRIVED

The Birth of the Triplets

A month after they returned to Shanghai.

The day dawned as storm clouds shattered, revealing brilliant sunlight that cast a golden hue over Peonies Castle. Ling Li's cries echoed throughout, a testament to her strength amidst vulnerability. Nearby, Four Eyes paced with his brush in hand, his shield faintly shimmering as if it might shield her spirit from afar. Shi Min stood close, his jaw tense, eyebrows furrowed, almost knitted together as he shared in their collective anticipation.

When the doctors emerged, their voices carried astonishment.

"Three girls!!! Triplets!!!"

"Congratulations, Master Chu Yan!!!"

Four Eyes froze, his eyes wide. Shi Min blinked, stunned. Both had expected three little boys and were genuinely excited for additional heirs to carry the clan's martial legacy. Instead, fate had given them three girls. As the realization sank in, a swell of pride and a flicker of anxiety danced within Four Eyes' heart. What would this mean for the future of their clan, to have daughters instead of sons? Yet amidst this uncertainty, he felt an overwhelming love blooming inside him, a vow forming wordlessly to nurture and stand by these unexpected blessings.

Four Eyes pressed a hand to his forehead, torn between laughter and tears. "Five girls... I am a father to five girls. Oh, no, seven!"

Shi Min groaned, stunned, his voice thick with disbelief. "Seven sisters. I am the only son with seven sisters."

Butler James and Mushu simultaneously chuckled. "Young Master, you need to work harder!" Mushu teased Shi Min.

"Heh, I know, right. No need to remind me!" Shi Min said with a playful snort.

They all followed Four Eyes into the room.

The twins were static, "Yes! We have three more sisters!" Kim Kim cheerfully said.

"I'm a big sister now!" Chin Chin chimed. "Yes! Yes! I'm a big sister now!"

For a heartbeat, silence hung heavy. Their anticipation, a mix of joy and trepidation, filled the room. Ling Li, pale but radiant, cradled the three infants as her gaze softened and her voice remained steady despite exhaustion. It was then that laughter broke through, raw and joyous, a release of the tension that had tightly gripped their hearts. In that moment, they didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but their hearts swelled with love.

"They are blessings. Not curses. Our clan will be stronger for them," Ling Li proclaimed, firmly rooted in the knowledge that history had taught them well.

Four Eyes knelt beside her, tears glistening in his eyes. "I never said they are a curse. Dear, thank you, they are beautiful. I will love and protect them."

Shi Min bowed his head, resolve hardening. "I will protect them all. Every sister. No blade will touch them while I breathe."

Ling Li felt warm as she looked at her husband and only son.

The Triplets' Celebration at Peonies Castle

The news of Ling Li giving birth to triplets spread like wildfire.

At the Li Mansion in Hidden Valley. Within hours, lanterns blazed across Peonies Castle, casting their golden glow against the night sky. Petals rained down from balconies, carried by disciples with reverence. The thunderous drums echoed through the courtyards, each beat a celebration of immense joy. Elders raised cups of wine, their faces flushed with pride at the legacy being honored. The air seemed to shimmer with a distinct energy, as though the heavens themselves were celebrating the auspicious occasion.

Arrival of Shun and Ren

From Shanghai, Shun and Ren descended like omens of flame and gold. Shun's arrival was marked by banners of fire unfurling across the sky, his Phoenix Command Sutra blazing in radiant arcs. He clasped Four Eyes' shoulder, his voice warm yet edged with awe:

"Five girls, Uncle. The Phoenix Command Sutra burns brighter with them."

Ren's golden needles glowed faintly, her smile tender yet resolute.

"Sacrifice is not always pain—it is love."

Her words carried across the courtyard, disciples bowing their heads as if the truth itself had been spoken.

Family's Arrival

Ling Li's parents arrived soon after. Her mother wept openly, clutching the infants, whispering lullabies of old that carried the weight of generations. Her father stood tall, his voice trembling with reverence:

"The covenant promised unity. These girls are proof of it."

Mr. and Mrs. Xu, the parents of Four Eyes, returned from their travels around the world. Their robes carried dust from distant lands, yet their eyes shone with joy. Mrs. Xu clasped her son's hand, tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Five granddaughters. The heavens have blessed us beyond measure."

Mr. Xu chuckled, his voice booming like thunder across the hall.

Four Eyes laughed despite himself, his shoulders trembling with both pride and disbelief. Shi Min groaned dramatically, clutching his head. "Seven sisters... I am the only son with seven sisters." He paused, then with a quick grin, added, "But perhaps it's my destiny to be the greatest brother ever, protecting such an army of sisters. They'll need my unmatched skills." The crowd erupted in laughter, the tension breaking into warmth.

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The Red Packets

Generous red packets flowed not only throughout the mansion but also to every employee under Ling Li, Four Eyes, Shi Min, Ren, Lily, Otako, and Fatty.

One manager nearly leapt from his seat, waving his phone.

"Ahhhhh! I just received a big red packet!!! What's the special occasion?"

"Me too!"

"Me too!"

The room erupted in cheers. Laughter bounced off the walls, voices overlapping in disbelief and joy.

The cleaner, who just started two days ago, upon seeing the amount credited to her account, collapsed to her knees in tears. Her hands trembled as she clutched her phone. Memories flashed before her eyes — sleepless nights worrying about overdue rent, the weariness of never-ending extra shifts, and the stifling fear of not being able to provide for her children. The unexpected gift felt like a lifeline, lifting the crushing weight she had carried alone for years.

"This... this means my three children and I can live without worry for two years. Thank you heavens!"

Her sobs echoed, and others gathered around her, patting her shoulders, their own eyes wet with shared joy.

The World Responds

Then the office channel lit up with the announcement: Madam Ling Li has given birth to three girls.

Business partners, stockholders, directors, and managers scrambled, their voices rising in frantic competition. Orders were placed, gifts purchased, and deliveries dispatched. None wished to be outdone.

Employees bowed their heads, whispering their blessings and prayers for their boss.

"Good health and prosperity to our good Boss!"

"More blessings and more children to our boss!"

"More twins and triplets for our generous boss!"

"..."

Ling Li, who is breastfeeding her newborn girls, sneezes. "Who is cursing me?"

Chapter 472: FUYAO, JINYUE, AND RUIXIANG

Meanwhile, at the castle gates, Butler James managed a ceaseless flow of arrivals bringing gifts and messages.

A director sent jade carvings shaped like phoenixes.

A stockholder commissioned golden cradles.

A business partner ordered silk embroidered with dragon glyphs.

Friends of Ling Li joined the chorus. The Chinese President sent a gilded scroll of blessings, infant toys, and clothes. Soon after, gifts arrived from the Russian, Colombian, and Cuban Presidents, each bearing tokens of reverence — ornate treasures, rare and custom-made clothes, and toys representing iconic items from their countries.

The courtyards were filled with crates, carriages, and emissaries bearing congratulations. The air buzzed with voices, laughter, and awe. Peonies Castle shimmered not only with qi but with the weight of global recognition.

The Full Moon Celebration at Peonies Castle

A month after the birth of the triplets, Peonies Castle once again burst into a festive mood for their *Full Moon Celebration. The courtyards glowed with lanterns shaped like moons, their golden light reflecting off polished jade floors. Red eggs — symbols of prosperity and renewal — were carried in baskets by smiling disciples, handed out to guests alongside trays of sweet rice cakes and candied fruits. Endless gifts flowed in, piling high against the walls, each wrapped in silk and tied with crimson ribbons.

