

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

## **#Chapter 171- BT [2] - Read Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?! Chapter 171- BT [2]**

### **Chapter 171: 171- BT [2]**

"Fang Chen," Fang Yuan called, his voice steady yet tinged with that warmth only reserved for kin.

Before long, his uncle appeared. After the usual greetings, Fang Yuan leaned back, folding his hands behind his back with a relaxed air. "How is the spirit pond doing?"

Fang Chen chuckled, his eyes bright. "It is thriving, Clan Head. To be honest... the spirit gathering formation you had me set there is so potent that even I, an old man, find myself wishing I could stay inside forever. Cultivating within it feels like bathing in pure springwater."

At that, Fang Yuan's lips curved into a smile, half pride, half amusement. "The ingredients for those flags aren't exactly rare. If you truly wish for it, Uncle, I can prepare another set for you."

But then his words trailed off.

His smile froze for an instant as he fell silent, gaze flicking absently toward the horizon.

Inside, he was speechless. *Wait. Didn't I also obtain a superior spirit gathering formation?? How did I forget about that...*

A helpless sigh stirred in his chest, though he quickly smoothed it away, leaving only the composed, benevolent air of the perfect Clan Head.

Fang Chen, unaware of the whirlwind of thoughts running through his nephew's mind, asked with a hint of curiosity, and perhaps a little desire. "You can prepare a set for me?"

Fang Yuan's lips curved into a calm smile.

"It won't be as potent as the one here," he said, his gaze briefly sweeping over the spirit pond, "after all, this one sits within a spirit pond itself."

Fang Chen nodded thoughtfully, then hesitated before speaking again. "Clan Head... if you truly can prepare a second formation, may I be so shameless as to request it be placed in the cultivation caves we have? Even a little extra spirit energy in the surroundings would be... greatly appreciated."

Fang Yuan's smile deepened, warm yet controlled, a mixture of pride and quiet amusement.

He regarded his uncle for a long moment, noting the sincerity in the elder's eyes, before giving a subtle nod.

"Why not keep it for yourself? Can you tell me why?" Fang Yuan asked, his voice calm but carrying a hint of amusement, the corner of his lips tugging upward.

Fang Chen blinked, a faint blush creeping across his face.

"Well... the spirit energy here is already so abundant, and... I thought, perhaps, others could benefit as well," he admitted, a touch of humility threading through his words.

Fang Yuan's gaze softened, though a spark of teasing danced in his eyes.

"Huh. So you're not selfish, then. Very noble of you," he said, his tone light, yet carrying an undertone that suggested he was already thinking several steps ahead.

He paused, tapping a finger against his chin. "But..." His lips curved into a faint, sly smile. "If I were in your shoes, I might've just hoarded it all for myself. You'd be surprised how much easier life gets with a bit more spirit energy."

Fang Chen chuckled nervously, scratching the back of his head. "I... suppose I could have..."

Fang Yuan shook his head slightly, amusement flickering across his face. "Ah, well. Since you're this generous, I'll make the second set for you. But don't expect me to go easy if you suddenly decide to get greedy."

Fang Chen laughed, relief and gratitude mingling in his expression. "Of course, Clan Head. I'd never..."

Fang Yuan gave a small, composed nod, a faint, almost imperceptible smile tugging at his lips. "Good. Now, I'm going into seclusion. I'll prepare the spirit gathering formation for you once I emerge. In the meantime... I expect you to do the usual."

"Nephew! You can't do this to me!" Fang Chen exclaimed, throwing up his hands, his voice a mix of frustration and amusement.

Fang Yuan's laughter, light and teasing, carried softly through the air. "You'll survive, Uncle. Don't worry."

And with that, he vanished, flowing like a shadow into the depths of the spirit mine that cradled the pond, leaving Fang Chen standing there, hands still raised, a mixture of exasperation and admiration on his face.

Fang Chen shook his head, letting out a long, measured sigh, and drew in a few deep breaths, trying to steady himself.

He straightened his posture, then turned toward a group of Fang family guards standing nearby.

"I want you to go inform Elder Jingyi that Protocol 2A is active once again," he instructed, his tone calm but carrying an undercurrent of quiet authority.

The guard inclined his head respectfully and slowly disappeared from view, moving with disciplined efficiency.

Fang Chen's gaze drifted back to the land they were tilling, eyes scanning the earth, the workers, the tools strewn about.

His lips pressed into a thin line, and a faint furrow appeared between his brows.

"You're still like a kid, Fang Yuan..." he muttered under his breath, the words laced with exasperation. "So many reckless, irresponsible actions all at once... it's such a mess cleaning up after you."

He rubbed the bridge of his nose, letting out another sigh as a dull headache began to thrum behind his temples.

Fang Chen rubbed at his shoulders, stretching the stiff muscles along his back, letting out a long, slow breath as he surveyed the enormous pit before him.

The royal family still hadn't sent a single messenger regarding the kidnapped third princess. The weight of uncertainty pressed on him, subtle but persistent.

This huge expanse of dug earth, what purpose did it serve? He and Elder Joshua had no clue. Only Fang Yuan could know, and now the young master had vanished into seclusion without a single word.

