

Resonance 91

Chapter 0091: Hello Again, Jiang Qing'e

The approaching group swiftly arrived at the bottom of the high slope.

Si Qiuying took one look at the approaching party led by the beautiful figure, then she tersely said to Li Luo, "Since you don't agree to my proposal, take it as I said nothing."

She threw him a meaningful look, indicating that he should not mention their discussion in front of Jiang Qing'e.

Li Luo was still smiling, his eyes fixed on the approaching girl.

She arrived on her horse, wearing a short, navy-blue vest and a battle skirt. Her long, white legs and gorgeous body were enough to bring the dead back to life.

The perfect heroine.

She turned her deep, gold eyes to Li Luo and then to Si Qiuying. "Little earthworm, are you interested in my Young Lord? Courting him aggressively?" she asked mildly.

Si Qiuying forced a nervous laugh and pleaded, "I just wanted to see the champion of the Tianshu exams in the flesh."

Jiang Qing'e turned to Li Luo. "Is that so?"

Si Qiuying desperately shot Li Luo looks.

"Miss Si over here asked me to cancel our engagement. She wants to start a new one between you and her brother."

Little girl, how naive! You should have asked Southwind Academy what Li Luo was famous for. It was tattling!

Si Qiuying's smile froze on her face, but her eyes were burning holes into Li Luo.

Jiang Qing'e's face did not change one bit. "Little earthworm, are you trying to burrow out of the ground? You dare worm into my business?"

Si Qiuying shrank away. "No, please let me explain, Sister Qing'e," she said in a small voice.

She ran away.

Jiang Qing'e flicked a finger and sent a pellet of light whistling out. It smacked against Si Qiuying's shoulder with a tiny ring.

"Uuuuu!"

Si Qiuying cried, clutching her arm. She turned to Jiang Qing'e, beseeching tearfully. "Sister Qing'e, I was in the wrong! Please don't hit me anymore."

Jiang Qing'e dispelled the light resonance. "I won't do it again."

"Also, stop trying to tie me up with your brother. He might be excellent, but he's not my cup of tea."

Si Qiuying was sulky. "Sister Qing'e, my big brother is quite the catch. Even the Astral Sage College mentors say that he has the makings of a Duke!"

"Duke?"

Jiang Qing'e scoffed. "That's it?"

Si Qiuying balked. Those words from anyone else would be bragging, but from Jiang Qing'e?

She bit her lip and then looked across at Li Luo, who was enjoying the show. "Maybe he can't compare to Sister Qing'e, but he's definitely better than that one."

Jiang Qing'e smiled. "Maybe not... two months ago, Li Luo had blank palaces. Now he's first in the Tianshu Province. Give him some time, and he might just top the Astral Sage College's newcomers."

"Sister Qing'e, your imagination has to have a limit," Si Qiuying said scathingly.

Although Li Luo's improvements in a mere two months could not be denied, him becoming the best in the new cohort was quite impossible. This was the Astral Sage College! The cream of the Xia Kingdom crop, all gathered in one place. What was Li Luo worth in this group!?

Jiang Qing'e turned away, dismissing her with a flick of her hand.

Si Qiuying had no choice but to get up and put on her shoes. Throwing one last angry look at Li Luo, she turned to leave.

Only after Si Qiuying had slunk off with her retinue did Li Luo speak. "That was harsh. I've just arrived and you've heaped resentment on my plate."

Once Jiang Qing'e's words got out, Li Luo felt that it was going to complicate his life at the Astral Sage College by a big notch.

"I think you might be angry at me, but I'm not really sure."

Jiang Qing'e gave him a puppy-eyed look with her golden eyes, and she cocked her head innocently.

Li Luo was planning to scold her, but the words stuck in his throat. She was so cute. Jiang Qing'e, it must be illegal for you to be so pretty and act so cute.

Regretfully, she soon returned to normal. "Not bad. It would have been enough to get into the Astral Sage College, but to think you took first place too."

"Sheesh. I was forced. I was forced from start to finish." Li Luo shook his head, indicating that he didn't want to elaborate.

She made a small noise of amusement and did not pursue.

Li Luo was aghast. Was she really not going to ask? He had finally gotten hold of something he could talk about to her, and she was not going to bite? Damn, that sucked.

But still, he could only swallow it. He couldn't very well start talking about it. That would be embarrassing.

He gulped.

"Let's go. I want to see Cai Wei and Lingqing, I haven't seen them in a while," Jiang Qing'e said. She took hold of her beasts' reins and draped a long leg over it, heading down the slope.

Li Luo could only follow grumpily.

The two made their way down as the sun began to set. Golden hour cast long shadows on the two, and from afar they seemed to merge into one.

Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing were watching from the carriage. "They look like the perfect match."

Yan Lingqing nodded in agreement. She had never been too concerned with looks, but she had to admit that few could compare to Li Luo in that aspect.

Soon enough, Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo were with them.

"Qing'e, I've missed you to death!" Yan Lingqing joyfully flew forwards to hug Jiang Qing'e. The latter's beautiful but aloof face warmed up considerably as she patted Yan Lingqing's back gently.

Cai Wei's eyes were filled with joy as well. She was not as worked up as Yan Lingqing, but she came forth for a small hug too.

Each of Jiang Qing'e's hands circled a waist. "Sister Cai Wei, Lingqing, thanks for all your hard work."

Behind her, Li Luo was feeling a little extra as he watched the three women hug.

They had been through a lot at Southwind together after all. They were comrades now. He wouldn't mind celebrating together with them.

"Li Luo, come celebrate with us." Yan Lingqing's voice floated over.

Li Luo looked over and was just about to reply when he saw Jiang Qing'e cocking her head at him, a half-smile on her lips. He kept his expression blank. "Girls' celebration, that doesn't interest me," he said indifferently.

Low giggles.

He stood there and watched them catch up for what felt like the longest time. Finally, they seemed to come to a pause.

Yan Lingqing and Cai Wei got on the red horses, while Jiang Qing'e got into the carriage.

Li Luo was about to mount up as well, but he saw Jiang Qing'e looking at him with mischief in her golden eyes.

"Aren't you coming in? I still want to hear about your time in the exam."

Li Luo started, then coughed quickly. "Well, there's nothing much to..."

"Forget it, then." She started to close the door.

"Hem. Well, if you insist on hearing about it, I guess I could tell you." Li Luo hurriedly changed directions. In a flash, he was boarding the carriage happily. Jiang Qing'e, you playful little minx.

Chapter 0092: A Special Connection

Since they were already very close to Xia City, the convoy slowed its speed and blended in with the flow of traffic. The thoroughfare was starting to get lively as well, with foot and vehicular traffic both swelling. Xia City was truly a large metropolis.

In the carriage.

Li Luo recounted his story of the College Final Examinations in a moderate tone. "I just wanted to slip into the top 10 and get an entrance slot, but those people forced my hand."

Jiang Qing'e was sprawled on the table, one hand propping up her chin. "Lu Qing'er seems quite interested in you." She smiled.

Li Luo almost choked. Was that the point of his story?

"We're just platonic. Classmates," he clarified.

"That doesn't mean anything. I always thought that she was quite good. If you can win her favor, that means you're quite attractive," she said sweetly. Li Luo looked at her lovely face, deep into her golden eyes. He could sense that she was truly not very bothered.

But her not being bothered made him bothered. It meant that Jiang Qing'e hadn't really started to think of the two of them as a pair.

She had her own feelings, and there was no doubt that they were complex. Perhaps she thought of him more as a childhood sweetheart, or an older sister and her younger brother.

Perhaps she didn't know herself.

But there was one thing he was sure of: Jiang Qing'e might be his fiancée in name, she might trust him unconditionally and do many things for him, but in truth, she had yet to think of them as lovers.

Still, not even lovers were as trusting of each other as this complex relationship that she shared with Li Luo.

He sighed. He knew that such things could not be rushed. He just had to go at his own pace. If he wanted to sort this mess out, then the one necessary step was to cancel the engagement between them.

Only then could Jiang Qing'e be free of her complex feelings, and truly begin to consider what they were to each other.

Making a move on Jiang Qing'e was not to be taken lightly and could not be done prematurely.

"Still, I have to congratulate you. Your results in the exams were outstanding," Jiang Qing'e said appreciatively, oblivious to the internal struggle that Li Luo was going through.

"Does this mean I've reached your expectations for the first goal?" he joked.

"Exceeded expectations, I must say."

