

Resonance 431

Chapter 0431: Dual Poisons

"The poison in Guo Ling's body is a rare one, called the Hellish Caterpillar. It is a virulent poison that takes the form of a worm, moving through the flesh and blood of the victim and feeding on their strength. It has especially powerful corrosive effects on resonant power, which is why ordinary resonant power is largely ineffective against it.

"This sort of rare poison would trouble even a Heavenly Dipper General. Pei Hao has really paid a bomb to secure something to scare Uncle Yuan away."

Li Luo had gathered what information he could about the poison in Guo Ling's body, and none of it was good news.

The poison in her body was even harder to deal with than he had expected. It was on a completely different level from the one Tang Yun and the others had been hit with.

The Hellish Caterpillar itself used a whole bunch of ingredients that were notoriously difficult to find. Li Luo had only seen their names mentioned in a bunch of arcane books that he had read in the last few months. With no disrespect to Guo Ling, it was overkill.

Yuan Qing bunched his fists in anger. "Damned Pei Hao!"

Yuan Qing had left House Luolan's headquarters for many years mainly because of how he favored this disciple of his. He had kept her ensconced away from the gritty ruins of House Luolan for all these years. And now he had brought her back straight into the depths of despair. Yuan Qing could not blame himself any more for the decision.

If he had known that this would happen, he would have come back by himself.

"Can you nullify it?" Jiang Qing'e asked solemnly.

Li Luo pondered the question. "It will be very difficult. But I think there should be no problem in helping her to stop the spread and disperse the concentration. It should buy us time to find a cure.

"Have all the remedies I asked for been prepared?"

"Rest assured that we have secured every last one of them, Young Lord." Cai Wei bustled into the room, a short line of servants with her carrying all sorts of packages and envelopes. "In good supply."

"Always reliable, Sister Cai Wei." Li Luo grinned.

He delayed no more, rolling up his sleeves and preparing the mixture he had in mind. There were many failures, and it took him a full four hours before he was satisfied with the result.

It was not strictly an antidote. It was not formulated to nullify the Hellish Caterpillar within Guo Ling's body, but merely to hold it at bay for some time.

Guo Ling had already fallen into a coma. Li Luo squeezed her cheeks gently to push her jaw downwards, then tipped the mixture in.

He reached out and took her cold hand in his own. The next step was immensely dangerous. He planned to imbue her body with his water and wood resonant powers. Using his dual antitoxin powers, he hoped to weaken the Hellish Caterpillar.

Yuan Qing and Jiang Qing'e watched tensely, palms sweating profusely. Li Luo closed his eyes, pushing blue and green power deeper into her hands and onward into her body.

The power crept along her skin, brilliant colors playing along her pale skin in a healing bath.

Very quickly, it touched the black, worm-like gas.

At first, Li Luo's resonant powers fared quite well. The Hellish Caterpillar was stopped from its advance towards Guo Ling's heart, wood and water resonant power covering it in a protective sheen. Besides that, its speed was also slowed down. As Li Luo had predicted, he was able to successfully slow it down, but not eradicate it.

Truly a poison that could fell even a Heavenly Dipper General.

Still, Li Luo's goal here was accomplished.

Just as he was about to heave a sigh of relief, the Hellish Caterpillar suddenly went into a frenzy. Li Luo could feel it thrashing madly, and the black worm began to mutate, the shadow-blackness lightening rapidly until it was a dark cherry-red.

The Hellish Caterpillar had morphed into a butterfly.

A cold pang of understanding flooded Li Luo.

A dual exotic poison.

Behind the Hellish Caterpillar was a second exotic poison, the Hellion Butterfly. This poison could also fell a Heavenly Dipper General.

Heavenly Dipper General-killer poisons against a Resonant Master Stage Guo Ling? Was Pei Hao allergic to money?! Li Luo was willing to bet that Pei Hao had gone to great lengths to secure two poisons of such rarity.

But if not Guo Ling, who could the poisons be targeted at?

Panic. Li Luo urgently began to pull back his resonant power from Guo Ling's body.

But the dark cherry-red butterfly poison had been triggered now. It locked on to his resonant power and flew along the stream.

It showed no intention of staying in Guo Ling's body at all.

Li Luo pulled back his resonant power decisively, but he had underestimated the Hellion Butterfly's speed.

Li Luo's head swam, and he could hear the flutter of a butterfly's wings fill his ears.

His eyes flared open.

"What's wrong?" Jiang Qing'e was the first to notice the change in Li Luo's expression.

Yuan Qing looked at Guo Ling. The color was already returning to her face. "Young Lord, have you managed to remove the poison?" he asked in wonder.

Li Luo shook his head with a strange expression. "Not removed... transferred."

He raised his own arm and showed them the cherry-red butterfly now flitting in and out of it..

Just like the Hellish Caterpillar, the Hellion Butterfly was in a gaseous form that flitted in and out of Li Luo's body.

He stared down at it in disgust.

"Pei Hao is truly a scumbag, but a scumbag with some uncanny planning skills.

"So many exotic poisons that could take down Heavenly Dipper General experts... he really loves me deeply."

Chapter 0432: Taking It For Myself!

When Li Luo rolled up his sleeve, a dark red butterfly outline could be seen vivaciously fluttering in his skin. The sight of this demonic poison caused Jiang Qing'e's face to turn steely green.

Striding forward, she grasped Li Luo's arm, and that ever pretty face transformed into a frosty veneer. Golden eyes surging with fury and killing intent, she unconsciously summoned forth waves of light resonant energy, almost akin to an erupting volcano of radiance.

"Sister Qing'e, calm down!" Li Luo immediately cradled her with his hands, attempting to appease this force of nature.

Jiang Qing'e's chest heaved heavily and she closed her eyes to recompose herself. A brief moment later, she reopened her eyes and newfound restraint could be seen from her glare. However, a bone-chilling remnant of her previous fury was still evident within the depths of her gaze.

"Young Lord..." Yuan Qing's expression had turned a grave gray. Who would ever have expected the debilitating poison within Guo Ling to be a trap?! The true target of this scheme was none other than the wondrous Li Luo!

Pei Hao had clearly taken Li Luo's ample detoxifying abilities into consideration.

He had already factored into his grand plan that Li Luo would inevitably attempt to resolve Guo Ling's predicament.

His ploy had evidently succeeded now.

On the other hand, Guo Ling's situation had worsened and Li Luo had also been implicated.

This unfortunate result left Yuan Qing full of regret and self-loathing. If only he knew!

A Heavenly Dipper General powerhouse was left shell shocked and without words. He simply didn't know what to say. His mind was blank and bereft of any solution to this predicament.

"Uncle Yuan, please don't blame yourself. That ingrate Pei Hao has always been hiding in the shadows of Xia City, looking for a prime opportunity to deal with us. Even if you had not come, he would have found other means to do so. The result would have been unchanged." Li Luo consoled the distressed elder with a smile.

Yuan Qing was considered to be the strongest cultivator within House Luolan with the exception of Uncle Biao. Hence, Li Luo knew that he had to pay exceptional attention and care to him.

Hearing Li Luo's soothing words, Yuan Qing could only respond with a bitter smile.

"Let's go. I'll bring you to find the First Princess. The palace should possess healers of the highest caliber. They'll be able to find a solution to rid your body of this insidious poison." Qing'e deeply sighed after she spoke.

However, this suggestion was met with a simple rejection. "Actually, this might not be a bad thing."

The trio looked at Li Luo in confusion.

Merely looking at the poisonous butterfly left the Heavenly Dipper General Yuan Qing feeling uneasy. With Li Luo merely at the Resonant Master Stage, a poison flare up would end his miserable, little life. How could this not be a "bad thing?" In fact, this was an absolute disaster!

Li Luo's gaze focused upon the butterfly outline. "Although this demonic poison is extremely virulent, my situation is enviable. I am trying to see if there are ways to make this poison my own. This sort of rare poison is so seldomly seen that even the Golden Dragon Bank's main branch might have difficulty obtaining it. It's a miracle that the rat Pei Hao managed to obtain this treasure."

