

Seller 711

Chapter 711: The New Sect Master's orders (Part-2)

The hall had barely settled after Mark's first announcement when he lifted his hand again, signaling that he was far from finished.

The elders braced themselves; robes rustled, backs stiffened, and even the grand elders exchanged uneasy glances.

Mark didn't soften his tone. If anything, his voice grew firmer, colder, sharper, like a blade pressing against their throats.

"Secondly," he said, "as I have already announced in the clan, which you might have heard through rumors, I am also introducing a new profession to our sect, the Gunmaster. Each of you is aware that cultivation alone limits the growth of countless disciples. Of the 100, we only find one good seedling that has the potential to grow into a tree. Of the 100 good seedlings, we can only find one that indeed becomes a tree. That means, for every 10,000 people we find, only one ends up being talented enough to enter our inner sect, which takes up almost 90% of our resources in the end. Under my rule, that changes."

He gestured mildly, and two adamantite guns materialized in his hands, silent, gleaming symbols of a new era. A few elders flinched instinctively at the sight. Mark dismissed the weapons just as casually.

"I will be stocking our warehouses with such guns. I believe those who watched my battles have seen how these mere guns could suppress even a transcendent. Unlike the artifacts and divine weapons, these are the creation of mankind, giving the power to even a mortal. Some of you might think it is beneath your level to

depend on external or foreign weapons like this to fight for you, and some of you think it goes against the principle of culture or whatnot. But that doesn't give you the right to berate those who want to depend on them. I won't ask you to change your opinion, but those who wish to train in this new path, you must not block their path.

I don't know how it will be after me, but as long as I am the sect master, Gunmasters will receive additional support and resources. Outer sect disciples with mediocre talent will have a new chance. Inner sect disciples with agility and precision will have a new advantage."

Mark then leaned back and continued. "We will expand the training grounds and restructure portions of the sect to accommodate Gunmaster divisions. Once we sort out the division in the sect, we will announce sect recruitment. This is the second decree."

He didn't wait for their reactions.

"Third," he said, "I intend to form peace and friendship with the Fire Clans."

That statement alone felt like a bomb thrown into the hall. Many elders' faces twisted in disbelief, others in confusion. Frost narrowed his eyes slightly, sensing the waves of shock rolling through the room. Pyro's lips curled, half-smirk, half-challenge, as if mocking those who hated fire clans.

Before any elder dared to speak, Mark continued with a commanding calmness.

"Regardless of whether you all like it or not, I will make this happen. The age-old division ends under my leadership. Prepare yourselves, for sooner or later, our sect grounds may be filled with disciples from the fire clans. And when they come, I expect tolerance, cooperation, and respect. Once the Empire formally gives its acknowledgment of our independence, we will proceed with forming an alliance with the Fire tribes. More specifically, the Immortal Pavilion Sect, our bitterest ally. How I do it is up to me. I just want all of you to be prepared and do nothing else about it."

His voice carried no room for objection. Even the grand elders remained silent.

Mark inhaled slowly, then delivered his fourth decree, the one that drew every breath from the chamber.

"And lastly... You all know that I have written the letter of independence to the Imperial Palace. Given the current atmosphere, those disciples and elders whose roots lie in the imperial cities or outer dominions must return to their families temporarily, until I form a peace treaty with the Emperor."

His eyes then sharpened. "If peace is signed, they may return. If peace is refused, they will have two choices: bring their families and live here permanently... or remain in the imperial dominions for good."

A few elders suddenly looked pale at that order, as some of them have roots and many of them have relatives in the imperial City. Others clenched their fists, feeling as if their sect master was fulfilling their lifelong wishes. After all, not everyone is loyal to the throne.

"I am giving them three days to leave for their homes. On the fourth day, they will be restricted to their residences until my negotiations are complete."

The weight behind his words felt absolute.

Mark paused, then slowly swept his gaze across the elders, especially those whose eyes wavered, the ones whose loyalties were uncertain.

"And let me be clear about one thing: leaving this sect and joining another in the same dominion is not an option."

His voice dropped colder.

"They will not take you in. Even if you are a first-stage transcendent."

A suffocating stillness filled the hall. Frost's aura began to chill the air; Pyro's heat curled faint embers through her hair. The combination made the elders' backs tremble in remembrance.

Mark ended with a single phrase, calm, yet carrying the heaviness of fate: "I will make sure of that."

The elders bowed low, their hearts trembling, their loyalty shaken, rebuilt, and reshaped all in the span of a single meeting.

They had barely recovered from the weight of Mark's previous decrees when he lifted his hand again, stopping anyone from moving toward the door.

Mark did not raise his voice; he didn't need to. His tone remained steady and calm, but every word sank into the hall like a hammer striking iron.

"Fifth... and final order."

A few elders stiffened visibly. Someone swallowed audibly.

"I am not as gentle or generous as the former Sect Master," Mark continued, his eyes never leaving the line of elders. "I am not old, I am not endlessly wise, and I certainly do not possess the patience many of you seemed to rely on when you thought you could twist his goodwill to your advantage."

A few elders flinched, knowing exactly which decisions he was referring to. Mark continued anyway, not bothering to hide the disdain.

"I seldom care about other people's opinions, especially when they are rooted in cowardice, bias, or tradition that should have died a thousand years ago. When I don't like something, I won't hesitate to punish the one who caused it. That is who I am. And I'm not hiding it."

He leaned forward, placing his hand on the arm of the sect master's seat, and the room suddenly felt colder.

"Bullying," he said, stressing the word, "is something I despise. If disciples have problems with each other, they will settle it through the official channels or the justice panel. What they should not do is run to the elders who favor them and ask them to crush their opponent on their behalf. You will not use your cultivation or your position to suppress a weaker disciple. If I see it, I will deal with it. Personally. Was that clear?"

A wave of unease swept across the elders. Some lowered their heads slightly, unable to meet his gaze.

Mark let them stew in the silence for a moment before lifting the sect head token and showing it to them, the medallion gleaming under the lantern light.

"For those who were still in ignorance, let me remind you that this was not gifted to me. I passed the trials set by the tribunals. I snatched this position with my own strength. Do not assume I am sitting here because I am the great-grandson of the former sect master."

Several elders exchanged stiff looks. Mark was right; they all knew it and wouldn't need any reminder. The trials were absolute. No one could cheat through them, not even a favored descendant.

Mark sighed softly and leaned back again, his expression unreadable.

"What I do, what I will do in the future, many of you will find it difficult to accept. Traditionalists like you are not easy to convince, and I'm not naïve enough to expect your immediate approval. That's fine. But here is what you must understand: I will act for the sect's future, not for your comfort."

He paused, giving time for the meaning to sink in.

"And those who dislike my decisions... may leave. I would rather have 100 loyal sect disciples who share my vision, put their trust in my actions and cooperate with my orders, than 100,000 disciples who are against me and make obstacles for me with their reluctance."

Shock rippled like a silent wave, though no one dared to gasp aloud.

Chapter 712: Origins of Tyranthir

Mark continued smoothly, "If you wish to join another sect, go. You have my permission. And you do not need to feel like traitors. A sect is a family. The family head's will is the direction the family walks. If a member refuses to walk in that direction, then staying will only hurt themselves... and the family."

He swept his gaze across all of them, slow and deliberate, allowing each elder to feel targeted personally.

"So leave. Create new lives. Do what makes you feel satisfied. No hard feelings."

The hall felt suffocating, not because of any aura, but because none of them had ever heard a sect master speak this honestly and ruthlessly.

Mark softened his voice just a fraction.

"You are all older than me. Wiser than me in many ways. If you sit down and reflect, if you truly think over every decision I've announced today, you will understand what I'm trying to do.

His tone became calm once again, almost gentle again, as he ended. "After you digest all of this, whatever choice you make... is acceptable to me. Just regret your choices later on."

He leaned back into the sect master's throne.

"Now... you may all dismiss."

The elders bowed deeply, some stiff, some trembling, some confused, some ashamed, and slowly filed out of the hall, each one carrying various thoughts over the orders.

Above them all, Frost and Pyro exchanged glances, as if silently acknowledging the same thing: Their new master was as gutsy as their old master.

The elders slowly filed out, leaving only the three grand elders seated under the dim lantern light. The atmosphere shifted once the doors closed behind the last elder.

The oldest grand elder released a long, weary sigh and rubbed his forehead with two fingers. "Sect Master... some of your words today were quite offensive," he admitted, though his tone held no anger. Instead, it carried the fatigue of experience. "But... some were unexpected in a good way. I cannot speak for others, but you have my support, Sect Master."

The second grand elder smiled with a trace of nostalgia. "It's been a long time since our sect has seen any real change. Perhaps too long. I also want to see what kind of transformation you bring."

Only Yujin remained silent. His expression was calm, but his fingers tapped lightly on the seat's armrest, a quiet rhythm hiding his unease. After a moment, he finally spoke, "But there is the grand expedition in two months. Wouldn't it be wiser to implement these new changes afterward? Too many shifts too quickly will confuse the disciples... and perhaps cause unrest."

Mark lifted one brow. "Seven weeks is not short, ancestor. The sect already needs change. And since the tribunals trusted me to lead the clan and the sect, I ask that you trust my judgment as well. If you cannot... at least watch the results before making your opinion."

Yujin held his gaze for a long moment. On the surface, his eyes were full of grandfatherly warmth, but deep beneath that warmth lay something colder, something calculating. "That goes without saying... but you must be alive until then," he thought silently. "If I allow you to continue at this pace, you will destroy everything our ancestors built."

But aloud, he simply said, "Very well. We will watch."

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Later that night, Mark returned to his residence.