And of course... He was certain of it. Fang Yuan had undoubtedly probably left a trail of unfinished paperworks in his wake.

Fang Chen cracked his neck, stretching his bones deliberately, and allowed a wry smile to tug at the corner of his lips.

He pivoted and strode toward Elder Joshua, his gaze sharp, calculating, playful even.

"If I'm going to be in a pickle..." he mused under his breath, voice low, almost amused. "Might as well have two of us in it, right?"

His eyes flicked toward Elder Joshua like a predator sizing up its partner in mischief.

## Chapter 172: 172- BT [3]

Fang Yuan arrived at the mouth of the spirit mine, the air faintly cool as the earth seemed to hum with hidden energy.

The two guards straightened the moment they saw him. Fang Yuan gave them a courteous nod first, his calm voice cutting the silence.

"Anyone inside?"

"Not yet, Clan Head," one of the guards replied with a bow.

"Good. Make sure no one enters until I emerge."

The guards answered with a firm nod, their expressions solemn.

Without another word, Fang Yuan turned and strode deeper into the mine.

The tunnels stretched on, a labyrinth of stone veins glistening faintly with traces of spiritual energy.

His footsteps echoed softly until, at last, he emerged into the chamber that cradled the spirit pond.

The moment he stepped within its range, the atmosphere shifted. The spiritual energy surged, dense and intoxicating, washing over him in a tide so much richer than the outside world.

It pressed against his skin like cool spring water, threading into his pores, into his marrow.

The feeling was calming, ethereal and almost divine.

Closing his eyes, Fang Yuan released a pulse of qi, sweeping it through the cavern.

The space was empty, no other presence lingered here but his own. Satisfied, he exhaled slowly, his focus sharpening.

From his sleeve, he withdrew a small bundle of formation flags. His fingers moved with practiced precision as he placed each one: a defensive formation, a sound-repelling barrier, and an invisibility shroud.

Each flag sank into place, threads of light weaving into the pond's aura until the chamber seemed to fold away from the outside world entirely.

It took nearly an hour before everything was complete. When the last flag dimmed and locked into position, Fang Yuan stepped into the pond's center, the rippling qi curling around him like mist.

All that remained in his mind now was the breakthrough.

*Surely... with the Hollow Spirit Pill, I will be able to step into the Hollow Spirit Realm.*

There was no doubt about it in his heart.

He sank into a lotus position, back straight, expression serene yet burning with determination.

With deliberate care, he drew out the jade bottle he had stored earlier. The cool weight of it in his palm seemed to thrum with promise.

Uncorking it, he withdrew the Hollow Spirit Pill. Its surface glimmered faintly, and the instant it touched his lips, a wave of sensation washed over him.

First came the taste, like savoring countless exquisite desserts at once, sweet layers unfolding in perfect harmony.

But the moment his teeth sank into the pill, everything changed.

The sweetness vanished, replaced by a sudden rush, sharp and clean, like drawing in the first breath atop a snowy peak, crisp, biting, and utterly invigorating.

And then came the flood.

The pill dissolved, and spirit energy erupted like a storm within him.

Extreme, violent and potent beyond his expectation. His body trembled, sweat beading instantly along his brow as though he stood against a crashing waterfall.

The sheer force of it threatened to tear through him, yet he dared not open his mouth, not even to gasp.

One slip, and that energy would scatter, wasted.

Grinding down every fragment, he forced the remnants into his core, his will as unyielding as steel.

He clamped down on the surging tide and began the arduous task of refining it, absorbing it, claiming it as his own.

The Hollow Spirit Pill's energy was not a river to be diverted; it was a tsunami intent on scouring him clean.

Fang Yuan's veins felt like they were filled with molten lead and lightning.

Every meridian screamed in protest as the raw, unrefined power of the pill crashed through them, threatening to burst his channels wide open.

His face, once serene, was now a mask of strain. Teeth gritted, tendons standing out on his neck, he focused every ounce of his will on the foundational cycling technique of his clan.

It was a simple, robust method, designed to be an unyielding anvil upon which spiritual power could be hammered into obedience.

**Grind the energy, compress the energy and absorb as many as you can.**

The mantra became his entire world. He was a man clinging to a cliff face by his fingernails in a hurricane.

The initial, violent surge of the pill began to slow, its wild energy reluctantly bending to his will, funneling into his core to feed the radiant, cross-legged Nascent Soul within his dantian.

The mini version of himself glowed brighter, its form becoming more solid, more real.

It was reaching its absolute peak, a state of perfection he had never before achieved.

A flicker of triumph, hot and heady, rose in his chest.

*It's working. I can do this.*

It was in that moment of premature pride that the first true test began.

The excessive energy from the pill had been absorbed, but the process had super-saturated his spiritual pathways.

The real effect of the Hollow Spirit Pill wasn't just raw power.

It was a catalyst, a key designed to violently unlock a higher state of being.

It began to vibrate at a frequency that resonated not with his body, but with the space around it.

The air in the sealed cavern warped.