Yuan Qing frowned. "Young Lord, don't fool around. This poison is incredibly frightening and must be dealt with as soon as possible. Wanting to control it is playing with fire! My Lady, please advise the Young Lord!"

Jiang Qing'e's lips pursed upon hearing this outrageous idea. "I don't support such a dangerous gamble. However, I'm aware that you understand your limits best. So, do you truly believe that you have a chance of success?"

Yuan Qing's jaw dropped upon hearing her reply. The world was going mad! He simply couldn't understand why Jiang Qing'e felt that Li Luo, a mere Resonant Master, could contest against this terrifying poison. This was too much even if the two blindly trusted each other!

"Well I've got to give it a try at least." A grin surfaced upon Li Luo's handsome face.

A headache was coming for Yuan Qing. Wasn't this too wilful? This debilitating poison was not child's play. A single flare up could very well end him.

Unfortunately, Li Luo had already made up his mind and decided to no longer explain himself. Turning around to leave with Jiang Qing'e, he informed Yuan Qing to take good care of Guo Ling.

"I once read about the Hellish Caterpillar and Hellion Butterfly in an old tome about poisons. The fusion of the two results in a capricious corruption that is able to consume the healing powers of wood and water resonant power. As a result, many healers are left completely helpless to it," Li Luo explained as he sauntered away with Jiang Qing'e.

"In order to temporarily prevent this poison from infiltrating the heart and ending my little life, I can endlessly supply wood or water resonant power to the poison to feed it. Although this is merely slaking its thirst, it is not the panacea to the problem. The poison will eventually strengthen and erupt in a frenzy. My situation will truly be desperate then, and perhaps even the gods won't be able to save me."

"Doesn't this mean that the poison was specifically targeted at you?" Jiang Qing'e queried with a furrowed brow.

Li Luo possessing water and wood dual resonances wasn't any hidden secret. This malady was clearly selected with the intention to target his unique abilities. Pei Hao was truly conniving and determined.

"If this dual poison is as you say, then I think there is a need for us to interrupt Uncle Biao's refinement of the miracle paste to aid you."

Ever since Li Luo had gloriously returned with copious amounts of Royal Sap, Ox Biaobiao had been in seclusion, refining the miracle paste as though his life depended on it.

Jiang Qing'e had originally not wanted to disturb Uncle Biao as the miracle paste was of even greater importance in the bigger picture. Yet this despicable toxin had left her without any other options. Inviting him to resolve this predicament seemed to be the only solution.

"No rush, no rush." Li Luo waved his hands. There was no trace of fear within him. "Pei Hao has put some real effort into his preparations. He attacked Uncle Yuan and poisoned his lone disciple, and at the same time attempted to chase him out of House Luolan. He knows that we put great importance on Uncle Yuan and hence had to personally deal with Guo Ling. Additionally, it even gave him the opportunity to deal with me by extension! He even had the foresight to ensure that my dual resonances were perfectly countered by these exotic venoms. He must have paid an inexplicable price for this. In fact, everything seems like it has gone according to his plan. Unluckily for him, there are some factors he is unable to account for." At this point, Li Luo paused his lengthy explanation, a smirk scrawled over his face.

Lifting up his sleeve, one could see the dark, cherry-red butterfly splotch. With a thought, two different resonant powers lit up and surged towards the poison, shining so radiantly that even Jiang Qing'e couldn't see it.

With a meal delivered to its doorstep, the Hellion Butterfly ravenously swallowed the resonant power in chunks.

Jiang Qing'e stared at the sight with utmost focus. Normally speaking, devouring wood and water resonant power should have led to the poison swelling in might. Instead, that expectation did not come to pass, and the poison actually seemed to be trembling...

Right before her eyes, a wisp of dark-red qi seemed to have separated itself away from the central mass, eventually dissipating.

As a result, the Hellion Butterfly seemed to have weakened slightly.

Although this was not a massive improvement, it was undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

"What...? How?" Even Jiang Qing'e was left flabbergasted at this sight. She simply could not comprehend how this poison, after eating its fill of beneficial resonant power, did not strengthen but instead became less potent!

Looking at the confused Jiang Qing'e brought about a sense of accomplishment for Li Luo.

Yet this sense of achievement was short lived as a heavy sword silently materialized in her hand.

Jumping back in fright, Li Luo hurriedly explained. "Ah! Put that away! The truth is that my resonant power doesn't only contain wood and water resonant power." Demonstrating it for her to see, Li Luo produced a ball of waterlight resonant power within his hand.

"You will understand once you feel it for yourself." Li Luo smiled.

Jiang Qing'e's golden eyes curiously studied the resonant power. The sparkling waves of energy easily let one understand that this was water resonant power, but there also seemed to be a certain gross incandescence to it.

She had never noticed that Li Luo's water resonant power seemed to be clearer and more resplendent compared to others.

Reaching out testily, she lightly prodded the globe of pure resonance energy.

After a few breaths, her luminous eyes shrunk in shock.

There was a familiarity to this power! Was this light resonant energy?

There was no mistaking it. Although the light resonant power paled in intensity compared to the water resonant power, it was there!

Just how could light resonant power appear within Li Luo?

Even the calm and collected Jiang Qing'e was left befuddled and dazed!

Chapter 0433: Almost Not Under Control

The dappled light in the corridor cast gray and yellow shadows on Jiang Qing'e's awestruck face. Her mouth was opening and closing repeatedly, with no words coming out. Such was the shock from the revelation of Li Luo's light resonant energy.

Li Luo was incredibly pleased with himself. It wasn't everyday that you could turn Jiang Qing'e into a goldfish. He stretched out a hand and gathered woodearth resonant power into a ball of light.

"Here, feel this too."

Jiang Qing'e looked puzzled, but she reached out a finger and touched the ball.

Whenever Li Luo used his resonant power publicly, he always took care to consciously hide the light and earth resonant power. These two secondary resonances were not on the same power level as the primary resonances, but they were good enough to give him that much-needed edge that his opponents rarely accounted for.

But now that he was actively exposing the secondary element, it was easy enough for Jiang Qing'e to detect the fainter earth resonant power... a woodearth resonance.

"Earth resonant power?" She inhaled sharply, but she was calmer by now.

"Your dual resonances... each have a secondary resonance?"

Li Luo grinned and nodded.

"No wonder your water and wood resonance arts have always been so strong and a little... strange. Everyone thought that it was because of the other resonance, but actually it's these two secondary elements affecting them.

"Water and light, wood and earth... These are good combinations. Li Luo, your secrets have secrets."

He chuckled. "Well, only you know about this secret's secret."

Jiang Qing'e smiled delightedly. She was extremely comforted by this piece of good news. She had known that Li Luo was special from the beginning. Even when he had blank palaces, she had not once believed that he was destined for a mundane life.

"Quite something, huh?" Li Luo puffed his chest out proudly.

The dual secondary resonances had been a secret that he had kept hidden for a long time. He had always planned to let Jiang Qing'e know when the time was right, since their closeness was on a different level. They were probably closer than some married couples already. "Secondary resonances are indeed very rare. But they're merely cherries on the cake. In terms of resonant power, they will never be able to compete with your primary resonances," Jiang Qing'e cautioned him.

Li Luo was in full agreement. If you divided up his power into percentages, his primary resonances held maybe 70 to 80 percent of the weight, while his secondary resonances held only 20 to 30 percent. They were truly supports.

For example, Li Luo's resonance arts were always water and wood-based. The light and earth resonances only augmented those arts.

If Li Luo tried to learn light and earth resonance arts, they would be significantly weaker.

"And although secondary resonances are rare, they're not completely unheard of. In fact, they're not even as rare as dual resonances. Plus, there are miraculous treasures and herbs in this world that can grant them. The Xia Kingdom is a rural little place, but I'm sure there will be many such people outside..."

"Yes, yes, I understand. I won't let it get to my head." Li Luo rolled his eyes. The slightest bit of pride, and Jiang Qing'e crushed it harder than a bug. He did appreciate that she was looking out for him though.