The air outside shimmered faintly. Frost had raised a barrier covering the entire courtyard, thick enough to block even the senses of a saint-level assassin. Frost stood like a guardian statue, silent and alert, while Pyro leaned against a tree nearby with her arms crossed, her expression filled with boredom. She still hadn't fully acknowledged Mark, but she stayed because she had given her word.

Inside, Mark sat cross-legged on the floor. The chamber was quiet, lit only by a single floating light orb. He held one of the inheritance items, the orb containing the Blood Essence Drop of Tyranthir.

Taking a deep breath, he swallowed it.

The moment the liquid touched his throat, an immense heat surged through his veins. His entire body trembled as if every bone was being reforged. His skin prickled, burned, then cooled, then burned again. And just as the pain peaked, his vision blurred, and suddenly the room was gone.

Mark found himself in someone else's memories.

He stood, no, crawled, in first-person view, inside a cracking eggshell. Sunlight poured in, harsh and golden. A dry desert stretched endlessly. He pushed harder, his tiny claws scraping, until the shell shattered completely.

His vision sharpened. His body felt alien, massive head, filled with rows of sharp teeth; thick scales layered over every inch of him; two small but muscular arms, ending in hooked claws; enormous feathered wings folded at his back; and on top of his skull, two thick horns curved backward.

Then he blinked, once, twice, and realized something else.

He had three eyes. Two normal ones and one vertical eye in the center of his forehead.

A guttural sound left his throat, a mixture of curiosity and hunger.

Mark, trapped inside the ancient creature's perspective, felt its emotions as if they were his own.

Confusion. Hunger. Instinct. Loneliness.

He watched himself, Tyranthir, the ancient Dinosaur God, take his first unsteady steps in a world that feared him.

The memory continued to pull Mark deeper, dragging him through an ancient creature's life as if he were living it himself.

The newborn beast, Tyranthir, staggered across the barren desert, his huge head dipping low as he sniffed for food.

At first, it found nothing but a few brittle shrubs clinging to life in the sand. It tore them out of the ground and swallowed them whole, feeling a brief spark of energy before hunger returned, sharper than before.

It then found small creatures, lizards, insects, avian reptiles, and devoured them without hesitation.

Whatever moved went straight into its maw. It never stopped, whether it is grass or a creature, or even small sects, as long as it is alive. Days turned to months, months to years. Its legs grew strong, its wings stretched wider, but its hunger never eased.

As the beast grew larger, its needs became monstrous. The desert no longer had enough prey to sustain it.

Eight long years passed like this. Finally, it stepped out of the wasteland and into an endless grassland.

Tyranthir fell to its knees and began ripping mouthfuls of grass, desperate and frantic. Grass turned into shrubs, shrubs into saplings, saplings into trees.

And among the trees, it found them, large dinosaurs, towering herbivores whose footsteps quaked the ground.

Rawr

Tyranthir attacked with a roar that shook birds from the sky. It tore into them with teeth and claws, ripping flesh and devouring spirit cores in a frenzy. Power surged in its veins. The more it hunted, the more the land trembled. Soon, it was not merely a predator; it was the ruler of the region.

A hundred years passed like seasons turning, the great beast aging slowly as its strength crept upward until it reached the peak of natural evolution. It became a 9-circle monster, unmatched on the planet. Nothing could challenge it. Nothing dared to. But the world itself was nearing its death.

One day, the sky tore open.

A black hole emerged, swallowing the light from the sun, the air, the land, the sea, everything.

Tyranthir tried to flee, beating its wings with all its strength. Mountains shattered beneath the force of its flight, but the black hole devoured the planet anyway. The beast escaped by a hair's breadth, but only into the cold emptiness of space.

In the void, it froze, drifting helplessly as its consciousness dimmed. It would have remained a dead husk if not for a miracle.

Its third eye stirred first.

A crackle of power ignited in its veins. It broke through the Demigod realm.

A scream ripped from its throat, but no sound traveled in the vacuum.

It opened its jaws wide and began drawing in the energy spilling endlessly from the black hole. It fed on destruction itself.

A thousand years passed, then four thousand more. It devoured energy without stopping, its body growing as planets drifted by like dust motes. Soon, it reached the 11-circle realm. Then the 12-circle. And eventually, after hundred thousand years of absorbing energy in patience, it reached 13 circles.

By then, its body was a hundred kilometers long.

Two million more years passed. Tyranthir broke into the 14-circle, becoming a monstrous titan on a cosmic scale. By now, it dwarfed continents; its shadow could blanket an entire moon.

Still, its hunger is never satisfied.

Chapter 713: Tyranthir's true potential

Tyranthir's hunger for strength was endless. It drifted closer to the black hole that is roughly 700,000km in diameter, absorbing more and more power. The black hole tugged at its wings, pulling the enormous creature closer, but Tyranthir resisted with godlike effort.

Fourteen and a half million years crawled by.

Finally, finally, it broke through to 15 circle realm, becoming a colossus over one hundred thousand kilometers long. Its roar shook meteor belts. Its third eye glowed like a star. It still wasn't satisfied. Wanting to become the strongest being in the universe, it tried to consume the black hole itself, and when it approached the singularity while greedily absorbing the energy, at one spot, it started to get overpowered.

Instead of escaping, it went on getting absorbed. The gravity tore into its body. Feathers, scales, teeth, bones, everything collapsed inward. The beast was devoured by the very thing it fed on.

And then something impossible happened.

The black hole shuddered.

Its surface warped.

And then, it instantly collapsed into a single human figure wreathed in stardust, turning the remaining. A young man floated there, naked, glowing faintly with cosmic energy. His face was the exact one Mark saw in the mirror every morning in his past life. It was basically the founder of the clan. Is it really himself?

Meanwhile, the figure blinked, looking at his own hands in surprise. "I broke through already?" he muttered, turning in the vastness of space. "I wonder how long I've been in here..."

And those words were the last thing Mark heard in his head.

As the dream shattered like a glass, Mark awoke with trembling fingers, feeling the weight of a creature that lived for millions of years... and died in hunger for power.

He whispered into the empty room, "So, he fed Tyranthir and then consumed it as a whole to make the breakthrough. Isn't it like adopting a cub and then raising it to a monster, only to kill it when it matured and then eat it? Ugh... when put like that... feels disgusting..."

Just then, a series of crisp notifications floated before his eyes, and Ark's calm voice filled his mind:

[Bloodline: Tyranthir is added to your bloodline.]

[1 Bloodline Skill have been extracted from the essence and added to the character.]

He leaned back against the wall and stared at his trembling hand. Was it fear, or excitement? Mark had no intention to think about it.

But one thing made his pulse quicken in realization. "Did I spend millions, no, tens of millions of years as a singularity, swallowing stars, planets... entire solar systems? Just to break through? Why couldn't I use Cosmic Essence Absorption to absorb energy from Stars instead?" His voice softened as he thought about it. And then the answer clicked inside his head, "I guess it's because if I became a black hole... time wouldn't exist in there. At the singularity, time stops completely. So, even though millions of years passed outside, for me, it was an instant. But that also means... I see... that is why I have gone to the past... because in the future, there would be my family, friends, and everyone."

Now it made sense why he went to the past. And perhaps, after breaking through, the original one might have taken some disciples and taught some techniques. They developed the sect, and then the future counterpart goes back to the past to do the exact same thing so that the timeline won't get fractured. And then all he had to do was get back to the timeline he was originally from.

Mark exhaled slowly, rubbing his temples.

"But then again... If I did all that, it should be for a breakthrough to either 15-circle or even 16-circle... Don't need to think about time travel now. Let's think about why I have things for myself as a part of inheritance. I can understand with Supreme Core and Supreme Crystal and even the Antimatter cannon, but not this one. Does Tyranthir have some special ability that I need? Or did I give it out because I felt bad for killing it and thought it was a pity to waste its bloodline?"

With curiosity filled his head, Mark opened the character interface. That's when he realized that Tyranthir was never added to Primeval, as it did with the others.

Instead, it was registered separately.

And when he tapped on it and saw its lone bloodline skill that he received, his eyes widened at it.

Tyranthir Transformation: Transform into Tyranthir's peak state form upon unleashing the skill. Effect: 15-circle-realm. Cost: 1% ether per second. CD: None

"+15.0 Stats?" he whispered, shocked. "No cooldown penalty? And no time limit on how long it lasts? This is just..."

It wasn't like the other transformations he had obtained before. Those gave a measly +1 stat increase. This one gave a direct +15, an absurd leap that could let him fight near the level of Elder Gods such as Hei Zhenyu or the Emperor, even in his current realm. Moreover, there is no cooldown or time limit either.

But it was then that Mark also remembered its biggest weakness. If he transforms when the beast is at its peak state, it could mean he will become a gas-giant-sized. Mark didn't visit other planets in the same plane, but at the very least, he does know that scientifically, it is impossible to have a planet to have the size of Tyranthir at its peak state. The thought electrified him. "I guess I really need to be careful when to unleash it, but it will be nice if I can control my size in that beast form."

He paused and leaned back against the wall again, a dangerous grin spreading across his face.

"But one thing is for sure, with this and the Antimatter cannon, I can handle the Emperor. No matter how strong he thinks he is... he won't be ready for this. But I cannot show it unless I am driven into a corner."

His voice grew quiet, almost amused at the thought of surprising the Emperor.

"Anyway, let's not go ahead too much..." he chuckled. "I still have a traitorous old man and his loyal supporters to deal with."

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Two days later;

Mark's residence felt unusually calm for once.

The sun was dipping low behind the frosted mountains, the air outside crisp and quiet, while inside the sitting hall, a delicate fragrance of peach-blossom tea drifted around the low table.