She had truly not expected him to do so well. Two months ago, he was a blank palace cultivator. Surpassing all of his peers in this time was testament to his talent and effort.

"Any additional rewards?" Li Luo asked.

She thought about it. "Well, I'll let you spar with me."

Her lip twitched. "If you win, there really will be a reward."

Li Luo paled. "Fight with you? Do you think I'm so keen on receiving a thrashing? If I could beat you, would I still be here talking crap with you? I would beat you up and take vengeance for all these tough years!"

"But I'm more surprised that you actually turned House Luolan's profits in the Tianshu Province around. It's at a historical high, and Cai Wei has told me that it's all thanks to your contributions at the Sun creek Villa," Jiang Qing'e said with real feeling.

"I had no choice. If I hadn't found a way to increase our profits, I'm afraid I wouldn't even be able to feed myself," Li Luo grumbled.

"Did Cai Wei tell you I need a ton of spirit liquids and purifying lights? I've used a lot of them in the past two months."

Li Luo stretched out his palm, showing her his blue water resonance power. The purity made her eyes widen.

"When you first solved your blank palace problem at the old manor, your resonance grade was not this high," she said.

From the purity, she would believe him even if he said he had a 7th-grade water resonance.

But she clearly remembered that his resonance was far from this when she saw it back at the old manor.

This had to be the result of the huge quantity of spirit liquids and purifying lights that he had consumed.

Still, she was doubtful. Had he truly consumed so many liquids and lights in a mere two months?

"It's because of the acquired resonances. My palaces can take a lot more impurity than others. That's why I can use spirit liquids and purifying lights without care to increase my resonance quality." Li Luo grinned. This was the only person he could trust fully. There was no need to hold secrets around her.

"I see."

She was still shocked. So this was the power of acquired resonances. No wonder he had improved so quickly.

"My resonance is already at the sixth grade, so I need a lot of sixth-grade liquids and lights. House Luolan's profits in Tianshu are already insufficient to feed me, you know."

It was his turn now to act cute with Jiang Qing'e. "So... Sister Qing'e, please feed me~"

She laughed and ignored the teasing. "How many sixth-grade liquids and lights to advance?"

"About 200. Conservative estimate," Li Luo quickly said. Sister Qing'e was the best. Cai Wei was too soft, she couldn't be depended on.

"Two hundred??"

Jiang Qing'e did some quick calculations. Sixth-grade liquids and lights went for 30,000 skygold apiece. 200 meant... six million skygold?

She shook her head. "Forget it. I can't afford you. I think I'll get someone to take you back to the City of Southwind."

Li Luo was devastated. "Jiang Qing'e! House Luolan has businesses across the land. Have you been embezzling the money? It's just a mere six million, why can't we afford it?"

She glared at him. "Businesses across the land? The great roof of Luolan has been leaking non-stop. I've been desperately trying to fix it, but it's like plugging a flood with a pacifier. The savings have been dwindling these past few years.

"And Pei Hao. He's taken three pavilions, finances, and the human resources divisions too. You heard him as well. His three pavilions won't send another penny to headquarters. How on earth would you think House Luolan is rich?"

Li Luo was aghast. He had looked forward to coming to Xia City so he could tap on House Luolan's headquarters' resources. But they were poor here too?

Then what was the point of being a young lord?!

"Two hundred sixth-grade spirit liquids and purifying lights. I can't get them immediately, but don't worry. I'll purchase them for you here and there. It will take some time though," Jiang Qing'e said.

Li Luo breathed out. Well, that was to be expected.

"But thanks to your great work at the Suncreek Villa, I intend to involve you in the Suncreek Villa's headquarters. Pei Hao has been vying hard to take control there. If you can have it firmly in hand and grow it to a top-10 villa in the Xia Kingdom, then I think a mere 200 liquids and lights will be chump change for you." She gave him an encouraging fist pump with her dainty, little hand.

"Wow, thank you very much for your kindness," Li Luo said tonelessly.

Make the Suncreek Villa a top-10 villa... Jiang Qing'e, you blackhearted maggot.

Listening to the sounds outside, she opened a window, and a majestic view of the city rolled into view.

Turning her golden eyes back to Li Luo, his youthful and almost childish features were reflected in her wide eyes.

She reached out a hand and placed it on the back of his. It was cool, firm, perfect.

She leaned in and spoke softly, her words clear as a cold ray of moonlight despite the din outside. They reached deep within him and calmed him.

"Li Luo, welcome to Xia City.

"And, I'm really happy you could come here," she said with a knowing smile and a glint in her eye. She was truly happy.

A beauty's smile was a weapon in itself, and Jiang Qing'e's smile was a godly weapon. Li Luo was sunk.

He suddenly felt a strong urge to fight someone for her.

Speak, Sister Qing'e! Who shall we cut down today?

Chapter 0093: Si Tianming

The streets of Xia City were far grander than Southwind's. Straight rows of neatly paved stone, properly spaced. The roads were well connected and well planned, an efficient network linking up high-rise buildings that one could lose oneself in.

There was no end to the people. Noisy, bustling—the roar of the crowd was omnipresent.

This was Xia City, the heart of the Xia Kingdom.

While Li Luo was contemplating this intimidating city from his carriage window, Si Qiuying was on another street, stopping in front of an inn at a prime location by the road. She entered a posh room.

"Oh, you're back?"

A youth was sipping tea, lazily watching the street. He smiled when she walked in.

He cut a handsome, noble figure, his brow sharp and his eyes keen. However, he had the same hair as Si Qiuying, green and smooth. It was a family trait.

This was Si Qiuying's elder brother, Si Tianming.

"What's wrong? Met the Young Lord?" Si Tianming asked cheerfully.

"Yes! A little slime! He tattled at the first sign of trouble. A childish, little kid!" she burst out. "And Sister Qing'e is so biased. She actually hit me," Si Qiuying complained. She had always been on good terms with Jiang Qing'e, who had treated her like a little sister. Now it was clear that she favored Li Luo much more.

"You're the childish one... Do you know what her relationship with Li Luo is? You were asking for it, trying to compete with Li Luo," Si Tianming said impatiently.

"I'm not fighting with him... Big Brother, Sister Qing'e said she's not interested in you," Si Qiuying said.

Si Tianming just laughed it off. "Of course she's not. Isn't that clear enough on the daily?

"Besides, someone as excellent as Jiang Qing'e definitely can say that."

Si Qiuying was still not happy. "Big Brother, maybe you can't compare to Sister Qing'e, but you're a hundred times better than Li Luo, right?

"You're a 4th-Star Hall student in the Astral Sage College. You're powerful, and even the mentors say that you have great potential to become a Duke!"

"And you think a Duke will impress Jiang Qing'e?"

Si Tianming sighed. "Qiuying, I told you before: the right to call off the engagement between Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e does not actually rest with Li Luo, but with Jiang Qing'e. If she isn't willing, no one can change a thing."

"Besides, I might like Jiang Qing'e, but that doesn't mean I have to pursue it."

Si Qiuying sulked. "Big Bro, you think you're a love saint? Let me ask you: if you were given the chance to woo Sister Qing'e, would you?"

Si Tianming gave her a sheepish smile.

Si Qiuying gave him a look. "Believe in yourself, Big Bro! Your talent, your strength, your reputation—you're one of the elites in the younger generation of the Xia Kingdom. Persevere and Sister Qing'e will definitely see the good in you!

"And you're definitely a better match compared to Li Luo!"

Si Tianming gave an exasperated smile. "Just keep your nose out of those matters. Also, don't go causing trouble for Li Luo either. There's no need. He's the Young Lord of House Luolan after all. If you cross him, I will not interfere when Jiang Qing'e comes for you."

"I couldn't care less about him," she said snootily.

"But he pissed me off today. The next time Duze Beixuan wants to cause trouble for him, I'm not going to help him."

Si Tianming shook his head. It was not like the young lord couldn't handle himself. He was the champion of the Tianshu Province—he must have earned it.

However, House Duze seemed to be on the move lately. Perhaps House Luolan was their target...

...

The carriage turned through the expansive streets, finally stopping outside a residence.

This was the House Luolan headquarters.

Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e stepped out. He whistled at the residence in appreciation. The old manor at Southwind was big, but it paled in comparison to this.

Bodyguards patrolled the perimeter in groups while keen eyes were scanning from the watchtower.

"I've already informed the management to gather at headquarters tonight. Since you're the young lord, you should be familiar with the backbone of House Luolan," Jiang Qing'e said.

