

Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?!

#Chapter 141-2nd Round [1] - Read Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?! Chapter 141-2nd Round [1]

Chapter 141: 141-2nd Round [1]

Fang Yuan flew straight towards the heart of the Lin estate, toward the patriarch hall.

When he had spread his divine sense in search of Fang Lian, he had also registered two qi signatures towards the Lin Patriarch hall.

He knew where the Lin Patriarch was waiting.

But as he stepped into the chamber carrying Fang Lian in his arms, he instantly paused.

There were two more presences than he had sensed.

Their qi had been cloaked, masked with alarming precision, being hidden even from someone at his level.

His gaze flicked across the room.

Still, no fear crossed his face. Just a quiet observation.

Lin Pe, the brother of Lin Zhaoyue. A Peak Golden Core cultivator, standing.

Beside him was Lin Xukong, Zhaoyue's father, an Initial Nascent Soul, fists trembling at his sides.

And then the unexpected guests.

Gu Jian, the current Patriarch of the Gu family. Mid-stage Nascent, posture tense, conflicted.

He couldn't even meet Fang Yuan's gaze.

And seated next to him, with a porcelain cup of tea poised elegantly in one withered hand, was Gu Lanyue, his father.

Initial Nascent Soul, old, grinning like a vulture with meat in its beak.

"Guess who decided to join the party," Gu Lanyue drawled, taking a slow sip.

His tone was sharp with mockery, like rusted iron scraping porcelain.

Gu Jian shifted but said nothing.

Just then, Fang Yuan's gaze flicked downward, his sharp senses catching a faint shimmer beneath his feet.

A formation.

Explosive formation, he realized.

Fang Yuan didn't waste breath on words.

His arm lifted, and in one fluid motion, his sword flashed into existence.

"Divine Line."

The slash came down in an instant.

A thin, silver line carved through, splitting the air.

The room instantly detonated as stone cracked and furnitures splintered.

Debris flew in every direction.

Fang Yuan didn't delay as well, he was already airborne, cradling Fang Lian as he exited the blast, cloak billowing, boots gliding over the fractured tiles.

Gu Lanyue, still chuckling, stroked his beard as if the near-death moment amused him. "Hoho... sharp eyes for a junior. But also foolish. You walked straight into the trap."

Fang Yuan felt it just then, a flicker, a shift in the air.

The shimmer of a containment barrier locking into place.

So the explosive formation was just a distraction, he thought coldly. A diversion to raise the walls.

Still, no panic touched his expression. He stood within the glowing seal, unmoved.

Gu Lanyue straightened slightly, voice rising with theatrical venom. "Did you think you would be alive after kidnapping the fiancée of Crown Prince Qin Hai? Truly, you've grown audacious."

Lin Xukong stepped forward, his voice ragged with emotion, eyes glistening. "Where is my daughter?! You monster!"

"My sister's life lamp... it went out!" Lin Pe snarled, spiritual energy flaring wildly. "You killed her! Bring her back!"

Fang Yuan didn't blink.

He looked at them, no, through them as if watching clowns perform a skit in the street.

Because he knew.

He had checked with the system the moment he heard the news of Fang Ruì and Fang Lian's kidnapping.

At the time, the retrieval quest for the Seven-Ring Lotus was still active—marked as only half-complete.

Du Juan and Lin Zhaoyue were still listed as alive within the system's readout.

Just as it had shown Fang Ruì and Fang Lian alive when the news of them "being kidnapped" reached his ears.

That alone had stopped him from turning the Lin estate into a crater the moment he arrived.

Information changes everything.

It had shaped his entire approach.

He didn't waste strength on dramatics. He didn't lash out in blind rage.

Because if there was even the slightest chance they were still breathing, he would find them. He had to.

His first priority had shifted instantly—rescue.

Just then, Gu Lanyue raised a crystal transmitter to his lips.

"He's trapped here with us. Take care of the task on your side. Don't worry, we'll hold him here."

The words were quiet but not quiet enough.

Fang Yuan's eyes gleamed.

Without a single warning, he raised his sword.

The air bent.

"Tyrant Light Sword — Second Form: Star Form."

A tremor shuddered through the chamber as the heavens answered.

From above, a burning star descended, a star, not metaphor but substance, its golden core blazing with killing intent.

It screamed toward Gu Lanyue like divine judgment.

But Fang Yuan wasn't done.

A second star, identical, split from his blade and hurled itself at Gu Jian, who barely had time to register the attack before reacting.

Then a third.

A fourth.

Lin Pe and Lin Xukong stared, stunned, as searing orbs of celestial energy bore down upon them from above.

Four stars. Manifested at once.

Each one a world of its own.

Fang Yuan hovered, sword still drawn, robes untouched by the wind of their descent.

His qi surged like an ocean held at bay, the system points beneath his skin thrumming, limitless and waiting.

He had qi to waste.

Gu Lanyue's eyes glittered with malice as he never hesitated.

In a single, fluid motion, his fingers snapped, poisonous silk spat forth like a swarm of spectral vipers.

Thousands of filaments, thin as spider threads yet glinting with toxic sheen, wove themselves into a living barrier around him.

The air reeked faintly of bitter alkaloids as the silken wall rippled with anticipation, ready to slice and dissolve any incoming assault.

At the same moment, Gu Jian moved with disciplined precision.

He lunged forward, seizing Lin Pe and Lin Xukong by the arms and hauling them behind his father's poisoned bastion.

The two Lin cultivators stumbled, their furious protests cut short as Gu Jian's grip tightened.

"Lin Xukong!" Gu Jian barked, his voice sharp as drawn steel.

"Transfer your qi—into him!" He jabbed a gauntleted thumb at Gu Lanyue's chest.

Lin Xukong's eyes widened, terror and duty warring in his gaze.

With a strangled cry, he thrust his palms forward, channeling his nascent-soul qi into the old patriarch's waiting form.

Gu Jian closed the circuit: a pulse of energy surged from his core into his father's barrier, flickering through the poison silk and infusing it with an even more potent, regenerative strength.

The threads shimmered brighter, the barrier solidifying into an impregnable dome of lethal, pulsating toxin.

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The four stars slammed home in rapid succession.

Gu Lanyue's barrier of shimmering, poison silk met the first stellar impact head-on.

It was a thunderclap that shook the earth beneath them, the silk rippling violently like disturbed water, but holding firm, deflecting the raw force outwards in a spray of corrosive green light.

The second star struck moments later.

A deeper, groaning CRACK echoed as the shield visibly dented inward.

The silk strands groaned under the strain, their luminous sheen flickering erratically.

Gu Lanyue gritted his teeth, a thin line of blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

The third star hit the dent.

The sound was the shriek of rending metal.

Hairline fractures, glowing with the contained fury of the star, spiderwebbed across the barrier's surface.

Gu Lanyue gasped, stumbling back half a step as the impact reverberated through his bones, the transferred force making his internal organs churn.

Blood now stained his lips freely.

The fourth star hammered into the weakened point.

The barrier didn't just crack; it shattered.

A deafening BOOM erupted as the poison silk shield exploded inward in a storm of dissolving, venomous threads and stellar energy.

Gu Lanyue was flung backwards like a ragdoll, a choked cry escaping him as he coughed up a gout of arterial blood, his face instantly ashen.

He hit the ground hard, skidding through the dirt, the defensive formation obliterated.

But the true horror was reserved for Fang Yuan.

The attack that had landed on Gu Lanyue poison silk returned with a reflected power of his own four stars, amplified by the poison silk's insidious nature, damaged back at him with double the ferocity.