Children ran through the halls with sparklers, their laughter mingling with the sound of drums and flutes. Elders sat in carved chairs, sipping fragrant tea, their faces softened by joy. The air shimmered with qi blessings, as if the heavens themselves had descended to honor the triplets.

The President's Gifts

Since the celebration was held in Shanghai, the Chinese President sent a car filled with treasures for the triplets. The emissary was none other than Fen Zhang, the President's right-hand man — and Ling Li's hidden spy in preparation for the upcoming election.

Fen Zhang entered with solemn grace, bowing deeply before presenting the gifts: golden bracelets, jade pendants carved with phoenixes, and silk embroidered with celestial dragons. His eyes flickered toward Ling Li and Shi Min, offering them a subtle, knowing look. It was a silent message: he had information, and he knew what needed to be done.

Ling Li's gaze held his for a moment, calm but sharp. Shi Min's jaw tightened. Both understood the weight of the unspoken exchange.

Shinsei's Blessings and the Naming of the Triplets

Shinsei arrived, his staff tapping softly against the stone floor. His aura was calm, his presence steady, like a river flowing beneath moonlight. Ling Li welcomed him warmly, placing the three infants before him.

"Shinsei," she said softly, "give them names. Let your wisdom bless their destiny."

Shinsei closed his eyes, murmuring prayers. When he opened them, his voice carried across the hall, resonant and clear:

Fuyao (芙瑶) – Blessed Jade, symbolizing purity and fortune.

Jinyue (锦月) – Brocade Moon, symbolizing beauty, prosperity, and radiant destiny.

Ruixiang (瑞香) – Auspicious Fragrance, symbolizing blessings that linger and spread through generations.

The crowd gasped, their hearts stirred by the auspicious meanings.

Ling Li cradled the infants, her arms trembling and voice wavering with emotion. Tears glistened on her lashes and slid down her cheeks as she whispered, "Fuyao, Jinyue, Ruixiang... may your lives be filled with fortune and unity." She kissed each baby gently, overcome with both hope and immense love.

Four Eyes forced a laugh, but his eyes were wet, and he swiped at them quickly, embarrassed by his own emotion. "Five daughters... the heavens must be laughing at me. But I will guard them all, even if it costs me my life," he choked, voice thick with pride.

The blessings poured forth like rivers, each word weaving into the covenant's promise.

The Twins' Joy

Kim Kim, and Chin Chin twirled in identical princess tulle gowns, their laughter ringing like bells. They ran to their sisters, calling their names with delight:

"Fuyao! Jinyue! Ruixiang! We are your big sisters!"

"Hey! Hey! Who are the big sisters?" Ren jokingly asked.

"Ah! Fuyao! Jinyue! Ruixiang!" Chin Chin called again. "I'm the fourth sister, and Kim Kim is the third sister!" She added.

The crowd didn't know whether to laugh or cry at the twins' cute act.

Their voices carried innocence and joy, their laughter capturing the celebration's spirit.

Guests and Teasing

El Padre and El Capitán arrived, their voices booming with congratulations. El Capitán smirked, nudging Four Eyes.

"Chu Yan, do you know the saying? The number of daughters you have represents your payment for past-life mistakes. You were probably a lady killer in your previous life!"

The hall erupted in laughter, disciples and elders alike teasing Four Eyes mercilessly.

Chatty, beside his pregnant wife Pharsa, puffed his chest proudly.

"Chu Yan, you're not as innocent as you look. Unlike me — hmph! I've got three boys!"

Pharsa pinched his waist sharply.

"You! Stop spouting nonsense!"

Chatty yelped, clutching his side.

"Ouch! Honey! Honey! I know it! It's what you call father's instinct! We'll definitely have three boys!"

Four Eyes snorted, rolling his eyes while balancing his three little buns in his arms.

Happy Conversations Before the Party Ends

As wine flowed and laughter filled the hall, conversations sparkled:

Fatty raised his cup, grinning: "With so many daughters, Chu Yan, you'll need an army of guards just to keep suitors away!"

Lily teased gently: "Or perhaps the suitors will tremble before Pap's shield. Who dares challenge the Silent Ink Dao?"

Ren smiled, her needles glowing faintly: "These girls will grow strong. Perhaps stronger than all of us."

Shun laughed, flames flickering around his fingers: "Then let them inherit the Phoenix Command Sutra. The world will bow before them."

Yet even amid celebration, shadows lingered. The cracked bell remained silent but faintly glowing, its fractured surface whispering of trials yet to come. Shi Min, gazing at the stars, saw constellations shift—patterns of conflict, betrayal, and blood.

He clenched his fists, his voice low:

"The Family Competition is near. The rival sects will strike. And now, I have more sisters to protect."

Four Eyes stood beside him, his shield shimmering faintly.

"Then we will protect them together. The covenant binds us. The bell may sing again, but we will not falter."

Ling Li, cradling the triplets, whispered:

"The world will test us. But tonight, we are blessed. Let us hold this joy before the storm."

The night ended with fireworks bursting above Peonies Castle, sparks raining down like blessings from the heavens. The triplets slept peacefully, their names whispered in prayers, their destiny sealed in joy.

Chapter 473: SISU: MUSHU'S BROTHER

The Call from Sisu

That same night, as the lanterns of Peonies Castle flickered against the velvet sky, Mushu's phone buzzed with an unknown number. He stared at the screen, hesitation tightening his chest. His thumb hovered, uncertain. Finally, he pressed accept.

"Hello, who is calling?"

A voice, trembling yet familiar, broke through the static.

“Brother? Is this... Borthé Mushu?”

Mushu’s heart skipped. His breath caught.

“Sisu?”

The voice cracked with relief.

“It’s really you! Big brother, I’m glad you didn’t change your number!”

Mushu’s throat tightened, emotion surging.

“I never changed my number because I was afraid you wouldn’t find me. Where are you? How is Father?”

There was silence. A pause heavy enough to crush the air. Mushu’s grip on his phone tightened, knuckles whitening. He could feel something terrible pressing at the edges of the conversation.

“Um... Big Brother. Father...”

Mushu's pulse hammered. His chest constricted.

"Big brother... Father passed away a week ago. He didn't want me to call you. He said... There was no need to disturb you."

Sisu's voice broke, emotion spilling through the line.

Mushu's heart trembled violently. Though his stepfather was not bound to him by blood, he had brought happiness to his mother, given them stability, and treated Mushu with kindness his birth father never had. Mushu respected him deeply — so deeply that he called him Father without hesitation.

His voice cracked, raw with grief.

"Then... where are you? I'm in Shanghai. Come find me. I will make time to pay respect to Father."

Sisu sniffled, trying to steady himself.

"Okay, I'll come find you. Please send me your address. Dad left some items he wanted me to hand over to you."

Mushu swallowed hard, forcing strength into his words.

“Alright. I’ll send you my address. Let me know when you arrive — I’ll pick you up myself.”

“I understand, Big Brother. See you soon.”

The line went dead. Silence pressed against Mushu’s ears, heavier than any sound.

Mushu’s Reflection

Mushu lowered the phone slowly, his hand trembling. He typed out the address of Peonies Castle, his fingers stiff, each keystroke echoing like a drumbeat of finality.

When the message was sent, he opened his gallery. His thumb scrolled until it stopped on an old photo: his mother, radiant with joy, standing beside his stepfather, Sisu, and himself. Her smile glowed like sunlight, her eyes alive with happiness.

Mushu’s vision blurred. A single tear slipped down his cheek, tracing the line of his jaw. He whispered into the quiet room, his voice fragile yet resolute:

“Mom... Father is now with you. I hope you’re happier now.”