Mark sat straight-backed on one side, Shang Jiao beside him with her usual gentle poise. Along with both of them sat Lan Jing, as he too was considered a family. Atleast in the eyes of Mark.

Opposite them sat Lan Xia, back straight, hands resting politely on her knee, and next to her was her master, who was also her foster mother, Grand Elder Yuxuan, wearing an expression that was neither stern nor warm, but something in-between.

It was the atmosphere of a formal family meeting. Hence, Frost and Pyro were nowhere in sight; Mark had ordered them to rest in their respective rooms to avoid startling Yuxuan and disrupting the peaceful talk.

Yuxuan took a slow sip of her tea before finally speaking, her voice even and composed. "I know both of you have already decided to marry... and will marry whether I approve or not," she said, her eyes shifting between Mark and Lan Xia. "But I am still Xia's foster mother and her master. I raised her, taught her, protected her, and in our customs, that means I am her guardian, the bride's family. So, even if you are the Patriarch, Lan Zhen, if you want her to marry you properly, with respect to tradition, then you must answer my questions. Before I give permission, I need clarity about your background, your household, your marriages... and what position my daughter will hold after entering your home."

Lan Xia quietly set her cup down, clearly choosing to let her master take the lead in this conversation. Mark could feel the tension beneath her calm posture, but she kept her face neutral. So Mark answered instead, meeting Yuxuan's eyes directly.

"I will be direct with you, Elder Yuxuan," he said without any hesitation, lowering his cup. "You already know that I come from the mortal realm. I came here with my sister." He paused briefly before continuing with calm honesty. "Regarding my family, I have been married twice. My principal wife holds no political authority. My queen consort, my second wife, currently rules in my place as the Empress Regnant. I had a daughter who is sixteen months old and a son around 37 months old."

Chapter 714: The Bridewealth proposition

Yuxuan didn't flinch, though her eyes narrowed just slightly in thought. Shang Jiao lowered her gaze, and Lan Jing watched quietly, absorbing every word.

Mark continued in a steady tone. "Originally, my intention was simple. After completing the work I came here to do, I planned to return home with your daughter. She would have been my equal to the Empress, and we would've built a new sect together on my world." His voice shifted subtly as he spoke of the past plan, lighter and calmer, but then it hardened as he switched to the present reality. "But unexpected things happened. I became the Clan Head. Then the Sect Head. And now I am the ruler of the entire Azure Frost Dominion."

He let those words settle. Even Lan Jing inhaled sharply at the reminder.

"So the situation has changed," Mark said. "Now, they must come here instead."

Yuxuan placed her cup down slowly. "And her position?" she asked, voice unreadable.

Mark answered without hesitation. "Lan Xia will hold the same status as my Queen Consort. Equal. No lesser, no higher. Even if I marry in the future for political alliances or other reasons, no wife after her will ever surpass her in rank. The only exception is my principal wife, whose position is bound by old vows. But no one else, no matter their background, will outrank Xia."

Lan Xia's fingers tightened slightly on her robe, her cheeks warming faintly. She didn't look up, but her chest rose and fell just a little faster.

Yuxuan studied Mark's expression, searching for any hint of insincerity.

Mark went on, voice steady, almost solemn. "As for taking care of her... You don't have to worry. I will fulfill every vow I make during marriage."

A brief silence settled over the hall, but Mark wasn't finished.

"And one more thing, to ease your worries," he said. "I promise you that only the children I have with your daughter will inherit rights to the Lan Clan. My other children from other wives will not be connected to the clan or be involved in its future. Last but not least, Lan Xia will have a greater right over our children's future than I. How they were raised, who they will learn from, what path they will take, I might guide them as a father, but Lan Xia will be the ultimate decider."

Yuxuan's expression finally softened, just a little. The last statement has both implications. One, Mark would more or less not care about his children's future, just like how the Emperor would only care about a few selected princes and keep the future of other children in their respective mothers' hands.

And two, the main branch of the Lan Clan's lineage will only continue through Lan Xia's children. As long as the elders convince Lan Xia, they could mould the future rulers of the dominion in whatever image they desire. It is easier to influence Lan Xia than Mark, after all.

The room fell into a pleasant silence as Yuxuan absorbed everything Mark had said. Mark sat still for a moment, then lifted his hand as he said. "Now for the official proposal."

With a simple thought, an object materialized before everyone's eyes. It was a solid, gleaming cube of deep metallic black. It hit the table with a heavy thud, dense enough to make even the reinforced wood tremble for a second. Everyone's eyes widened in recognition.

Mark said, sliding the cube forward, "Elder, I believe you know what this is. This is adamantium, the strongest metal in existence." His fingers tapped the surface as he explained. "This block weighs roughly 20 jin (ten kilograms). And according to the customs here, the groom must provide bridewealth." He reached into his inventory again and pulled out a simple dimensional ring, placing it next to the cube. "So I am giving you every adamantium block I have stored and refined over the years. All 1,042 of them."

Shang Jiao almost bit her lip to stop herself from gasping. Even Lan Jing jerked slightly as if jolted. But Mark didn't pause.

"The remaining 1,041 blocks are in this ring," he said calmly. "You can forge battle puppets, divine weapons, divine armor... whatever you choose. As for my other treasures, I doubt they'll be useful to someone already in the First Stage of Transcendence, so I didn't bring them. If you want nothing, you can sell this too and make a fortune. I heard 1 jin (half kg) of adamantine is worth between 10,000-20,000 cronies. So, that's a total worth of about 200 million to 400 million cronies in here. And this..." he pushed the cube and ring closer, "this is my bridewealth. Elder Yuxuan... will you give us your permission?"

There was a silence so deep that the faint crackle of the oil lamp became loud.

Yuxuan stared at the ring as if it were a mythical beast. Her hand trembled when she picked up the adamantium block; she needed both palms. Her expression flickered between disbelief and speechlessness before her voice finally escaped, shaky and thin. "You... you are offering one thousand and forty-two blocks... for her? I... I am not even her real family."

Before Mark could respond, Shang Jiao leaned forward with sparkling eyes and whispered, unable to hide her awe, "Gege... you must love Sister Xia very much to give something like this." Lan Xia's cheeks tinted red in an instant, her gaze dropping to her lap as if she were afraid to meet anyone's eyes. Mark glanced at his sister with a faint sigh, letting the comment slide as he looked back at Yuxuan.

"So," he said gently, "do we have your permission?"

Yuxuan exhaled slowly, almost shakily. Then a soft smile spread across her face, not the stern expression of a grand elder, not the cold mask she wore in public, but the gentle warmth of a mother. She nodded.

"Yes," she said quietly. "You have my permission."

Just as Mark smiled that his little proposal worked, she stunned all three of them by sliding the dimensional ring back across the table. She placed only the single adamantium cube aside and said, "And you may take the rest back. This one block is more than enough."

"Eh?" Mark blinked. Shang Jiao mirrored him, both equally dumbfounded. Even Lan Jing straightened his back sharply as he exclaimed, "Elder Yuxuan, do you truly understand what you're refusing? Not even the imperial palace could reject such a gift."

But Yuxuan raised a hand calmly, stopping him.

Her expression softened further as she turned to Lan Xia, gently brushing a stray strand of hair from her forehead in a motherly gesture that made the girl stiffen, then lower her head shyly. "Bridewealth is not a transaction, Lan Jing..." she said, her tone firm yet warm. "Nor is it a bribe or purchase. It is simply a measure

of sincerity. And Patriarch Zhen, I have seen your sincerity. In your words. In your decisions. In your willingness to carry the responsibility of her future beside your own."

She returned her gaze to him, eyes steady and sincere. "You are reckless. You are bold. You are stubborn. But you do not lie. You do not pretend. You did not try to hide your wives, your children, your flaws, or your weaknesses. And that kind of man will not hurt my daughter."

Lan Xia's face was crimson now, her fingers tangled together on her lap, but her eyes watered faintly with relief.

Yuxuan smiled and rose gracefully. "I do not need anything else from you, Patriarch Zhen. I accept this single cube, as custom, and I give you my full blessing. We will begin preparations immediately. The time is short. There is much work to be done."

Mark exhaled in relief and nodded respectfully, glancing once toward his sister and Lan Jing, who both wore softened expressions. And Lan Xia, still looking down but smiling, clasped her hands together tightly, unable to hide the small tremble of joy running through her.

The wedding was now officially set.

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When Yuxuan finally left the residence with Lan Xia, the atmosphere softened. Lan Jing released a small breath he had been holding for a while and turned toward Mark.

"Xiao Zhen," he said, folding his hands behind his back, "should I go to the mortal realm to inform your parents and escort them here? In both of your previous weddings, they only attended as guests, not as your parents. And this... this was your mother's ancestral land, too. It would not be right for them to be absent when you stand as the patriarch of her ancestral clan."

Mark shook his head before the suggestion could settle. "No, Granduncle," he said softly. "They will not come. They should not come."

"Eh?"

Chapter 715: The Invitation to the Palace

"Eh? Why?" Even Shang Jiao was surprised at Mark's refusal to invite their parents.

To that, Mark calmly replied, "They abandoned me when I was small. The ones who raised me, my foster parents, would be wronged if I allowed that authority to return to people who were not there. Moreover, I don't want to give another woman a blessing Song Yue herself never received."

Shang Jiao opened her mouth, ready to protest, but Mark placed a hand on her head, brushing her hair aside with that familiar, affectionate gesture that always stopped her words. "Don't worry," he said. "I don't hate them anymore. I forgave them long ago. I've already acknowledged them as my parents. It is just that, regardless of what they call me, I'm still Lu Zhen. And Lu Zhen's consciousness wouldn't allow them to do things for me as what parents should do, because Lu Zhen's parents are dead. That won't change. And since I

accepted before the birth of my children... perhaps, they can extend their authority of being grandparents for their events... but not mine..."