She looked at Li Luo. "These managers are in charge of House Luolan's businesses in Xia City. You should know that 60% of our yearly income comes from outside of Xia City, while a full 40% depends on the businesses in Xia City."

Li Luo was surprised to hear this. House Luolan's Xia City revenue held a much higher percentage than he had expected.

Truly the capital of the Xia Kingdom.

"When I first took over House Luolan a few years ago, the Xia City businesses had been decimated by Pei Hao. But after a few years of rectification, I've managed to cut away a lot of his meddling. Things here should be quite stable," she continued.

"You must have gone through a lot."

The proportion of House Luolan's businesses in Xia City was major. If Pei Hao was allowed to rot their assets here, House Luolan's headquarters would be doomed. Luckily, Jiang Qing'e had stepped in to save House Luolan in time.

As the two spoke, they had already walked through the main doors. Suddenly, a huge, burly figure cannonballed right at Li Luo, a loud voice booming out. "Oh, my Young Lord! You're finally here in Xia City! This old ox has missed you so much!"

Li Luo felt like he was being attacked by a bowling ball. He was seized up in a hug that felt like a steel vice, squeezing all the air out of him.

The person before him reeked of oil, a pungent odor that assailed Li Luo's nostrils.

"Uncle Biao, you're strangling him." Jiang Qing'e laughed, rescuing Li Luo.

The burly man let go of him, and finally Li Luo could get a good look at him. He was a bald middle-aged man bulging with muscles. He was covered in a sheen of oil and had an almost barbaric look to him. At his waist, a pig cleaver gleamed.

"And you are..." Li Luo stared at him. He had a vague impression, but he could not recall this man's name.

"Young Lord, it's me, Ox Biaobiao. Don't you remember me? I even made your meals when you were young," the bald strongman anxiously said.

It lit up Li Luo's memory. Indeed, there was once a baldie accompanying him when he was young. But after a shift in the headquarters' manpower, that memory had come to an end.

"Uncle Biao has spent the longest time in House Luolan. Back when the Master and Mistress founded House Luolan, he was there. His cooking skills are famous in Xia City, and even now he oversees the food matters here," Jiang Qing'e told him brightly.

Li Luo clapped his hands. "I remember!"

"Uncle Biao! You look like a real hulk, but you're so gentle that you won't even kill a chicken. I remember you lured me into the kitchen when I was young, to get me to help you kill the chicken!"

Ox Biaobiao's face froze. "Young Lord, your memory is very good," he said sheepishly. "You remember well indeed."

Li Luo burst into laughter. Despite his ferocious appearance, his personality was the complete opposite. His looks alone could probably bring children to tears, and yet he wouldn't dare kill a chicken.

Everyone said that the pig cleaver on Ox Biaobiao's waist had probably never touched blood in its life. It was pure decoration.

The moment of hilarity over, Li Luo confirmed that this was indeed an old hand of House Luolan. He was deserving of trust.

"Uncle Biao, I'll be in your care again from now on." Li Luo reached out a hand to clap his meaty shoulder.

Ox Biaobiao took his hand, moved. "I had long wanted to go to the City of Southwind to take care of the Young Lord, but Little Jiang here didn't let me. Now that you're in Xia City, I will feed you until you pop."

He measured Li Luo's arm. "Young Lord, you're scrawny. I'll whip up a huge pot of nourishment!"

He turned and rushed away.

"Uncle Biao is as high-strung as ever." Li Luo smiled at the muscular figure hurrying off.

"Uncle Biao can be trusted. I intended for him to take control of some of House Luolan's assets, but he refused. He just wants to be in the kitchen," Jiang Qing'e said.

"Whatever he's willing to do. No need to force the issue."

Jiang Qing'e nodded. "Let's go, then. I'll take you around. We'll eat later. The management should be here soon. Today might be a little more tiring."

Li Luo smiled at her. "What's this compared to how much you've suffered these few years, Sister Qing'e? You're so amazing."

"Your words have become sweeter. You must have had a lot of practice with the girls in school," Jiang Qing'e said with a curious smile.

"Are you jealous?"

She made a small, vague noise and strode off. Her lofty voice called back to him.

"Jealous? Nothing to be jealous of yet. Work hard, and maybe one day I'll know what that is."

Li Luo stared at her elegant figure and hurried after, irritated.

How was he supposed to reply? Jiang Qing'e, you're too much. We've drifted... No...

You've been so aloof today... This didn't fit the mood.

Oh forget it.

"What's for dinner tonight?"

Chapter 0094: An Important Custom

"Young Lord, this is a Nine Fungi Bear Bladder Soup. It uses nine different kinds of lingzhi mushrooms and has the gall bladder of a Pyreghost Bear and other assorted beasts. It's very nourishing.

"And this rice with spirit fruits has the cured juices of plenty of spirit fruits. The rice is three-month energy rice. After coming to maturity, we leave it in a place with high natural energy and let it bask for three months.

"And this one..."

In the dining room, Li Luo, Jiang Qing'e, Cai Wei, and Yan Lingqing were seated. Ox Biaobiao was scurrying back and forth with heaping platters. Each dish was fragrant as could be.

"That's too much nourishment." Li Luo didn't know whether to laugh or cry. He thought Ox Biaobiao was speaking metaphorically, but it seemed like he was serious on making Li Luo more herbal than a poultice.

"Your body is growing at this phase of your life, Young Lord. You need more nourishment. You can't go wrong," Ox Biaobiao beamed.

"Thanks, Uncle Biao. Let's eat."

Jiang Qing'e seemed to accept it as normal. Thanking Ox Biaobiao, she began eating.

Li Luo followed her lead, taking hearty helpings of these delicacies that were hard to get a hold of in the City of Southwind. He enjoyed them fully, giving Ox Biaobiao a big thumbs up to show his appreciation.

After stuffing himself, Li Luo felt a strong fire within his body that made him feel hot all over.

Thanks to Biaobiao's exceptional culinary skills, even Jiang Qing'e and Cai Wei could not maintain their decorum, and tucked in with uncommon fervor.

Ox Biaobiao watched them tackle the mountain of food with a big, satisfied smile on his face.

When they had all eaten their fill, he called servants over to clean the tables and then serve them each a cup of sweet tea.

"This is Floweret Steeped Tea. After eating those highly nourishing foods, you need something strongly calming to quench the fires of the body."

Li Luo drank it all in one gulp and then felt his body begin cooling down immediately. It seemed like the resonant power within him had grown stronger.

"Uncle Biao's the best," Li Luo marveled.

Ox Biaobiao's laughter boomed out. "Young Lord, you're too kind. I will prepare it for you daily. Nourish you up."

He packed the table and took his leave.

Li Luo stared at Ox Biaobiao's retreating figure with a tingle of suspicion. He kept saying Li Luo was empty and needed nourishment...

Just a casual remark?

Or... did he know something?

Two months ago, he had gained acquired resonances. He had indeed been empty of blood essence, and even his lifespan had been shortened... But he had not even told Jiang Qing'e, to spare her the worry.

Could it be that Uncle Biao... knew? Impossible.

Li Luo turned back to Jiang Qing'e, who was delicately sipping at her tea. "How strong is Uncle Biao?" he asked in a low voice.

She looked up at him. "I saw him use resonant power a long time ago. Roughly at the Resonant Master stage."

Li Luo didn't really believe that. He was average...?

She seemed to guess what he was thinking. "There's no need to speculate. All we need to know is that Uncle Biao is trustworthy. That's all," she said simply.

Li Luo thought about it and nodded. Indeed, there was no need to overthink it. Whether he was stronger than he let on or not, if he wasn't going to volunteer information, they shouldn't push it out of him. After all, if his parents had entrusted all food matters at House Luolan's headquarters to him, he had their absolute trust.

Jiang Qing'e unhurriedly sipped her tea. Finally, she rose. "Let's go. It's about time."

Li Luo stood up as well, sucking in a deep breath. It was showtime. A declaration of the young lord's presence to all at House Luolan's headquarters, and that he was here for good.

In the future, he would be one of the controlling powers here.

It was a simple yet highly significant custom.

Calming himself, he followed Jiang Qing'e out of the hall. They passed through a long corridor and pushed through a set of doors at the end.

The blindingly bright lights inside forced Li Luo to squint as he entered.

When his eyes adjusted, he saw that many people were seated behind the long tables at both sides of the room. They were all looking at him with unreadable expressions.

There was a strange stiffness in the atmosphere here.