The photo shimmered faintly in the glow of his phone screen, as if the past itself was reaching out to comfort him. Mushu pressed the phone to his chest, his body trembling with grief, yet his heart filled with determination. He would honor his stepfather's memory. He would protect Sisū. And he would carry forward the legacy of the man he called Father.

The Gathering After Confinement

The morning after the celebration, the great hall of Peonies Castle was filled with solemn faces. Ling Li, finally out of her one-month confinement, sat at the head of the table. Her aura was calm yet commanding, her eyes sharp as blades.

“We only have a month left before the Family Competition,” she said, her voice carrying a weight that pressed against every heart in the room. “Are you all confident to participate?”

Her words hung in the air like a challenge. Silence followed. No one dared answer immediately, for they all understood the gravity of the question.

Shun's Painful Breakthroughs

It was Shun who broke the silence, his voice trembling yet resolute.

“Auntie... within this month, I had a breakthrough twice. But may I ask — why is it that every time I break through, I feel like dying from pain?”

His hands clenched tightly, knuckles pale. He recalled the agony: his body breaking and recombining, his soul whipped by raging fire, his meridians torn and stitched back together by an invisible hand wielding a thread and needle. The process was slow, excruciating, and each time he felt as though death itself hovered over him.

Even remembering it now sent shivers down his spine, cold sweat breaking across his brow.

Ling Li's gaze softened, though her tone remained firm. Rising slowly, her robes whispering against the floor, she placed a reassuring hand on Shun's shoulder.

"Shun, what you suffer is not ordinary pain. It is the mark of your exceptional power. The heavens themselves watch you, and they are jealous."

A hush fell over the hall.

"Each time you break through, your body is forced to endure trials beyond mortal limits. The fire that whips your soul is the heavenly flame, testing whether you are worthy to wield the Phoenix Command Sutra. The needle that mends your meridians is fate itself, stitching you back together so you may rise stronger. The heavens fear what you may become, so they try to break you. But remember this: every scar you carry is proof that you defied them."

Her eyes glowed faintly, her aura pressing against the disciples like a mantle of truth.

"The pain you experience is not punishment—it is a sign that the heavens have recognized your potential. You are destined to command fire as powerful as the sun. The heavens themselves will try to stop you, but if you endure their tests, you will surpass even their jealousy."

Reactions

Ren, who had witnessed Shun's torment during his breakthroughs, had been distraught. Her hands had trembled each time she saw him writhe in agony, her heart breaking with helplessness. But now, hearing her mother's words, her expression softened. She inhaled deeply, resolve settling in her chest.

"Mom... I think I'm ready."

Lily straightened, her carp voice resonating with clarity.

"I'm ready."

Fatty clenched his fists, his Stoneheart Resilience pulsing faintly.

"I'm ready."

Jack smirked, his eyes sharp, his body vibrating with speed.

"I'm ready."

Nicu and Ailun also gave their assurances.

Only Chatty hesitated, his voice quieter.

“I will do my best.”

The Enfield on his neck rolled its eyes and snorted, earning chuckles from a few disciples. Ling Li was not disappointed. She knew she and Butler Oda had deliberately slowed Chatty’s cultivation. His body was not ready. If he were pushed too far, it might explode. She had chosen patience, knowing his time would come.

Ling Li looked at her husband seated beside her, “What about you?” She asked in a teasing tone.

Knowing his wife was teasing her in front of everyone, he teases her back, “I’ll show you tonight whether I’m ready or not!”

“You!” Ling Li’s face flushed; it was red as an apple.

Everyone in the room laughed.

“Oh come on, Pap’s, please be kind to all the singletons in the room,” Shi Min said, which made everyone once again roar in laughter.

Chapter 474: I LIKE YOU ON TOP

Ling Li’s Command

"Ehem," Ling Li’s gaze swept across the room, her voice steady and commanding once again.

"Tomorrow, training resumes with the highest intensity. The Seven Shah will give their final recommendation for which category of competition each of you will enter."

Her words weighed on them like steel.

"But remember this — the composition of the competition is only announced three days before the actual event. It changes every time. You must be ready for anything."

The disciples exchanged glances. Tension thickened the air as their breaths quickened and hearts pounded. The Family Competition was not just a test—it was survival, honor, and destiny itself.

As the meeting ended, Shun’s hand lingered on his chest, feeling the faint burn of heavenly fire on his soul. Ren’s eyes followed him; worry lingered, but resolve shone through. While Chatty scratched his head and muttered, Fatty and Jack exchanged smirks.

Ling Li stood tall, her aura vast, her gaze piercing the horizon.

"The heavens may be jealous, but they will not break us. The Li Clan will rise."

The hall fell silent. Each disciple carried the weight of their words. Outside, the cracked bell shimmered in the night, its fractured glow whispering of trials to come.

The Knock at the Door

A firm knock broke the silence of the hall. Butler James stepped inside, bowing.

"Sorry to interrupt. There's someone at the gate asking for Mushu. He says he's his brother."

Mushu stirred, his usually stoic face shifting with emotion.

"Madam, that must be Sisu," he said, bowing.

Ling Li rose gracefully, her voice steady yet compassionate. She placed a reassuring hand on Mushu's shoulder.

"Everyone, let us join Mushu to welcome his brother. Both of them just lost their father."

Gasps rippled through the room.

Ren stepped forward, her eyes soft. "Mushu, I'm so sorry. Losing a father is never easy. We stand with you."

Lily clasped her hands. "You've always been strong; let us be strong for you now."

Fatty, subdued, scratched his head. "Brother Mushu, my condolences. I'm here if you need me."

Jack nodded firmly, his jaw tight. "We'll protect your family as our own."

Chatty, unusually serious, muttered, "You don't carry this alone. We're here."

Mushu's chest tightened. Their words warmed him, a rare comfort breaking through his stone-like exterior. He bowed his head slightly, murmuring,

"Thank you... all of you."

The Reunion at the Gate

The group followed Mushu out to the gate. The air was cool, lanterns flickering against the night.

When Sisu saw Mushu, he dropped his bags without hesitation, sprinted forward, and leapt into his brother's arms — just as he had when they were children.

Mushu's eyes widened in surprise, but instinct took over. He tightened his hold, afraid he might drop Sisu despite his towering strength.

The sight was striking: Mushu, nearly seven feet tall with a body like carved stone, cradling Sisu, five-foot-ten, leaner, flushed with emotion. The audience behind them froze, breath caught in their throats.

Sisu realized too late that they had an audience. His face, already red, deepened until it glowed brighter than a ripe tomato. He scrambled down, embarrassed.

"Ah, brother, I'm sorry. I was too excited and carried away."

Mushu ruffled his hair with familiarity, his voice calm.

"It's alright."

Then, in his usual stoic fashion, Mushu bombarded him with questions.

"Why is your face so red? Are you sick? Are you too tired from the trip? You should have called me so I could have picked you up."

He pressed his hand to Sisu's forehead, comparing temperatures, his eyes filled with concern.

Sisu, however, looked straight into Mushu's eyes, his hand gripping the hem of his shirt, his knees twisting nervously.

The Onlookers' Thoughts

The onlookers exchanged knowing glances, each reacting inwardly to the heartfelt reunion before them.

Ren, arms crossed, thought silently: "Haist, this Mushu... as cold and hard as stone. He can't even tell that his brother has feelings for him?"

Lily, tagging Fatty's shoulder, whispered: "How can there be such a difference between the two brothers? One is hard as stone, the other soft as a persimmon." Fatty, mouth agape, could only nod in trance.