Jiang Qing'e smiled. "So you fed the dual poison some water resonant power, but imbued light resonant energy inside?" She intuitively understood how he had weakened the Hellion Butterfly poison.

"Mm. Light resonant energy has purification properties. But if attacked directly with light resonant energy, the Hellion Butterfly's defenses would have been triggered and then it would've rampaged

throughout my body, complicating things. This way, it's like poisoning the poison. I've blunted its edge at least."

Jiang Qing'e nodded thoughtfully. "Didn't the poison release some poison gas just now? Where did it go? You should know that it's incredibly deadly as well. A bit in your body could cause a lot of damage." Li Luo stretched out his hand and put it in Jiang Qing'e's. She closed her eyes and searched his body with her mind. Inside, she found the ten resonant bubbles.

Each was shining like a star, chock full with Li Luo's resonant power.

Save one.

It was not sparkly like the others, but instead filled with a sinister, dark-red swirl.

A butterfly seemed to be fluttering inside. A worm seemed to be crawling inside.

Li Luo had trapped the escaping poison gas in a resonant bubble.

Jiang Qing'e's eyes widened as she shook her head in admiration. "Only you could have thought of something like that."

She understood that Li Luo intended to use the dual poisons as a weapon against a stronger opponent. Just another secret weapon to store for a rainy day.

"Could it be that you... guessed that the dual poison was targeted at you from the start?" Jiang Qing'e suddenly realized this. Every move Li Luo had made had been too measured, too perfect.

"I must say that I panicked a little when the poison first entered my body. It's quite deadly... but then the brainwave came to me."

"Of course, deadly works both ways... I like the power it gives me." Li Luo cackled. With enough power to threaten a Heavenly Dipper General, this poison was something he badly needed.

"Li Luo, there's no need to push yourself too much. House Luolan has me as well," she said softly. Li Luo had taken great risks to harness this dual poison for his own use.

Li Luo looked up into those special, golden eyes. "Qing'e, I won't let you face all that pressure alone. House Luolan has us. Both of us."

Moved by his seriousness and sincerity, she simply nodded.

"Alright, let's give all of the Xia Kingdom a real shocker when they come and test our Young Lord."

Li Luo smiled confidently.

"Ah, but there's something else I need your help with, Qing'e."

"Hmm?"

"The resonant bubble is a little thin. I don't think it can hold the poison for long. I'm feeling a little weak now, so can you charge me up with your light resonant energy to reinforce the bubble membrane? Otherwise, at this rate, the resonant bubble will pop in a day from internal corrosion. I might die." Jiang Qing'e stared at his quickly reddening face, then reached out to pinch his ear with two fingers.

"So in the end... everything was almost not under your control, hmm?"

Chapter 0434: Pei Hao's Pain

"It's done. I put a few membranes of light resonant energy around your poison bubble. The purification that my light resonant energy has should stop the corrosive spread." Jiang Qing'e clapped her hands together decisively. She had been working Li Luo over in his bedroom.

These layers of light resonant power were not as easy to make as they looked. Because she was leaving it outside her body, she had to first channel her energy into Li Luo's body and then manipulate it there.

It required exquisite control over one's resonant power.

And the stakes were high—one bubble bursting would release the poison gas within Li Luo and hurt him badly.

In order to create a few extra layers for safety, Jiang Qing'e had labored through the night.

"You've worked hard, Qing'e," Li Luo said gratefully. She was the only person he would trust to do this. At her slightest inclination, she could have the light resonant energy explode or dissipate within him, essentially setting off the bomb that was inside him.

Ordinarily, no one would allow another person to leave resonant power in their body like that.

But neither Li Luo nor Jiang Qing'e felt that this was a risk in any way.

Li Luo had asked, and Jiang Qing'e had complied. That was all.

"Also... I know why you're trying to harness the dual poison, but you should know that it's a double-edged sword. You can't really use it and escape unscathed. It will hurt you just as badly as your opponent," she warned him gravely.

She knew that Li Luo was tempted by the dual poison's power, but such a deadly substance was not easily tamed. It would be hard to employ properly as a weapon.

Li Luo nodded soberly.

"Don't worry, Qing'e. I understand that. I do find my little life precious too."

She nodded and then yawned. "I'm beat. I'm going to sleep."

She lied down on the bed, stretched out until her whole body quivered, then snuggled down under the blanket.

Li Luo stared at the lithe figure in his blankets. "Er... this is my bed."

"I don't mind," she said easily.

Li Luo climbed back into his bed. "Well then," he said wearily. "I'm super tired too, so I guess I'll also go to sleep."

Shing.

He was ready to rest his head on the pillow, but he bumped it against a gigantic sword with a little thunk instead.

Li Luo froze, then stood back up. "That's very unreasonable," he grumbled. "It's my room! My bed!"

Jiang Qing'e ignored him.

"Well then, I'm going to the Golden Dragon Bank," he said sullenly.

"Oh? Spurned here, so you're off to find Lu Qing'er?" Jiang Qing'e's amused voice came from under the covers. Li Luo rolled his eyes. He intended to make a trip to the Golden Dragon Bank to see what his parents had left him. After all, he should start thinking about his third resonance soon.

"Rest well," he called as he pushed the door and left the room.

Behind him, he heard Jiang Qing'e call out.

"Bring Uncle Yuan with you, so the dog Pei Hao doesn't jump you."

...

Outside House Luolan's headquarters, in an inn.

Pei Hao was watching the door of the headquarters, a fat, gloating smile plastered across his face. "The dual poison has transferred hosts. I knew that the Young Lord would fall into the trap. So eager to win a favor from Yuan Qing. So predictable."

He stretched lazily in his chair.

"One down for good."

"Even a Heavenly Dipper General would be crippled badly by that dual poison. Li Luo might have water and wood dual resonances, but not even his antitoxin abilities will save him from this. He should be in horrible pain for quite some time, with no choice but to try and keep it at bay with his dual resonances. Even so, he must be on the verge of death."

"An inevitable poison. I don't think Li Luo will be able to take part in the Holy Grail Meet now. Jiang Qing'e will definitely still go, and once the two are split up, we'll have our chance."

Mo Cheng's gaunt face broke into a small smile too. Pei Hao's plan was perfect. Yuan Qing, Li Luo—he had moved them around like chess pieces.

"Pei Hao, no wonder the great one chose you. It was a great plan." Mo Cheng laughed.

"It's all thanks to Ancestor Mo Cheng's support," Pei Hao said, casually tilting his wine cup towards him in a salute.

"All at the will of the great one," Mo Cheng said with a gleeful smile.

"The Housemeet approaches. At that time, you will be the new house lord."

Pei Hao's grin cracked even wider. He closed his eyes and allowed himself to indulge in a moment of fantasy. The dream that he had longed for for many years. Back when he had first joined House Luolan, he had wanted to protect the place. He worshiped the very ground that the two house lords stood on.

He respected them like his own father and mother.

When had his attitude started to turn?

When Li Luo was born.

He remembered that night well. He saw the joy on Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan's faces when they held the baby in their arms.

A joy that they had never shown towards him, and the seeds of jealousy had sprouted right there and then.

He envied Li Luo, born with everything he could possibly want.

He hated him for it.

Pei Hao could sense that the House Luolan he loved so deeply was not even worth a hair on the head of that infant in the eyes of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan.

It was unthinkable. Unacceptable. From that moment, his intent began to twist.

"Whew."

Pei Hao breathed out deeply, trying to put those thoughts in perspective and justifying it to himself.

If you don't care about the house, then you won't mind if I take it away.

"Eh?" Pei Hao heard Mo Cheng gasp.

He turned around and followed Mo Cheng's gaze.

Strolling out of House Luolan's headquarters with his hands tucked comfortably behind his back was Li Luo.

With Yuan Qing by his side.

Pei Hao watched Li Luo make his breezy way up the path, grinning as widely as if a pizza had just fallen out of the sky and into his hands. His cheeks were rosy pink with health, and he looked as un-poisoned as a person could possibly look. He looked... even healthier than he was yesterday.

Silence fell in the room.