Jiang Qing'e's voice rang out to break it. "Do you all not see the Young Lord here?"

Only then did they stand up in twos and threes, cupping their hands. "Our respects to the Young Lord."

Li Luo smilingly replied to them in kind. "My respects to you too."

They could all see that this unusually handsome young man had inherited the looks of Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan. However, none of their charisma or natural commanding presence were visible. Instead, all they saw was youthful greenness.

Many of the higher management at House Luolan had forgotten about Li Luo ever since his blank palaces had come to light. Even though he was the rightful heir to the house, his blank palaces had pronounced his death sentence.

No one would be willing to leave House Luolan in the hands of a powerless young lord.

Therefore, they had put him out of mind in recent years. And now the mascot of House Luolan had appeared before them again.

However, he was no longer the same blank palace cultivator that he once was. He was first in the Tianshu Province's exams and had earned his place in the Astral Sage College.

Although the difference between him and Jiang Qing'e was still huge, he was no longer a complete invalid. If the two truly married in the future, perhaps there would still be hope for House Luolan.

Unsure of how to feel yet, they again cupped their hands in respect.

"This is Pavilion Master Lei Zhang, on the Council of Nine. You should have met him before. He is the only Pavilion Master who remains at House Luolan's headquarters. He is also in charge of the headquarters' security matters." She pointed to a middle-aged man in the foremost seat on the left. Li Luo had noticed him when Pei Hao had come to the old manor.

"This is the master of the resonant artifacts workshop, Yuan Jin."

Li Luo looked at him. He was a scholarly middle-aged man that did not look at all the part of a resonant artifacts expert.

"And the pill workshop mistress, An Hongyan."

She was a beautiful matron with a prim air about her, clad in white.

"Greetings, Young Lord."

The three that Jiang Qing'e had just introduced held high positions in House Luolan, and they all bowed to him.

Li Luo nodded in acknowledgement. He neither appeared too friendly nor too cold.

Li Luo noticed something wrong. The Suncreek Villa's headquarters management was not here.

He turned to Jiang Qing'e, who was also looking cold and angry. Her voice rang out with steel in it.

"Where is the Suncreek Villa's President Hanzhi?"

Chapter 0095: Presidential Takeoff

Jiang Qing'e's voice rang out coldly, met by mutters and exchanged glances within the hall.

"Miss, someone was sent to the Suncreek Villa's headquarters to convey the message. President Hanzhi should have hurried over if he received the message," Lei Zhang said.

Jiang Qing'e nodded. "Seems like we have a problem."

"Is President Hanzhi Pei Hao's man?" Li Luo asked.

Today was his presentation as the young lord of House Luolan. The management staff knew it was important. Even if they did not respect him, they had to respect Jiang Qing'e.

And if this Hanzhi was planning to disrespect both, then he had to be a diehard Pei Hao supporter.

Jiang Qing'e shook her head. "Hanzhi is not one of Pei Hao's. He has always swung between us, a shrewd and cunning person. There's no reason he wouldn't be here..."

"If he's not here, there must be trouble."

"Or," Li Luo said softly, "he found a buyer even more attractive than either of you?"

The entire room turned to him in horror. This meant... Hanzhi had betrayed House Luolan?!

Jiang Qing'e's eyes narrowed too, then her expression became even more grim than before.

She felt that Li Luo's guess might just be exactly right.

As the whispers grew around the room, there suddenly came the sound of hurried footfalls from outside. An old man barged in.

Li Luo recognized him as Zheng Ping, who had come to the City of Southwind before. He had affirmed Yan Lingqing's position there.

Zheng Ping was an elder of the Suncreek Villa's headquarters. He had a wealth of experience. Right now, his weathered face was creased in anger.

"Young Lord, Young Mistress, that scumbag Hanzhi suddenly announced that he's leaving the Suncreek Villa for House Duze's Bigswamp Villa. Before he left, he took half the Suncreek Villa resonance artificers with him. Worse, the cursed devil even burned the formula research center!" Zheng Ping shouted hoarsely, his face miserable.

There was a collective gasp across the meeting room. All of House Luolan's management was dismayed.

Was Hanzhi crazy? A betrayal of House Luolan, poaching the Suncreek Villa's resonance artificers, and arson at the formula research center?!

A loud outcry of anger exploded in the meeting room.

Li Luo's face was grave. He had worked in the Suncreek Villa's branch workshop before. He knew well that the most important thing to a villa was the resonance artificers.

If Hanzhi was dissatisfied with the Suncreek Villa, he could have chosen to leave, no problem. But to break and bury the Suncreek Villa with his departure?

And the formula research center. That was the lifeblood of any villa. Immense capital had been poured into experimentation and research. And now it had all been burned down by Hanzhi. It was a devastating loss.

One more point. He could have chosen to leave any time, but he had purposely waited for the young lord's return to do such a despicable thing... No one would believe that it was not a targeted attack on Li Luo.

"Silence."

Jiang Qing'e's voice sharply silenced the hall.

"This is a well-calculated plot of House Duze against House Luolan." There was no apparent anger on her face, only seriousness.

Her calmness helped them control their anger as well.

"House Duze again..." Li Luo sat down beside Jiang Qing'e. He had heard it straight from Si Qiuying's lips—House Duze had it in for him from the moment he set foot in Xia City. This was a masterful stroke they had delivered.

"They must have spent quite a lot to pull Hanzhi to them. Otherwise, he would not have dealt such a cruel blow," Jiang Qing'e said. This was not only a move against House Luolan, but also against the new leader, Li Luo, the young lord.

They had purposely chosen their timing to completely embarrass Li Luo and reduce his standing within House Luolan.

After all, a change in leadership being immediately met with such a tragic betrayal was sure to get people pointing fingers at Li Luo.

They might even say that the young lord was so out of touch with the management that their people were fleeing from him.

Li Luo sighed inwardly. So these were house politics? Cruel, savage, cutthroat. Compared to them, the City of Southwind's Song family looked like a child's squabble.

"House Duze has gone too far! This is underhanded!" Lei Zhang shouted in a trembling voice.

"We have always been rivals. It is naive to blame our enemies for being harsh," Jiang Qing'e said flatly. "We will remember this. We will pay them back when the time comes."

Although she was angry, she quashed it down with logic. She knew that House Luolan could not engage in all-out war, if the house was to survive this storm.

"Young Lord, Young Mistress, the Suncreek Villa is in disarray right now. You have to do something.

"Pang Qianchi is only adding fuel to the fire. He says that since Hanzhi has left, there should be a new president..." Zheng Ping reported with barely suppressed fury.

Jiang Qing'e turned to Li Luo. "Pang Qianchi is a Pei Hao supporter. He has always blocked my interventions at the Suncreek Villa. When Hanzhi sat back neutrally, Pang Qianchi could control many things at the Suncreek Villa."

Li Luo gave her a small nod. This was similar to the situation back at Tianshu, although this Pang Qianchi was probably much harder to deal with than Zhuang Yi.

He had heard the story regarding the headquarters' vice president back at the City of Southwind. He was once a strong contender to be President of the Suncreek Villa, and was favored over Hanzhi at one time. However, his parents ended up choosing Hanzhi over Pang Qianchi.

Perhaps his resentment of Li Luo's parents was the reason he immediately turned to Pei Hao the moment they disappeared.

But now it seemed like neither Hanzhi nor Pang Qianchi could be relied upon. He could not blame his parents. When House Luolan was in its fledgling years and growing, they were sorely lacking talent. They could only make do with what they had, and make a note to replace the bad people later.

But before these two could be replaced, they had vanished.

"Elder Zheng, please help calm things down over at the Suncreek Villa's headquarters. Tomorrow, the young lord and I will personally go and sort things out. Do not worry. The Suncreek Villa is precious to the House Lords and many of the elders. We will not let it fall into ruin," Jiang Qing'e said soothingly to Zheng Ping.

"Alright." Zheng Ping immediately turned away after paying his respects to Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e. He hurried off.

With his departure, the mood in the meeting hall returned to normal, although this was only on the surface. House Duze had chosen the perfect time to strike, souring the young lord's return.

Starting tomorrow, word would spread all over Xia City, and they would be made fools of.

House Duze was disgustingly low.

Chapter 0096: The Suncreek Villa Headquarters

The next day.

An early-rising Li Luo sat down to another nourishing feast by Ox Biaobiao. This one was enough to raise a wave of heat up his nostrils. He tapped them gingerly, checking for a nosebleed.