Ling Li shook her head, amusement flickering in her eyes. "If Sisu were a wolf, his pheromones would have filled the air by now. Mushu and Sisu—both dragon names. I wonder who will be on top and who will be on the bottom?"

Four Eyes, reading his wife's thoughts, smirked. He leaned close and whispered, "I like you on top."

Ling Li froze, her face flushing crimson. "...."

She silently reminded herself: 'I forgot about my husband's mind-reading habit.'

She was genuinely speechless.

"Pap's... don't you know how many single dogs are here?" Shi Min sheepishly said.

The Invitation

Ling Li cleared her throat, then smiled.

"Ehem. Mushu, why don't you invite your brother in?"

She turned to Sisu, her voice warm.

"Sisu, welcome."

The group parted, allowing the brothers to step inside. The air was thick with curiosity, amusement, and unspoken thoughts — but beneath it all, there was warmth. The clan had gained another presence, and Mushu had regained a piece of his past. inheritance?

The great hall of Peonies Castle was lively again. Family and friends lined the walls, and Ling Li presided at the chamber's head. Mushu stood tall beside her, stoic, his eyes betraying a flicker of anticipation.

Sisu entered, his feet moving slowly but with purpose. He paused at the center, drew a steadying breath, and bowed deeply before Ling Li and the assembled clan, holding his gaze low in respect until invited to rise.

"Madam Ling Li, honored elders, family and friends... I am Sisu, the younger brother of Mushu. I come not only to greet you but to fulfill my father's last wish."

The hall fell silent, the weight of his words pressing against every heart.

The Father's Items

Sisu reached into his bag with careful fingers, withdrawing two small lacquered chests. He ran his thumb over its surface — polished yet showing nicks. With both hands, he set it gently before Mushu, his breath wavering.

"Before Father passed, he told me these belonged to you. He said they carry both memory and responsibility."

Mushu's hands shook as he opened the chest. Inside lay three items:

A weathered sword hilt, its blade long gone, but the grip polished smooth by years of use. Mushu's breath caught—this was the weapon his stepfather had once wielded to protect their family.

A jade pendant, carved with the symbol of a dragon. Mushu lifted it reverently, recognizing it as the token his stepfather wore every day, a symbol of loyalty and strength.

A scroll, sealed with wax and his stepfather's handwriting. Mushu's chest tightened as he opened it. The message was simple yet heavy:

"Mushu, you are my son, not by blood but by choice. Protect your brother. Guard the clan you've protected for years. Live with honor."

Chapter 475: STOIC MUSHU WAS EMOTIONAL

Emotional Reactions

Mushu's stoic mask cracked. His eyes glistened, his jaw clenched as he whispered,

"Father... even in death, you guide me." Sisu reached for Mushu's sleeve, his tears matching Mushu's, and his voice quivering.

"He loved you, Big Brother. More than you ever knew."

The elders bowed their heads in respect.

El Padre murmured: "A vow beyond blood is stronger than lineage."

El Capitan, usually stern, placed a hand over his chest: "Your father's honor now lives in you."

Ling Li rose, her aura vast, her voice carrying authority and compassion.

"Sisu, you are welcome among us. Mushu, your father's legacy is now bound to the Li Clan. His spirit will watch over us."

The Second Chest – Mother's Belongings

The hall of Peonies Castle was hushed once more, the air heavy with anticipation. Mushu's broad hands trembled as Sisu placed the second lacquered chest before him. Its surface was worn smooth, faint scratches etched like scars of time. Mushu drew a deep breath, his chest rising and falling as though bracing for a storm.

Mushu's fingers trembled as he lifted the lid of the second lacquered chest. The air seemed to thicken, as though the memories inside had been sealed for decades.

Inside lay treasures of tenderness, fragments of a life that had shaped him:

A silver locket – worn and scratched, but when opened, it revealed a tiny portrait of his mother smiling, her eyes radiant with warmth. On the opposite side was a faded lock of her hair, tied with a red thread. The sight pierced him — her presence preserved in something so small, yet so eternal. This is now their eternal bond together.

A jade bracelet – pale green, smooth as water, etched faintly with lotus patterns. Mushu remembered how she wore it every day, the sound of it clinking softly whenever she worked, the way she would touch it absentmindedly when she worried.

It was said to be a family heirloom, passed down through generations of women, carrying blessings of protection and fertility. His mother once said, "Once you find a wife, Mom will bestow this bracelet on her."

However, his father drowned in gambling, kept attempting to force his mother to hand it over to him to be sold, even beating her half dead, so his mother decided to keep it and told his father she had pawned it and presented some amount of money from her small savings to pacify her husband. Mushu held the bracelet tightly before returning it to the small chest.

An old sepia-toned photograph showing Mushu as a child standing between his mother and his birth father. His father's hand rested awkwardly on his shoulder, while his mother's smile lit the entire frame. Mushu's throat tightened; though his birth father had failed them, the picture reminded him of the bond his mother had fought to preserve. It's a bittersweet memory of his father.

A handkerchief embroidered with her initials – delicate stitches forming her name, faintly frayed from years of use. Mushu lifted it reverently, remembering how she would wipe his tears with it when he was small. It's a remembrance of her tenderness and care.

Mushu's stoic mask shattered further. His breath came unevenly, his eyes glistening as he whispered:

"Mother... you carried me through storms. Even now, you remind me to stand tall."

He pressed the locket to his chest, his massive frame trembling with vulnerability. The jade bracelet slipped into his palm, its cool touch grounding him in memory.

Sisu, standing close, touched the jade bracelet with trembling fingers.

"She wanted you to have these, Big Brother. Father said they would remind you of her love... and of the strength you gave her."

Clan's Reactions and Blessings

Everyone bowed their heads, their voices hushed with reverence.

Ling Li stepped forward, her aura vast yet gentle. "A mother's love is the first shield we ever know. Treasure it, Mushu. Let it guide you as much as your father's honor."

Four Eyes added softly, his shield shimmering faintly: "Your father gave you strength. Your mother gave you a heart. Together, they made you whole."

Ren, tears in her eyes, clasped Mushu's arm. "Uncle Mushu, her love lives in you. And now, it lives in us too."

Shun bowed his head, his flames dimmed in respect. "Even the Phoenix bows to a mother's fire. Carry it proudly."

Lily's carp voice resonated with clarity: "Truth binds us, and truth says her spirit is here, watching."

Fatty, wiping his eyes, grinned through his tears: "Brother Mushu, Brother Sisu... you've got me too. I'll fight beside you, just as she would have wanted."

Chatty, scratching his head, muttered: "I'm not good with words... but welcome. Your mother's love is now our clan's blessing."

Shi Min gave Mushu a firm tap on the shoulder, his jaw tight. "You are not alone. Seven sisters, one brother... and all of us behind you."

Ling Li's gaze lingered on Mushu and Sisu, her voice calm yet edged with steel.

"Tonight, we honored a father's legacy and a mother's love. Tomorrow, we defend both in the Family Competition. Their spirits will walk with us."

The hall erupted in applause.

Mushu stood taller, the jade pendant from his father resting against his chest, the jade bracelet of his mother in his hand. His parents' words and love were etched into his soul.

Sisu stood beside him, no longer hesitant, his place in the clan secured. Together, they carried not only memory but destiny.

The Nursery at Night

The nursery glowed softly under lantern light, its walls newly adorned with painted cranes and lotus blossoms. The triplets lay in their cradles, swaddled in silk, while the twins giggled in their tulle gowns, chasing each other around the room. Ren and Lily sat close to their mother, who was nursing the youngest of the triplets, her aura calm and maternal.