"What... is going on?" Mo Cheng asked a moment later. "He looks completely fine."

"Is he... faking it?" Pei Hao sneered.

"Doesn't look like it." Mo Cheng shook his head. The two exchanged a dark look. Although they could not believe that their plan had failed, they could not lie to themselves when the evidence was right before them—Li Luo looked completely fine.

"Could the poison have been transferred to the wrong host?" Mo Cheng asked.

Pei Hao shook his head. "I had the dual poison specially tinkered with by a professional. It will only react in response to the simultaneous presence of wood and water resonant powers. Only Li Luo fits that criteria in House Luolan."

He had taken no chances with such an exotic poison, unwilling to waste it on some other person. That was why he had chosen Guo Ling. Even if Li Luo had not taken the bait, he could still have threatened Yuan Qing, which was a decent consolation prize.

But now the dual poison had left Guo Ling's body, and Li Luo was looking healthy?!

Even Pei Hao felt a sudden chill run through him. Was he seeing a ghost?!

"Shall we take him down?" Mo Cheng asked flatly.

Pei Hao took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down. "If we attack him now, the Astral Sage College will definitely react. Although they call themselves neutral, the Holy Grail Meet is very important to them. Li Luo is highly valued.

"Attacking Yuan Qing by poisoning Guo Ling, they'd still turn a blind eye. And if Li Luo ended up poisoning himself, that's on him.

"But if we make such a blatant attack, it's different." Pei Hao sighed.

"I was careless. I never thought the blank palace young lord would one day become so valued by the school."

Pei Hao waved it off.

"Forget it. It was only an attempt. Li Luo's luck can't hold forever. And we're almost at the Housemeet...

"At that time, all will be put to an end," he said, his heart aching painfully.

*Damn, that dual poison was expensive as f*ck!*

Chapter 0435: Possessions

Li Luo reached the Golden Dragon Bank without any trouble at all. Still, he wasn't surprised at the lack of ambushes. He was now a highly valued student in the eyes of the Astral Sage College. Not even the likes of House Jiyan or House Duze would dare to lay a finger on him, let alone Pei Hao.

Only someone as devious as Pei Hao could have thought of such a roundabout way to poison him indirectly.

Even if the school had learned about that, they could have done nothing. A neutral party could not actively reach out to shelter him from all the troubles that House Luolan was facing.

If they had been so inclined, they would already have done so back when Jiang Qing'e had revealed her ninth-grade light resonance. One word from the school, and no faction in the Xia Kingdom would dare to lay a finger on House Luolan.

But the school had not. Neutrality was a big part of their direction, and not even someone with a ninth-grade light resonance could sway them from it. The school had to think about its long-term goals, and the future implications of its actions. Besides, students came and went. Even brilliant stars would lose their shine when they were far away.

Neither Li Luo nor Jiang Qing'e had ever expected the school to protect House Luolan.

They had simply done their best within the school system, laying their potential out and trading it for some individual protection. They were happy that they could buy time to grow.

Li Luo stepped into the bank and made straight for Yu Hongxi's office.

"And what wind blows the House Luolan young lord here? Your reputation has been glowing recently." Yu Hongxi looked up at him. She was dressed in her usual red today, bringing out her mature beauty.

She waved for her staff to leave the room, then sat back down on her chair, elegant fingers tapping lightly against her cheek as she regarded Li Luo.

"This tiny bit of reputation? Not even a glow compared to the bonfire that is President Yu's reputation," Li Luo said modestly.

Yu Hongxi laughed. "Oh, Li Luo," she said, shaking her head, "your tongue is a thousand times sweeter than your father's.

"So... what brings you here to the Golden Dragon Bank today? What is this serious business you have with me?" She laid a meaningful finger on the stack of documents on her table. "I'm a busy woman, and I don't like to give just anybody the time of day. It makes me want to fire people."

Li Luo swallowed nervously, but he soldiered on. "President Yu, I think my parents left some things at the Golden Dragon Bank for safekeeping."

Yu Hongxi's hand froze, and her mischievous smile faded. "Yes, and this is top secret at the Golden Dragon Bank." She nodded. "In fact, no one else at the Golden Dragon Bank knows about it besides me. But since you are the last remaining blood relative of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan, I will tell you accordingly.

"Yes, Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan left something at the Golden Dragon Bank headquarters."

"I will take that away now," Li Luo said.

Yu Hongxi was silent for a moment. "That is your right."

She snapped, and suddenly a wave of resonant power pulsed from the ceiling, running across the walls in a phosphorescent, turquoise ring downwards until the room was caged off.

All sound outside vanished.

Yu Hongxi stood up and showed Li Luo a golden ball of some unknown material in the palm of her hand.

"I know who you are, and that you are the son of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan in many ways. Still, this is a necessary process.

"Drip your blood on this. It will confirm your identity. Only with this verification can you take away what they have left at the Golden Dragon Bank."

Li Luo was quite happy to see Yu Hongxi take this so cautiously. After all, there were many ways to change one's appearance in the world. She was truly a dependable and vigilant banker.

If a doppelganger had ended up taking the treasure away, it would have been a calamitous error on her part.

He stretched out a finger and let a drop of blood fall on the golden ball.

Weng!

The blood immediately flowed into a runic pattern. A few moments later, the golden ball vibrated and cracked like a flower bud, peeling away to reveal a black key inside.

"Congratulations, you've passed the test. You are definitely the son of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan."

"Er, should I be relieved?"

Yu Hongxi chuckled, then she gestured for him to take the key. She turned to the wall behind her and pressed against it with a complex sequence of resonant power pulses.

Gradually, the wall started to rearrange itself, until a shining door appeared.

Beyond it was pitch-darkness. Who knew where it would lead?

"Come with me."

Yu Hongxi led the way in, and she vanished into the darkness the moment she stepped through.

Li Luo did not hesitate. He trusted that Yu Hongxi would not do anything to him. Even if you didn't trust the person, you had to have faith in the organization. And if his parents had invested so much and trusted the Golden Dragon Bank with their business, then it would definitely be a safe place.

He followed her in through the gateway.

He found himself in a dark corridor. The walls and floor were polished smooth like mirrors, and faint lines of light zipped through them occasionally.

There was a strong and uncomfortable feeling, which Li Luo identified as a complete lack of any worldly natural energy.

Even his two resonant palaces seemed to dim a little in the energy desert.

Li Luo felt a little uneasy about it. It reminded him of darker times when he had blank palaces.

"This is the energy-void corridor, where all resonant powers are removed. Only the headquarters of the Golden Dragon Bank in each region are allowed to build it. Even a Duke would be trapped here if they barged in uninvited." Yu Hongxi's voice came to him faintly from ahead.

"A terrifying place." Li Luo shuddered. Was this the Golden Dragon Bank's power? Truly impressive.

"Only our dearest clients are allowed to store things here."

Yu Hongxi suddenly stopped, turning towards the left wall as though admiring her reflection in the mirror-like surface.

"Is... it here?" Li Luo stared doubtfully at the wall.

She nodded. "Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan left you something extremely important to them. When they came to leave it, your mother took me by the hand for the first time, pleading with me to leave this place for you to open.

"Two of Xia Kingdom's proudest people bowed before me. I think no one but myself could have achieved that.

"Well, they didn't have to. No matter what our relationship was, I will always carry out my duties as president of the Golden Dragon Bank properly. Of course I would have kept their possessions according to the rules. But besides you, no one else could take it, unless Principal Pang decides to wipe out the entire Golden Dragon Bank himself.

"They are among the most brilliant people I know. Especially your mother—the look in her eyes often conveyed that she had no equal. Your father is a little easier to get along with, but truthfully, his pride is almost her equal. And yet for you, they could shelve that overweening pride, if but for a moment." Yu Hongxi looked at Li Luo pensively.

"What I'm trying to say is that your parents really love you."

Chapter 0436: Third Godly Forging Art

Yu Hongxi's words brought a lump to his throat. Li Luo recalled his mother—hands always stuffed deep in the baggy pockets of her clothes, and a relaxed smile on her face. He knew better than most just how proud of a person she really was.