After breakfast, Li Luo followed Jiang Qing'e to the Suncreek Villa's headquarters. And as an important member of the Suncreek Villa and the House Luolan management, of course Cai Wei was there too.

They sat comfortably in the spacious carriage, the fragrance of the three women mingling sweetly in the air within.

"Qing'e, although Hanzhi didn't lift a finger when he was president, Pang Qianchi was a bit more circumspect with him around. Now that Hanzhi is gone, he'll run rampant for sure," Yan Lingqing said worriedly, fussing with her silver-rimmed spectacles.

"The Suncreek Villa's headquarters is in shambles. We have to quickly appoint a new president to calm things down and get production underway, or the losses will continue to escalate," Cai Wei fretted.

"Probably Pang Qianchi's goal..."

Jiang Qing'e nodded. "Given Pang Qianchi's reputation and artificer skill, there's no one who can compare to him. He'll definitely be the favorite in the running for president. Even the moderate majority would choose him."

"But if we make him president, there's going to be trouble. Pei Hao will be able to step all over us. It's a one-way ticket down to our doom," Cai Wei said.

"Urgh," Yan Lingqing hissed. While she might be competent enough to hold her own in the Tianshu Province, her skills were insufficient here at the Suncreek Villa's headquarters. Her appointment would

have to be forced through, and it would incite dissatisfaction. The stubborn old geezers in the Sun creek Villa would be first on the protest line.

"It's not as though we don't have other candidates though," Jiang Qing'e said with a light laugh.

Yan Lingqing and Cai Wei looked at her, astonished.

She nodded forwards, gesturing with her dainty, little chin. Yan Lingqing and Cai Wei turned to look at Li Luo.

"Me?" Li Luo was startled at the sudden nomination by Jiang Qing'e.

"Although I'm a resonance artificer, I'm only a second-grade... That's definitely not enough to become the Sun creek Villa's president, right?"

Jiang Qing'e smiled. "Ability-wise, perhaps. But you have another advantage—your status.

"You are the young lord of House Luolan. Even the old geezers at the Sun creek Villa would have no reason to refuse your support at headquarters. Besides, you're not without your own accolades. The Tianshu Province's Sun creek Villa flourished under Lingqing and your care. You should be proud.

"You might not even have noticed it yourself, but you are the best person to take up the role of president."

There was a spark in Yan Lingqing and Cai Wei's eyes as they saw the merits of Jiang Qing'e's idea.

Li Luo mulled it over. "I guess I could take up the president role temporarily. But look at the state of the Sun creek Villa's headquarters! Resonance artificers leaving in droves and internal strife aplenty. If the Sun creek Villa wants to get its future back on track and compete against top villas like the Bigswamp Villa, there must be changes."

"I already spoke to Sister Qing'e last night about them."

Jiang Qing'e fell silent for a moment too and then finally nodded seriously.

"You are the rightful young lord of House Luolan. If you think it is possible, I will support you."

"Then my early thanks to Sister Qing'e for your support." Li Luo grinned.

Cai Wei and Yan Lingqing looked back and forth curiously, in the dark regarding this exchange.

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The Sun creek Villa's headquarters were at the south of Xia City, in the same region as the headquarters of House Luolan. However, the sluggish city traffic and complex road systems meant that more than an hour passed before they arrived. Xia City was much bigger than the City of Southwind.

Compared to the City of Southwind's branch office, the headquarters here were much grander as well.

There were stone lions flanking the main doors, and flights of steps that elevated the dignity and grandeur of the place. Through the main doors, towering buildings loomed within.

There was a constant flow of people both ways. Occasionally, they would stop and gesture at the headquarters, laughing among themselves.

Evidently, news of the resonance artificer migration to the Bigswamp Villa had spread far and wide across Xia City.

As their coach rolled to a stop, their arrival was immediately noticed by the bystanders.

"That silver-haired kid, is that the young lord of House Luolan, Li Luo?"

"What a dashing young man, the spitting image of his father. Wow! Back in the day, Li Taixuan was the dream guy of many noble girls in Xia City. He got himself some haters because of that."

"Li Luo looks ready to surpass him."

"Heh. Li Taixuan was popular because he wasn't just a pretty face—his talent was unbelievable. The Youngest Duke in the Xia Kingdom—now that's a title that shines brightly. This Li Luo, though, a prettier vessel, sure, but far more hollow."

"I heard that it was precisely his arrival that made President Hanzhi run away..."

"Does that even make sense?"

"Haha, who knows? But there must be some connection, right? Can't be a coincidence."

Li Luo ignored the whispers around him as he ascended the stairs with Jiang Qing'e, Cai Wei, and Yan Lingqing, entering the building.

Within the compound, the usually picturesque environment was now in tatters. There was no one of rank to welcome them, only a few servants hurrying forth.

"Where are the elders and Vice President Pang?" Jiang Qing'e asked calmly.

The servants looked at each other, then bowed them towards the back. "Elder Zheng Ping and the others are arguing with him," they whispered.

Jiang Qing'e swept past them without further comment.

Li Luo and the others hurried after her.

They passed through a short boulevard to a courtyard centered around a fountain. There were many people here, all dressed in the Sun creek Villa resonance artificer robes.

"Gentlemen, Hanzhi was sick in the head. He not only betrayed the Sun creek Villa, but also burned down our research labs. We should never have made him president. It should always have been Vice President Pang!" someone shouted.

Their collective anger at Hanzhi had put them in an agreeable mood to anyone else.

"Yeah! Hanzhi's a damned animal! Let's put Vice President Pang in charge!"

"We need to fill the position quickly and get things under control. Vice President Pang's the logical choice!"

Elder Zheng Ping stood firm amongst them. "The Young Lord and Mistress will make the decision. Who are you to decide?!"

"Things were fine before that young lord came! A real harbinger of trouble..." someone grumbled.

"Who's that talking nonsense?!" Zheng Ping glared at the crowd. "When did a puppy like you grow a spine? The Young Lord has come to smooth things over. His presence brings nothing but good. You shortsighted sparrows, stop your chirping!" No one dared to argue back. Elder Zheng Ping's fiery temper was famous in the Suncreek Villa.

"Keke, no need to get angry, Elder Zheng Ping. No one is blaming the Young Lord. But it's understandable that everyone's a little flustered in these times." A bright voice rang out, and a man walked out from the crowd.

The middle-aged man had thin eyes and a warm expression on his face. There were cheers upon his arrival. "Vice President Pang, you're here!"

Elder Zheng Ping looked at him with a hostile expression. "Pang Qianchi, I'm not even going to waste my breath on you. The Young Lord and Mistress will be here shortly. There's no need to play these crowdpulling games. They will make their own choices. Just wait and see."

The narrow-eyed Vice President Pang Qianchi snickered softly.

But before he spoke, someone from the crowd called out, "We'll only acknowledge Vice President Pang in the Suncreek Villa. Only he is qualified to lead the Suncreek Villa! We won't accept anyone else!"

Elder Zheng Ping was seething fit to burst, his anger whitening his face along his wrinkles.

He too knew that Pang Qianchi was swooping in for the kill. Hanzhi's betrayal was very fortuitous for him.

Elder Zheng Ping also knew that in terms of qualifications and ability, there was no one who could match Pang Qianchi. There was no one else who would win the approval of the Suncreek Villa's artificers.

If things blew up yet again, perhaps even the remaining resonance artificers would leave. That would be the final nail in the Suncreek Villa's coffin.

Even he could not see a way out of this dilemma.

Just as he was despairing, a calm voice cut through the noise.

"I think... that I can give the president position a try."

Chapter 0097: I Guess I'll Be President

When the crisp voice cut through, the quarreling resonance artificers fell into a stunned silence. A hothead shouted, "Which arrogant idiot is that!?" An angry roar of agreement followed his call, and they turned as one in the direction of the voice. Their voices faded away.

They saw a silver-haired youth looking at them with a wry smile on his face.

Beside him was a willowy diva staring coldly at them. Jiang Qing'e.

Her presence confirmed the identity of the young man, and it was mildly amusing to watch their faces contort in embarrassment. As panicked as they were, no one dared to maintain the bluster from before.

"What? No respect for the Young Lord and Mistress?!" Elder Zheng Ping roared.

The resonance artificers hesitated briefly and then murmured their respects in a ragtag chorus.

Pang Qianchi was looking at Li Luo with alarm. He had seen him once before, a long time ago when the house headquarters was still in the City of Southwind. The young Li Luo already showed his resemblance to Li Taixuan and Tan Tailan back then.