Ren tilted her head, her eyes sparkling with curiosity.

"Mom, will Shun and I have any possibility of having twins or triplets, too, in the future?"

Lily leaned forward, her crisp voice carrying a playful lilt.

"Yes, Mom, tell us! They're so cute and irresistible — how can we not want one?"

Ling Li chuckled, shaking her head gently.

"I never thought both of you would be so eager to have multiple babies."

Her laughter softened the air, but her tone grew thoughtful as she answered.

Chapter 476: HE'S NOT A DUMPLING! HE'S MY BOYFRIEND

"Well, Lily, sad to say this, but you and Fatty are very unlikely to have twins or triplets. The Li Clan, even on your father's side, doesn't carry the genes for multiple births. I gave birth twice with multiple babies because your stepfather's genes are very strong. His father is a set of triplets, and their great-grandfather is also a set of triplets." Ling Li explained

Lily's shoulders slumped dramatically, her lips pouting.

"Ah! That's too sad!"

Then, with sudden indignation, she wagged her finger at her mother and Ren.

"And please, you and big brother, can you stop calling him Fatty? He hates it, and honestly, so do I!"

Ren burst into laughter, covering her mouth with her sleeve.

"But it suits him so well! He's round and cheerful, like a dumpling."

Lily rolled her eyes, cheeks flushed.

"He's not a dumpling, he's my boyfriend! Call him by his name, or at least something dignified."

Ling Li smiled knowingly, her gaze warm but teasing.

"Names carry weight, Lily. If you wish him to be seen as more than 'Fatty,' then you must help him carry himself with dignity. But don't worry — whether dumpling or dragon, he is family."

Ren's brows furrowed as she remembered her mother's earlier words. She leaned closer, her voice curious but tinged with hope.

"But Mom, you only said Lily and Fatty don't have the chance. Does it mean Shun and I have the possibility?"

The twins paused in their play, their wide eyes turning toward their mother as if they, too, awaited the answer. Lily, still pouting from her mother's earlier remark, crossed her arms and leaned in, eager to hear the reply.

Ling Li chuckled softly, shifting the triplet in her arms before answering. Her gaze moved between Ren and Lily, her voice calm yet thoughtful.

"Ren, the truth is... yes, you and Shun have a possibility. The bloodline of the Phoenix Sutra carries unusual strength. Sometimes, that strength manifests in multiple births. It is rare, but not impossible."

Her eyes softened as she looked at Ren.

"But remember, child, such blessings are not without burden. The heavens grant them only when they believe their parents can endure the trials that come with raising more than one soul at a time. It is not just joy — it is responsibility.

And I remember, Shun's maternal aunts are also a pair of twins, and this makes the chance higher."

Ren's lips parted, her eyes shimmering with excitement. She clasped her hands together, whispering almost to herself:

"Twins... or even triplets... Shun, and I could be blessed."

Lily's Reaction

Lily groaned dramatically, flopping back against the cushions.

"So unfair! Shun and Ren get the possibility, but Quan Ye and I don't? Mom, you're breaking my heart!"

Ren laughed, nudging her sister playfully.

"Don't worry, Lily. Even if you don't have twins, you'll still have adorable children. And knowing Fatty, they'll probably be round and cheerful like him."

Lily sat up, cheeks flushed.

"Stop calling him Fatty!"

The twins, catching the word, burst into giggles.

"Fatty! Fatty!" they sang, twirling in circles.

Lily buried her face in her hands, groaning. Ren laughed so hard she nearly toppled over, while Ling Li shook her head, amusement flickering in her eyes.

Ling Li's voice cut through the laughter, gentle but firm.

"Enough teasing. Whether one child or many, each is a blessing shaped by destiny. Do not chase what the heavens may or may not give. Instead, prepare your hearts to love whatever gift comes."

The nursery quieted. The triplets stirred softly in their cradles, their tiny cries weaving into the twins' laughter. Ren's eyes glowed with hope, Lily's cheeks remained flushed with indignation, and Ling Li's calm presence wrapped them all in warmth.

The Nursery at Night

The fragrance of herbs still clung faintly to Four Eyes as he stepped into the nursery, his hair damp from the bath. The twins, Kim Kim and Chin Chin, immediately abandoned their toys and ran to him, their gowns fluttering like little banners.

He bent down, scooping them into his arms with practiced ease.

"Were both of you behaving today?" he asked, his voice warm but carrying the weight of expectation.

Kim Kim puffed her chest proudly.

"Of course, Father!"

Chin Chin nodded vigorously, her eyes sparkling.

"We even helped keep watch of our younger sisters!"

Four Eyes smiled, pressing a kiss to each of their foreheads before setting them down.

"Alright, that's good. Dad is very proud of you. Now let me see your younger sisters."

The twins tugged at his sleeve, eager to show off the triplets.

Kim Kim pointed at the cradles, her voice ringing with excitement.

"Yes, Dad, look at them! They are no longer crumpled than yesterday!"

Four Eyes froze, blinking.

"..."

Chin Chin tilted her head innocently.

"Were Kim Kim, and I also this ugly when we were infants?"

Four Eyes opened his mouth, then closed it again.

"..."

He is truly helpless when it comes to his twins.

Ling Li, nursing one of the babies, laughed softly, her eyes glimmering with amusement.

"Kim Kim, Chin Chin, all newborn babies look the same way. They are wrinkled because they've been soaked in embryonic fluid inside the mother's womb to keep them alive."

Kim Kim furrowed her brows, deep in thought. Suddenly, she darted to the door.

"Kim Kim, where are you going?" Chin Chin called after her.

"To the library!" Kim Kim shouted without stopping.

Chin Chin gasped, then chased after her.

"I'm coming too! Wait for me!"

Four Eyes rubbed his temple, speechless once again.

'Having genius children is not too easy,' he thought, shaking his head.

Ren and Lily, watching from the side, burst into laughter.

Alright, Paps is here, let's go too," Ren said, tugging Lily along.

"Good night, Mom,

Good night, Paps!"

A Quiet Moment

When the sisters left, Four Eyes knelt beside Ling Li. His hand brushed a strand of hair from her face, tucking it gently behind her ear.

"Dear, it's been hard on you," he whispered, his voice low and tender.

Ling Li chuckled, her eyes soft with exhaustion yet glowing with joy.

"It's alright. I just never imagined that I would have a pair of twins and triplets in my whole life."

She handed him one of the babies who had just finished nursing. Four Eyes cradled her carefully, his gaze tender.

Chapter 477: GIRLS ARE CUTER

"Jinyue looks very similar to Lily," Four Eyes murmured.

Ling Li blinked, surprised.

"Did you think so too? I thought it was only my mind."

"They are similar," Four Eyes reassured, placing Jinyue gently in the crib. He then lifted Fuyao, already asleep, and chuckled.

"I'm glad they all sleep well at night. Unlike Chin Chin, she wouldn't sleep for three straight months after birth. I had to carry her at all times." Four Eyes recalled how Chin Chin would cry when lying in bed at night.

He laid Fuyao down, then turned to Ruixiang, still nestled in Ling Li's arms.

"Is she full?"

"She's almost done," Ling Li replied.

Four Eyes frowned, his brows knitting.

"She's too little."

Ling Li's voice was calm, reassuring.

"It's natural for them to be smaller than usual because there were three of them, and they were also born two months earlier. But with my qi, they were born strong enough not to need incubators."