Shang Jiao's throat tightened. She could only step forward and wrap her arms around him. Mark closed his eyes and hugged her back quietly.

*

That night, Mark lay in bed staring at the ceiling. No matter how many times he closed his eyes, his thoughts drifted toward Song Yue's gentle smile, toward the small hands of his children tugging at his sleeves, toward laughter echoing across familiar halls. The longing scraped at him quietly.

Maybe it's because he brought up his family with Yuxuan. He now wanted to go home, hold them, and hear their voices. But he could not forget the danger. As long as he can't sort out peace within the clan, his family will face danger from these cunning elders.

The next morning, inside the imperial council hall of the Imperial Palace, Heavenly Ocean Empire;

The Emperor and his ministers sat around a wide jade table discussing the war with the Ravagers and the upcoming Grand Expedition. The atmosphere was tense, filled with maps and markers, strategies and grim predictions.

The doors slid open, and a soldier kneeled, interrupting their discussion. "Your Majesty, a messenger from Azure Frost Dominion requests an audience."

The Emperor raised an eyebrow. He expected one, after all. Before he spoke, the Fifth Prince leaned forward with interest. "Father, I heard Lan Zhen plans to marry in a week's time. It may be an invitation."

"Let him in," the Emperor ordered.

Footsteps echoed through the hall, calm, firm, unhurried. Frost stepped inside with the quiet grace of a ruler rather than a messenger. His energy was suppressed so completely that the entire room felt only a faint breeze passing through. Ministers dismissed him in their minds as another 11-circle envoy...

But the Emperor's eyes sharpened like blades.

The moment Frost crossed the threshold, the Emperor felt the truth beneath the disguise. The weight of that suppressed aura rippled faintly, like lightning threatening to break through storm clouds.

A divine beast of third-stage transcendent... hidden inside the Lan Clan? Where did this one come from? Wait a second... is that... Blizzard Pegasus? No, not her... is it one of her children? He thought.

He leaned back on his throne and calmly gazed at the incoming messenger.

The Emperor then said slowly as if he was unaware, "I did not know that Azure Frost Dominion possessed two third-stage transcenants. And one of them comes as a mere messenger."

His words slid across the hall as a blade dipped in ice.

The ministers stiffened.

The Fifth Prince blinked in confusion.

Frost simply straightened, spread his faint icy aura through the air, no longer hiding his aura, and replied without bowing his head, "I suppose it is impossible to fool the Emperor after all."

And then he released his realm.

The suppressed pressure rose like a silent avalanche, heavy, ancient, and suffocating.

Ministers staggered where they stood, a few instinctively reaching for defensive talismans. The Supreme Commander of the empire's armies instantly pressed his hand to the hilt of his weapon, ready to strike. Only the Emperor remained unmoving, his fingers lightly gripping the armrest of the throne.

"Enough," the Emperor commanded with a single gesture.

At once, the commanders and generals froze. His frown deepened, but his voice remained calm. "There is no one in this world foolish enough to walk into my palace and attempt an assassination. Lower your weapons."

Frost, despite having revealed the weight of a third-stage transcendent, looked completely relaxed. The Emperor studied him with narrowed eyes before speaking again, this time with genuine curiosity.

"I sense the bloodline of the Blizzard Pegasus in you," he said while continuing to maintain ignorance of Frost's true identity. "And also... You seemed to be far older than I am. Tell me, are you one of the Lan Clan's hidden ancestors?"

Frost's expression didn't change. His tone was polite, but absolutely unmoved. "At this moment, Your Majesty, I am nothing more than a messenger. My identity is irrelevant. Only my master's words matter."

"Your master?" The Emperor lifted an eyebrow. A Blizzard Pegasus bowed to someone? Did Azure Frost Dominion get the helping hand of a fellow 4-stage transcendent or something? He wondered.

Frost nodded and continued in one breath, his voice carrying through the hall like winter wind moving across frozen plains.

"My master, known to your palace as Lan Zhen, will marry a daughter of the Lan Clan in eight days' time. He deemed it proper to send me personally as a sign of respect."

A eunuch approached carefully, and Frost handed the invitation scroll into his hands.

"The invitation is for the Imperial Family of Heavenly Ocean Empire," Frost said, "with a specially extended one for Lord Hei Zhenyu."

The name caused a visible ripple in the room. Even the Emperor's fingers tightened by a fraction. No one dares to invite Lord Hei like this...

Frost continued calmly, never missing a beat.

"My master adds this: Azure Frost Dominion seeks only independent governance. It does not wish to be bullied at the whim of the imperial palace. The dominion has no desire to become your enemy. Instead, we extend the intention of a peace treaty."

His voice grew firmer, a shade colder.

"If His Majesty wishes for friendly relations, then the Emperor may send an envoy who has full authority to negotiate the terms of this treaty. Not a powerless messenger or a puppet. A representative who has enough weight in his identity."

Several high-ranking nobles stiffened in shock at the directness.

Frost's eyes swept through the court, sharp and unblinking. "Failure to send such an envoy," he continued, "will be taken as the imperial palace having no intention of peace."

For a long moment, the Emperor said nothing. Frost allowed the silence to settle before speaking one last time.

"If His Majesty questions my master's capabilities, whether he could be arrogant or not..." he said clearly, "I shall ask His Majesty to make enquiries about the recent war concluded Sky Sect and the Golden Demon Cat Empire, in the immortal plane."

Murmurs broke out instantly. The Emperor's gaze hardened.

Frost bowed slightly, not submissively, but in acknowledgment, and concluded: "My master does not enjoy boasting, but he will brag if it prevents unnecessary conflict born from ignorance. His words are not threats. They are simply the truth."

The tension in the imperial hall thickened like frozen fog.

The Emperor leaned back slowly, golden robes rustling. "Well then," he said quietly, "it seems this Lan Zhen wishes to speak to the empire as an equal."

His smile did not reach his eyes.

But Frost didn't care about the comment. He simply said, "The choice of words, from the beginning to the end, is fully my master's. Please take them exactly as he intended. If that is all, Your Majesty, I will now return to my master's side."

He turned without hesitation, steps echoing across the polished floor. His aura had been withdrawn, but every noble present still felt the lingering pressure of this messenger. He took three steps before the Emperor's voice cut sharply through the hall.

"Wait."

Frost stopped. A slow turn, expression neutral. "Yes, Your Majesty?"

"I have a message for your master."

Frost shook his head once. "I am the messenger of my master, not a servant of the Heavenly Ocean Empire. I hold no obligation to deliver the Emperor's reply. If Your Majesty wishes to respond, Your Majesty may send his own messenger."

For the first time, irritation flickered in the Emperor's eyes. He exhaled through his nose and said, "My message is for Lu Zhen, not for 'Lan Zhen', the dominion's ruler. Will you still refuse to hear it?"

Frost's gaze sharpened, not with disrespect, but with an elder's unwavering discipline. "Under no circumstance," he said slowly, "shall I carry any message related to the one I delivered earlier. That matter is between the dominion and the palace."

A muscle in the Emperor's cheek twitched. Then he leaned forward on the throne, voice lowering.

"Tell your master, Lu Zhen, that out of respect for Lord Hei, I will consider the deal he proposed through him. My envoy will discuss the details in person."

Frost gave the smallest nod, neither deferential nor rude. "Understood."

He turned again, but he only managed two steps before the Emperor spoke once more.

"Wait."

Frost paused. "Yes?"

The Emperor's gaze lingered on him for several seconds. No words followed, only silence, and a stare filled with contemplation. Finally, he waved his hand.

"Nothing. You may leave."

This time, Frost walked out without stopping.

The great doors closed behind him.

Chapter 716: The Wedding (Part-1)

Inside the hall, the Emperor leaned back against his throne, resting his elbow on the armrest and tapping his fingers thoughtfully even for several moments after Frost left the room. A smile crept across his lips, not warm, but intrigued.

"This Lu Zhen..." he murmured. "Interesting. He actually made a third-stage transcendent beast acknowledge him as master. Blizzard Pegasus's aren't like other beasts. Based on its strength, this is a second-generation beast that retains the core divine authority of its mother. Not even I have such a capability. I wonder how he did it..."

The fifth prince stepped forward respectfully, interrupting his thoughts. "Your Majesty, our spy reports were investigated thoroughly. They confirm that he has a family in the mortal realms. But we still have no information on which world they reside in."

"Why not?" the Emperor asked with a frown.

"Because only three living people know," the prince replied. "Lan Jing, who was believed to be expelled years ago, Lu Zhen himself, and his sister Shang Jiao, the new inheritor of the Blizzard Pegasus line. We can't do anything to Lu Zhen. Shang Jiao is well protected, and Lan Jing was the son of the former patriarch. Lan Yujin wouldn't sit still if we hurt his son."

The Emperor tapped his fingers twice, then made his decision.

"Then abduct Lan Jing. Do not injure him. Use hypnosis and extract the information quietly, and erase his memories afterwards. I want the location of their world at all costs."

The hall fell silent. The ministers exchanged anxious glances.

Then the Emperor added, almost casually, "This Shang Jiao... the inheritor... how old is she now?"

"Eight heavenly years (18), Your Majesty," the fifth prince answered.

"Already of marriageable age..." the Emperor murmured, his eyes gaining a calculating gleam. "Good. Very good."

His smile deepened, slow, cold, and dangerous as he then said, "Summon the Crown Prince."