Whenever she entertained important guests, Tan Tailan would always pull a long face after they left.

"Spending time on these idiots darkens my future," she would complain to a young Li Luo.

Later on, when Li Luo started to get a little older, he realized that these were all important people in the Xia Kingdom.

At times like these, Li Taixuan would come and put a hand around his wife's shoulder. "You're too good to talk to them, Dear."

She would roll her eyes right back at him. "You think you're any better than me?"

Li Taixuan would suffer her ratty moods until he couldn't take it anymore, then he would run to Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e for solace.

The fact that those two had begged Yu Hongxi for something meant that the request was important enough for them to put down their pride. Li Luo immediately understood the worth of whatever it was that was being left to him.

They knew well that Yu Hongxi was professional enough to carry out their request even if they did not beg. And to go that extra mile... "I love them very much too," Li Luo said with a vulnerable smile.

"Although there's been no news of them for all these years, I know they'll be back one day."

Yu Hongxi gave him a small nod. "Well, put your key into the wall."

Li Luo touched the black key to the smooth wall.

Immediately, the solid wall melted away into liquid, some of it reaching out to wrap the black key. A thread of black appeared around the key, spreading across the liquid wall.

"Go on, then. Only you, holding the key, can enter," Yu Hongxi told him.

"Thank you, President Yu."

She waved it off. "I take money and do business. That's all."

Li Luo nodded, then he pushed his way through the liquid wall. Meeting no resistance, the liquid enveloped his body and sucked him in.

The sucking continued for a full 10 seconds, and then he finally emerged on the other side.

He took stock of his surroundings.

He was in a spacious, black, stone room. The walls were embedded with fluorescent crystals that emitted a faint, green glow.

He very quickly focused on the center of the stone room, where a short, stone column stood. On top of it there was a black sphere made out of some sort of metal.

There was nothing else of note in the room, so Li Luo moved towards the stone column.

"So the thing's inside this?" Li Luo eyed the black ball. It was familiar to him—he had seen something similar in the City of Southwind's Golden Dragon Bank. He reached out for it and squeezed it lightly.

The black sphere melted away like the wall, coating Li Luo's hand. At the same time, he felt a sharp prick on his finger, drawing a single drop of blood.

A light burst out of the black liquid.

It projected a scene all around him, and the stone chamber itself seemed to transform into a peaceful garden that Li Luo recognized all too well—the old manor of House Luolan back in the City of Southwind.

A nostalgic scene.

He walked along the mossy cobblestone path and saw two familiar figures in front of him, beaming.

One man, one woman.

The man was dressed in white, exceptionally handsome features lit with happiness. His hands were clasped behind his back, and he exuded confidence and power that was not to be underestimated.

The woman was in a loose, lavender shift, her long hair hanging neatly over her shoulders. Hands thrust in her pockets, she was smiling just as brightly as the man by her side.

Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan.

Li Luo rubbed his nose to get rid of the prickly feeling that was filling it up. He did not jump into their arms. He knew it was just a projection.

"Little Luo, if you're here, I'm sure you're not far from the General Stage. I assume you're one of the top students in the Astral Sage College by now." Li Taixuan grinned.

"What are you talking about? How could a run-down stick house like the Astral Sage College ever hold Little Luo back? He's definitely the best in all of the sage colleges in the East Divine Continent," Tan Tailan said indignantly.

"Of course, my dear wife! I was foolish! With such an exceptional mother, how could Little Luo ever be normal?" Li Taixuan teased, looking lovingly at his wife.

It was a familiar sight for Li Luo, watching his parents' adoring banter. Although his mother had always been pushy against his father, the love between the two was greasy enough to have both him and Qing'e feeling a little dirty while watching them.

Still, every moment that they showed him was a precious memory.

"Get to the point!" Tan Tailan said, slapping her husband gently on the wrist.

"Ahem," Li Taixuan coughed. "Well, it's nothing really important... I guess Little Luo's ready for his third acquired resonance now, huh? With this, you'll really shoot to glory. I'm so excited for you! In order to temper your third acquired resonance, the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel is the most important thing. I'm sure the previous one we left you has been broken by now. After all, it only works once. So what you need to do is make yourself a new one, which means you'll need the third volume of the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art." Li Taixuan gestured, and suddenly pages of words flooded Li Luo's mind. He briefly scanned them, confirming that it was indeed the third volume that he had dreamed of.

He was ecstatic. With this third volume, he had all he needed to forge his third acquired resonance.

"Always reliable, Dad," Li Luo cheered.

"This third volume of the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Art contains the method to build the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel. However, there's a little snag. You have to reach the Duke Stage before you can forge it." Li Taixuan rubbed his chin. Li Luo's smile froze on his face.

Chapter 0437: King Quintessence and Black Plaque

"I need to be at Duke Stage before I can make the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel?!" Li Luo was horror-struck by his father's declaration.

Come on, Dad, this isn't even funny!

If I was already a Duke, would I need to be here discussing this crap with you?!

Forget it, just prepare the coffin for me.

Just as Li Luo was despairing, he saw his mother reach out to crunch Li Taixuan's ear in a pincer-like grip.

"Li Taixuan, are you crazy?! Pranking Little Luo at a time like this!"

"Ow ow OW OW I'M SORRY!" Li Taixuan yelped. "Mercy, Dear, MERCY!"

Li Luo watched on with cold satisfaction. "Harder. Harder!!"

Tan Tailan finally let go after she had finished turning her husband's ear into a beautiful shade of rose red. "Tell him properly, or you can go sit in a corner and stay out of my conversation with Little Luo."

Li Taixuan hastily nodded, only too happy to have his ear still attached to the side of his head. "Well, technically, I didn't lie. You indeed require a Duke's strength to create the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel. But don't worry! Don't you know how smart your father and mother are? How could we not foresee the fact that our precious Little Luo would not make it to the Duke Stage in time?"

"Come on, Pops! Enough with the bush beating! Get to the point!" Li Luo snarled, knowing full well that he was talking to a projection.

But as if hearing Li Luo's frustration from the future, Tan Tailan started to wiggle her finger again ominously, and Li Taixuan hurriedly turned serious again. He quickly pulled out a scroll and unfurled it before Li Luo.

There were ancient runes on the scroll, swirling in a circular pattern.

"Your mother and I have made preparations. This is the blueprint for a custom formation. It will allow external power to be converted into acquired resonance flame and help you create your Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel.

"By my calculations, you will only need to find two Dukes to provide you with enough power to make the wheel." Li Taixuan smiled smugly, as though everything was already as good as done.

Li Luo put his head in his hands.

Find two Dukes to supply him with power? Did his father think that Dukes fell out of the sky and could be called on like cheap entertainment?

The only Duke he could count on might be Ox Biaobiao, but was he even up to the task?

"You probably can't count on Ox Biaobiao," his father said, seemingly reading his mind. "He's frail, so it's best not to bother him with this."

Li Luo stared at his father exasperatedly. Then he was down to zero candidates.

Given the way that House Luolan was, he was already thanking his lucky stars on the daily that the other Dukes were not turning on him. Ask for their help? And even if they offered to help, Li Luo wasn't sure if he could trust them.

"Don't worry, Little Luo," his mother said. "There's one likely candidate right under your nose."

Li Luo nodded in surprise. "President Yu?" he said aloud.

His mother was smiling cheekily. "Yu Hongxi is quite an interesting person. She's the only one in the Xia Kingdom who still has my attention. If I hadn't come here, she would probably be the best woman here. Pity for her..."

Li Luo was a little speechless at his mother's conceit.

Besides, making the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel was no easy task. Would Yu Hongxi really be willing to help him with this? Li Luo felt like it was in the air. Yu Hongxi was a principled woman, and the Golden Dragon Bank was a neutral organization. This would be tantamount to joining House Luolan's side.

"Little Luo, are you worried about whether Yu Hongxi will agree? It's reasonable to doubt. Yu Hongxi is a clever but stubborn woman." His mother chuckled. "But we've thought of it all already." She jerked her chin at Li Taixuan, and he pulled out two glowing objects.