The Twins Return

Just as she finished, Kim Kim, and Chin Chin burst back into the room, followed by Pharsa, her pregnant form graceful yet firm. She had found the twins in the library, their noses buried in medical texts far beyond their age. She didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Pharsa ushered them back toward their beds, but the twins immediately began reciting in unison, their photographic memories shining through.

Kim Kim started, her voice clear:

"Mom, we now understand how the baby is conceived and how the growth inside the womb continues until delivery."

Chin Chin picked up seamlessly, explaining the stages of fetal development with startling precision.

Four Eyes froze, his jaw slack.

"..."

He rubbed his temple, utterly speechless.

'It was only about twenty minutes when they ran out, and they already know this much!'

Ling Li listened with amusement, her lips curved in a smile.

"Alright, you two, up to your beds," Pharsa commanded.

Pharsa's Preparation

Pharsa firmly guided the twins, then turned to Ling Li.

"In three months, it's my turn to give birth. How is your preparation?" Ling Li asked gently.

Pharsa smirked, her hand resting on her belly.

"Why do you think I'm here? I'm learning how to take care of triplets from you, so when these three brats come out, I'll know how to handle them."

At that moment, Chatty entered, his face twisted in mock indignation.

"Honey, why do you keep calling our baby boys brats?"

Pharsa snorted, rolling her eyes.

"Because I think girls are cuter!"

Chatty "...."

Pharsa turned to Ling Li, her tone softening.

"Ling, give me Ruixiang. You should rest. I'll take care of them until the nannies arrive."

Ling Li smiled gratefully and handed the baby over.

"Alright, thank you."

The nursery was filled with warmth and laughter, yet beneath it all lay the quiet tension of responsibility.

The twins' brilliance, the triplets' fragility, Pharsa's impending birth — all threads weaving into the tapestry of the clan's future.

Four Eyes stood silently, his gaze lingering on his daughters, his wife, and the family gathered around them. His heart swelled with pride, but his mind whispered caution.

"So many blessings... and so many burdens. May the heavens grant us strength to carry them all."

Quiet After the Children Sleep

The nursery had finally fallen silent. The twins were tucked into their beds, their giggles fading into soft breaths. The triplets lay in their cribs, tiny chests rising and falling in fragile rhythm. Pharsa had retired to her own quarters, and the nannies had taken their posts outside.

Back at the main chamber, Ling Li sat by the window, moonlight spilling across her face. Four Eyes entered, quietly closing the door behind him. He walked over and knelt beside her, his hand resting lightly on hers as he gazed at her profile.

"They're asleep," he murmured, his voice low. "But my heart is still restless."

Ling Li turned to him, her eyes rimmed with exhaustion yet burning with fierce, protective love.

"Restless? Why?"

Four Eyes' Worries

Four Eyes exhaled, his brows furrowed.

"Kim Kim and Chin Chin... they're too clever. Genius children, yes, but sometimes I fear their minds run faster than their hearts. They absorb knowledge like water, but what if they lose innocence too soon? What if they grow apart from us, from the clan, because they see the world differently?"

He pressed his fingers to his temple, trying to recall the moment the twins rapidly mastered medical texts.

"It was only twenty minutes in the library, and they already grasped the mysteries of conception and birth with eerie clarity. They're still children, but their words are stained with wisdom that feels ancient. My heart twists with pride... and dread."

Ling Li's lips trembled into a smile, worry and gentle hope warring in her eyes.

"I understand. Genius is a gift, but it can be a burden. The heavens gave them sharp minds, but it is our duty to shape their hearts. They must learn compassion as much as knowledge."

Ling Li's Worries

"And then these triplets... fragile, born too soon. Their strength is borrowed from my very bones, and yet they seem perpetually balanced on the edge between worlds. Every cry is a knife. Every shallow breath feels like a prayer trembling in the night. I never imagined the fear and awe of raising genius twins and ethereal triplets in one exhausted heart."

Ling Li squeezed Four Eyes' hand, her grip tightening with emotion.

"Sometimes I feel the heavens are watching, testing if our love can shelter those so extraordinary, yet so heartbreakingly fragile. Have we been chosen, or simply challenged beyond what our hearts can bear?"

Four Eyes leaned closer to Ling Li, letting his forehead gently rest against hers.

"I fear I won't be enough that I'll fail to protect and guide them. Genius children who may outgrow us, fragile triplets who may need more than we can give... it feels overwhelming."

Ling Li closed her eyes, steadying herself as her words wrenched themselves free through the pounding ache in her heart.

"But we're not alone. The clan—Shi Min, Ren, Lily, Shun, Fatty, Chatty... Even Pharsa, Mushu, and Sisu — they'll help us teach them not just to cultivate, but to love, endure, honor the covenant."

Four Eyes lifted her hand to his lips, pressing a gentle kiss to her knuckles, his voice firm.

"Then let's promise: however heavy the burden, we'll carry it together. Genius or fragile, they're ours. We'll raise them to face the heavens."

Ling Li's eyes glistened, her lips curving into a smile.

"Together."

Chapter 478: MILK IT AND SUCK IT DRY

***** WARNING ***** R18 ***** MATURE CONTENT *****

"Alright, let me help you take a bath. It's been hard on you." Four Eyes carried Ling Li into his arms.

Ling Li playfully snorted, 'I think it's been harder on him than me.'

"Dear, have you forgotten I can read your mind, especially when I'm holding you? And you're right, it has truly been hard on me. And as I remember correctly, you're out of confinement. Ah, we'll take a shower instead!" Four Eyes happily said, taking big strides to the shower.

Ling Li "..."

'Did I just shoot my own foot?'

Four Eyes placed Ling Li down and hurriedly stripped her and himself of their clothes.

"Is there a need for such hurry?" Ling Li asked in amusement.

"You don't know how I have endured this month!" Four Eyes said and led Ling Li to the shower.

Just as the warm water was turned on, Four Eyes slammed his lips to his wife. He has been controlling his desire, and this day finally arrived, and he could no longer wait.

His hand roamed Ling Li's body with practiced precision. He kneaded her breast as his kiss moved down to her neck before finding her breast.

"I want my share of this," he murmured.

Ling Li moaned.

"Hhhmmmmmm..."

"Dear, I like you this way... a little plumper..." Four Eyes whispered as he kissed Ling Li's belly, finally moving down to her entrance.

Four Eyes kissed it, and its smell... he missed it so much. He took his tongue out and found Ling Li's clit.

Ling Li gripped Four Eyes' hair as her toes curled. Moaning with her head tilted back.

"Aahhhhhhh..."

Four Eyes slowly moves his tongue on each of her folds and sucking every drop of juice.

"Chu Yan...."

Aahhhhhhh...

"Aahhhhhhh..." Ling Li moaned with uneven breath, moving her hips towards Four Eyes while gripping his hair.

"Please...

Chu Yan...

Aaahhhhhh...

I'm... I'm cumming...

Hhhmmmmmm...

Yes..

Aaahhhhhh..."

Four Eyes didn't stop moving, with his face buried in her wet entrance, his lips and tongue moving, making sure nothing was missed to give his wife a perfect cum. As he finished off every drop of her cum, he stood up, washing his face with the warm water, and faced his wife.

"Dear, may I? I can no longer wait." He whispered as he slammed his lips to hers, while Ling Li wrapped her arms around his neck.

At the same time, Four Eyes' hard cock, whose tip is full of pre cum, the shaft's vein is almost begging to explode, thrusts into Ling Li. When it did, Four Eyes couldn't help but tilt his head and groan.

"Ugghhhhhh..."