A low hum, felt more than heard, pressed against his eardrums. The glistening walls of the spirit mine seemed to waver like a mirage.

The spiritual mist from the pond didn't just swirl; it fractured into impossible geometric patterns before dissolving back into chaos.

Fang Yuan's eyes flew open, but he wasn't seeing the cavern. He was seeing the seams of the cavern.

Hair-thin, black lines etched themselves across his vision, the faint stresses in the fabric of local space itself.

The Hollow Spirit Pill was doing its job: it was forcing him to perceive the Void, whether he was ready or not.

A cold, sharp terror, entirely different from the pain of overflowing energy, lanced through him.

This was too vast, too abstract.

He was a man of substance, of blood and bone and measurable power.

This was the opposite. This was nothingness. This was the end of all things.

His breath hitched. The meticulous cycling of his energy faltered.

**No. No, no, no. Focus!** he screamed at himself internally.

But it was too late. The first heart demon, born of his fundamental flaw, his inability to control his terror in the face of the incomprehensible sank its claws into his fractured concentration.

## **Chapter 173: 173- BT [4]**

The hum of the mine vanished. The ache in his meridians faded. The cold stone beneath him became soft sheets.

A familiar, forgotten smell filled his nostrils: the sterile scent of hospital air, tinged with antiseptic.

He was lying down. His body felt weak, frail, as if even the act of breathing required borrowed strength.

Behind his eyelids, a pale, sterile glow pressed down, a ceiling lamp's flat fluorescence.

Then came a voice.

A woman's voice, trembling, thick with tears. A voice he hadn't heard in thirty years. His mother's voice.

"...the doctors say he's showing signs of waking up—", she suddenly reacted.

"Oh, honey... can you hear me?"

Fang Yuan's lashes fluttered, and through the haze of light he saw them, two figures at his bedside.

A woman and a man. His parents.

"You've been asleep for so long... the car accident... we thought we'd lost you..." Her words broke apart as sobs overtook her.

She leaned down, clutching him desperately, tears spilling as if to anchor herself to the sight of her son's open eyes.

Fang Yuan's thoughts wavered, a haze tightening around his mind.

*Car accident? A coma?*

*Thirty years... thirty years of clawing his way up through blood and fire, of cultivating in defiance of Heaven, of learning to bear the weight of a clan upon his shoulders... Could it all be nothing more than the fevered dream of a broken brain?*

*It's just a dream, a voice whispered in the dark. None of it was real. You never died. You never transmigrated. Just... let go. Wake up. Go home. Is this not what you dreamed of?*

The notion sank its claws into him, heavy and sweet. The temptation was not a stream but a vast, inexorable ocean, dragging him under.

To abandon the crushing burden of vigilance, the endless anticipation of ambush from the shadows, the suffocating calculus of power and survival...

And instead, to return to the quiet warmth of a simple life. To his family. To the laughter and embraces that once defined his world.

Yet his heart rebelled.

Every fiber of him ached to move, to lift his arms, to touch his mother's tear-streaked face, to wipe them away with trembling hands.

But his body lay unresponsive, as though shackled by invisible chains.



Still, his mother seemed to sense his desperate struggle.

A gentle smile softened her face as she reached out, clasping his arm with warmth that cut through the haze.

Leaning close, she whispered, her voice a balm against the storm in his chest:

"It's alright, son. Your father and I aren't going anywhere."

For a fleeting moment, Fang Yuan felt at home.

Warmth, family, the comfort of belonging, he almost let himself believe it. *Perhaps... perhaps the last thirty years were nothing but a dream. This... this is where I truly belong.*

His drifting thoughts were abruptly shattered. A jolt ran through him.

Something was wrong. Terribly wrong.

His father, his real father, had long since died. It was a mining accident. So who was this man wearing his father's face?

And he himself, the fall... twenty stories straight into the pavement. How could he possibly have survived that, only to enter a coma? What do you mean car accident?

The illusion buckled. The warmth bled away into something sticky and hot, blood. The scene shifted violently. He was sprawled on the ground, dust choking his throat as he coughed.

Confusion cut deep. *Survived the fall? No... impossible.*

Another jolt, sharper this time. Memory surged. He had died. Truly, utterly died. He remembered the nothingness that came after, the cold, absolute void.

That was no coma, or a manifestation of a dream. It was pure ending beyond endings.

The illusion trembled.

"You never died..." the heart demon whispered, oily and insidious.

"LIES!" The roar did not tear from his throat, but from the depths of his soul.

Fang Yuan knew. He had tasted True Death, felt its cold signature etched into his very being.

He had crossed into its void, only to be flung back into existence by some unfathomable twist of fate.

That was his comprehension. That was the truth the Hollow Spirit Pill was forcing him to confront, to carve into his soul.

The Void was no mere emptiness. It was the other side of existence itself, the silence after the final note, the darkness that granted meaning to light.

And Fang Yuan... he was among the rare few who had been there. Who had returned.

The ground beneath him fractured like brittle glass, shards of illusion scattering into nothingness.

Fang Yuan's body convulsed in the spirit pond, veins alight with wild, uncontrollable energy.