The sheer blunt force was catastrophic. His surging ocean of qi churned violently within him, forced to absorb an impossible shockwave.

Bones groaned, muscles screamed, and blood erupted from his mouth and nose as his golden shell armor's passive defense flared desperately.

He was driven backwards, feet carving deep trenches in the earth, the landscape around him shredded by the uncontrolled backlash.

He had no time to recover.

As the dust and dissipating stellar light swirled, the counterattack was already upon him.

"NOW!" Gu Jian roared, a blur of motion leaving his father's side.

His hands wove through intricate seals, the air crackling with condensed, jade-green qi.

"Jade Serpent's Coil!"

Tendrils of solidified emerald energy, sharp as razors and quick as striking vipers, lashed towards Fang Yuan from multiple angles, seeking to bind and pierce.

"Heaven-Piercing Talon."

Simultaneously, Gu Jian's right hand formed a claw, unleashing a massive, translucent talon of force aimed to crush Fang Yuan's torso.

Lin Xukong, face grim, channeled his qi through his staff.

Heavenly Timber First Form - Wood Explosions: The ground beneath Fang Yuan's feet erupted.

Not with earth, but with violently sprouting, hardened roots and trunks that detonated outwards the instant they breached the surface, showering him with shrapnel-like splinters carrying potent, numbing toxins.

Lin Pe, moving in eerie synchronicity, swirled her hands.

Heavenly Timber Second Form - Sleep Dust: A shimmering, almost invisible cloud of fine golden pollen, deceptively beautiful, billowed towards Fang Yuan on an unnatural wind.

Battered, bleeding, and with his internal qi still roiling from the reflected stars, Fang Yuan faced the onslaught.

His mind, however, was a blade honed in countless battles.

Golden light flared not as a full-body shell, but as a single, intensely concentrated disc – the Second Form: Bravery, refined and improvised.

It wasn't the safe, encompassing dome his father had taught him, deemed too risky for its single point of failure.

This was pure, desperate efficiency.

The improvised shield moved with flickering speed, a flickering golden afterimage.

It snapped into place just as Gu Jian's Heaven-Piercing Talon descended, absorbing the crushing force with a resounding **GONG**, the golden light flaring bright.

Instantly, it vanished and reappeared below, intercepting the worst of the Wood Explosions' shrapnel storm in a series of rapid, percussive PING-PING-PINGs.

A micro-shift deflected the lashing tip of a Jade Serpent's Coil.

A final, desperate sweep tried to disperse the encroaching Sleep Dust cloud.

He moved like a phantom, the single shield a blur of golden defiance, blocking only where the lethal force converged.

It was a breathtaking, terrifying display of control and reaction speed, born from necessity and forbidden refinement.

He conserved qi fiercely, but the strain was immense; each block sent fresh jolts of pain through his already battered body, his golden light flickering precariously under the relentless, coordinated assault.

The clang of steel ripped through the chaos.

Gu Jian, seeing his qi techniques partially thwarted, materialized his weapon, a six-foot staff of deep, shimmering Verdant Ironwood, capped with jade-tipped points.

It hummed with condensed poison qi.

"Enough dancing! Crush him!" Gu Jian roared, becoming a whirlwind of emerald death. His staff became a blur.

"Autumn Cicada Thrust!"

A lightning-fast, piercing stab aimed straight for Fang Yuan's heart, the jade tip leaving a trail of virulent mist.

Lin Xukong, staff already in hand, amplified his assault.

Heavenly Timber Third Form: Vine Lash!

Swinging his staff overhead, he summoned thick, whip-like vines, barbed and dripping paralytic sap, lashing out to bind and tear.

Lin Pe, graceful yet deadly, unsheathed twin daggers seemingly carved from living heartwood, their edges gleaming with Sleep Dust residue.

He flowed around Fang Yuan's flank, daggers a stinging blur aiming for joints and pressure points, each cut releasing a puff of golden pollen.

And with a stomp, he triggered localized root bursts directly under Fang Yuan's shifting feet.

Fang Yuan danced a deadly ballet.

His sword, became an extension of his desperate will.

He parried Gu Jian's crushing sweeps with angled deflections, sparks flying as steel met Verdant Ironwood.

He sidestepped the Cicada Thrust by a hair's breadth, feeling the poison mist sting his skin.

He severed snapping vines with precise cuts and used swift, low kicks infused with qi to shatter entangling roots before they fully formed.

His Second Form: Bravery shield was a frantic golden flicker.

It snapped to block a cluster of Lin Xukong's thorns aimed at his eyes.

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The golden shield slammed down to deflect a crushing overhead blow from Gu Jian's staff, the impact jarring Fang Yuan to his bones and making the golden light sputter.

It swept desperately to disperse a concentrated cloud of Lin Pe's Sleep Dust billowing towards his face.

He moved with inhuman speed and precision, conserving qi where possible, but the sheer volume and coordination of the attacks were relentless.

Sweat mixed with the blood trickling from his nose and split lip.

His breaths came sharp and fast.

"Keep pressing!" Gu Lanyue's voice, strained but venomous, cut through the din from where he struggled to rise.

"He just unleashed Four Stars! From the display of that technique, it definitely devours qi like a black hole! He must be running on fumes! Don't let him breathe! Drain him dry!"

Fang Yuan internally scoffed, even as he narrowly avoided a vine lash that tore a gash in his robe. *Fumes? Hardly.*

His strong foundation and the thrumming system points meant his reserves were vast, deeper than they could ever fathom.

But the constant defense was taxing, and Gu Lanyue's words sparked a brilliant idea.

Seeing an opening, Gu Jian roared, "TOGETHER! FINISHING BLOW!"

All three attackers converged in a terrifying symphony of destruction, Gu Jian leaped high, staff held overhead like a divine punishment, gathering crushing earth qi meanwhile Lin Xukong thrust his staff forward, unleashing a concentrated beam of splintering wood.

Lastly and also the least, Lin Pe darted low, twin daggers aiming a scissoring cut at Fang Yuan's ankles while releasing his thickest cloud of Sleep Dust directly upwards.

Trapped, pressured, and seeing no path to dodge or block individually without catastrophic injury,

Fang Yuan did exactly what they hoped for.

He abandoned his efficient, mobile defense.

"COWARDICE!" Fang Yuan screamed, the word raw with seeming desperation.

A blinding eruption of golden light engulfed him.

The First Form: Cowardice, the full-body, impenetrable golden shell he'd been avoiding snapped into existence.

It was a shimmering, perfect sphere of radiant energy, sealing him within.

CRACK-BOOM-SHING!

Gu Jian's attack hammered onto the dome like a falling peak.

Lin Xukong stabbed into it with concentrated force.

And Lin Pe's Sleep Dust cloud washed over it, and his daggers skittered uselessly off the flawless surface.

The dome held. Not a scratch.

But the visible drain was instant and enormous.

Fang Yuan, visible inside the golden sphere like an insect in amber, visibly staggered.

His face contorted in effort, veins bulging at his temples.

The golden light pulsed violently with each impact, dimming perceptibly as it consumed staggering amounts of qi to maintain absolute defense against three simultaneous high-level techniques.

Gu Jian landed, eyes blazing with triumph. "SEE! He's forced to use it! The qi drain is immense! KEEP HAMMERING! BREAK THE SHELL AND HE BREAKS WITH IT!"

Lin Xukong redoubled the force of his lance. Lin Pe drew back, gathering more pollen.

They pressed their attacks relentlessly against the immobile golden dome, the air shuddering with the concussive force.

Inside, Fang Yuan screamed again, his voice muffled but filled with what sounded like terrified outrage:

"NO! THIS ISN'T FAIR! YOU CAN'T DO THIS!"