They were jeweled gourds, each one roughly the size of a thumb. They both contained a golden substance, darting and flowing around as though the liquid were alive. Li Luo squinted at it. He could sense a great urge to take it, and also a danger emanating from it.

"What is this?" he muttered to himself.

"It's King Quintessence, a special essence that all Dukes lust for. If you ask Yu Hongxi for help, offer her one. I doubt she can refuse a temptation like this."

"King Quintessence?" Li Luo blinked. Sounded complicated. He understood nothing.

Still, he took the two gourds carefully. He got the gist of it—offer one, get Yu Hongxi's help in making the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel. Easy enough.

"If Yu Hongxi agrees, then you just need one more Duke. We don't have someone in mind, but you're a resourceful boy. I'm sure you can find someone dependable."

Li Luo thought about it. The most natural choice was, of course, Mentor Chi Chan. Although school mentors had to be neutral in house affairs, helping him refine something should be acceptable.

And if this King Quintessence was really as awesome as his parents had made it out to be, then it was just fair business.

Li Luo felt relief wash over him. His parents might have thrown him into the deep end, but now it seemed like they had properly scouted the waters as well.

"Alright, so the matter of the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel is settled. Little Luo, is House Luolan doing well? We might have caused you some minor inconveniences when we left, but you and Qing'e are smart. I'm sure you're managing the house properly." Tan Tailan laughed.

Li Luo rolled his eyes at his mother's teasing. Minor inconvenience? He'd almost broken his damn back carrying the damn thing!

Still, he craved words from his parents. Any word would do, even teasing. He had not seen them for many years now.

He wondered how they were doing on the Nobles' Battlefield. But these were projections—no point in talking to them.

"Oh, yes, there's something else for you, Little Luo," Li Taixuan suddenly said. He lifted his palm, and a black light swam through the air until it was before Li Luo's eyes.

A black, palm-sized plaque.

He could not for the life of him tell what material it was made of. Metal? Not metal. Wood? Not quite right either. Li Luo rapped it experimentally with a knuckle, and instead of any ringing sound, the roar of a dragon sounded.

It was a true dragon's roar, and Li Luo trembled down to the depths of his soul.

Yet at the same time, he could feel his own blood tingling in response to the sound, resonating with the black plaque in his hand.

The prickly, invigorating feeling faded when the sound ceased.

As if it had all been a dream.

Only the cold sweat remaining on his brow reminded him that he might have just encountered something even scarier than a Duke...

He looked down at the black plaque and noticed that there was a "Li" character in the middle.

It had something mystical about it. Li Luo felt an awesome power within, and also some strange affinity with it.

The strokes of the character dragged on more than they should, creating a long, twisting dragon.

Li Luo suddenly recalled the words of Principal Pang Qianyan.

Bloodline of Heavenly King Li.

Did the black plaque have something to do with it?

Some sort of bloodline between him and his father?

Was that the real source of their power?

"Little Luo, I'm sure you still have many questions, but it can't be helped. Your father's a man of many secrets, and a man with secrets is the sexiest thing alive. You'll know in good time anyway. Take good care of the plaque for now. You'll eventually realize that a broken hut like House Luolan is nothing. Your father has left even larger broken huts for you!" Li Taixuan roared with laughter. Li Luo decided to throw the plaque in his hand at his father's projection's head.

But the plaque seemed to have a mind of its own. It jumped into Li Luo's pocket sphere. "I can't get rid of it?" Li Luo was astonished.

"Shoo! Stop scaring my son!" Tan Tailan sent a fist swinging towards his head, and Li Taixuan ducked in alarm.

BOOM!

Li Luo saw a crater in the wall of their old house and cringed a little. Damn... his mother was strong.

With her unruly husband subdued, Tan Tailan turned back to Li Luo, and the look in her eyes went soft. "Don't worry about us, Little Luo. You just need to worry about yourself. That will be the greatest help for us. Understand?"

Li Luo understood. Staying alive was already a big problem for him.

"Don't worry, Mother," he said softly under his breath.

Tan Tailan bent down and reached out a hand that almost touched Li Luo's cheek. He could almost feel the warmth.

"Little Luo, there's not much time now, so we'll wrap things up. I believe you and Qing'e are both healthy and well.

"Oh, one more thing about Qing'e...

"Treat her well, and don't make her angry. She's a great girl. And she might also beat you up if you don't treat her well.

"Also, both you and I owe her," his mother said.

Li Luo's eyes widened in surprise. He waited to hear more, but his parents' figures were fading away now, and suddenly it was black, icy stone all around him again.

Li Luo frowned.

What did his mother's final words mean?

Chapter 0438: Excellent Helper

When Li Luo exited the stone room, Yu Hongxi was already awaiting him outside. Leaning casually against the wall, her expression was dragged down by a hint of sadness, but upon seeing the young man stride out, she recomposed herself.

"So, have you taken everything?" Yu Hongxi queried.

Li Luo nodded.

Without speaking further, she led Li Luo out.

"President Yu..." Li Luo wheedled as he rushed over, moving to her side. "I have a tiiiiiiiny task I need your help with."

Relentless and without skipping a beat, she coolly responded, "If it's just business, we can settle things professionally. I know you've helped Qing'er in the Golden Dragon Dao Fields and will give you a discount. But if it's anything else that has nothing to do with the Golden Dragon Bank... Well, you can keep this request to yourself."

"I need your help to refine a little something... It requires a Duke's vast might." Li Luo didn't hesitate.

A flash of surprise could be seen in her eyes before they narrowed in contemplation. What is this brat up to now? What would require a Duke's strength?

"Nope. Can't do it. Since this requires a Duke's involvement, this thing you're trying to refine must be of great significance. If news of this leaks out, it would inevitably leave a shadow on the Golden Dragon Bank's stance of neutrality." Yu Hongxi was not going to lightly accede to such a shady request, so she simply rejected him immediately.

On the other hand, her response did not seem to be out of Li Luo's expectations. Furthermore, this rejection didn't seem particularly firm... No longer planning to beat around the bush, Li Luo coughed and cut straight to the chase. "President Yu is truly an esteemed business leader. What if I told you I could sufficiently compensate you?"

"What sort of compensation? Are you trying to hire me for a ride?" Yu Hongxi's red lips turned into a smirk as she teased him. "An old lady like me is extremely expensive. Do you think House Luolan is able to afford me?"

Yu Hongxi's proud proclamation did not faze Li Luo in any way. On the other hand, he gently opened his palm, revealing a jade gourd, a golden object slowly flowing within.

The jade gourd on its own seemed pretty uninspirational, and an uninspired, casual glance was all she afforded it. But when she noticed the golden substance waffling around within, her gaze quickly sharpened. She came to a halt, and a passionate look finally surfaced within her eyes.

"President Yu, I think you know what this is. I don't know... Do YOU think this is enough to warrant your help?" Li Luo asked earnestly.

After which, he proceeded to put the jade gourd away slowly. Yu Hongxi continued to endlessly stare at his hands, as though an intense glare could cause the gourd to reappear.

"If this isn't enough... sigh... I guess I have to find someone else, then." Looking at her lack of response, Li Luo could only sigh wistfully.

Yet just as he almost completed his slow show, Yu Hongxi reached out and firmly grabbed his hand, directly taking the jade gourd away for closer inspection.

"You brat! Are you trying to mess around with this old woman?" Yu Hongxi snorted with a cold smile.

"This is definitely some good stuff... In fact, if you were to wantonly parade this in front of any Duke Stage expert, you'd definitely attract the attention of even more hungry wolves hoping to take a bite out of House Luolan."

With an innocent face, Li Luo replied, "Well, it's because I trust President Yu with my heart and soul that I would dare to do so. You're not a starving wolf, slobbering over my items, right?"

Her gaze immediately softened and she became more cordial, all the while fiddling with the jade gourd in her hand. "Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan clearly left behind some goodies for you." She easily made the connection that this was something that Li Luo had only just obtained.