Yet his eyes snapped open, wide, blazing with a clarity that cut sharper than any blade.

"I HAVE DIED!" His voice thundered into the cave, ragged but unyielding.

"I have faced the true Void, and it did not claim me! You dare show me this pitiful shadow? This illusion? I have seen the real thing!"

The words were not just defiance, they were truth. Carved into his soul.

That truth became the key. He no longer fled from the memory of death, he embraced it.

The emptiness that had once terrified him now became his foundation.

He understood the Void, because he had been Void. He had become nothing... and from that nothingness, he was reborn.

His will surged, colder and sharper than ever before, infused with the certainty of a man who had nothing left to lose.

The chaotic flood of energy no longer whipped him like a storm, it bent, subdued beneath his command.

Fang Yuan's awareness turned inward, to the radiant Nascent Soul that hovered within his dantian, a miniature version of himself, perfect and brilliant, pulsing with the culmination of decades of cultivation.

A flawless creation. A symbol of mastery.

And now, the final chain.

To step into the Void, he could not remain a solid thing of spirit.

He had to shatter what he was, to dissolve and remake himself anew.

Gathering every drop of the Hollow Spirit Pill's raging energy, every fiber of his own will, every insight carved into him by death itself, Fang Yuan aimed it all inward.

His soul voice cut through the storm like a blade of finality:

"Break."

## **Chapter 174: 174- BT [5]**

**CRACK.**

The radiant Nascent Soul shattered like fragile glass.

Agony unlike any physical torment tore through him. The pain was beyond anything physical.

For it was the unmaking of his very spiritual self.

Fang Yuan's physical body convulsed, slumping forward, more blood leaking from his nose and ears.

The light in the cavern died, as if the source had been extinguished.

For a full second, there was only chaos and him slowly losing his consciousness.

But Fang Yuan's will did not vanish. It coiled back, sharp and unyielding, honed across two lives, one of failure, one of a cautious survival.

He was not just a man in that instant, but a single, stubborn point of awareness adrift in the wreckage of his own spirit.

*From emptiness, form, the thought rang in him. From stillness, motion.*

He began to gather the pieces. Not to put them back together as they were, but to weave them into something new.

Each glittering fragment of his former soul was a star, and he was the gravity that pulled them into a new constellation.

He didn't force the fragments instead, He guided them. He allowed the fragments to drift and settle, not into a solid form, but into a shimmering, ethereal outline of his shape.

It was semi-transparent, a being of potential energy and spatial resonance.

A hollow silhouette of himself, translucent and ethereal, rippling with spatial resonance.

Not spirit, not body, but something in-between, an emptiness that invited power, a vessel born of Void.

A Void Spirit.

As it settled into place within his dantian, the external world reacted.

The warping of space around him intensified, no longer a chaotic byproduct but an extension of his new being.

The thin black lines he'd seen earlier now glowed with silver light, and with a thought, he could feel them, could feel the texture of the space around him.

He had done it.

The violent spiritual tempest subsided. The warping of space smoothed out, leaving the cavern still.

The only sound was the drip of water and Fang Yuan's ragged, steadying breaths.

He slowly pushed himself upright. His body was a wreck, covered in a film of blood and impurity expelled during the tribulation. He felt utterly drained, hollowed out.

But as he closed his eyes and looked inward, he saw it. The Void Spirit, a serene, ghostly twin to himself, sat in his dantian.

It was calming and felt infinite.

Powerful in a way that was silent and absolute.

With a mere flicker of intent, he could feel them, the texture of existence itself, pliable, malleable under his perception.

Slowly, he straightened, every bone aching, his skin slick with expelled impurities, his frame trembling from exhaustion.

He looked like a broken man on the edge of collapsing.

He opened his eyes and raised a hand. He didn't grab for spiritual energy. He reached for the space in front of him.

His fingers didn't just move through air, they moved directly through a medium he could now feel.

And with just a faint exertion of will, he folded the space between his hand and a rock on the other side of the pond.

The rock didn't move from its place. His hand also didn't move. But for a nanosecond, the distance between them ceased to exist.

His fingertips felt the cool, damp surface of the stone and then the space snapped back, seamless and whole, as though nothing had happened.

Fang Yuan lowered his hand.

A slow, bloodied smile curved across his lip after realising he really had ascended to a whole new realm.

Fang Yuan exhaled slowly, lifting his arm.

With a casual sweep, all the formation flags scattered throughout the cavern trembled, then flew obediently back into his sleeve.

When the last one clicked into his grasp, he finally looked around.

The spirit pond, once brimming with vitality, had shriveled to a cracked basin.

Veins of dried essence clung faintly to the rock walls, but the water was gone, consumed in the storm of his breakthrough.

Fang Yuan's mouth twitched. "...Ah. How am I going to explain this to the elders?"

His gaze lingered on the ruin he had wrought, irreplaceable spirit water reduced to dust. After a long pause, he swallowed dryly and muttered, "... Whatever happened has happened, it's a loss but i suppose it's also a gain for the clan."

As he walked, an odd sensation crept over him.