His cry, perfectly pitched with panic and exhaustion, was the sweetest music to his enemies' ears.

They redoubled their efforts, pouring their own qi into the assault, utterly convinced they were moments from grinding him down.

From the side, Gu Lanyue suddenly barked. "Hurry! We don't have all day! I just received a message that those four damn Saberfangs are almost upon us!"

And then the old patriarch suddenly uncorked a vial of berserk potion and downed it in one gulp.

Muscles surged beneath his robes, veins knotting as years of disciplined training burst forth in seconds.

He looked twenty years younger, hulking, primal and unstoppable.

Before the transformation could wane, he gulped a second brew, an elixir to replenish his qi.

The energy roared back into him... but the cost was brutal: once the effect faded, he'd be utterly qi-empty for a week, as mortal and defenseless as any peasant.

Risk be damned.

He raised a trembling hand, voice low and feral. "Gu Swarm!"

He slashed his forearm in one practiced arc. His blood welled in the air, then exploded into a writhing cloud of crimson insects, thousands of them, their wings clicking like chitinous drums.

They surged toward Fang Yuan, hungry for living qi.

Fang Yuan's eyes flared.

A flicker of genuine horror passed his features as he continued to maintain the brilliant golden shell of light.

Golden Shell Armor, First Form: Cowardice.

The barrier continued to surround him, shimmering like molten brass but each second cost him precious reserves of qi.

Gu Jian seized the moment.

"Now! Retreat as far as you can!"

His voice cracked like a whip.

Lin Xukong and his son, Lin Pe, didn't hesitate, they turned and sprinted for the exit, boots slamming against the cracked stone floor as the swarm clung to the golden barrier like sticky gum on the sole of a shoe, refusing to fall away.

Behind them, the insects writhed, thickening, pulsing, growing unstable.

Gu Lanyue's eyes gleamed with cruel anticipation as he raised his hand and roared,

"Gu Swarm—Explosion!"

And they did.

One after another, the blood-born insects detonated in rapid succession, a chain reaction of fiery bursts erupting against the golden shell.

The hall trembled under the barrage, the heat distorting the air, each blast meant to obliterate the man inside.

But Fang Yuan didn't flinch or panic.

In fact, he couldn't.

Because something inside him had already snapped into place.

Instead of fear, a sharp, electric thrill surged through his veins.

His heart pounded not with dread, but exhilaration.

And then he laughed.

Low at first, almost disbelieving, and then deeper, rising like the crackle before a lightning strike.

It echoed across the shattered hall like a blade drawn from its sheath.

This is it! his mind roared, not with alarm, but with *euphoria*.

A clear, ringing pulse of adrenaline-fueled clarity.

This was the moment.

Cradling Fang Lian gently in his arms, his eyes gleaming like molten gold, he whispered slowly,

"Golden Shell Armor: Third Form... Take Back What's Yours."

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The golden shell instantly brightened up and then it shuddered for a split second.

And then it erupted.

An explosion of inverted force surged outward, magnified thrice over.

All the violent energy poured into the shield was returned into a retaliatory storm.

Light flared like a miniature supernova, hurling shards of mirrored energy outward. The chamber trembled.

Dust and stone rained down as the shockwave cleaved through the barrier walls.

Silence fell, broken only by the ringing in their ears.

From the settling haze of destruction, Fang Yuan stepped forth carrying Fang Lian by his arm, untouched, perfectly fine amidst the ruin.

With a flicker of intent, he summoned the golden System screen.

His gaze flicked briefly toward the corner of his vision, where faint, glowing numerals hovered in the air, visible only to him.

System Points: 17,400

A sharp breath hissed through his teeth. His eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

That low already?

A flicker of tension passed across his face, quickly buried beneath his usual composure.

"Tch... I'll have to start earning points again," he muttered under his breath. "Come on, System—give me a task already."

With a single, decisive thought, his finger tapped the invisible interface.

–5000 System Point deducted!

The numbers bled away like sand in a storm.

+1 Nascent soul realm pill.

In the very next moment, light shimmered in his palm, then solidified.

The pill appeared in his hand, round and rich in aroma.

He didn't hesitate as he tossed it into his mouth and swallowed it dry.

The effect was immediate, like a rush of energy surged through his meridians, cool and forceful like a river thawing in spring.

His depleted core drank it in greedily, stabilizing the turbulence left by the earlier onslaught.

And all the while, Fang Yuan's eyes never stopped moving scanning the wreckage around him.

Gu Lanyue currently looked like a broken marionette, lifeblood pooling beneath him, utterly still save for the shallowest, faltering rise of his chest.

As the one who did the most damage to Fang Yuan, the reflective damage he received had been the highest.

Gu Jian on the side was crawling like a gutted insect, leaving a smeared trail of crimson on the shattered floor, dragging himself inch by agonizing inch towards Gu Lanyue.

Meanwhile Lin Xukong was propped against rubble, breath a ragged, wet gasp.

His eyes, wide and bloodshot, burned with impotent, venomous hatred, fixed unblinkingly on Fang Yuan.

And then there was Lin Pei laying utterly still, unmistakably dead.

Fang Yuan began to walk, slowly, deliberately each step echoing like a war drum struck in a dead man's temple.

The air grew heavier with every footfall, oppressive and thick with dread.

Cradled in one arm, Fang Lian lay unconscious, her breath shallow but steady.

With his free hand, he gently stroked her blood-matted hair, a gesture of haunting tenderness amidst the ruin.

And he was smiling.

That same calm, chilling smile as his gaze locked onto the trio who still clung to life.

Gu Jian, Gu Lanyue, and Lin Xukong, battered, scorched, barely breathing.

He looked at them as one might regard insects under glass.

His voice then cut through the ringing silence, cold and clear.

"You all," Fang Yuan said calmly, his voice carrying like a blade through the smoke-filled air, "should be thanking Sir Gu for that little technique I just used."

His eyes lingered on Gu Lanyue's broken, wheezing form, what was left of the once-proud cultivator crumpled amidst the rubble.

"He taught me the principle," Fang Yuan continued, his smile deepening, voice almost casual. "Quite thoroughly, at that."

And it wasn't even a lie. Not really.

After their last clash, a brutal battle that had ended in a draw, neither side able to claim victory Fang Yuan had walked away with more than bruises.

He had walked away with inspiration.

The moment he returned, he had handed over all clan affairs to his uncle, vanished into seclusion, and spent days in absolute silence, replaying every second of the fight, over and over in his mind.

That cursed rebound technique.

The instantaneous return of force.

To Fang Yuan, it had been perfect clay.

He studied it, deconstructed it and then reforged it.

Not as a simple copy but as an improvement.

Because his creed was simple:

If it's useful... I'll make it mine.

Gu Jian reached his father's side, trembling fingers brushing a bloodied sleeve.

He lifted his head, blood bubbling at his lips.

"Fang... Yuan..." he rasped, the words thick with fluid. "Your... family... is in... danger. If you... spare... me... I'll talk... to... Qin Hai... for... you."

Fang Yuan paused.

A ghost of a smile touched his lips, devoid of warmth. "Oh no," he corrected softly, the calm terrifying. "They aren't and you don't have to."

He took another step, the crunch of debris unnaturally loud.

"First and foremost, I am the Clan Head. If need be... I would sacrifice an arm to save the body." His gaze hardened, glacial.

"But if I see a chance to save both the arm and the body..." He let the implication hang, heavy and ruthless. "...I won't hesitate."

Gu Jian coughed violently, more blood staining the stone. "Wha... what are you... getting at?"