Later;

Ice Palace of Lan clan, Azure Frost Dominion;

When Frost repeated the Emperor's words, Mark's eyes widened, before his brows drew together sharply.

"Accepted the deal?" he muttered, leaning back in disbelief. "How? Why?" He crossed his arms and paced once around the room, his mind moving faster than his feet. "Hei Zhenyu told me that the Emperor dismissed that proposal without even thinking. Even when Hei Zhenyu brought it up personally, the Emperor refused." His pacing slowed, his voice dropping to a contemplative murmur as he gazed out the window at the

shimmering barrier Frost and Pyro had erected. "Did he change because of the Blizzard Pegasus' return? No... someone like him doesn't just shift decisions in a few days because of political pressure or my sudden rise."

He exhaled slowly, rubbing the bridge of his nose. "And the strangest part, he still hasn't replied to my independence letter. No royal decree, no threat, no warning, no envoy. Not even a spy group is trying to test our borders. Nothing." Mark stared at Frost for a moment before sighing. "Regardless of mortal realm or even the Celestial realm, there is one common factor among all the monarchs. They all have big egos, and none of them would like to easily lose a chunk of their land without getting anything in return. He's planning something. But until the wedding day arrives... I guess all I can do is wait."

*

The week slipped by quickly, consumed by nonstop preparations.

The entire Lan Clan territory transformed: lanterns glowing with icy-blue light hung along every walkway, banners bearing the crest of the Blizzard Pegasus fluttered across the central square, and cultivators and disciples rushed from one end of the estate to the other carrying gifts, arrangements, and ceremonial items.

And then, finally, the day arrived.

The wedding day of Lan Xia and the new Sect Master.

Lan Clan had never seen such a crowd in centuries. Every guest courtyard was filled to capacity and they even had to open the outer pavilions for the overflow. Hundreds of VIP guests gathered at the gates, their entourages stretching into the distance like a sea of banners and shimmering robes. Some had arrived from other dominions entirely, drawn either by curiosity, respect, or the desire to assess this strange child-sect-master who defied the imperial palace.

But nothing caused more stir than the sight of the imperial envoys.

Two princes arrived as representatives of the Heavenly Ocean Empire, a gesture so unprecedented that even ancient clan elders exchanged anxious looks the moment their ornate flying ship touched down.

The Fifth Prince emerged first, a tall figure robed in deep indigo, his eyes sharp and unreadable. He was infamous, known throughout the plane not only as a genius strategist but also as the man who controlled an invisible web of spies spread across countless worlds. His mere presence caused the grand elders to stiffen, and even the guards straightened nervously.

But the second envoy drew even more gasps.

Prince Zetian.

The Emperor's eldest grandson, heir to the Crown Prince, already a demigod at merely eight heavenly years, the same age as Shang Jiao. His appearance caused a noticeable ripple among the younger disciples, especially the girls, who immediately whispered about his cold handsomeness and overwhelming aura. He always wore a half mask, which only made it seem like he was purposely trying to avoid attention.

Lan Clan elders, however, reacted very differently when they realized the unspoken meaning.

Two imperial envoys...

One a strategist...

The other, a marriageable crown-blooded prodigy the same age as Shang Jiao...

It isn't that difficult for them to think of what conditions will be in the peace treaty that they brought.

The atmosphere subtly tensed, especially around the grand elders who exchanged grim looks. If the palace wanted leverage in the Lan Clan, the easiest method was marriage alliances, and Shang Jiao was an obvious target.

*

The morning of the wedding rose with a quiet solemnity that wrapped the entire Lan Clan Estate in a veil of soft white mist.

Frost hung on the rooftops like silver cloth, and disciples wearing ceremonial blue robes moved briskly through the courtyards with lanterns, banners, incense holders, and jade trays.

Security was at its absolute peak.

Every elder from the sect had been assigned to guard a cardinal direction, and top inner-sect disciples were patrolling the skies in rotating formations, making sure nothing disturbed the auspicious day.

Even the imperial envoys had stationed their personal guards near their resting areas.

Inside the groom's preparation chamber, Mark sat quietly in front of a polished bronze mirror.

A ceremonial attendant moved around him with careful hands, adjusting the layers of his wedding robes.

A crown-like headpiece sat on the table, waiting to be placed. Frost and Pyro stood outside the door, keeping everyone away from the chamber, yet Mark could still hear faint murmurs of disciples marveling at how youthful their Patriarch looked despite the majestic attire. Of course, that's because he was young, He thought.

Mark stared at his reflection for a long moment. He wondered what Song Yue would say if she saw him right now. He exhaled slowly, clearing those thoughts, and finally stood up.

A knock sounded, followed by Lan Jing's calm voice. "Xiao Zhen, everyone is waiting outside. Shall we proceed?"

Mark nodded silently and rose.

The attendant placed the headpiece on him, and as he stepped outside, the air shifted immediately.

Elders bowed. Disciples lowered their heads. Even Prince Zetian and the Fifth Prince paused their conversation and raised their eyes toward him.

A solemn procession was already arranged at the entrance: musicians with ancient string instruments, ceremonial guards holding long spears with white silk tied under the blades, and two young disciples carrying red lanterns at the front.

Mark took his place in the center and began walking forward, his steps slow and composed, each movement echoing the authority he now held.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the estate, inside the Phoenix Pavilion, Lan Xia stood in front of her own mirror. She wore an icy blue bridal gown embroidered with silver feathers

She held her hands together tightly, trying to calm her trembling fingers. Behind her, Elder Yuxuan adjusted the final ornament in her hair while Shang Jiao watched with shining eyes, teasing Lan Xia lightly about how she had finally stolen her brother away.

Lan Xia tried to hide her nervousness, but her voice betrayed her when she spoke. "Master... I don't know... but it feels weird..."

Yuxuan smiled softly and touched her shoulder. "Every bride feels that on her wedding day. Just breathe. You are entering a new life today."

Lan Xia lowered her gaze, her cheeks warming under the veil. "He said he didn't feel for me that way... but he still kept his promise." Her voice softened further. "I will make him see me as someone he trusts... someone he can lean on."

Yuxuan crossed her arms as she shook his head, "Feelings change over the time, Xia. That's why I didn't say anything about his emotional preference always being his first wife. As long as he is going to be a dutiful husband and spend enough time with you, things always change."

Lan Xia took a slow breath, steadying her heart. She nodded.

Outside, a ceremonial maid announced, "Bride's procession, prepare!"

Chapter 717: The Wedding (Part-2)

The drums rolled gently, and the pavilion doors opened.

Lan Xia stepped out, supported on both sides by her attendants.

A path of red silk had been laid from the Phoenix Pavilion to the Grand Ancestral Courtyard, where the joining ceremony would take place.

As she walked, numerous disciples gathered along the sides, whispering their awe. Even the elders straightened their robes when the bride passed by, their expressions softening in respect.

Prince Zetian watched silently, his calm expression giving away nothing, while the Fifth Prince raised an eyebrow, perhaps making quiet comparisons, perhaps plotting something deeper.

The two processions moved slowly toward the ancestral courtyard from opposite directions.

Mark's procession turned the corner of the lotus pond just as Lan Xia's reached the far end of the red carpet.

When Mark saw her figure moving under the veil, his steps slowed for a heartbeat. He didn't know whether it was because she looked delicate, beautiful, or simply because this was the first time he truly saw her as a bride.

Lan Xia, unable to see him through the veil but sensing his gaze on her, felt her heartbeat quicken. Her feet nearly paused, but her attendants gently guided her forward.

When the two stood face to face, the elders and guests fell silent. Even the imperial envoys watched intently.

The ceremonial officiant spoke loudly, "Today, before Heaven, Earth, Ancestors, and the witnesses from all realms, the Patriarch of the Ancient Lan Clan and Sect Master of the Ancient Lan Sect, Lan Zhen, takes Lan Xia as his wife."

Mark extended his hand toward her. Lan Xia hesitated only for a moment before placing her hand in his, her fingers cold with nerves. He tightened his hold gently, reassuringly, and she felt warmth rush into her chest.

"Bow to Heaven and Earth!"

Both lowered deeply, the entire courtyard echoing with the rustling of robes and murmurs of reverence.

"Bow to the Ancestors!"

Mark and Lan Xia bowed again toward the towering ancestral tablets and the statue of the first Sect Founder. Frost and Pyro watched from behind the formation, their expressions strangely solemn.

"And now... bow to each other!"

Lan Xia lowered her head deeply, her red veil swaying softly, while Mark's eyes remained fixed on her for a full heartbeat longer than necessary before he bowed as well.

Finally...

"From this day forth, husband and wife!"

A wave of cheers erupted through the estate, disciples clapping, drummers beating their drums louder, banners fluttering wildly as cultivators released harmless bursts of spiritual light into the sky. Fireworks crafted from ice crystals exploded above, creating shimmering frost flowers that drifted down like snow.

Mark exhaled slowly. Lan Xia lowered her veil a fraction to peek at him, but before she could lift it fully, Yuxuan stepped forward with a smile and gently pulled the veil up.

Mark's eyes met Lan Xia's clearly for the first time as bride and groom. Her cheeks were flushed, her lips trembling slightly, and his expression softened completely.

"Let's go," he whispered to her, barely audible.

Lan Xia nodded quietly, her heart pounding as they walked together toward the wedding banquet, unaware of the many gazes, supportive, jealous, calculating, that followed them.

*

The lanterns in the banquet hall glowed with gentle azure light, illuminating the carved ice pillars and shimmering crystal decorations that had been arranged specifically for the grand wedding.

Musicians played soft string melodies, and the fragrance of spirit wine drifted through the air.