Elder Zheng Ping pushed past the crowd and cupped his hands respectfully to the pair. "Young Lord, what did you just say?" he asked worriedly.

"I said that since the position of the Suncreek Villa president lies open, I'll take up the role temporarily," Li Luo said casually.

Elder Zheng Ping stammered in confusion. "Ah... but...."

He was about to say that it was completely against the rules, but this was the young lord. Who else was more qualified to bend the rules as he pleased?

The Suncreek Villa resonance artificers also looked around at each other with a disapproval that they could not voice. They were unsure of how to broach the issue.

Pang Qianchi spoke with just a hint of mockery. "Young Lord, surely there is no need to humble your esteemed self to the lowly position of president. Such roles are not even worthy of your attention, although mere mortals like us work hard to even achieve them.

"If an august presence like yourself sweeps in to take it, then it's rather unfair to us normal mortals who have worked so hard for all these years at the Suncreek Villa, don't you think?"

Pang Qianchi belied his cunning in these words. Every point he made seemed to speak on behalf of the Suncreek Villa artificers. At the same time, they were laced with an underlying challenge.

It was working, and the resonance artificers stirred in response.

Li Luo looked at Pang Qianchi for a few moments. This old fox was indeed harder to deal with than Zhuang Yi.

"I am a resonance artificer too, albeit a second-grade one. I cannot compare to your wiser selves. But I think the job of president is not just about creating spirit liquids and purifying lights. The president must have the ability to make the Suncreek Villa stronger," Li Luo commented mildly.

"I wonder, do you know about what happened at the Tianshu Province's Suncreek Villa? In yesteryears, the profit was roughly 100,000 skygold, but under my leadership it increased to 300,000, a full threefold increase.

"If I remember correctly, the Suncreek Villa headquarters only turns a yearly profit of about one million?" Li Luo asked calmly, soothing the crowd and working to unravel their defensiveness. Had a

mere branch of the Sun creek Villa managed to turn a 300,000 skygold profit? That was a full third of the headquarters!

Yan Lingqing stepped forwards. "It is indeed as the Young Lord says. If anyone doubts it, you can check for yourselves."

Seeing how sure Yan Lingqing was, the whispers were fading away now. If it was true, then this young lord was a real monster indeed!

Although ability was important for the role of president, wasn't the ultimate goal to make the Sun creek Villa stronger?

Pang Qianchi's jowls quivered with anger. He had not expected Li Luo to show up in person.

"Young Lord, are you trying to discourage us?" Pang Qianchi burst out.

"Does Vice President Pang find my appointment discouraging?" Li Luo countered.

Pang Qianchi could not reply to this, so he skirted the issue. "I have worked hard on behalf of the Sun creek Villa for all these years, and everyone here can attest to that. I competed against Hanzhi for the president position, but the two House Lords chose him. I accepted my loss. But now Hanzhi's betrayal shows that they made the wrong decision. Why can't the Young Lord work towards righting that wrong?"

Li Luo smiled at him. "Vice President Pang has indeed worked hard on behalf of the Sun creek Villa for many years. But now? Will it be for Pei Hao?"

"Pei Hao is also a disciple of the two House Lords. I am loyal to House Luolan, and all I do is for its sake!" Pang Qianchi asserted stoutly.

"Hanzhi's betrayal means that the Sun creek Villa is now short an experienced fifth-grade resonance artificer. If the Young lord continues to break all the rules, the Sun creek Villa might well lose another experienced master." His threats were coming forth more clearly now.

With Pei Hao supporting him, evidently Pang Qianchi was not afraid of Jiang Qing'e and Li Luo.

After all, Pei Hao could kick up a real fuss if they did anything to him. That would only harm House Luolan further.

"Pang Qianchi, you insolent—!" Elder Zheng Ping was red in the face.

Pang Qianchi was unafraid, lifting his head defiantly. "I just want the Young Lord to be more reasonable. All that I have done is for the Sun creek Villa's good!"

"Will you all support me?" He turned to the other artificers.

There was some hesitation, then they slowly came forth one by one. "Vice President Pang is indeed the best choice to be president."

Their views were not wrong. In terms of ability and experience, there was no better candidate.

But... How could these be the only terms they had considered?

Hearing their voices, Li Luo empathized. Who would choose an unknown young lord over the familiar presence that Pang Qianchi held in their hearts?

He did not get angry. Instead, he walked forwards to the stage. "Do you know how I managed to raise the Tianshu Province's Suncreek Villa to where it is in a mere two months?"

They looked at each other, curious. After all, he was a mere second-grade resonance artificer. How had he managed to turn around an entire branch of the Suncreek Villa?

"It's very simple. I mastered a special watersource. I believe that with this watersource, the Suncreek Villa's headquarters will also see a huge improvement. Entering the top 10 will not be beyond reach."

There was a loud uproar of surprise at this.

"Secret watersource?! The Young Lord has a secret watersource?!"

As resonance artificers, they knew how incomparably precious secret watersources were to a villa. The formula for one's own trademark waterlight resonance was worth more than millions of skygold.

After all these years, the Suncreek Villa still had not come up with its own patented watersource, such was its rarity.

As for the famous villas in the Xia Kingdom, each had multiple secret watersources and formulas. Therefore, if the Suncreek Villa wanted to become a top villa, the foremost requisite was to find their own patented formula.

Hearing that Li Luo actually had his own patented formula was enough to knock them out of their preconceived notions.

Pang Qianchi's expression did not slip. "Even though you have a secret watersource, how pure is it? Something just above average will not be able to make up for the gap."

Li Luo had to smile at Pang Qianchi's stubbornness. He pulled out a few glass bottles and tossed them out to the resonance artificers.

Stubbornness? I have just the cure.

Elder Zheng Ping took one bottle as well. After quickly opening it, he poured out a few drops and tested what was inside. There was astonishment on his old, creased face.

"This... this secret watersource is at least a seventh-grade! A high seventh-grade in purity!"

"WOW!"

The other resonance artificers tested the purity, and everyone was equally amazed. Their hands shook as they passed around the bottles reverently.

Upper seventh-grade... A watersource of such quality could perhaps only be found in the best of the Xia Kingdom's villas!

All of the artificers looked at Li Luo with a new light of enthusiasm now.

With such a pure watersource, they could not only refine much better spirit liquids, but frequent refining with it would also improve their own resonance arts. With some luck, they could break through their respective bottlenecks and reach the next grade.

This was similar to how Li Luo had helped Yan Lingqing create a fifth-grade spirit liquid back during the Festival of Purifying Spirits...

This was why all resonance artificers wanted to join villas with watersources of high purity. It was better for them to hone their refining skills there.

And with that seventh-grade secret watersource, Li Luo had stolen away all of their hearts...

Li Luo looked at Pang Qianchi with a half-smile on his face.

"Anything else, Vice President Pang?"

Chapter 0098: Li Luo's Strength

Pang Qianchi stared at Li Luo, and the corners of his eyes seemed to be spasming. He was unprepared for Li Luo's finishing move.

The details of Tianshu's branch had not reached headquarters, so even he was not sure of what had happened there...

He knew now. Li Luo's secret seventh-grade watersource was the magic behind Tianshu's success.

But how could Li Luo have such a powerful watersource?!

Could it be an inheritance from the two House Lords? But if that was the case, why would he not take it out earlier? With a watersource of such quality, the Sun creek Villa would definitely be many times stronger than it currently was!

Pang Qianchi reeled from the confusion. Li Luo ignored him. He turned to the other resonance artificers. "So, am I qualified to be president now?"

Silence greeted him, and the hothead from before hung his head shamefully.

In this situation, silence meant consent.

Elder Zheng Ping's rage had already subsided fully. "No objections from me," he stated.

He spoke on behalf of many of the moderate artificers, who were fully intending to lend Li Luo their support now.

Pang Qianchi's face was stony as he struggled with his anger. In his mind, the position of president was already his, but now Li Luo had swooped in to take it away. All of his carefully ministrated opportunities had been thoroughly swept away.

It seemed like he had no other reason to block Li Luo's ascension.

However, he had already swayed many resonance artificers to his side before this. Although Li Luo might have won this battle, he had yet to win the war.

With those who had promised to follow him, he could continue a secret struggle against Li Luo. He would start attending the Astral Sage College soon, so he would not have much time left with them. Once he left, wouldn't the Suncreek Villa be back in his hands again?