Fang Yuan stared down at him, a flicker of something unreadable in his eyes.

Then it vanished, replaced by finality.

"I think," he murmured, almost to himself, raising his sword, the blade catching the fading, dust-choked light, "I'll let you go down... without knowing."

The sword began its descent, a swift arc aimed at Gu Jian's exposed neck.

WHOOSH-CRACK!

A pressure wave hit first.

Dense, suffocating and radiating pure unleashed power.

The air screamed as if torn.

Mid-swing, Fang Yuan's eyes snapped wide. Instinct screamed louder than thought.

He wrenched his body sideways, a desperate, twisting leap backwards, abandoning his strike.

BOOM!

Where he had stood a heartbeat before, the air fractured like glass.

Dust plumed violently outward in a perfect ring.

And standing within that ring, feet planted on the sundered stone, was a figure, Mid-Stage Nascent Soul Cultivator, Lin Zhaoyue.

Chapter 145: 145- Lin Zhaoyue

Fang Yuan's gaze locked onto Lin Zhaoyue, every muscle coiled. Battle readiness thrummed through him.

Who wouldn't be wary?

The carnage before him was undeniable, her father, Lin Xukong, broken and gasping while her brother lay there, dead.

Lin Zhaoyue lifted her head. Her eyes, wide and glistening, found Fang Yuan.

A tremor ran through her voice, raw with desperate hope. "Husband! You're alive!"

Fang Yuan's stance didn't waver.

Trickery.

How could anyone behold their slaughtered kin and feel anything but rage or grief? This is likely a ploy, a feigned vulnerability to lower my guards.

His expression hardened, suspicion etched into every line.

She saw the cold disbelief in his eyes. A flicker of sadness crossed her face, vanishing as quickly as it came.

Her gaze drifted downwards, settling on her father's ruined form.

She knelt beside him, movements unnervingly graceful.

"Husband," she murmured, her voice softening into something disturbingly intimate, "I came as soon as I heard you were in danger. You know I would."

Her hand reached out, fingers trembling slightly as they brushed Lin Xukong's cheek.

But it wasn't comfort she offered.

Under her touch, the dying patriarch flinched, a choked gasp escaping him, pure and primal fear.

"Dad," Lin Zhaoyue whispered, the word dripping with bitter irony. "It'll be the last time I'll call you that."

Her voice sank to a whisper, a venomous secret poured only into her father's dying ear. "Mom always told me... to respect you. To obey your words."

A brittle smile touched her lips, devoid of warmth. "Even as your other wives carved pieces of her soul away, slice by tiny slice, every single time she crawled back to you."

Her fingers, delicate yet terrifyingly strong, tightened on his cheek. Nails bit deep, drawing tiny beads of blood like crimson tears.

"I wanted to be her good girl. So I listened. Every word. Every cruel command. I became your perfect, silent blade..."

She leaned closer, her breath cold against his skin. The brittle smile vanished, replaced by a terrifying vacancy that promised annihilation. "...because she asked it of me."

Then came the sound. A soft, breathless giggle, utterly incongruous with the scene, bubbling up as if sharing a delightful secret.

It was the sound of sanity fraying beyond repair.

"But this?" Her whisper turned razor-sharp, laced with incredulous, icy fury.

"You dared to aim for my husband?" The giggle died, replaced by a silence more chilling than any scream.

Her eyes, wide and unnervingly bright, locked onto his fading ones, filled with a terrifying blend of triumph and absolute, unshakeable conviction. "Oh, Father... I'm not remotely sorry."

Light flashed.

A subtle, lethal pulse of Nascent Soul energy. Lin Xukong's terrified eyes glazed over forever.

In one fluid motion, Lin Zhaoyue rose.

She turned to Fang Yuan, the haunting sorrow and chilling fury wiped clean.

A brilliant, wide smile bloomed on her face, dazzling, yet utterly devoid of warmth.

Her eyes, however, held an unnerving intensity, a bottomless hunger fixed solely on him.

"Husband," she breathed, taking a step forward, arms opening slightly. "Can I hug you now?"

Fang Yuan remained silent, a statue carved from wariness. His lack of response hung heavy in the blood-scented air.

Lin Zhaoyue's radiant smile flickered, replaced by a desperate intensity. He needs proof. More proof.

Her hand flew to her hair, retrieving her weapon, the jade pin and her spatial ring.

"Husband," she breathed, her voice thick with fervent promise, holding both objects out like sacred offerings.

"See? Here's both my weapon and spatial rings. I'll also swear the oath again with your family heirloom ring. Right here, on their graves if you wish. My life, my soul, bound to yours. Ever and ever." Her eyes, wide and luminous, pleaded for his belief, for his acceptance of her terrifying devotion.

The sight of her sent a jolt through Fang Yuan. She's beyond reason.

His gaze snapped past her, locking onto Gu Jian and Gu Lanyue.

They were loose ends also the clue to his parents dead, he couldn't get rid of them, not yet.

"Restrain them," Fang Yuan commanded, his voice cutting through Lin Zhaoyue's fervent plea like shards of ice.

He didn't look at her, keeping his eyes fixed on the Gu father and son. "Destroy their Dantians."

Lin Zhaoyue's reaction was instantaneous. The desperate hope in her eyes flared into pure, terrifying delight. A dazzling, manic smile split her face. *Husband trusts me! He gives me a task!*

"Yes, Husband!" she chirped, the sound chillingly bright against the backdrop of carnage.

Her focus shifted from supplicant to predator in a heartbeat, her earlier vulnerability vanishing like smoke.

She spun towards the duo, her movements a blur of lethal grace.

The Gu men barely had time to register the command before the crushing weight of a Mid-Stage Nascent Soul's aura slammed into them, pinning them like insects.

Gu Lanyue's shout of protest died in his throat, choked by sheer terror.

Gu Jian managed half a draw of his sword before invisible bands of pure energy coiled around him, snapping bone and spirit.

Lin Zhaoyue didn't physically touch them. She didn't need to.

With a flicker of will, two precise, devastating pulses of energy, sharp as scalpels, heavy as mountains, lanced out.

They struck with surgical accuracy.

Thud Crunch.

Thud Crunch.

The sounds were sickeningly soft, yet echoed with finality.

Gu Jian and Gu Lanyue convulsed, their faces draining of color and twisting in silent agony as the very core of their cultivation, their Dantians, was irrevocably shattered.

Their connection to Qi severed, their power bled out instantly, leaving them broken shells slumped over their mounts, gasping in the sudden, crushing weight of mortality.

Lin Zhaoyue turned back to Fang Yuan, her smile radiant, her hands clean.

The silver ring and jade pin still glinted in her palm.

"Done, Husband!" she announced, her voice bubbling with pride, as if she had just fetched him a cup of tea, not crippled two powerful cultivators for life.

"No more interruptions. Now... about our oath?" She took a step closer, the ring held out like a key to a gilded cage.

Chapter 146: 146- A second Oath.

Just then four massive Saberfang beasts crashed through the remnants of the courtyard wall.

Dust billowed, mixing with the lingering scent of blood.

Before the dust could settle, a figure leapt down from one of the towering Saberfang.

Du Juan, a young woman clad in practical but travel-stained leathers, sprinted forward, her eyes wide with frantic concern.

She skidded to a halt near Lin Zhaoyue, ignoring Fang Yuan completely in her focus on the terrifying woman.

"Matriarch Fang!" Du Juan yelled, her voice tight with a mixture of relief and apprehension. She bowed deeply, almost instinctively. "You're unharmed!"