"So is this a yes?" n).Or**Elb**In

A brief moment of silent contemplation was punctuated by Yu Hongxi's final reply. "Although I have no idea what you're trying to refine, this compensation definitely moves me. I'm a businesswoman, as you've said. Since the remuneration is sufficient, I have no reason to reject your humble request."

"Then you have my thanks!"

Li Luo was absolutely jubilant upon hearing this reply. Immediately, he took out a list of items with a smile. "Since President Yu is willing to help, I would kindly like to trouble you with just another small matter. I hope you can help me obtain the goods within this list." These were all materials required for the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel, some extremely complex and rare to find. If he had to locate these ingredients himself, it would undoubtedly take up a significant amount of time. Enlisting President Yu's help was definitely the smartest choice.

Yu Hongxi took the list and briefly scanned through it. "Some of these items here can even be considered to be peculiar and esoteric. I still can't for the life of me fathom what you're trying to do. Uncommon as they may be, they are definitely going to be expensive. I reckon this would cost you around seven to eight hundred thousand skygold. However, this cost is something I can bear for you."

"President Yu is truly generous and kind!" Li Luo emphatically exclaimed. He silently heaved a huge sigh of relief. President Yu was truly a wealthy lady. Only someone like her could casually flaunt hundreds of thousands of skygold. "This is just a token sum compared to your King Quintessence. Barely even a drop in the ocean when compared to this item's true worth. I'm not keen on ripping off the younger generation, and if Qing'er knew about this, I would definitely get an earful for the rest of the day," Yu Hongxi casually replied.

"Okay, so when do we begin?"

Li Luo replied, "Around 10 days from now should be good."

The Holy Grail Meet would start in 10 days, and he would have to leave the Xia Kingdom. Hence, he would have to complete the Acquired Resonance Godly Forging Wheel before he left.

"Location?" Li Luo gave it a thought, and if he were to request both Mentor Chi Chan and Yu Hongxi's help, the location could not be House Luolan's headquarters. The headquarters possessed a ward that suppressed the might of any Duke Stage expert, and he would definitely require them to give their all. Thus, he would definitely have to find a safe location to carry out this clandestine task.

"It would most likely be in the Astral Sage College." Li Luo smiled. There was probably no safer location in the entire Xia Kingdom.

"Within the school?" Yu Hongxi seemed a little taken aback at the suggestion, but she came around quickly. "Hmm... that would indeed be the ideal place."

"This refinement will require the assistance of two Dukes, hence I will also need to reach out to someone else to help," Li Luo quickly explained.

Yu Hongxi's brows furrowed upon hearing his words. "I have to remind you, Li Luo, that this King Quintessence possesses an uncanny attraction to any Duke. You can't simply wave this around openly. House Luolan is already in dire straits, and adding fuel to the fire is not the way to go."

Li Luo knew that this warning was well intentioned and thus nodded in agreement. "Rest easy, President Yu. I am well aware of this, and the other Duke expert I plan to enlist is none other than my mentor, Chi Chan. I trust her, and as a mentor of the Astral Sage College, she is a neutral party to all this too."

"Chi Chan, hmm...?" She nodded and no longer said anything. Having had some interaction with her in the past, this was indeed a good choice.

"I will assist you with gathering the ingredients. When the time comes, I will find you in the school."

Li Luo nodded and once again heaved a sigh of relief. Thankfully, his kind parents had left behind him these precious King Quintessences. Otherwise, he would have had no way to get a Duke expert to help, and he would've been ruined! As both Mentor Chi Chan and Yu Hongxi were neutral, one would naturally have to produce something of equivalent value to obtain their help.

Now that half the problem was resolved, he would have to look for Mentor Chi Chan. Things seemed to be looking up now.

Chapter 0439: Three Favorites

The next day, Li Luo made his way back to the Astral Sage College after saying farewell to Jiang Qing'e.

There was still roughly half a month's time until the Holy Grail Meet. All of the participants were buckling down and working hard to cultivate and train. He was no different. It was time for the final sprint.

Upon reaching the college, Li Luo made his way to Mentor Chi Chan's residence, finding his favorite mentor sipping tea within the gazebo in the courtyard.

"Your shoes, remove them. Don't sully my mats," Mentor Chi Chan commanded without batting an eye.

Hurriedly removing his footwear, Li Luo immediately mustered the most radiant smile he could as he scrambled into the gazebo, taking a seat in front of the mentor.

"What are you up to now? The way you rushed over gives me a bad feeling." Mentor Chi Chan glanced over at him with a strange look. The usual Li Luo seemed relaxed compared to this uppity, bouncing rabbit in front of her.

"Well, I have something really important that I need your help with!" Li Luo earnestly explained.

Raising a single eyebrow in curiosity combined with a tinge of suspicion, Chi Chan immediately asked, "I hope you're not asking me to fight off House Luolan's secret nemesis, are you? Even if I agree, the college will never accede to this request either."

"Mentor, your love for your students is vast and wide like the ocean... How could I take advantage of that and be so shameless!? I, Li Luo, am certainly not that type of person!" Shaking his head vigorously, he continued, "To be honest, I was just hoping you could assist me with refining a certain object. This requires the assistance of two Dukes working together, and the other cooperator is the Golden Dragon Bank's Yu Hongxi."

"Yu Hongxi?"

Mentor Chi Chan was slightly taken aback. "The Golden Dragon Bank is very similar to the Astral Sage College. Both are neutral parties, so why would she accept your request?"

Without further prompting, she continued, "Although I don't know exactly what you want to refine that requires so much help, assisting you doesn't break the Astral Sage College's rules. Hmm... it should also count as my reward to you for performing so exceptionally during the ticket match."

"Mentor Chi Chan, did you just agree so easily?" Li Luo burst out in surprise.

"You aren't satisfied with this?" She grinned.

"No, no, no... I had never expected you to be so decisive. Much better than that fellow from the Golden Dragon Bank..."

"I can't be compared with her. She is in charge of the entire Golden Dragon Bank, and her every action will inevitably be scrutinized. Since she agreed to help you, I would definitely not have any concerns."

Nodding, he exhaled a sigh of thanks. "Since Mentor Chi Chan has so unwillingly agreed to assist me, then I won't let you act for free."

"Oh? Did you want to bribe me?" An almost entertained smile hung on her lips. "I think you may have misunderstood what it means to be a Duke Stage expert. Although you're supported by House Luolan, that doesn't mean that you have the means to hire one. My assistance is purely based on the fact that you're my student. If we were to look at proper compensation... I don't think anything you can provide would be sufficient." This was the inner pride that all Duke experts possessed.

Grinning in response, Li Luo quietly removed a jade gourd from his pocket and lightly placed it upon the tea table.

When her gaze fell upon the jade gourd, a golden, flowing substance entered her eyes. n-.o--v((e))l)(B.-1-/n

The original glimpse of suspicion and confusion was quickly replaced with utter shock.

She finally understood what this was!

The atmosphere seemed to congeal at this very moment as time seemed to freeze.

Ten breaths later, she gingerly reached out and lightly cradled the finger-sized jade gourd.

"Time. Place."

"In 10 days. We will be refining the object in the college. I was hoping you could arrange for a suitable location," Li Luo said candidly.

"Mhm." Mentor Chi Chan nodded in agreement.

Although Chi Chan seemed to be calm on the outside, she was now tightly clutching the jade gourd to the point that even veins could be seen on her fair hands.

When she noticed Li Luo's gaze, she finally let go, and the jade gourd was quickly hidden in her sleeve and put away.

A quick glance revealed a slight blush that could be seen even below her veiled face. Chuckling secretly within, it was evident that this King Quintessence possessed utmost temptation even for these mighty

Duke experts. The always-calm Mentor Chi Chan had been completely unsettled by the mere sight of this object.

However, he was smart enough to not poke the bear, just in case Chi Chan got angry.

"Mentor Chi Chan, do you think I have a chance to ascend the podium in the One Star Hall Holy Grail Meet?" Li Luo quickly changed topics to prevent harping on the situation.

Although her mind was full of confused and conflicting thoughts, the unbridled question snapped her out of her stupor. "Yeah, if you're talking about winning the most shameless participant competition, your chances of being in the top few are probably unrivaled."