Tables were lined with immortal delicacies and rare beast meats, the aromas mixing into a festive scent that made even guests from rival clans relax their shoulders.

At the entrance, Mark and Lan Xia stood together, welcoming every important guest with a smile.

Lan Xia's shy joy was obvious; her cheeks remained faintly flushed all the way to her ears beneath the subtle wedding makeup.

Mark wasn't far behind; whenever he looked at her, he found himself unable to hide a small smile. There wasn't love in his gaze, but enough affection still there.

Meanwhile, Shang Jiao stood beside them with a storage ring specifically prepared for the gifts. She handled each treasure calmly, though she glanced at her brother every now and then, her eyes sparkling with happiness for him.

Guests came one after another. The leader of Cold Moon Valley presented a Frost Lotus that could extend life by fifty years.

The leader of Iron Forge Mountain gifted a divine-grade hammer.

The Starfall Sect Master offered a rare cosmic stone.

But every time Mark glanced at these items with his "Eyes of God," he placed them into Shang Jiao's hands without hesitation. Weapons, pills, talismans, none of them stirred his interest.

And then...

A commotion rippled through the entrance because of the arrival of the imperial envoys.

The eunuch stepped forward in elegant robes embroidered with golden dragons, bowing deeply before unrolling the imperial scroll with both hands. His voice rang loud and clear:

"By decree of His Majesty, Emperor of Heavenly Ocean Empire, on this auspicious day, the Emperor bestows his blessing upon Lan Xia and Lan Zhen.

May their union be prosperous, their future bright, and their bond unbreakable."

Guests bowed automatically. Lan Xia lowered her head respectfully. Mark offered a polite nod, but his expression did not reveal a single emotion.

Then the eunuch stepped aside, and the Fifth Prince emerged with a smile that seemed both warm and calculating.

"Patriarch Lan," he greeted, raising a jade box. "This is a divine treasure gifted by the Imperial Family. A Star Tortoise."

Mark accepted the box and his "Eyes of God" quietly activated.

Star Tortoise

Grade: Celestial

Effect: On equipped on one's body, at the behest of its user, the treasure can use natural energy from the surroundings and conjure a defensive barrier over them, capable of blocking any attack under 14.0 stats. No Cost. No cooldown.

Note: Wearing it would reduce the bearer's speed drastically by 90%.

*

"Hmm... I guess this would be useful for Song Yue..." He thought.

The prince's eyes sparkled as if expecting gratitude or shock. However, Mark simply smiled and handed the jade box to Shang Jiao as if he wasn't much impressed or surprised by such a present. "Thank you, Your Highness. I will cherish the Emperor's thoughtfulness."

A faint stiffness tugged at the prince's smile when he saw Mark's reaction.

Regardless, he reached into his sleeve again and pulled out another scroll, this one wrapped elegantly in black silk.

"This," he said, "is a treasured painting from Lord Hei Zhenyu. He deeply regrets being unable to attend today. Hence, he asked me to deliver it personally."

Mark unfurled the painting. It wasn't actually big. If anything, it was small, just about 70x50cm. But when Mark inspected it, his eyes widened in surprise as he saw the image of a shield. It wasn't a painting but a skill scroll.

The Skill Scroll

Grade: N/A

Effect: A one-time use scroll that will unleash a defensive skill and cover the user with an energy shield. It was capable of blocking any attack under 15.3 stats.

Note: Binding with the soul will automatically make the skill release when the attack carries the power of at least 14.0 stats.

"So, he was just worried about me being assassinated, huh. I guess I can give it to Lan Xia, instead..."

Mark accepted it, this time with more of a genuine smile. The prince's eyebrow twitched ever so slightly, as if irritated that Mark preferred Hei Zhenyu's one-time scroll to the Imperial Palace's treasure.

But he didn't comment.

Instead, he took out a third scroll, sealed with the imperial crest.

"This," the Fifth Prince continued, "is a private message from His Majesty for you. I wished to give it tomorrow, but unfortunately, I will not be present for the peace negotiations. My nephew will represent the Imperial Family instead to communicate with the palace."

As Mark raised his head properly to look at the young man standing behind the Fifth Prince, Lei Zetian stepped forward with calm steps. He bowed deeply and cupped his fists.

"Greetings, Patriarch Lan. I am Lei Zetian."

His voice held confidence without arrogance. But what caught Mark's attention was not the greeting; it was his mask. It by itself, a celestial-grade treasure, blocking his Eyes of God skill.

Mark narrowed his eyes slightly, not out of hostility, but in silent curiosity. Zetian, however, maintained an innocent smile. Mark gave a nod.

The princes then entered the banquet hall, followed by the eunuch and the 13-circle guard, as strong as any grand elder or sect leader present here. Only Lan Yujin and the two divine beasts are on a higher realm than this imperial guard, who is neither a general nor an official.

Meanwhile, Mark placed the sealed imperial scroll into his inventory, deciding to read it later in private.

Around them, the hall began to fill with conversations, spirit wine cups clinking lightly as guests took their seats.

Lan Xia leaned closer, whispering softly, "I didn't expect the Emperor to send such gifts... It's a good thing right?"

Chapter 718: The Wedding Banquet

Mark nodded slowly, his eyes scanning the hall with a calm expression that failed to hide the sharpness beneath.

"I don't know..." he murmured. "Can't trust those who play with politics. They won't even give things out of mere goodwill, especially to the people whom they saw as mere ants for centuries..."

Lan Xia's smile froze for a second. She opened her mouth, but Mark simply squeezed her hand lightly and smiled, "Forget about them. Today's our wedding day. Not a day to care about others."

Lan Xia's smile returned at that. She too squeezed his hand and nodded.

Almost two hours later, when the final important guest crossed the threshold, the couple finally stepped into the banquet hall.

Their seats were arranged at the host's table, an elevated platform overlooking the hall. To the right sat Yuxuan, composed as ever, and Lan Jing, wearing a proud smile. To the left sat Shang Jiao with a bright expression... and Yujin, whose eyes hid a storm no one else noticed apart from the loyalists.

The hall quieted when Mark rose with a cup of wine in hand. The lantern lights reflected off the cup's surface, casting a warm glow over his face.

"Everyone," he said, voice steady but warm, "thank you for honoring our wedding with your presence. Your blessings are our joy. Let us drink together."

The hall rose at once. Cups were lifted unanimously. A chorus of voices echoed:

"To the couple!"

The wine was drunk in one gulp, marking the official start of the feast.

Dishes were brought out: spirit beast roasts, frost lotus soup, celestial fruits, and endless streams of delicacies. The musicians resumed their soft melodies, and laughter filled the air as Mark and Lan Xia finally took their seats.

Mark calmly picked up his chopsticks and took a bite. Lan Xia did the same. Everything looked normal... but across the table, Yujin was frozen mid-motion, fingers tightening around his cup.

It should have acted instantly.

For a moment, the old man stared so hard that even the flickering candles seemed afraid to move. His gaze stuck to Mark, waiting... searching...

But Mark ate, talked lightly with Lan Xia, and enjoyed the wine with an easy smile. He turned his head slightly and caught Yujin's stare.

Their eyes met.

Mark didn't say anything, didn't frown, didn't give any reaction, only lifted the cup again and sipped with deliberate calmness. Inside his mind, Ark's notifications flashed one after another:

*Ding!

[Poison Detected: Zhen Venom]

[Neutralized]

His plan, so carefully timed, so meticulously arranged... had crumbled before it even began. Originally, he had two plans. One to use assassins. Two, to use the poison. The first one ended up a failure, not because of Frost and Pyro's presence, but also due to the attendance of two imperial princes. He then used the potent version of zhen poison, which carries no scent and is completely mixed with any drink, but now even that failed.

Yujin got the urge to suddenly strike Mark, who was sitting nearby him, with his most powerful attack. It wouldn't matter what others think as long as Mark dies. Yujin was confident in making damage control, but then he remembered something and glanced up.

High above the banquet hall, concealed in the rafters, Frost and Pyro watched over their master. Frost's eyes were sharp and focused. Pyro, arms crossed, looked half-interested, still stayed alert enough that a ripple of killing intent flickered whenever someone suspicious moved too close to the platform.

Meanwhile, the feast below grew lively.

At the highest guest section, where imperial guests sat, the Fifth Prince leaned toward the young Prince Zetian with a knowing smile.

"Don't be so obvious, nephew," he murmured.

Zetian, startled, nearly dropped his chopsticks. "W-What's obvious? It's not, I wasn't..."

The Fifth Prince chuckled softly, swirling his wine. "You keep glancing in her direction. I know that she is a rare beauty, but if you continue to become obvious, someone will spot and in no time, the entire hall will hear of it. And you don't want her anger on your head, do you? You have to stay here, after all. Don't worry, you will get plenty of chances..."

Lei Zetian stiffened, face turning red beneath the mask. He quickly nodded, head bobbing like a startled chick. "Understood."

He turned back to his food with forced seriousness.

But habit betrayed him; his gaze flickered once more toward the host table. When Shang Jiao briefly smiled at someone's joke, Zetian immediately ducked down and grabbed his cup as if hiding behind it.

The Fifth Prince shook his head with amusement.

The banquet carried on peacefully, with laughter, toasts, gentle music, and guests exchanging words of admiration for the new couple. There were no fights, no ominous shifts, no dark clouds gathering overhead.

No one dared cause trouble at an event guarded by two transcendent beasts and a Patriarch whose ruthlessness had already spread across half the dominion.

But one thing did happen.

Yujin failed.

His brow twitched several times throughout the meal, each twitch a dagger stabbing whatever plan he had built. Mark's subtle smirk every time he lifted the cup only made the old patriarch's heart sink deeper.