Fang Yuan's jaw slackened. *Matriarch Fang?*

The title hit him like a physical blow, utterly incongruous with the blood-soaked reality.

His eyes darted between Du Juan's fearful reverence and Lin Zhaoyue's suddenly transformed expression.

Lin Zhaoyue's face flushed a delicate pink.

She waved a dismissive hand, a picture of exaggerated modesty, though the predatory gleam never left her eyes.

"Du Juan! I told you not to call me that in public!" she chided, her voice suddenly light, almost playful.

Yet, the subtle lift of her chin and the satisfied curve of her lips betrayed how much she relished the title.

As she spoke, Lin Zhaoyue casually shifted her weight. Her boot came down squarely on Lin Xukong's already lifeless head.

There was a sickening, wet crunch as bone yielded under her heel. She didn't even glance down.

"You are late, you know," she continued, her tone shifting to one of mild disappointment aimed at Du Juan.

"The main event is already over. I had to deal with... distractions." She gestured vaguely with her blood-spattered hand towards the bodies.

Du Juan flinched, her gaze flickering to the pulped ruin beneath Lin Zhaoyue's boot before snapping back up.

She swallowed hard, her knuckles white where she clenched her fists. "I'm sorry, it was my first time trying to lead the beast," she stammered, her voice trembling slightly. "It was... unexpectedly tough. It took everything to bring them here. I... I missed seeing your glory firsthand." The words sounded rehearsed, a necessary appeasement.

Lin Zhaoyue's expression softened into something resembling sympathy, though it felt as fragile as ice.

"Oh, my poor Du Juan," she crooned. In a sudden, fluid motion, she closed the distance and wrapped her arms around the younger woman in a tight embrace.

Du Juan stiffened instantly, her body rigid with terror.

She didn't dare pull away, her eyes wide and fixed straight ahead, unblinking.

Lin Zhaoyue rested her chin on Du Juan's shoulder, her gaze locking onto Fang Yuan over the girl's rigid form.

"She missed seeing your glory, husband," Lin Zhaoyue murmured, her voice thick with faux sadness.

"Such a shame. But don't worry, Du Juan," she added, tightening the hug until Du Juan gasped slightly, "there will be many, many more opportunities to witness my husband's brilliance. I'll make sure of it."

Fang Yuan watched, a cold dread solidifying in his gut.

The display was horrifyingly intimate, Lin Zhaoyue clinging to Du Juan like a child with a doll, while simultaneously crushing her father's skull and addressing Fang Yuan with possessive fervor.

Lin Zhaoyue finally released Du Juan, who stumbled back half a step, breathing shallowly.

Lin Zhaoyue's attention snapped back to Fang Yuan, her smile returning, bright and unnerving.

"See, husband? My little helper is here too! Everything is falling into place."

She took another deliberate step towards him, her earlier desire for a hug seemingly forgotten in the wake of demonstrating her power and control, yet the obsessive focus remained laser-sharp.

"Now, where were we before the interruption? Ah, yes... the oath." The way she lingered on the word promised nothing good.

Behind her, the Saberfang beasts shifted, their low growls rumbling like distant thunder, punctuating the suffocating silence.

"Du Juan," Fang Yuan called, his voice low but commanding.

She appeared at once, hurrying to his side with hurried steps.

"Yes, Patriarch Fang!" she responded, bowing slightly.

Without a word, he gently handed the unconscious Fang Lian into her waiting arms.

His fingers lingered for a breath longer on the girl's form before he leaned in and asked in a hushed tone:

"Are the Saberfang safe? Why aren't they attacking?"

Du Juan visibly shivered. Her eyes didn't meet his.

Instead, she lifted a trembling finger and pointed wordlessly, toward Lin Zhaoyue.

"Patriarch Fang... I believe only Matriarch Lin knows the answer to that," she said, her voice tight with something that wasn't quite fear... but wasn't far from it either.

Fang Yuan watched her in silence for a brief moment, eyes sharp beneath his calm exterior.

Resourceful and composed.

Even now, stripped of her cultivation, nothing more than a mortal, Du Juan didn't falter.

She didn't panic and with a swift, precise action she tend to Fang Lian.

He murmured under his breath, "I should be more prepared next time..."

Then he turned and walked toward the waiting figure of Lin Zhaoyue.

She was standing still, her eyes bright with excitement, something unspoken flickering just beneath the surface.

Without ceremony, Fang Yuan removed the ring from his left hand, a band of deep obsidian metal, etched faintly with silver filigree.

Ancient patterns of dragon breath and ancestral flame coiled across its surface like living script.

He held it between them, and with a steady breath, infused it with a thread of his qi.

The ring responded to his qi as a soft, golden glow began to bloom within the silver inlay, light weaving through the carvings like breath made visible.

"Place your finger here," he said, pointing to the circle of golden light at its center.

Lin Zhaoyue didn't hesitate at all.

She lifted her hand and pressed her fingertip to the light.

The ring pulsed.

And then, like a heartbeat syncing between two souls a transparent ripple of energy radiated out from the ring, expanding in a perfect sphere around them.

Like sunlight dancing across the surface of still water.

And for that one quiet instant... it felt like the world beyond them had faded out of existence.

Chapter 147: 147- Marry Me [1]

A few minutes later, Fang Yuan lowered his hand from the obsidian ring, the golden light fading like dying embers.

The sphere of isolation dissolved, returning the scent of blood and dust to his senses.

Fang Yuan stared, brows faintly drawn, a flicker of surprise dancing in his eyes.

The ring's verdict was unmistakable and claimed Lin Zhaoyue bore no ill intent toward him.

Opposite him, she tilted her head, a slow, unnerving smile spreading across her blood-flecked face, the smile of a predator who'd just passed an unexpected test.

"So?" she purred, anticipation crackling in her gaze. "Did I pass, husband?"

Fang Yuan let out a slow, controlled breath, the weight of the ring's revelation settling heavily.

No ill intent.... He inclined his head, his voice carefully neutral. "Splendidly so."

Another thing he had also learned by probing through the ring, was the utterly bizarre nature of her control over the Saberfangs.

God knows how, but she had somehow tamed all four monstrous spirit beasts.

Four felt inadequate to commemorate their strength.

Two of the beast pulsed with the raw power of the early Nascent Soul stage, one radiated the deeper resonance of the mid-stage, and the largest, its eyes like smoldering coals, radiated the terrifying aura of the Nascent Soul Peak stage.

When he had questioned how, her answer, verified as absolute truth by the ring, had nearly stopped his heart: "I offered them flowers."

The sheer, terrifying absurdity of it was staggering. Flowers for apex predators.

Instead of answers he was stuck with more questions!

At least she's not an immediate enemy, he thought grimly.

Lin Zhaoyue's smile widened, a flash of genuine, almost childlike triumph before it was swallowed by her usual predatory gleam.

Then, as if struck by a sudden, casual afterthought, she reached into the folds of her stained leathers.

"Oh, and this..." Her hand emerged holding the shimmering, multi-layered Seven Ring Lotus, its petals radiating pure spiritual energy.

She held it out towards Fang Yuan. "Husband, I found..." Her gaze flickered sideways, landing on Du Juan, who stood rigidly beside the unconscious Fang Lian.

A fraction of hesitation, then correction: "...we found it. Du Juan and I."

Fang Yuan accepted the precious herb, its cool weight a stark contrast to the heat of the ruined courtyard.

His eyes met Lin Zhaoyue's, then briefly acknowledged Du Juan's pale, tense face.

"Thank you for the assistance," he stated, his tone formal.

"The Fang Clan will ensure appropriate compensation for your role in its recovery."