The cavern felt... different, as though its very walls had shifted in some imperceptible way. He couldn't name what was wrong, but his gut twisted with quiet certainty, something was amiss.

He stopped mid-step. And instantly his divine sense surged outward, except this time, it was different.

In the Nascent Soul realm, his perception had been sharp, able to dissect minute details.

But now, with his Hollow Spirit body, his awareness pierced deeper. He no longer sensed only the surface, he saw beneath.

The fine seams in space itself shimmered before his mind's eye, like hairline cracks in glass. He could see them.

He extended further. The city sprawled out in exquisite clarity beneath his sense, every courtyard, every breath of wind.

His awareness brushed across the Wu Clan and there, faint and thin, were traces of teleportation formations.

Before, such things would have been invisible. Now they were glaringly clear.

A faint pulse of weakness tugged at his core. His new strength came at a cost.

The Hollow Spirit realm was vast and alien to him, and the drain on his energy was immense. He would need time to adapt.

Just then—

A crisp, mechanical chime echoed in his mind.

### **[SYSTEM NOTIFICATION]**

**Congratulations, Host!**

**You have successfully advanced to the Hollow Spirit Realm.**

**Rewards Granted:**

**100 × Qi Condensation Pills**

**100 × Qi Realization Pills**

**100 × Qi Transformation Pills**

**100 × Golden Core Pills**

**100 × Nascent Soul Pills**

**10 × Hollow Spirit Pills**

**1 × "Guide to the Hollow Spirit Realm" (manual)**

Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed, the words etching themselves deep into his mind like molten script on stone.

Then, slowly, his lips curved into a smile.

"Ten Hollow Spirit Pills, is it? System... you truly are concerned for me after all. So eager to see me steady my realm, hm?"

## **Chapter 175: 175- Fang Clan Meeting [1]**

With a dismissive flick of his wrist, Fang Yuan swiped the golden screen away.

As the screen disappeared, the world snapped back into focus, the cavern's damp, stagnant air heavy in his lungs.

He also retracted his divine sense, leaving behind a hollow silence within him.

He let out a weary breath that misted in the cool air.

"I wish I had the time to figure out what those teleportation traces are," he muttered to the empty tunnel.

Steeling himself, he took a step forward, then another, leaving the scene of his miraculous transgression behind.

Emerging from the cavern's mouth, the weak sunlight felt abrasive.

As his divine sense had already informed him, the family guards who were usually a permanent, watchful fixture were conspicuously absent today. The clearing was eerily still.

Before he could even process this anomaly, that familiar, dispassionate voice resonated directly within his consciousness, cutting through his fatigue.

**[Host, the system highly recommend you integrate the knowledge of 'Guide to the Hollow Spirit Realm' before proceeding ahead.]**

A flicker of irritation rose in him, quickly smothered by a deeper, more pragmatic weariness.

He didn't have the energy to argue with the system or tell the system that there were more immediate problems at hand.

**[The integration process will require no more than one second. Do not underestimate the system's capabilities.]**

Fang Yuan paused as he stared at the golden screen.

*One second?* He was stunned for a moment there.

"Fine," he conceded inwardly, "Alright system, learn it."

The command was barely a thought before the world vanished once more.

A tsunami of pure information slammed into the core of his awareness.

It was like a flood of diagrams etching themselves onto the back of his eyelids, not of meridians, but of the very fabric of spacetime, mapping folds and fractures he had only just begun to feel.

Concepts of spatial resonance, void energy assimilation, and spiritual stabilization unfolded with terrifying, crystalline clarity.

He felt the foundational principles of his new realm, the very laws that allowed his fingers to brush a distant rock earlier lock into place in his understanding, as if they had always been there, merely waiting to be recalled.

A violent tremor wracked his frame. His muscles locked, his breath catching in his throat as the knowledge branded itself onto his soul.

It was a searing, instantaneous enlightenment that left no room for doubt or question. In the span of a single heartbeat, a lifetime of esoteric study was compressed and forced into his being.

And then it was over.

Fang Yuan swayed on his feet a little before he balanced himself real quick. He then blinked and his eyes saw the world in a new light.

The space around him no longer felt like a mystery. Instead it felt like a tool, an extension of his own will, its properties now as familiar to him as the back of his own hand.

The exhaustion was still there, a deep ache in his bones, but it was now underpinned by a thrumming, terrifying certainty.

A slow, blood-flecked smile touched his lips, devoid of warmth, full of sharp-edged understanding.

He then flew to the sky with his qi, gliding effortlessly through the skies heading straight towards the Phoenix Soul Pavilion.



From above, he caught sight of the massive reservoir carved beside the cultivation caves, a grand project he had told his elders to complete.

It was finished, the earth was hollowed and shaped just as planned, yet the whole place looked abandoned, its stone edges already dulled and weathered as if long forgotten.

*How much time has truly passed?* The question pressed against his chest, heavy and disquieting.

At least the clan had not suffered any fatal calamities so far.

He could bank on that because if they were, he didn't doubt that his aunt won't hesitate to come and ask for him even at the cost of rousing him from a breakthrough.