He had run a tight ship with the Suncreek Villa before. Was a young lord really going to change anything?

Thinking thus, Pang Qianchi managed to calm himself. So be it. The fight would simply take a little longer than expected. Pei Hao had already told him: just hold on until next year's housemeet. He would make his move then. And when House Luolan was dust, who would care about a lord of nothing?

When Pang Qianchi fell silent, Li Luo's gaze swept their ranks. "Since there seems to be no objections, then I will assume the role of the Suncreek Villa's headquarters' president. I ask for your kind regard."

The gathered resonance artificers dutifully applauded. Such was the temptation of an upper seventh-grade watersource.

"The proverb goes: a new boss cracks the whip three times. Let me crack the whip for the first time."

Li Luo declared. He turned to Pang Qianchi. "Vice President Pang, you have worked very hard. I give you a year's leave. Please enjoy your rest at home."

In other words, a temporary removal of Pang Qianchi.

Pang Qianchi remained unmoved. Was this young lord so naive to think that removing him would lessen his influence at the Suncreek Villa in any way?

Those he had swayed to his side would be his eyes and ears. He would simply use different methods to interfere in the Suncreek Villa's affairs.

Some resonance artificers frowned doubtfully. Li Luo seemed to be moving too hastily. It might not be good for the Suncreek Villa's future.

But before anyone could speak up on Pang Qianchi's behalf, Li Luo suddenly announced, "I know that some of you have been swayed by Pang Qianchi, and your allegiance is with Pei Hao."

There was a jolt of panic suddenly, and some queasy looks could be spotted on faces.

Pang Qianchi frowned as well. He stared at Li Luo. What was he planning to do? It was not a hard guess to make, but what could he do?

"Perhaps you think you can communicate with Pang Qianchi in secret, but you're underestimating the intelligence network of House Luolan..."

Li Luo said with a calm expression. He pulled out a scroll that was sealed with wax. "This is the list of all who have turned to Pang Qianchi's side."

There was even more restless shuffling now, but no one spoke. They waited quietly.

The tension in the atmosphere was palpable.

Pang Qianchi started. Was he intending to cull them based on the list? If so, that was incredibly bold. Still, the price would be a thorough sacking of the Suncreek Villa.

With some resonance artificers stolen away by Hanzhi, if Li Luo chased even more of them away, it would be virtually impossible for the Suncreek Villa to resume normal operations any time soon. That would be a huge loss.

Elder Zheng Ping's face was rigid with tension as well. One wrong move, he knew, would bring the whole Suncreek Villa crashing into disaster.

The silence continued to build until some found it difficult to breathe.

"I haven't looked at the list yet."

Li Luo said calmly. And then he pulled out a flare, setting the scroll on fire. The flames ate at the paper hungrily.

He then carelessly tossed the burning scroll aside.

He had their attention now, and all eyes were staring at the burning scroll.

They did not understand.

As for Pang Qianchi, he was staring at Li Luo fearfully now.

He seemed to have guessed what Li Luo was up to.

"Gentlemen, you all know what has been going on in House Luolan in recent years very well. The fact that all of you have remained here through these hard times speaks of at least some loyalty.

"It is normal for you to falter in hard times. Therefore, I pledge to you here, in the capacity of a young lord, that all you have done in the past will be wiped away clean, just as this namelist burns. As long as you are willing to work hard on the Suncreek Villa's behalf in the future, you are a valued member.

"Have no fear, your previous allegiances will not be used as blackmail against you."

His declaration gave them much to ponder. They did not know if the namelist he had was real, but that was not important compared to the significance of the pardon he had just pledged.

Clearly, he was prepared to extend his generosity in order to assure the stability of the Suncreek Villa.

"Moreover, the Suncreek Villa intends to take out 20% of all profits in the future, which will be passed on to the resonance artificers as remuneration, through higher salaries and other perks."

If Li Luo's burning of the list had been enough to make them reconsider, this further push was enough to bring them over into joy.

Resonance artificers joined villas for two purposes. One was to improve themselves, and the other was to earn money. After all, they all had families to feed.

Li Luo had first presented them with a high-purity watersource that would help them improve in the future. And now, a salary increase. 20% of the Suncreek Villa's profits was no small number—it was enough to match what the best villas were paying.

This meant that the Suncreek Villa would have a bright and rich future ahead of it.

How could they not rejoice at such news? Moreover, they were sure that this declaration would bring resonance artificers flocking to the Suncreek Villa.

Anyone with the slightest shred of acumen could see that the Suncreek Villa was about to take flight in the near future.

They looked at Li Luo with renewed passion now flaring in their eyes.

This young lord was far more capable than they had expected.

As for Pang Qianchi, the blood was steadily draining from his face as he watched Li Luo appeal to the artificers. He had made one masterful move after another. It would pull away the majority of his followers.

Li Luo's combination of punches was enough to undo much of the work that he had done before.

Pang Qianchi was getting the feeling that his hands were being tied tighter and tighter. They had underestimated this young lord—he seemed to be a more formidable opponent than they had given him credit for.

Chapter 0099: I Want To Quit

At the courtyard with the fountain.

When New-Boss Li Luo was done cracking his whip thrice, everyone was staring at him with many thoughts crowding their minds. Their contempt from before was gone, replaced with a new respect.

Elder Zheng Ping had heaved an inward sigh of relief as well. He had feared Li Luo would take a barbaric bulldozer approach characteristic of his age, lining up half their artificers on the chopping block. It might feel satisfying, but the Suncreek Villa would take a heavy hit as well.

Moreover, it would give the Suncreek Villa a bad reputation. It was not only about chasing out their resonance artificers—the subsequent hit to their image would make a comeback that much harder.

Fortunately, Li Luo had not chosen such primeval methods. Instead, his triple whip crack had smacked the doubt out of the artificers and gotten them believing in the potential of the Suncreek Villa again.

Although it would not purge them of Pang Qianchi's influence and tricks, it was a good start. He believed that the temptation of the secret watersource and Li Luo's management would pull the Suncreek Villa back on the right track in good time.

Pang Qianchi looked at Li Luo glumly, then he turned and left without a word.

Li Luo had won the hearts at the Suncreek Villa in record time, and his troublemaking had failed. He could only hunker down now and wait for his next opportunity.

As Pang Qianchi left, the resonance artificers looked around at each other and then bowed to Li Luo. "Our respects to the President."

Li Luo waved it off with a smile. "Go about your work. Don't worry—the Suncreek Villa will soon be back on the right track. The Suncreek Villa will be stronger than it ever was before."

The resonance artificers noted his words as they dispersed.

As they started to leave, Li Luo breathed out in relief. He turned around to look at the three women who had not said a word the entire time.

"How was that?" He grinned.

All three, including Jiang Qing'e, stared at him. They didn't speak, but there was surprise in their eyes.

"Not bad," Jiang Qing'e said, pleased. "Better than I imagined."

Of course she was appreciative. She had always dealt with the Suncreek Villa's problems as best as she could, and yet she had been unable to interfere much. The best that she could do was maintain the stalemate.

Since she was not a resonance artificer, she did not understand matters here too well. Of course, more importantly, there were just too many problems at House Luolan, and she did not have the time to deal with them all.

Trawling back through what had just happened, she could find no flaws in the way Li Luo had pulled his whip-cracking stunt off. Especially the burning of the list—it did not matter whether it was real or fake. More importantly, the gesture alone would pull artificers back away from Pang Qianchi.

Although things were not cleanly solved, their situation had improved greatly.

Of course, none of this would be possible without Li Luo's high-purity secret watersource. That was a strong temptation for the resonance artificers.

The secret watersource was the reason his pitch went smoothly.

Yan Lingqing fiddled with her spectacles, her rosy lips curving up in a smile. "Seems like the secret watersource is very useful indeed. I wonder if the Young Lord has enough."

Perhaps out of the three women, only Yan Lingqing could guess where it came from, thanks to Li Luo assisting her during the Festival of Purifying Lights.

Li Luo sighed in response. She had raised a good point. He was only a Tenth Seal cultivator, so the amount of secret watersource he could produce each day was limited. Besides, he had promised the Tianshu Province's Suncreek Villa a set amount of secret watersource each month as well. That would already take quite a toll on him. If he was going to supply the Suncreek Villa's headquarters as well, he would be squeezed dry.

Luckily, he was not far from his breakthrough to the Resonant Master stage. Once he broke through and formed his resonance seed, his resonant power would improve by leaps and bounds.

He should be able to get by then.