Lin Zhaoyue waved a dismissive, blood-crusted hand. "Compensation? We are family, husband. Speaking of your clan..."

She scanned the surrounding devastation, her gaze analytical, missing nothing. "Oh and When I visited the Fang Family estate, I saw ruins, yes. But the dead... they're all outsiders. You did that?"

Fang Yuan gave a curt nod. "I had... assistance."

His eyes briefly touched the distant, kneeling forms of Gu Jian and Gu Lanyue.

Lin Zhaoyue followed his gaze, her head tilting again, a predator assessing prey.

"Ah. Them." Her voice dropped, cold and sharp.

"Husband... you don't want them dead?" Her fingers twitched, the Saberfangs shifting restlessly behind her, low growls vibrating the air.

Fang Yuan didn't flinch. "Not yet. I have some interrogations to do before I kill them."

She gave a slow, almost imperceptible nod. "Answers are valuable. Very well."

Then she turned back to him, the intensity in her eyes flaring back to full force.
"Husband."

This time, she didn't wait for acknowledgment.

In a blur of motion that defied her earlier languidness, she closed the distance between them, stopping mere inches away.

The scent of iron and wild earth clung to her.

Her voice, when she spoke again, dropped the possessive endearment, becoming chillingly direct, laced with steel:

"Clan Head Fang Yuan."

Not 'husband'. Just his name and title, spoken like a command.

"I believe it would be in your clan's paramount interest and your own continued survival that you and I are wed. Here. Now."

The threat hung thick and heavy, unspoken but deafening.

Her posture radiated readiness; a subtle tension in her shoulders, a flicker of command in her eyes towards the massive Saberfangs.

They responded instantly, muscles coiling, heads lowering, focused entirely on Fang Yuan.

The peak-stage beast exhaled a plume of hot, sulfurous breath that washed over him.

Fang Yuan's jaw tightened. He could feel the sheer, overwhelming pressure of the beasts' combined auras, a physical weight pressing against his spirit.

Against one, perhaps... but four? Including a Nascent Soul Peak? It was suicide.

He clicked his tongue, a sound of pure, frustrated calculation.

"Will you grant me no time to consider this... proposal?" he asked, his voice tight, buying milliseconds to think.

"No." Her response was a whip-crack, absolute and final. "Your answer. I need it. This instant."

Before he could react further, her hand shot out, not to strike, but to seize his.

Her fingers, strong and calloused, intertwined with his own in a grip that was both intimate and inescapable.

She pulled his captured hand towards her chest, forcing proximity.

Her gaze locked onto his, the madness momentarily banked, replaced by cold, ruthless pragmatism mixed with possessive fervor.

"Husband," she breathed, the endearment now a weapon, "think. Think clearly. Marry me, and this," she gave a minute jerk of her chin towards the hulking Saberfangs, "becomes your shield. Four Nascent Soul guardians.. And your enemies will drown in their own terror before they reach your gates."

She leaned closer, her voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper that carried unnervingly well. "Along with unrestricted access to all Lin Clan trade routes. Gold. Spirit stones. Rare herbs. Flooding your vaults, lifting your clan from the ashes. Think of your clan's survival, Fang Yuan. Think of its ascension."

Then, the predatory gleam returned, edged with a terrifying possessiveness.

Her free hand rose, not to touch him, but to gesture vaguely towards herself, a dark parody of allure.

"And you," she added, her voice softening into something grotesquely seductive, "gain a wife. Beautiful. Strong. Utterly, devastatingly loyal... to you."

Her eyes held his, promising madness, power, and a gilded cage forged in blood and beast-taming flowers.

"All it requires... is a single word. Yes."

The Saberfangs rumbled, a synchronized, hungry growl that shook the shattered stones at their feet.

The air crackled with Lin Zhaoyue's terrifying blend of ultimatum, temptation, and raw, unstoppable power.

Fang Yuan stood trapped within her grasp, the fate of his clan, and perhaps his own life, balanced on the edge of a single syllable.

Chapter 148: 148- Marry Me [2]

Fang Yuan met Lin Zhaoyue's predatory gaze, the pressure of the Saberfangs' auras like a physical vise.

He forced his voice into a tone of icy disdain, pulling his captured hand back just enough to emphasize the point, though her grip remained iron.

"A marriage sealed in blood and ruin before our dying enemies?" he challenged, his words sharp as shards of ice.

"Is this how the future Matriarch Fang wishes her authority recognized? A hasty oath in a graveyard, witnessed by corpses and captives?" He paused, letting the image of the pulverized Lin Xukong and kneeling Gu father and son duo sink in.

"Your name deserves more than this. Let us return to the ancestral hall. Marry me there, before our living clan elders and the city's nobility... or let them whisper forever that you forced me at saber-point." There, he thought, the cold calculation settling in like frost.

This should hold for now. After all, what woman doesn't crave recognition? What woman wouldn't be tempted by the allure of fame?

If she just gave in to vanity, to the grandeur of being seen as the one destined to marry me, then I could buy time.. days, maybe even weeks. That's enough time for me to maneuver or find a way out of this mess.

Lin Zhaoyue stared at him.

For a heartbeat, her predatory gleam flickered.

Fang Yuan braced himself for her to bite the bait. Or for her to flip and instantly become hostile.

Instead, her eyes widened.

The intense, possessive fervor didn't dim instead it shifted.

The cold pragmatism vanished, replaced by pure, unadulterated, terrifying delight.

"YES!" she exclaimed, the sound startlingly loud in the ruined courtyard.

It wasn't a shout of anger, but a cry of pure, unhinged joy.

She bounced slightly on the balls of her feet, the motion grotesquely childlike amidst the carnage. "Husband! You're absolutely right! Why wait?"

Fang Yuan's carefully constructed composure cracked. His brows shot up, genuine shock freezing him for a critical second. *What?*

Lin Zhaoyue beamed at him, her blood-flecked face radiant. "Authority? Recognition? Gossip?"

She waved her free hand dismissively, scattering droplets of blood.

"What does any of that matter compared to you? If you want the ancestral hall, fine! We'll rebuild it after! But the marriage? The oath? The binding of you to me?"

Her grip on his hand became almost painfully tight, pulsing with frantic energy. "That happens now. Right here. Who needs stuffy elders and simpering nobles as witnesses? We have better!"

She spun, dragging Fang Yuan slightly with her, her free arm sweeping out dramatically towards the hulking Saberfangs.

"Behold! The most magnificent wedding guests! They understand true power! True devotion! They will witness me claim you, and they'll witness me bind to you!"

She pointed next at Du Juan, who flinched violently.

"Du Juan! She's the guardian you are going to raise! She's practically family already! She'll stand here as my attendant and also be a witness!"

Her finger then jabbed towards the near dead Gu duo.

"And them! Our honored captives! Perfect witnesses to the dawn of our union! Let them see the futility of opposing us!"

She turned back to Fang Yuan, her eyes blazing with manic triumph, utterly devoid of any concern for legitimacy, appearances, or power plays beyond possessing him.

"You see, husband? You worry about whispers? Let them whisper! Let them scream! All that matters is that you are mine. Here. Now. Before the beasts, the blood, and the broken! It's perfect! So much more... intimate... than some drafty old hall."

She leaned in, her voice dropping to a feverish whisper that sent chills down his spine, her breath warm against his ear.

"Say the words, Fang Yuan. Bind yourself to me. Right now. In this moment we made together. Or..."

Her gaze flickered meaningfully towards the largest Saberfang, whose lips peeled back in a silent snarl, revealing fangs longer than daggers.

The unspoken threat vibrated in the air, sharper than any blade. "...our witnesses might get impatient."