That, in itself, was a small comfort.

Although the estate's aura of life felt diminished compared to the joyous aura he could recall before going into seclusion.

When he arrived at the Phoenix Soul Pavilion.

The place loomed in quiet majesty, its crimson pillars etched with flowing flame patterns that seemed to shimmer faintly under the lamplight.

Fang Yuan's figure slipped through the pavilion's wards as though they didn't exist.

A faint smile tugged at his lips as none within had noticed his arrival, though he could feel each presence as clearly as stars in the night sky.

They were gathered and deep in discussion, completely unaware of his presence.

With a casual step, he descended from the air and landed softly at the entrance.

And when he did, the reactions were instantaneous.

Chairs scraped against the floor, robes rustled, breaths caught. One by one, the elders rose to their feet, shock flashing across their faces.

"C-Clan Head?" Fang Jingyi blurted, her eyes wide.

"It's the Clan Head!" Fang Chen exclaimed, his voice unable to mask his surprise.

Around them, the hall stirred with excitement.

Fang Mei, Fang Sun, Fang Ra, Fang Joshua, Fang Long, Fang Yang, Fang Bo, Fang Rui, Fang Yin—each elder's expression lit up with reverence as they looked upon the man who had so casually appeared among them.

At the far end of the pavilion, upon the raised dais, stood the Patriarch's Seat, the symbol of Fang authority.

Ordinarily, that single chair would command the entire hall. Yet tonight, another seat had been placed beside it.

Upon it sat a woman of breathtaking poise.

Her eyes shimmered like distant galaxies, deep and unfathomable.

Her smile carried a serene grace that quieted the heart.

Though the elders were in a stir, her gaze was fixed wholly upon him, as though the world beyond him no longer existed.

Lin Zhaoyue.

The pavilion's lamps seemed to burn brighter, as if bowing to her presence.

Like courtiers before the queen.

Fang Yuan's gaze locked with hers. For a heartbeat, silence reigned and then her lips parted, her voice gentle and sweet.

"Husband... I'm so glad you're alive."

## **Chapter 176: 176- Fang Clan Meeting [2]**

Fang Yuan stepped forward while the elders were starting to surge towards him too.

Some were already reaching as if to embrace, others eager to shower him with questions.

But before anyone could touch him, a sharp crack rang out, the sound of a gavel striking wood.

The hall froze. Every elder stiffened, then, as though spellbound, slowly retreated to their seats.

Lin Zhaoyue rose. With measured steps, she crossed the hall, posture impeccable.

She stopped directly before Fang Yuan, dipped in a graceful bow, one hand lifting the hem of her skirt with perfect etiquette.

"Welcome back, husband. The clan has struggled in your absence, but I have absolute faith you will raise us to glory once more."

The words were sweet, the tone gentle, too gentle for his ears.

Fang Yuan felt no comfort in that gentle tone. Instead his chest tightened.

*This woman... this woman is insane.* In his memories, Lin Zhaoyue was a storm in human form, wild and unpredictable, her tongue was sharp as blades. But this? Soft, demure, compliant?

He almost staggered. *What trick is this? What sorcery is this? Is this my heart demon?* His mind spun, suspicion clawing at the edges.

No matter how he tried, he couldn't understand how her personality was unlike what he had ever seen.

Fang Yuan kept his composure, his tone steady as he replied,

"Thank you. You've cared for the clan in my absence, and I'll do my best to match that trust."

He dare say it because, only moments ago, she had demonstrated it, with a mere gesture, she had swayed the entire court.

Such control could only belong to the one truly holding the reins while he was gone. She had to be the one carrying the clan in his presence and she deserved the gratitude even if she was a madwoman.

But Lin Zhaoyue simply shook her head. When she spoke, her voice carried neither arrogance nor false modesty, but the calm weight of someone accustomed to command.

"Husband, the credit is not mine to claim alone. *Our* clan elders are exceptional. When I told them to march south, they marched south and they also did not forget to guard the east and west besides. They carried out every task without hesitation and does even more. It was my honor to guide them, but the strength of the Fang Clan stands firm today because of them."

Her words, polite yet resolute, pressed against him like an unseen current. Fang Yuan felt that same chill coil around his spine once more.

These mannerisms of hers, this grace laced with gentleness, were not something he could simply grow accustomed to.

Lin Zhaoyue's serene voice broke the tension.

"Husband, we shouldn't just remain standing here."

She stepped forward with unhurried poise, her robe brushing against the polished pavilion floor, and without hesitation, slipped her arm through Fang Yuan's.

Her touch was warm, her presence close enough to unsettle even his Hollow Spirit-tempered mind.

"Husband," she continued, her tone as smooth as flowing jade, "there is much I long to speak with you about. But now that you've returned... would you care to preside over the clan meeting with me, and discuss solutions together?"

For a man who had stared into the Void itself, Fang Yuan should not have been surprised by anything. And yet, he was. Completely caught off guard, his mind stuttered.

This woman, this was not the Lin Zhaoyue he knew. Not the volatile, sharp-tongued, unrestrained madwoman burned into his memories.