Fuck! Dear! I miss you so much!" He said with a hoarse voice, as he thrust fast and deep into Ling Li.

"Dear, did you miss me too?"

"Did your pussy miss my cock fucking you?"

Ling Li was caught off guard by Four Eyes' dirty talk and was not able to reply.

"Dear, it seems I'm not doing enough that you didn't even miss cock!" Four Eyes said and slammed his cock hard into Ling Li, wanting to punish her, gripping her butt hard as he kept banging his cock hard into her. Each thrust was formidable and deep as if it tried to reach her womb, both her breasts bouncing up and down.

"I'm going to fuck you hard, dear, so you won't ever forget my cock. Hm?" Four Eyes said, his eyes were red like a hungry wolf.

Ling Li is so overwhelmed that her face is flushed.

"Chu Yan...

Aaahhhhhh...

I miss you... very much...

Hhhmmmmmm..." Ling Li said in between breaths.

Four Eyes grabbed one of Ling Li's legs and held it high. As he continues to thrust his cock.

"Good that you miss me, my Dear. My cock, looked how angry it is for missing your pussy. Let that pussy cum for my cock, dear." Four Eyes said as he grunted.

"Ugghhhhhh..."

Ugghhhhhh...

"Chu Yan...

Honey...

Aaahhhhhh...

I'm cumming...

Aaahhhhhh...

Hhhmmmmmm...."

After Ling Li calmed down from her orgasm, Four Eyes carried her out of the showing without even pulling his cock out. He then placed Ling Lin on the table, raising both Ling Li's legs over his shoulder, slamming his lips over hers as he cock once again, thrusting into his wife.

"Fuck! Fuck! Dear!

Ugghhhhhh...

Your pussy feels so good!" He said while grunting.

"Chu Yan... Aaahhhhhh..."

Calling his name and gripping him tighter are the only cues to know his wife is cumming.

"Let's come together, dear..." He said as he thrust faster and harder, how Ling Li wants it, making sure to hit her G-spot.

The couple simultaneously cum. Each one moaning and grunting.

"Ugghhhhhh..."

Ugghhhhhh...

Aaahhhhhh...

Hhhmmmmmm...."

Four Eyes once again lifted Ling Li and placed her onto their bed. Looking directly at her flushed face. That red tint that always shows on her cheeks every time she cums is always very alluring to his Eyes. And the smell of her cum truly drives him into a frenzy.

After looking at her as if he had memorized her face, he kissed her lips, down to her nipples. He let her relax as he kissed her whole body before shifting her on top of him.

"Dear, ride me..." Four eyes said as he positioned Ling Li's pussy on his cock.

"Ride my cock with your pussy..." He said as he lifted her hips up and down.

"Let your pussy milk my cock, dear. Let you pussy suck it dry..."

Ling Li chuckled. She's been amused by his dirty talk. She never thought that he was so good at it, and he will be addicted to doing so.

She tilted her head and gave her hair a shake, and she transformed into her immortal form.

"Dear, this is what I'm waiting for... Please... fuck my cock hard and wild..." Four Eyes said, mesmerized by his wife's ethereal look.

Ling Li grinned with a sly smile. She snapped her fingers, and Four Eyes found both his hands and feet tightly tied to their bedposts.

"Fuck! Dear! I'm all yours!" Four Eyes thrilled and yelled. But he never expected Ling Li to pull out.
"Dear, please..."

Ling Li, with a single feather in her hand, played with it on Four Eyes' chest, then to his ear, as she whispered in the other ear...

"Please, what?" She teasingly asked, her warm breath all over Four Eyes' face and neck, driving him crazy.

"Ling Li! Ride my cock and fuck me hard!"

Chapter 479: I LOVE HIM. SILENTLY. DESPERATELY. SECRETLY

***** WARNING ***** R18 ***** MATURE CONTENT *****

Ling Li chuckled. "So impatient." She said as she kneeled on top of him, played with his nipples, nibbling them one after the other. At the same time, her wet entrance was slowly grinding the shaft of his hard cock. Up and down, watering it all over with her cum.

"Fuck! Ugghhhhhhh..." Four Eyes granted loudly. His cock wants to scream with him. "Dear... please..."

Ling Li, looking at Four Eyes directly in his eyes, teasingly let her wet entrance play with the tip of his cock.

Four Eyes' hand gripping tightly, his breath heavy, as he looks back into Ling Li's eyes with red eyes.

Ling Li could see the lust in his eyes. She then slowly slid down to let his cock enter her. It was so slow that Four Eyes retaliated by forcing his way up to his pussy and started to ride him with his limbs tied.

Ling Li swayed her hips to match him.

Four Eyes silently thought, 'Finally! Fuck!'

"Ride my cock hard, Baby! Suck it dry!"

Ling Li didn't disappoint him.

The night was long, and Four Eyes was grunting, yelling, and cursing all throughout. And for the first time, Four Eyes slept ahead of Ling Li.

The Room That Night

That same evening, Mushu guided his brother Sisu down the quiet corridor to his chambers. The lamps and chandelier flickered, their warm light casting long shadows that moved in tandem with the brothers as they walked side by side.

I didn't know you were arriving today so that I couldn't prepare the guest room — it's still cluttered with my training gear and old books. Just stay in my room tonight," Mushu said, his tone calm and matter-of-fact, as if the arrangement were perfectly ordinary.

Sisu froze mid-step, his entire body going rigid as heat surged from his chest to his face, staining his cheeks a deep, betraying crimson.

"Ah! Big Brother! This... this..." he stammered, his voice cracking and trembling like a leaf caught in an autumn wind, words dissolving before they could fully form.

Mushu's brow furrowed with concern. He closed the distance between them in two swift strides, then reached out and pressed his calloused palm firmly against Sisu's forehead. The gesture was both clinical in its purpose and unexpectedly gentle in its touch.

"Why's your face red? Are you sick? You're burning up! Let me check your pulse."

Sisu jerked backward from Mushu's touch as if scalded, panic flashing in his wide eyes. His breath came in short, shallow gasps, and his body tensed as he put space between them.

"No! No! No, Big Brother!" The words tumbled out in a desperate rush. "I'm not sick... I'm just — just a little exhausted from the journey. Where's the bathroom? I need to wash up first!"

Mushu gestured with a slight tilt of his head toward the carved wooden door at the far end of the room.

"That's the bathroom—"

But before he could finish the sentence, Sisu darted past Mushu, moving quickly like a startled deer. He practically threw himself through the doorway and slammed the bathroom door shut with a resounding bang that echoed through the chamber.

When the bathroom door slammed closed with jarring finality, Mushu stood rooted to the spot, momentarily stunned and silent. A question mark twisted through his mind as he slowly shook his head in confusion, 'What is even the problem?' Then, regaining composure, he turned to the bed and began stripping away the old covers, replacing them with crisp, fresh linens that smelled faintly of lavender and sunlight.

Sisu's Inner Turmoil

Inside the bathroom, Sisu pressed his back firmly against the closed door, his legs nearly giving out beneath him. He brought both trembling hands to his burning cheeks and slid down until he was almost crouched. His chest heaved with ragged breaths, heart hammering against his ribs as if braced for an impossible battle.

"How do I control myself?" he whispered hoarsely, fixing his reflection with desperate eyes. "Years of keeping my distance, forcing myself to be apart... And now we're together again, breathing the same air. How do I stay calm? How can I act normal around him?"

He staggered toward the shower, each step unsteady, fumbling to unfasten buttons and pull off clothing with shaking, clumsy fingers. As he finally stripped down, the sound of running water crashed and

roared, filling the tiled space, but even its thunderous noise couldn't drown the turmoil swirling in his mind.