Fang Yuan stood frozen, his clever gambit lying in shattered ruins at his feet.

He hadn't appealed to a power-hungry matriarch.

He had handed a justification to a person whose only hunger was for him.

Time hadn't been bought instead it had just run out in the most horrifyingly literal way possible.

The ancestral hall was irrelevant.

The nobility meant nothing.

All that existed in Lin Zhaoyue's world was this ruined courtyard, her monstrous beasts, and the absolute, immediate need to make Fang Yuan hers.

The gilded cage wasn't just closing.... she was demanding he weld the lock shut himself, right this second, surrounded by the evidence of her madness.

The sulfurous breath of the peak-stage Saberfang washed over Fang Yuan, hot and reeking of carrion.

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes burned into his, a vortex of manic joy and absolute, unwavering demand.

Her grip on his hand was a shackle forged in madness.

The weight of four Nascent Soul beasts pressed down on him.

His clever ploy lay in ruins, shattered by the sheer, terrifying singularity of her obsession.

Legitimacy? Authority? She doesn't even crave a throne!

A glacial calm settled over Fang Yuan, colder than the obsidian ring on his finger.

The frantic calculations ceased.

The desperate search for an escape route vanished.

He looked past the blood-flecked radiance of her face, past the monstrous witnesses, to the ruins, to the unconscious form of Fang Lian cradled by a trembling Du Juan.

Survival. Ascendancy. These were the only currencies left.

He met her feverish gaze with the steady, assessing look of a general surveying a battlefield he'd unexpectedly won through catastrophic losses.

"Very well, Lin Zhaoyue." His voice cut through the tension, clear, cold, and utterly devoid of affection, yet resonant with finality.

"If a binding witnessed by ruin and beasts is your desire... then we shall pledged our wedding vows here."

Lin Zhaoyue's breath hitched. Triumph, pure and feral, blazed in her eyes.

"Husband!" she breathed, the word a caress and a brand.

Chapter 149: 149- Marry Me [3]

Fang Yuan took a deep breath, the air thick with sulfur and blood.

Lin Zhaoyue's grip was a brand on his wrist, her eyes shining with rapturous anticipation.

"Before we begin... there's something I must confess," he began, his voice taut but steady.

Lin Zhaoyue leaned in, her smile sharp as a dagger.

"Mmmhmm? Confess to me, husband? How delicious." Her free hand traced a possessive line down his arm.

"I currently have... a very likely feud with the royal family."

She nodded without hesitation.

"I've already verified the rumors. They're not quite true. Your brother is on the run after thwarting the Crown Prince's plan to harvest a grade four weapon. Not because he kidnapped the third Princess."

"A... heaven grade?" Fang Yuan blurted out.

Hell—his own sword barely scraped into grade three, and it still cut just fine. And the Crown Prince was about to have a heaven grade weapon?

Lin Zhaoyue leaned in, her tone almost conspiratorial. "It happened because the Third Princess was showing your brother around the palace."

Fang Yuan's brows knit. *How in the nine hells did Fang Tian even step foot in the palace, let alone...?*

She pressed on, her voice lilting. "My 'friend' told me she saw the heaven grade weapon fly out mid-refinement and... attach itself to Fang Tian."

Then poof he vanished. Probably the sword's doing. The Crown Prince blamed the Third Princess, took her captive, and laid the rest of it at your brother's feet. So, if you want to clear your name..."

She smiled sweetly, "...raiding the Crown Prince's estate might be your only option."

Fang Yuan swallowed, the sound audible.

But before the weight of that settled, she laughed, light and ringing, the sound entirely out of place with the subject.

"Don't worry, husband! We can do this. This four nascent beasts, you and me, together we're unstoppable!"

But that didn't quite register in his head, instead a sliver of cold relief cut through Fang Yuan's tension.

So the Third Princess wasn't kidnapped by Tian. He was just framed.

The "crime" itself meant little to him as survival was the only currency that mattered.

His gaze swept back to Lin Zhaoyue, standing amidst the carnage.

What she offered was more than marriage, it was an instant, terrifying alliance.

One that could sate his hunger for stability, and arm him with the strength he desperately needed.

This, he realized with chilling clarity, is the only shield strong enough right now.

Having decided, Fang Yuan turned fully to her, the movement deliberate.

He reached out and grasp her other hand.

His touch was firm, purposeful, devoid of warmth but charged with intent.

Her breath hitched, eyes widening with rapture at his sudden compliance.

"Alright then," he stated as he hold out the family heirloom ring in his right hand, his voice cutting through the ruined courtyard's silence.

"Do you vow that you will, here and now, be the Matriarch of the Fang family?"

Lin Zhaoyue's reaction was instantaneous.

A peal of laughter burst from her, sharp and bright as shattering glass, echoing off the broken walls.

"Oh, husband!" she gushed, swaying closer, her eyes crinkling with manic delight. "So silly! So adorably formal!"

She squeezed his hands with bone-creaking force, her laughter subsiding into a breathless, adoring giggle.

"That's not how the binding vow goes! Not for us!"

Before Fang Yuan could react, she reversed their grip, her smaller hands engulfing his with startling strength.

One hand clamped around his wrist like an iron manacle, while the other guided his fingers with terrifying possessiveness.

She leaned in, her lips almost brushing his ear, her voice dropping to a low, intimate whisper that vibrated with feverish intensity.

It wasn't a suggestion. Instead it was a command wrapped in silk.

"Repeat after me," she breathed, the warmth of her breath ghosting over his skin.

Her eyes, locked onto his, held no room for refusal, only an ecstatic, all-consuming hunger. "I, Fang Yuan..."

Her grip on his hand tightened, physically forcing his fingers to mimic hers as she slowly, deliberately raised his hand towards her own.

"...take you, Lin Zhaoyue..." she whispered, guiding his trembling (or was it resisting?) fingers towards the ring.

Her own hand trembled, but not with nerves, with barely contained euphoria.

Her gaze never wavered from his face, drinking in every flicker of his expression as she manipulated his hand.

"...to be my wedded wife..." Her voice was a caress and a brand.

She positioned his thumb and forefinger around the cold band.

Her free hand came up, not to help, but to cradle his captive hand against her chest, over her pounding heart, as if forcing him to feel the frantic rhythm of her devotion. "...to hold and to cherish..."

She guided his hand, inexorably, towards the ring finger of her left hand.

Her touch was possessive, claiming his action as much as the ring would claim her.

"...in ruin and in reign..." she murmured, her whisper gaining fervor, "...bound by blood and bone..."

Her eyes blazed, reflecting the carnage around them as if it were candlelight.
"...forsaking all others..."

The final words were a hiss of absolute possession. "...until death itself unmakes us."

She paused, her breath coming in short, excited gasps, her gaze burning into his, demanding he speak the words that would seal his fate, her hand poised to force the ring onto her finger with his.

Fang Yuan followed, his voice, cold and deliberate, echoed Lin Zhaoyue's feverish whispers.

Each vow "bound by blood and bone... forsaking all others... until death itself unmakes us" fell from his lips like shards of ice, precise and devoid of warmth.

Yet, he spoke each of them. Word for word.

His fingers, guided by her iron grip but not resisting, slid the Fang Family heirloom ring onto her finger.

It settled against her skin and a visible tremor ran through Lin Zhaoyue, filled with pure, uncontainable ecstasy.

Her eyes widened, pupils swallowing the irises, fixed on his face with terrifying rapture.

Before the echo of his final syllable faded, she surged forward.

"My turn!" she gasped, the words tumbling out in a frantic, breathless rush, a chaotic counterpoint to his measured coldness.