Cai Wei stared at him grumpily. "One word from you, and now 20% of the Suncreek Villa's profits are locked away. Won't you spare a thought for me, fretting over every gold piece to get your spirit liquids and purifying lights?"

Li Luo flushed. "Sister Cai Wei, we have to look ahead. The Suncreek Villa's situation is terrible, and we have to hold on to the few resonance artificers we have left. We have to entice more to come back as well. It's the only way to restore the Suncreek Villa," he pleaded.

"Ai, ai, I was actually reprimanded by the Young Lord," Cai Wei moaned theatrically.

Jiang Qing'e laughed. "Sister Cai Wei is pulling your leg. We believe that the Suncreek Villa will become a top 10 villa in your hands. We believe in you."

"Eh, I hope so," Li Luo groaned. He had just arrived in Xia City, and already such a burden was being thrust on his shoulders. It truly would be no easy task. And right now, the amount of secret watersource he could produce was not enough.

Other top villas had a never-ending supply of secret watersources and lightsources. Therefore, if the Suncreek Villa was to truly make it big, they would have to think of other ways to secure their sources. It could not rely on one person forever.

Li Luo briefly chatted with the three, then he left for the office, Elder Zheng Ping by his side. Now that he was the president, he had best acquaint himself with the matters at hand.

This took a full day.

Night had fallen on Xia City, and Li Luo was sprawled tiredly in the office chair. He looked over at Jiang Qing'e, who had been with him the whole day. "Sister Qing'e, these past few years must have been difficult for you," he groaned sympathetically.

He was only taking over the Suncreek Villa, and already he was bushed. He could only imagine the enormity of her task, looking after the entirety of House Luolan.

She stretched her arms lazily, revealing the fullness of her figure. Although she was less curvy than Cai Wei by a little, the overall picture was still perfect.

"If you really feel for me, manage the Suncreek Villa well. That will be one thing off my plate," she replied.

Li Luo was feeling an oncoming headache. After reading through the Suncreek Villa's books for the whole day, he was getting a better sense of the situation here. Still, it made no improvements in his mood.

There were just so many damned problems at the Suncreek Villa.

If he had known this, he would not have shot his mouth about being a top 10 villa.

If not for the fact that he was scared that Jiang Qing'e would immediately drag him off to the practice room for a sparring session, he would have asked if it was too late to tender a resignation.

Chapter 0100: The Golden Dragon Bank's Headquarters

Clearly, quitting was out of the question.

But just like Li Luo had realized, the Suncreek Villa had many problems. There were three that were particularly serious.

First was the resonance artificers who had left. Ex-president Hanzhi had taken close to half of them with him. It was a terrible loss. After all, resonance artificers were their production power. Without them, the production volume of the Suncreek Villa would be compromised.

Second was that the Suncreek Villa lacked high-level resonance artificers. There used to be five fifth-grade resonance artificers, including Hanzhi and Pang Qianchi. With the former betraying them, and the latter put on leave, they only had three left. It was a pitiful number.

The other top 10 villas in the Xia Kingdom, such as the Bigswamp Villa from House Duze, had dozens of fifth-grade resonance artificers, and even a generous handful of sixth-grade artificers...

The gap was incredible.

The third problem was that the spirit liquid formulas the Suncreek Villa used were not considered high-grade. They could only barely be considered middle-grade.

In the Xia Kingdom, formulas were classified into five star grades, with one-star being the lowest and five-star being the highest.

The Suncreek Villa's formulas, such as the Azure Jade spirit liquid that Li Luo was most familiar with, was only considered a two-star.

Li Luo had only defeated the Inkwater Villa's Blackstar spirit liquids thanks to the brute-force domination that his seventh-grade watersource provided him. Their Blackstar spirit liquid was a three-star formula.

Li Luo flipped through all of the formulas that the Suncreek Villa had. The highest was their main product, the third-grade White Feather spirit liquid, which used a three-star formula.

As for four-star formulas, they did not even have a single one.

If the Suncreek Villa was to become a top 10 villa in the Xia Kingdom, a single three-star formula alone was not going to cut it.

Li Luo frowned and looked over to Zheng Ping. "Elder Zheng, start recruiting resonance artificers as quickly as possible, or our production will not be able to keep up."

He could only deal with these problems one at a time. He couldn't summon expert resonance artificers from the ether, nor could he create a formula on command. Those things took too much time to research, so there was no choice but to buy them.

However, the price of high-star formulas was a real nail biter. The Suncreek Villa could not afford them.

"Yes, Sir," Elder Zheng Ping said.

He paused. "Young Lord, how soon will that high-purity watersource be provided to headquarters?"

Li Luo was again getting the feeling that he had bitten off more than he could chew. Although half the Suncreek Villa artificers were gone, the volume produced was still more than Tianshu's branch. Of course, that meant that they needed more watersource as well.

And he was just a Tenth Seal kid!

How could he feed all these ravenous artificers?

But he had already made the promise, and he could not renege on it now. That would be the end of the Suncreek Villa's reputation.

"I'll make some preparations. I should be able to provide headquarters with a batch soon," Li Luo said with a reassuring smile and a sinking heart.

Elder Zheng Ping nodded, eyes gleaming eagerly.

Li Luo did not dare linger. After sending out some more orders, he concluded business for the day and then left the headquarters with the three women.

He felt that the most urgent thing for him now was to quickly break through to the Resonant Master Stage. Otherwise, this frail body of his would not stand up to the merciless watersource wringing that was to follow.

But before that, he had to make a trip to the Golden Dragon Bank, where he had left his final two pieces of wood and earth materials for a long time. He had to temper his second acquired resonance.

...

The next day, Li Luo and Jiang Qing'e met and set out for the Golden Dragon Bank.

Although security in Xia City was good, Li Luo still brought a few third-tier Resonant Master bodyguards along with him. Just in case.

Although it was a mid-sized power in the Xia Kingdom, the Golden Dragon Bank's position was special. Its headquarters was located in the most prosperous district, and it took up a sizable plot of land as well. It was far more magnificent than the branch at the Tianshu Province. From afar, it was a towering behemoth stretched out across the land that struck fear and awe into people's hearts.

Outside the Golden Dragon Bank's headquarters, a constant stream of people flowed in and out of the majestic, bronze doors. Although three huge doors were open, the crowd was still bottlenecked—such was its popularity.

Li Luo followed them in, stepping into a hall so big, it felt like a courtyard. The dome was about a dozen meters high. From it hung an expensive, crystal chandelier, lighting up the hall as bright as day.

There were many different desks arranged around the hall, and many ushers dressed in the rich uniform of the Golden Dragon Bank were directing customers.

Li Luo did not pause here, continuing down the corridor.

At the end of the corridor was a high-level area, where there were fewer people and the noise of the crowd fell to a whisper. The brightly-lit hall sparkled with crystal cabinets, where rare and luxurious goods were displayed.

These were evidently far higher in quality than those displayed outside.

Of course, the prices were different as well.

When Li Luo walked in, he was immediately met by a beautiful and sexy female usher. Her looks and manner were a class above those outside.

"Sir, what do you require today?" The beautiful girl bit her lip as she stared at Li Luo. She had seen many people in her time at the Golden Dragon Bank, but such a handsome youth was a first for her.

Behind her, a few other young girls stopped, frustrated that she had beaten them there.

Li Luo gave her an unconcerned smile, already immune to such struggles over him.

"I need rare materials that have wood and earth properties," Li Luo said.

"Of what energy grade, Sir?" she asked carefully.

Rare materials were also divided into grades, such as the 100-grade, 1,000-grade, 10,000-grade, etc. These were indicators of the energy that the materials held.

Put simply, the maximum amount of energy that these rare materials could reach.

Li Luo thought about it. "Let's look at the 1,000-grades first." Most of the rare materials he had seen at the Tianshu Province's branch were 100-grade materials. There were far fewer 1,000-grade materials, and none of them were suitable.

"Certainly. Follow me, please."

She smiled happily. 1,000-grade rare materials were valued in the thousands of gold. The nonchalance of his tone indicated that this youth was very rich indeed. She liked these customers best.

She turned and walked ahead, making sure to accentuate the sashay of her hips.

Li Luo couldn't care less. He was already used to such womanly wiles from Cai Wei. This little minx held no attraction for him at all.

As he followed her onwards, there was a beautiful girl on the second floor who had spotted him. She was dressed in green and white, with lacy socks below her short skirt.

Her bored eyes suddenly lit up with pleasure.