By the end of the banquet, all guests were full, cheerful, and satisfied. Even the imperial envoys had enjoyed themselves.

Only one man was left with trembling hands hidden within his sleeves.

And he wasn't a guest.

He was family.

Because now he couldn't help but wonder whether Mark knew about the poison and was acting ignorant or whether the wine was swapped at the last minute.

Yujin swallowed hard in a bit of nervousness.

*

The moment the final dish was cleared away, the elders signaled the close of the banquet. A soft chime echoed across the vast hall, followed by the soothing notes of the musicians shifting into a slower, more auspicious melody. The air grew gentler, more intimate; laughter faded and was replaced by warm well-wishes as guests rose from their seats.

Clan elders and sect dignitaries stepped forward one after another, offering short blessings to the newlyweds.

Some spoke of fortune, some of longevity, some of harmony between fire and frost. Mark nodded politely to all of them, keeping Lan Xia's hand securely held as if promising her silently that he would not leave her alone even for a heartbeat during their wedding night. Lan Xia, cheeks still rosy from wine and emotions, bowed gracefully at each blessing.

As the atmosphere softened into the final phase of the ceremony, attendants carrying lanterns appeared, forming a gentle procession of light toward the exit of the hall.

Some carried trays adorned with peanuts, lotus seeds, dried dates, and little red pastries, the ancient symbols of fertility and abundant blessings. Others held candles protected within crystal casings, their flames steady despite the slight breeze.

The guests made way as the couple stepped down together. Mark stood tall and composed; Lan Xia walked in small, careful steps beside him, her fingers curling slightly around his as if grounding her nerves.

The escort procession guided them through quiet pathways lit with red lanterns. Elders, disciples, and guests watched with smiles, whispering blessings as they passed. The palace attendants followed respectfully behind, carrying the auspicious items meant to be placed in the bridal chamber.

When they reached the chamber, the doors were already decorated with red ribbons and the double happiness sigil shimmering faintly under the dim lantern light. Red curtains draped the walls, lotus motifs embroidered across them. A large marriage bed sat in the center, its sheets crimson, with Frost Dragon King and Blizzard Pegasus stitched across the silk.

The moment the couple stepped inside, the elders outside activated a noise-cancelling barrier for the couple's privacy. Once the barrier shimmered subtly in place, the doors closed gently with a soft thud, leaving only the glow of red candles dancing inside the quiet room.

Mark led Lan Xia to sit on the edge of the marriage bed. She lowered her head, her hands resting atop her knees, her heartbeat almost audible in the intimate silence. The slight tremor in her fingers revealed her nervousness far more than her calm expression ever would.

Mark's gaze softened. With deliberate gentleness, he reached for her veil. For a breath, Lan Xia held her breath, her eyelashes trembling behind the thin fabric.

He lifted the veil slowly.

Lan Xia's shy, slightly flustered face appeared beneath the candlelight, cheeks pink, lips parted slightly, eyes lowered but shining bright.

Mark smiled faintly.

"You look beautiful," he said quietly.

Lan Xia's breath hitched, and she murmured back, "You... don't have to say things like that just because it's the wedding night."

"I'm not saying it because of that," Mark said, voice softer. "I'm saying it because it's true."

She quickly looked away, ears turning even redder.

Mark chuckled under his breath and reached for the small gourd the attendants had placed on a tray. It was cut into two halves, each filled with red wine. A symbol dating back thousands of years: two halves of one whole, joining again.

He offered one half to Lan Xia and held the other himself.

Their fingers brushed lightly as they raised the cups.

The candles flickered.

The night waited.

Only the two of them existed within that warm, quiet space.

"To our union," Mark whispered.

Lan Xia looked up at him, her eyes soft and brimming with warmth. "To our future."

They tilted the halves and drank together, a single, symbolic act binding them in the eyes of ancient tradition.

Outside the chamber, the grand elders began escorting VIP guests to their accommodations. The princes were led to their specially prepared chambers. Clan leaders returned to their guest houses. The music faded into the distance.

One by one, the pathways emptied, lanterns dimmed, and quiet settled over the estate.

The world outside rested.

Inside the bridal room, a single pair of shadows sat together on the red silk bed, just beginning the long night of their union.

Chapter 719: The Peace Treaty (Part-1)

Hours slipped away inside the bridal chamber, yet neither Mark nor Lan Xia noticed the passage of time.

With pent-up lust suppressed because of various events that occurred for Mark, he went on and on for hours. Not to mention, Lan Xia was also an immortal, and Lan Xia has high stamina. The only thing Mark didn't expect was her cooperation.

Hours later, by the time the candles were half melted, they lay together naked in sweat-soaked sheets, their bodies pressed close, breathing hard but smiling through exhaustion.

Lan Xia rested atop his chest, tracing idle circles on his skin, her cheeks still flushed.

"In the books," she murmured, her voice soft and dazed, "it says people... only last twenty minutes. Maybe an hour. But us..." She buried her warming face against him. "How... how did it end up like that? And this is even my first time..."

Mark chuckled weakly, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear. "I might have... gone a bit overboard," he admitted. "It's been a year after all. But I didn't expect you to be aggressive too."

To which Lan Xia blushed in embarrassment and looked away, "Well, it's not my fault. The bloodline of Frost Dragon King acted in the middle, taking over my reasoning."

Mark chuckled, "That's good then. I won't have to worry in the future, then."

Lan Xia lifted her head, looking into his eyes, closer now than she had ever been.

"Tell me something, Zhen-Ge... Even when I move to your main residence later, even after I start living with your family... you'll still take care of me, right?" she whispered. "I know you love Sister Song Yue deeply. I know her place in your heart. But... when we're alone... I want you to think of only me. I want my share of your time, of your affection."

Mark smiled, sliding his hand along the curve of her back. "You'll have it," he murmured. "All of it."

Her eyes softened. She leaned in to kiss him, slowly at first, then with rising heat that made him pull her back into his arms again.

Feeling the hardness of the thing touching her, she startled for a second. As she looked at him, Mark awkwardly smiled, "Sorry. It looks like I'm not done."

Lan Xia giggled, "Alright then... I'll drain you completely..." She went on kissing him deeply.

And once more, the candles flickered against the curtains as the two newlyweds surrendered to their lust. By the time they drifted into sleep, it was already past 4.

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Only a couple of hours later, soft knocking echoed through the chamber door.

"Milord... Madam... dawn has arrived. It is time to visit the ancestral shrine."

Mark groaned, momentarily considering burying himself under the covers. Lan Xia curled closer into him, equally unwilling to move.

"Morning already...?" he mumbled, rubbing his forehead. "We just fell asleep..."

Lan Xia blushed and gently pushed at his chest. "It's your fault," she whispered.

Mark gave a tired laugh. "Who is the one who challenged to drain my energy and stamina..."

She hit him lightly with a pillow. "pervert..."

Still, responsibilities awaited. With weary limbs and lingering warmth between them, they rose from the bed.

*

Later in the afternoon;

Mark sat alone in a private chamber, elbows resting on the carved table, one hand supporting his head, the other holding the sealed scroll that the Fifth Prince had delivered.

The earlier meeting with the sect envoys had been long and exhausting. He had repeated his plans, about the gunmaster profession, the expansion of grounds, the independence declaration, so many times that even his calm composure had begun to strain at the edges.

Now that the hall was empty and the voices were gone, the silence around him felt heavier than before.

He broke the seal slowly and unrolled the scroll at last. His eyes moved across the first half, taking in the surface generosity with a steady, indifferent expression.

The Imperial Court formally recognized Azure Frost Dominion as independent. It was a hundred-year peace treaty, withdrawal of officials and troops, and a guaranteed period where the Empire would not interfere with Dominion matters.

Even the purchase of adamantine guns and ammunition seemed harmless enough, especially when the Empire offered large quantities of rare stardust ore in exchange.

Adding on top of that, there's also a matter involved Prince Zetian, his expression became still. Prince Zetian was not sent here as an envoy.

The direct imperial descendant was actually sent to the sect as a disciple. It was supposedly a sign of trust, a political hostage one might say. But Mark wasn't comfortable with it.

Even if Zetian behaved politely, even if he was respectful, his presence alone would force the sect to act carefully. After all, he would be a potential spy for the Throne.

It looked like friendship. It looked like the Emperor was showing his respect at first. But now, Mark felt something was off.

He breathed slowly and moved on.

The next line made his brows draw together.

Whatever mentioned before is what the empire is giving him. And now the things they want in return in exchange.

First, Ten million Cronies every year for a hundred years, and every decade the amount would rise. It felt like they were looking for a way to bleed the Dominion quietly, politely. If the Dominion refused to pay, the Empire would have a legitimate excuse to declare them enemies. And with an imperial prince inside the sect, the threat would only grow heavier.

His gaze darkened as he reached the second clause that dictated the Dominion's expansion. For a full century, they were forbidden from growing outward even after gaining independence. They were forbidden from helping any foreign force against the Empire.

As for the third clause, it isn't that serious. It was a demand for Lei Fengyun to be returned. As a direct disciple, he couldn't abandon his sect on his own. It would be harmful to his reputation. And neither can be expelled from the sect, which will also damage the reputation of the family. But the Sect master can release him from his duties. That's what the throne is asking for.

And then came the fourth clause, where in exchange for putting their Prince Zetian as a political hostage at Lan Sect, the Emperor wanted Lan Yichen, Elder Yuxuan's grandson, to be delivered like a hostage.

Still, the scroll wasn't done with him yet.

When his eyes reached the final condition, he felt a cold pressure settle in his chest.