A heartbeat too late, he managed to recover his composure yet he did not pull away.

Instead, he inclined his head and answered evenly,

"If you say so, my dear wife. Let us take our seats and—"

His words froze in his throat.

Because Lin Zhaoyue did not walk forward with him.

Instead, she collapsed to the floor in a rustle of silk, crouching low, her delicate hands covering her flushed face.

Her shoulders trembled and then the muffled sound of laughter broke out, spilling past her palms.

"Ahhh!" her voice came, half-strangled, half-squeal, utterly unlike the poised matron of moments before.

Her whole body quivered like a girl overwhelmed by joy. "He called me 'dear wife'! He called me dear wife!"

The elders stared in petrified silence, unsure if they were witnessing a divine revelation or a descent into madness.

And Fang Yuan... Fang Yuan felt the icy bite of recognition. *Yes. This... this is the Lin Zhaoyue I remember.*

And then she suddenly pinched her thigh, halting her own display.

With practiced grace, she rose to her feet, her posture flawless, her smile polite yet unreadable.

"Forgive me, my dear husband," she said, her voice smooth as silk. "I've shown you and the elders a most unseemly side of myself. Come, let us take our seats. This clan meeting is far too important, and we are honored that you have graced us with your presence."

Without waiting for a reply, she glided forward and sat down as though nothing had happened.

Fang Yuan was left momentarily stunned.

*What in Heaven's name is this woman trying to pull?* The thought pressed itself into his mind, unshakable and unnerving.

Fang Yuan exhaled softly, gathering the weight of his thoughts before finally striding to the patriarch's seat.

The air seemed to shift as he settled into the high-backed chair, the carved wood whispering of generations past.

His presence alone steadied the hall, yet beneath his calm, a sliver of irritation lingered.

Lin Zhaoyue's sudden changes in demeanor were beginning to gnaw at him.

Just as the silence threatened to stretch, Lin Zhaoyue rose from her seat, her movements precise, commanding, and utterly graceful.

She clasped her hands and allowed her gaze to sweep over the gathered elders before speaking, her voice calm yet carrying an iron undertone that brooked no interruption.

"Dear clan elders," she began, the words deliberate, measured, "now is the time to present your troubles and the clan's troubles. Together, we will seek solutions for the good of the Fang Clan."

Her eyes flicked toward the right side of the table, then the left, and she continued, a faint, almost mischievous smile tugging at her lips:

"As usual, we will start from the right side of the table and move left. Should anyone find this arrangement objectionable..."

She let the pause stretch just long enough to make her point. "...you are welcome to challenge me to a duel."

### **Chapter 177: 177- Fang Clan Meeting [3]**

"You jest, Matriarch Fang," Fang Chen said, trying to interject, "but at most, the strongest one here is me and I'm barely even at Golden Core Realm."

Lin Zhaoyue turned her gaze toward him, eyes sharp, unblinking, and cold as steel. "So... did I ask you to open your mouth?"

Fang Chen froze mid-sentence. His jaw tightened, and he immediately sank back into his seat, eyes darting toward Fang Yuan as if silently pleading, *Nephew... do something.*

Fang Yuan couldn't help the chuckle that rose deep in his chest. Because this was the first time he had ever seen his uncle like this, in his head, he was chuckling, amusement flickering across his mind.

Then, Lin Zhaoyue's attention shifted smoothly to the right side of the table.

Her posture remained flawless, but her voice... oh, her voice now carried a gentle, soft lilt that seemed almost saccharine.

"Ah, Elder Yin," she said, the tone sweet, almost coaxing, "you've come today as well! Would you please tell me what you need? I will do everything I can to help you."

Fang Yuan froze mid-breath. His throat constricted; he nearly choked.

*Ghhk...* he made a small, surprised sound in his chest.

He instinctively coughed, blinking rapidly, trying to comprehend what he was hearing.

He had to look up, eyes wide, squinting in disbelief. *Is that... the same Lin Zhaoyue?!*

Elder Yin looked up, her whole face lighting up as if she had just stumbled into spring itself.

"Ah—Clan Head! And... and the Clan Head's wife!" she said, waving enthusiastically as though the two were across a courtyard instead of within arm's reach.

Lin Zhaoyue's shoulders gave the faintest tremor. Though she managed to school her expression this time, the flush that touched her cheeks betrayed her excitement.

She lowered her gaze, lips pressed together, stealing glances at Fang Yuan from the corner of her eye.

Fang Yuan, meanwhile, only leaned back slightly, arms folded behind his back, eyes half-lidded as he watched every flicker of Zhaoyue's expression, her barely restrained glee, the way she straightened her posture, even the tension in her hands.

He said nothing, but the faint curl of his mouth suggested he missed none of it.

Elder Yin clasped her hands and launched straight into her report. "So, so—Tushar Village, ah, it's been doing wonderfully, truly wonderfully! The river water, you see, it flows just as we had hoped, and the little streams, such clever streams, they run in neat little fingers across the streams. It's really quite a sight, especially in the early morning when the mist hangs low, oh, you should see it sometime! And, yes, yes, of course, thank you again, Clan Head's wife, for sending those young disciples to help me. Such diligent boys and girls! Though some of them can't swing a hoe straight to save their lives, heavens bless them, they were willing, and willing hearts make the soil soft, don't you think?"