"I Lin Zhaoyue take you Fang Yuan husband mine forever mine only mine blood yours bone yours life yours death yours never let go never leave always always TOGETHER!"

Then, she desperately lunge towards him.

Her hands flew to his face, fingers digging into his jaw, tilting his head down.

Her eyes, blazing with manic triumph and raw hunger, locked onto his.

There was no request, only demand, as she pressed her lips against his.

Fang Yuan didn't evade.

He didn't freeze.

In a move that surprised even himself, a spark ignited in the glacial depths of his eyes.

He met her.

His lips parted in deliberate, calculated indulgence.

He kissed her back.

One arm snaked around her waist, pulling her hard against him, crushing her blood-stained robes against his own.

The other hand came up and cradle the back of her head, fingers tangling roughly in her hair, anchoring her to him.

The embrace was fierce, almost violent in its intimacy, sealing the vows spoken amidst ruin.

Lin Zhaoyue melted into it with a muffled whimper of pure, unadulterated bliss.

Her frantic grip on his jaw softened, replaced by trembling fingers tracing his cheekbone.

Chapter 150: 150- Sealed Pact [1]

Coldwind City:

Fang Family Estate, Phoenix Soul Pavilion

The air in the Phoenix Soul Pavilion thrummed with restrained power as the Fang Elders filed in, their robes whispering against polished jade floors.

Some wore expressions of distinct irritation while others wore an expression of acceptance.

Glowing sigils on the high ceiling cast shifting light over their stern faces.

Elder Ra slumped into his seat with a theatrical groan, running a hand through his disheveled hair.

"Ugh! I just paid for the spirit stones for my slot in the Eastern Ravine cave," he grumbled, voice tight with frustration.

"Didn't even get to see my cave before the sudden call. Clan Head better reimburse me for this... disruption."

Elder Long, seated nearby, sniffed disdainfully.

His posture was rigid, chin held high. "Hmph. How ungrateful you are. Look at me," he retorted, smoothing his immaculate sleeve.

"I had paid for my hourly usage too. Yet when the Clan Head's summons echoed, I departed instantly. No complaint. Duty before cultivation. The ideal cultivator the clan head desperately needs right now."

Before Elder Ra could form a spluttering reply, a sharp voice cut through from the back benches.

"Hey! You imbecile!" Elder Joshua leaned forward, his weathered face pinched.

"Who are you calling ungrateful? Don't spin tales! You just finished your entire hour! And the time you exited just happened to be when the summons came. Convenient timing, Long!"

Elder Long didn't flinch.

A smug, infuriatingly serene smile touched his lips. He waved a dismissive hand.

"Perception, dear Joshua, perception. The fact remains, the Clan Head called, and I answered. Promptly. Unlike some who whine about reimbursement." He cast a sidelong glance at Ra.

Murmurs began to ripple through the pavilion.

But the underlying tension was palpable.

Their bickering source of their collective envy and frustration was due to the new cultivation caves recently carved into the Eastern Ravine cliffs, and the Clan Head's personal project.

Using methods the elders could only whisper about as 'black magic', he had somehow summoned spirit wells within every caves.

These wells pulsed with pure, concentrated energy, offering temporary but immense boosts to focus and spiritual pressure – invaluable, especially for...

All eyes, sharp as daggers, burning with barely veiled desires, snapped toward one man.

Fang Chen.

He lounged in a prime seat near the head of the pavilion, the picture of unbothered authority.

That unshakable calm of his wasn't just composure, it was provocation.

The faint curl of his lips said he knew exactly what power he held.

After all, he was the only living uncle of the current Clan Head... and the Fang Family's newest Golden Core cultivator.

"What are you all gawking at? Show some respect, I'm going to be the new Grand Elder," Fang Chen announced, leaning back with deliberate nonchalance, as though the title sat on him like a perfectly tailored robe.

The smug curve of his lips said he believed this was his grand moment.

Yet the gleam in the elders' eyes wasn't for his posturing, it was for the golden core aura radiating from him in steady waves.

And his breakthrough was a living proof, a blazing declaration, that Qi Transformation was not their ceiling.

The path climbed higher, and if someone like he could ascend, so could they.

A sharp flick snapped him out of it.

"—Ow! Ow! Sister, stop!" he yelped, jerking to the side.

Jingyi stood there, fingers poised for another jab, a mischievous glint in her eye.

Her dark hair was slightly disheveled, stray strands escaping their pins, likely the aftermath of one of her "experiments."

A faint whiff of burnt herbs and singed fabric clung to her, the telltale perfume of an alchemist who treated explosions as part of the craft.

"Your nephew will be here soon, keep your voice down," Jingyi's tone cut through the murmurs, sharp but measured.

Her gaze swept the pavilion, pinning each elder in place. "And you all should know... now is not exactly the time where we should be celebrating. The Tharz Kingdom

breathes down our necks because of what my second nephew did. So every new shred of strength we gain matters to us right now."

"You're right... Mother-in-law."

The new voice drifted from the front, smooth, feminine, and laced with a confidence that silenced the room.

"But you're also very wrong."

Every head turned, searching for the speaker, the weight of her presence heavy enough to make the air feel just a touch colder.

When they saw her, the air itself seemed to still.

It wasn't just one thing that struck them, it was everything.

The way she addressed Jingyi as mother-in-law along with the unflinching audacity in saying, "You're right... and you're also wrong."

And then, above all else, the crushing weight that spilled from her in the next breath.

A Nascent Soul Realm aura.

They had felt such power before, from Fang Yuan himself... but this?

This was no pale echo.

This was the same overwhelming presence, perhaps even broader and heavier.

"Wh—what do you mean?" Fang Jingyi stammered, the words slipping out before she could stop them.

The woman's gaze swept over the room, calm yet sharp enough to cut.

"First," she said evenly, "every ounce of strength we can muster counts. Which is why... Fang Yuan and I are married."

A ripple of stunned silence swept through the pavilion.

"You mean... you're going to be married, right?" Fang Chen leaned forward, brows furrowed, his tone almost pleading for clarification.

Judging by the shifting, bewildered expressions of the other elders, they were all hoping the same.

But Lin Zhaoyue only shook her head, once, sharply, her eyes gleaming with a brightness that was far too intense to be mere joy.

"No, no, it is as I say," she breathed, and the smile curling her lips was sweet... yet just a touch too sharp at the edges.

"We're married. Already. Because, as Mother-in-law so wisely said, every bit of strength counts."

She clasped her hands together, leaning forward as if to share some delicious secret, her voice lilting with a giddy, almost feverish delight.

"And since I became Fang Yuan's wife today... that makes today a day worth celebrating, doesn't it?"

The way she said wife clung to the air like the scent of blood on silk, beautiful, but unsettling.

And then, from the back, a calm, unhurried voice cut through the air.

"Fang Zhaoyue... as the new matriarch, that's not how you should act or deliver important news. Come and sit here with me."

It was Fang Yuan.

The name, Fang Zhaoyue rang in her ears like a divine bell. Sharing his family name?

Her breath caught, and a shiver of pure, unrestrained excitement rippled through her.

Her hands curled into trembling fists at her sides, as if she could barely contain the glee threatening to spill over.

The elders, meanwhile, felt the weight of his words in an entirely different way.

For the Clan Head to address her so... it was as good as a public acknowledgement, a tacit seal on everything this new woman had just declared.

The shock was so great that their earlier irritation, at being abruptly pulled from their cultivation evaporated without a trace.

Not a single one dared speak against it.

The hall was silent, save for the echo of that one, undeniable truth: the Clan Head had consented.