It was a proposed dual marriage alliance with the Imperial Family, one pairing involving him, the other involving his sister. Shang Jiao, only 18, matched with the 21st Prince. And himself, matched with the Emperor's granddaughter, who would reach maturity in two years.

Mark leaned back in his chair, the scroll spread open before him, his expression unreadable.

So this is how you want to play it, Emperor Lei.

Mark exhaled through his nose, "but you made one mistake... The one you wrote the proposal for isn't Lan Yujin... It's Mark... Mark Spencer... And there is no deal Mark will make that goes against his ethics or face a loss. In this case, it is both..." A faint smile tugged at Mark's lips, one that held no warmth.

He folded the scroll carefully, set it on the table, and tapped his fingers in a steady rhythm as his mind began crafting its response.

In the next instant, Mark summoned the prince, who is still a guest in his palace.

When Zetian entered the chamber, the youth saluted politely, his expression calm yet sharp, too sharp for someone his age.

Mark wasted no time in exchanging pleasantries and directly placed the first scroll in front of him and spoke plainly, leaving no room for misunderstanding.

He rejected every major condition without hesitation. No hostages. No arranged marriages. No century-long tax disguised as "tribute." The only point he was willing to compromise on was returning Lei Fengyun, because the man himself had long wished to go back. Money? If the Empire wanted it so badly, Mark would rather throw a mountain of cronies at them for ten years than bow for a hundred.

Zetian listened without interruption. He didn't defend the Emperor. He didn't try to persuade.

He simply waited, and when Mark finished, the young prince drew out a second scroll from his sleeve, sealed with a different emblem.

"My uncle anticipated this, Patriarch Lan," Zetian said softly. "He instructed me to deliver this if you rejected the first terms outright."

Chapter 720: The Peace Treaty (Part-2)

Mark narrowed his eyes. Anticipated? So, this is the work of the fifth prince?

He accepted the scroll, unrolled it, and read.

The changes were immediate. And a bit slightly drastic.

The contributions were reduced from a hundred years to twenty-five. The yearly amount doubled, yes, but it was twenty million cronies a year, fixed without any increase later on, regardless of inflation. The empire was giving up the slow strangling method and opting for a shorter, more direct gain.

The no-expansion clause remained untouched, but that was fine; Mark had no intention of expanding yet anyway.

The hostage clause was rewritten entirely. No more sending Lan Yichen away.

Instead, the Empire asked for an elder of the sect who could serve the court. It was a political exchange rather than a hostage. A compromise one could swallow.

But then came the marriage clause.

Mark's eyes moved slowly across the lines, and his heartbeat stopped for a breath

Lan Yichen betrothed to the fourth prince's daughter, a child only four years old. The marriage would be carried out when they reached adulthood. It was distasteful, but manageable. Betrothals between children were common, and they could break them later if they wished.

But the next line...

The next line was a blade disguised as an agreement.

A marriage pact between his newborn daughter, Shen Yi... and the unborn son of the second prince.

"What the..."

Mark felt something cold twist inside his chest. The scroll crinkled faintly beneath his fingers. His daughter's name stood there in bold, elegant brush strokes, making him wonder just one thing. How in the hell did the imperial family know about his daughter's name?

Zetian watched quietly. He didn't speak, didn't offer an explanation, didn't rush him. He simply waited for the response.

Mark forced himself to breathe, slow and deep, before he raised his head and said. "My daughter is not a bargaining chip."

Expecting that response, Zetian held his gaze and replied. "His Majesty believes that tying bloodlines is the strongest assurance of peace. He does not force this marriage to take place immediately. It is a future pact, one that can be broken if both sides agree. But he wishes to show sincerity, Patriarch Lan. If the Dominion refuses all political ties, he will doubt your intentions."

Mark tapped the scroll with his finger, deliberate and steady. "Tell me, Prince Zetian... did your uncle truly think I would hand off my daughter for the sake of a peace treaty?"

Zetian hesitated, then bowed slightly. "He expected you would refuse. But he also expected you would consider the revised conditions more seriously. If not your daughter, then your sister. If not your sister, then your son as a political hostage. There should be something that ties you down, making sure that the Lan Sect will not support the enemies at any cost."

Mark didn't speak.

Instead, his thoughts churned rapidly, his expression darkening further. I said Shen Yi's name a few times. But only in private. Only to a handful of people.

Did the Emperor's network discover my world? Did they intercept my conversations somehow? Or did someone overhear?

Regardless of the method, the truth was clear: information had leaked. And if they knew one thing, they could eventually learn more. He needed to bring his family here as soon as possible. His marriage to Lan Xia was complete. The path forward was clear.

"My family cannot stay in the mortal realm anymore," Mark thought to himself in panic. "It became too risky now."

He exhaled slowly, refocusing on Zetian.

"Prince Zetian," he said firmly, "I still reject the marriage alliance involving my daughter. And I refuse to use my loved ones as bargaining chips. I respect political marriages. My marriage was also one. But I will not bind my daughter's future to the Empire's whims. That line will not be crossed."

Zetian did not act offended. Instead, he looked almost troubled, even sympathetic, though he tried to hide it behind royal formality.

"Patriarch Lan," he said with a tone caught between duty and sincerity, "please view this from His Majesty's perspective. A peace treaty without a binding force is unstable. The court has studied you deeply. His Majesty believes that unless you step down voluntarily, which seems unlikely, you will remain the dominion's ruler for a very long time. And... forgive me for speaking plainly, but your actions speak for themselves. The very moment you rose to clan head, you defied imperial authority. You declared independence boldly, without negotiation. That frightens the court."

Zetian leaned forward slightly, lowering his voice. "So unless there is a personal bond, a marriage, a bloodline tie, or a hostage from your side, he cannot trust the treaty to hold."

Mark's jaw tightened, but he didn't interrupt.

"And," Zetian added carefully, "my brother also said something else. If the Lan Sect gives a bride to the imperial family, be it your daughter, or your sister, or another chosen clan member, then Patriarch Lan may also choose anyone from the imperial bloodline, anyone at all, to send to Azure Frost Dominion as a counter-hostage or marriage partner. His Majesty intends for this to be equal. You choose the person. A prince. A princess. Even a royal cousin. They are willing to match your choice. They only want a binding tie and nothing else."

Mark leaned back slowly, eyes cold, expression unreadable. Inside, however, a storm was gathering.

He understood what they wanted. He understood politics. He understood their fear.

But they had touched the wrong nerve. His daughter. His Shen Yi. Barely sixteen months old. The Prince wanted to chain her future for "security."

The Fifth Prince had misjudged him, truly indeed. Perhaps sending Frost to the imperial court as a messenger made a wrong impression. Did they think we are afraid or something? Mark wondered.

He then folded the scrolls carefully, placed them on the table, and spoke in a low, controlled voice.

"That is all very reasonable from the Emperor's perspective," he said. "But I don't care."

Zetian blinked.

Mark continued, "I will not negotiate my daughter's future. I won't use Shen Yi. I won't use Shang Jiao either. I won't even use a distant relative. No child, no innocent, will be forced into a marriage for a peace treaty."

Zetian swallowed, but he didn't argue. He only looked at Mark, waiting.

"As for Elder Yuxuan's grandson," Mark added, "I will speak with her first before deciding on Yichen's matter. If Yuxuan refuses, then so do I. Her grandson is not my asset to bargain with."

Zetian nodded slowly.

"Then... what do you propose, Patriarch Lan?"

Mark pushed the scroll back toward him, eyes locked onto the young prince with solemn intensity.

"Tell your Emperor this," he said. "If he needs a binding tie, I will agree to only one kind."

Zetian looked confused. "One kind?"

Mark nodded.

"A binding pact made only through power and mutual respect, not through human sacrifices disguised as marriages. Tell the Emperor: I will meet him halfway. But not at the cost of my children. If he insists on involving them... then there will be no treaty. And also remind him, I declared the independence, that means I'm ready to fight to the death, if necessary..."

Zetian bowed deeply. "I understand. I will deliver your message, Patriarch Lan."

The Prince turned and was about to leave, but a few steps away, he was stopped by Mark's call, "Wait."

"Yes?" As Zetian looked back, wondering what other message/warning was left to say, Mark then said, "I have a personal question. You don't need to answer if you are not interested."

"Please question, Patriarch Lan." The Prince said calmly.

Mark pointed at his mask and said, "What's with the mask? That's a divine treasure."

The Prince blinked in surprise, not because of the question itself, but at how the patriarch managed to find out that it was a divine treasure.

The Prince sighed and then sat down. "The thing is..."

After a while;

Mark sat quietly for a moment after Zetian finished speaking.

The story was that once upon a time, the Crown Prince went on an expedition. He met a girl in the woods. He fell in love with her and had a child with her. But only later did they find out that the girl wasn't a human but a Baihu, the White Fox.

In rage of betrayal, the Crown Prince killed her, but he couldn't kill Lei Zetian and instead brought him to the Imperial Palace.

Letting out a sigh, Lei Zetian lightly touched the half-mask, pressing it back over the left side of his face. His expression returned to calm as he continued, "The Emperor, my grandfather, protected me. He passed the order that everyone who knows it not to touch me, but no matter how much protection I receive, the world outside the palace still faces difficulty in accepting my existence. And neither could he stop people from giving disgusting glares. So, I hide my bloodline. My Baihu's bloodline grants me high sensitivity to aura and overwhelming charm abilities. It doesn't distinguish a male or a female. There are only four types of beings that can resist my charms. One with a similar or powerful bloodline to a Baihu. One who is in a higher realm than I, one who had a powerful mental barrier. And one who is blind. Hence, this mask. If I remove it casually, I need to close my eyes instead. It becomes... troublesome when they look into my eyes without the suppression of my bloodline."