Hearing that blunt reply, Li Luo was left a little dissatisfied. "What do you mean by that?"

"Do you really think that beating the Blue Abyss Sage College's Lu Cāng qualifies you as one of the strongest One Star Hall students across the divine continent?" she snapped impolitely.

"Do you mean that Lu Cāng isn't even considered to be an average participant?" Li Luo retorted.

"Lu Cāng is a strong opponent. Based on my experience, he should be in the top 10 of the East Divine Continent's One Star Hall students. Beating him puts you in the top tier of competitors. However, if you feel that this is sufficient to ascend to the top of the One Star Hall rankings, you are sorely mistaken. You are underestimating the trump cards of the other top tier colleges."

"Do you have any information on these students?" Li Luo curiously continued to ask.

Yet his query was met with the shake of a head. "This ticket match was slightly different from the ones before. If this was in the past, you would have received detailed information on your opponent before the match. This was the norm for an exchange between colleges. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and you were inevitably faced with a surprise during the match. Now, considering the fact that this was just the friendliest of matches, what do you think will happen for the actual Holy Grail Meet? All of the best colleges will indubitably conceal any and all information on their participants! It's a secret they will bring to the grave. If you want to get in-depth information, then you will have to experience it for yourself during the actual meet." Unsurprisingly, this response was met with a regretful Li Luo.

"Of course, we won't let you go in blind... but our assistance will be limited. We should be able to get some general information on the three strongest. And you don't belong in this group, Li Luo."

"So who are these three champions?"

"The Spear of Enlightened Sage. The Beast of the Sacred Summit. And last but not least, the Infernal Core's Illusory Thunderbolt."

Chapter 0440: Quasi-Ninth, Duke Art, Dual Resonance User

"Spear of Enlightened Sage? Beast of the Sacred Summit? The Infernal Core's Illusory Thunderbolt?"

Li Luo forcefully spat out their names before unknowingly asking, "What does this mean?"

Mentor Chi Chan's willowy fingers were rhythmically thumping against the table, releasing a series of crisp thumps, almost as though her impatience was gradually building... But still, she replied with a

smile. "The Spear of Enlightened Sage should be referring to the student from the Enlightened Sage College. Have you heard of this college? Well, let me tell you now, it was the champion of the previous Holy Grail Meet. They have managed to obtain tremendous amounts of cultivation resources and all sorts of benefits. The years of accumulation have allowed them to reinforce their position as the mightiest sage college in the East Divine Continent.

"The one known as the Spear is a One Star Hall student who goes by the name of Jing Taixu. He possesses a wind resonance of the Nine Voids Grade."

"Quasi ninth-grade? What do you mean by that?"

"As you are close to Jiang Qing'e, you might not fully comprehend the immense might and rarity of a ninth-grade resonance. Perhaps you might have forgotten what it means to be fearful... Constantly living next to a wild beast would naturally desensitize you. For others, being terrified of these mighty cultivators is a self-preservational reaction to danger. People are afraid of vicious tigers, after all. "

Li Luo was left dumbstruck. Why was Mentor Chi Chan comparing Jiang Qing'e to a wild tigress?

"Between the upper eighth-grade and the ninth-grade resonance exists a cataclysmic gap that is not simply bridged. How should I put it... Ever since Jiang Qing'e entered the Astral Sage College, no one has seen, or been able to draw out her true capabilities. Even the battle during the ticket match would have been mere entertainment for her. Zhao Huiyin is not an opponent that would force her to bring out her hidden potential and trump cards. Just as you are making preparations against the strongest competitors of the One Star Hall, the rest of the sage colleges' Three Star Hall students are specifically researching Jiang Qing'e's strengths and weaknesses. It's everyone's understanding that she is the mountain pass-blocking tiger! Whilst the One Star Hall has three highly and somewhat equally favored victors, the Three Star Hall only has one hegemon: the Astral Sage College's Jiang Qing'e."

Surprise after surprise left Li Luo hanging in utter shock. He had never encountered such a feeling of dread when dealing with Jiang Qing'e. Perhaps they had spent too much time together and he never really noticed her strength. And now, her resounding reputation had already reverberated around the entire East Divine Continent.

"Why? All of this can be attributed to the vast gap between an eighth-grade and a ninth-grade resonance. To better identify the relative strength amongst those who reside in this gap, a new form of resonance grading was developed. This is what the quasi ninth-grade represents. However, just because it isn't an actual ninth-grade doesn't mean that it's weak. On the contrary, anything that possesses any sort of association with a ninth-grade resonance possesses horrifying power. Thus, the one in fiercest contention for the strongest One Star Hall student is none other than Jing Taixu," Chi Chan explained methodically.

A ninth-grade resonance was truly the dream of countless individuals. Even a quasi ninth-grade was unthinkable uncommon.

"What about that Beast from that Sacred Summit or something?" he continued to ask.

"The Beast of the Sacred Summit refers to a student from the Sacred Summit Sage College. This sage college also has its own unique points. What it's most renowned for is its beast resonances. Amongst the numerous sage colleges of the East Divine Continent, they have the greatest number of students with

Just how would these dual resonances combine and what sort of spectacle would that create?

Li Luo could only sigh at the massive struggle that awaited him. The Holy Grail Meet was truly a place full of crouching tigers and hidden dragons.

Quasi ninth-grade resonance.

Duke Art.

Dual Resonances.

It was no wonder Mentor Chi Chan had told him to be grounded and to remain humble.

"With your strength today, you will definitely place within the upper echelons of the Holy Grail Meet. Unfortunately, if your target is to be the strongest One Star Hall student, your aim might just be out of reach," Chi Chan kindly reminded him.

A solemn expression blanketed Li Luo's face. Mentor Chi Chan's words did not come from her underestimating him. It was that the favored contenders were all truly monsters in their own right!

"Of course, your chances aren't zero." Her gaze flitted over.

"I seek your guidance, Mentor." Li Luo very sincerely pleaded for his mentor's help in response.

The drumming of fingers atop the table finally came to a halt.

"Dual Resonances, Becoming One. In this remaining half a month, I will guide you personally. If you are truly able to reach the Becoming One realm, then the three championship seeds will become four!"

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Whilst Li Luo continued his intense training with Mentor Chi Chan during this period of time, a certain Cai Wei had come to find the practicing Jiang Qing'e in House Luolan.

"What's wrong, Sister Cai Wei?" Jiang Qing'e sheathed her sword, her wry smile and golden eyes focused upon her friend.

Cai Wei had come adorned with a flowery hand fan which coquettishly covered her red lips. "Nothing much. When I was tidying up the study, I found an interesting object." She laughed.

"Hm?"

Cai Wei handed over a folded letter with a mischievous look on her face.

Jiang Qing'e curiously received the letter and proceeded to open it, reading it carefully. However, what she saw caused her eyebrow to lift lightly.

This letter was addressed to Li Taixuan.

What left her surprised was that the letter did not come from someone from the Xia Kingdom, instead coming from the Holy Sun Dynasty, a kingdom that was far to the north end of the East Divine Continent. Jiang Qing'e recognized this symbol purely because the Enlightened Sage College was situated there.

The contents of the letter came from a low profile but ancient family from the Holy Sun Dynasty.

The Jing family. The Jing family's head was clearly acquainted with Li Taixuan.

Interestingly, the Jing family had sent a request for a marriage with a Qilin son of theirs, known as Taixu. The bride? Yours truly! Jiang Qing'e emotionlessly continued to read, yet something at the end caused her to smirk.

There was little message written at the bottom of the letter, with a handwriting she was incomparably familiar with. Li Taixuan's.

Two simple words.

Get.

Lost.

It was a pity that this letter had not been sent out. It had been casually thrown aside, and only today had Cai Wei discovered it. "Cough. Qing'e, it looks like you were already distinguished amongst peers even years ago..." Cai Wei giggled.

Shaking her head in response. "The Jing family is truly bored."

After passing the letter back to Cai Wei, she waved her hand.

"Burn it to ashes. Don't let Li Luo see this."