The hot spray hit his skin like needles, steam curling around him. Tears — hot, bitter, long suppressed — fell down his cheeks, mixing with the water. He couldn't hold them back anymore.

'Ever since I was young, I knew I was different—fundamentally, irrevocably different. I am gay. And when Father married my stepmother and brought Mushu into our home, everything changed. I... I loved him. Silently. Desperately. Secretly. I followed him everywhere like a devoted shadow, like a duckling imprinted on its mother, unable to resist the pull. I memorized his habits, his favorite foods, the way he smiled when he thought no one was watching. Until one day, he left. And part of me died with his departure. But I know, it's for the best.'

His sobs echoed and reverberated against the cold tiled walls, raw and broken, the sound of a heart that had been caged for too long. Sisu knew — had always known — that his father had long ago realized the true nature of his feelings for his stepbrother. Yet, his old man had remained deliberately, maddeningly silent, neither condemning nor condoning.

"Father..." he choked out between sobs, his voice breaking. "Are you testing me? Is this some kind of trial? Why did you send me back to him, of all people? Why now, when I've barely learned to breathe without him?"

Mushu's Confusion

Outside, Mushu's vigilant ears caught the muffled sobs through the door. His heart clenched, concern disturbing his usual composure. But as soon as he heard Sisu mention their father, he exhaled slowly and forced himself to relax.

"He's grieving for Father," Mushu thought, his analytical mind latching onto the explanation with relief. "The loss is still fresh, still raw. I'll take him shopping tomorrow — get him out of these walls — maybe dine at that fine restaurant by the harbor he used to love as a child. That should help lift his spirits, help him relax."

He shook his head, trying to physically dislodge the persistent unease that clung to his thoughts like cobwebs. With practiced efficiency, he stripped off his outer garments, then methodically removed his concealed arsenal — twin pistols from shoulder holsters, throwing knives from his boots, a garrote from his belt — laying each weapon down in precise, neat rows on the table. His discipline was absolute, ingrained through decades of training; even drowning in confusion, order and ritual remained his anchors.

Chapter 480 480: I'M NOT SICK

The Encounter

When Sisu finally emerged twenty minutes later, steam trailing behind him in wisps, he stopped short in the doorway, body tensing as if encountering an invisible barrier. His eyes widened, and he swayed slightly, throat suddenly dry despite the lingering humidity. Mushu sat on the edge of the bed, legs spread in a relaxed posture, dressed only in loose black trousers and a fitted sleeveless undershirt that clung to his torso, revealing muscles honed by years of training. Mushu's physical presence dominated the room, commanding Sisu's reluctant attention.

Sisu swallowed hard, his gaze locked.

"Oh, you're done. You rest first. I already changed the beddings with fresh linens," Mushu said, not looking up from his phone.

Sisu's heart skipped. Mushu had said his bed. Did that mean they would share it? The memory of childhood nights with Mushu replayed in his mind — a fragile, private ache.

Mushu finally looked up, his sharp eyes catching Sisu's frozen stance.

"What's wrong?"

Sisu blinked rapidly, his mind scrambling desperately for words, for any coherent thought that might explain his bizarre behavior.

"Ah... Big Brother," he managed, voice higher than intended. "I... I can sleep on the sofa. Really, it's fine. I'm very unruly when I sleep — I toss and turn and kick. I wouldn't want to disturb you."

Mushu chuckled, the sound a low, rich rumble that seemed to vibrate through the air and settle directly in Sisu's chest.

"So you do remember you sleep like a windmill," he said with fond amusement dancing in his eyes. "You never outgrew it. It's alright — the bed is king-sized, practically an ocean. Even if you flip over completely, there's plenty of room. We won't even touch."

Sisu's face burned with such intensity that he worried it might actually combust as he silently thought, his heart twisting painfully:

'Big Brother remembers... those nights we shared a bed, when I would curl close, needing him desperately. He remembers, but he can't know what those memories mean to me—how I've carried them for years, unable to let go.'

The Breaking Point

The moment Mushu disappeared into the bathroom for his turn, the door clicking shut behind him, Sisu thumped his burning cheeks with both palms repeatedly, as if physical pain might shock him back to sanity. He whispered frantically to himself, his voice barely audible.

"Calm down! Calm down, you idiot!" he hissed through clenched teeth. "Get yourself together! He's your brother. Your brother!"

He stared at the massive king-size bed as if it were an instrument of exquisite torture, his entire body trembling with a volatile mixture of anticipation and dread.

"This can't be happening! This cannot be happening!" His voice rose in pitch. "Good Lord, Buddha, every deity in heaven — you are testing my limits, pushing me to the absolute breaking point!"

He climbed onto the bed with exaggerated caution, as if it might explode, then wrapped himself tightly in the blanket like a cocoon, swaddling himself from neck to toe in multiple layers of protective fabric armor.

When Mushu returned fifteen minutes later, droplets of water still glistening on his bare shoulders and dampening his hair, making it fall roguishly across his forehead, he stopped short at the sight before him and nearly laughed out loud.

"Aren't you afraid you'll suffocate in there?" he asked, genuine bewilderment coloring his tone as he approached the bed. "It's not even cold."

Sisu peeked out from his fabric fortress, and his eyes nearly rolled out of their sockets, his brain short-circuiting completely. Mushu stood before him like some ancient warrior god, towel draped casually around his neck, low-slung gray sweatpants clinging to his narrow hips in a way that should be illegal, abs glistening with residual moisture, each muscle defined with almost painful clarity. The perfect V-line of his lower abdomen disappeared tantalizingly beneath the waistband, a roadmap to perdition.

Sisu's heart thundered so violently he could hear nothing else, his face aflame with heat that had nothing to do with the blankets. His body betrayed him utterly — blood rushing south, arousal hardening between his legs despite every desperate mental command to stop. Shame crashed over him in suffocating waves, followed immediately by panic.

Mushu's expression shifted from amusement to concern, his brow furrowing as he stepped closer to the bed.

"You! Your face is burning hot again!" His voice sharpened with alarm. "Come out of that blanket right now!"

Without waiting for compliance, Mushu yanked the covers away with one swift motion and grabbed Sisu's wrist in an iron grip, his fingers finding the pulse point with the practiced precision of someone trained in both healing and killing.

"Why is your heart racing like this? This isn't normal!" His grip tightened, his other hand reaching for Sisu's forehead. "Did you develop a heart condition while I was away? Tell me the truth! And you're burning up like you have a fever!"

Sisu panicked completely, his composure shattering. He struggled against Mushu's iron grip like a trapped animal, desperate to escape before his brother noticed the damning evidence of his arousal.

"Big Brother, I... I... I'm not sick!" The words came out strangled, desperate. "Please, please, just let go of my hand first! I'm fine! I promise I'm fine!"

Mushu released him, startled by his desperation. Sisu bolted like lightning, fleeing back into the bathroom and locking the door.

Mushu's Helplessness

Mushu stood frozen, staring at the closed bathroom door as if it might hold answers. His brows furrowed deeply, creating harsh lines across his forehead. His usually sharp, analytical mind felt clouded, sluggish, unable to process the puzzle before him.

"What in the seven hells is happening?" he muttered under his breath, dragging a hand through his damp hair. "How do I solve a problem when I don't even understand what the problem is? How do I answer a question mark without a question?"

He sat heavily at his desk, rubbing his temple. He had mastered blades, guns, strategy, and war. Yet here, with his own brother, he was utterly helpless.