She chuckled to herself, then leaned in slightly as though sharing a secret. "But, well, you see, after the digging was done, and the water started flowing so smoothly, some of the villagers, ah, how to put this. They've... returned to being a bit stubborn, I suppose.

Not unfriendly, no, not unfriendly, they always smile and nod if they meet me, but when I requested of them to let the irrigated waters flow through their fields, they... mm, they didn't quite budge. They keep saying they will only listen if it's young master Fang Tian who tells them to. Only Fang Tian, your younger brother, clan head. If he so much as sneezes in their direction, they said they will rush like he's dropped gold. Hah! Imagine that."

Her laugh was airy, though her eyes lingered on Fang Yuan, as though hoping he would untangle the knot she herself could not cut.

Fang Yuan gave a slow nod, fingers drumming lightly on the armrest of the Patriarch's seat as he weighed the matter in silence, threads of thought weaving toward a conclusion.

But before he could speak, Lin Zhaoyue's voice cut through the chamber, sharp, unwavering.

"Who dares disrespect Elder Yin?" Her gaze swept across the elders like a drawn blade, cold and merciless. "I'll personally visit this so-called Tushar Village and teach them a lesson."

There was no jest in her tone, no performative bluster.

It was like the raw, protective ferocity of a mother who had just been told her only daughter was being bullied.

Her aura surged like a storm tide, making the air itself tighten.

Several elders lowered their eyes, unwilling to meet her gaze. Fang Yin, cheeks flushing, shifted slightly in her seat as if torn between gratitude and embarrassment.

Fang Yuan leaned back, lips curving ever so slightly. He did not miss the way Lin Zhaoyue's voice trembled with conviction, nor the unyielding fire in her eyes.

She wasn't posturing. She meant every word.

Fang Yuan's gaze lingered on her for a beat, unreadable.

Then, with an unhurried calm tone of his, he said,

"Zhaoyue, Tushar Village is one of our key holdings. my ancestors had once sworn to the founder of that village that we would protect the village for atleast five hundred years, there's another hundred years to go. Do you truly think we can afford to forget that and go back on our ancestors words?"

Lin Zhaoyue didn't flinch. If anything, her eyes glowed brighter, steady against his.

"Husband," she said, her voice soft but firm, "what they're doing now is not mere stubbornness, it is an open disregard for your authority. I cannot, and will not, stomach such disrespect."

She turned slightly, her gaze falling on Fang Yin, who shifted nervously under the weight of it. "You sent our adorable Elder Yin to guide them, to protect them. And she has done nothing but pour her heart into their welfare. Yet those villagers repay her kindness with coldness? With dismissal?"

Her expression melted into sorrow, her tone thick with pity. "Elder Yin is far too gentle for such cruelty... too innocent. How could they not see the sincerity of her efforts?"

She turned back to Fang Yuan, her gaze steady. "But husband... four hundred years have passed, and Tushar is still nothing more than a village? Surely, something is wrong with them."

## **Chapter 178: 178- Fang Clan Meeting [4]**

Fang Yuan's lips curved into a faint smile.

"So what do you mean by that, Zhaoyue?"



Lin Zhaoyue leaned forward slightly, her tone steady but sharp. "Think about it, husband. This village has been around for at least four hundred years, and they still remain just a village. Look at Phungrei City. That was nothing but wasteland two centuries ago, and now it's the busiest cities in the entire northern regions."

Fang Yuan shook his head slowly. "That city grew because it sat on a pure-grade spirit mine. Its rise was inevitable."

But Lin Zhaoyue only mirrored his gesture, shaking her head in quiet defiance. Her eyes glimmered with conviction.

"No, husband. From what I've heard from my beloved Elder Yin, every elder sent before her has tried to introduce new management, new techniques, new tools to improve Tushar Village. And yet... every single one of them was ignored. Does that not sound suspicious to you? There must be a reason."

Fang Yuan's smile froze. He didn't answer immediately, because he knew the truth.

Every elder dispatched to Tushar Village had been... defective. Either crippled in cultivation, disgraced, or quietly punished. They weren't there to manage, they were there to disappear.

And unlike Zhaoyue's impression, none of them had ever tried to improve the village. Not one. Except for Yin.

He thought back, his father had arranged for Elder Yin to take the role for this generation.

After Fang Yuan became clan head, he had left her be, uncertain what to do with the arrangement because she had taken the duty seriously. Too seriously, perhaps.

She was bright, enthusiastic, eager to throw herself into every little matter of the village.

Yet no matter how much effort she poured in, the outcome was painfully obvious.

The villagers shunned her.

Fang Yuan's brow furrowed slightly.

He remembered what the system had once told him: the villagers had grown more open to Fang Yin, thanks to his younger brother's act of valor, slaying a bandit group that had been plaguing their roads.

*So why? Why now did they turn away from Lin Zhaoyue so completely?*

*What shifted so drastically that her words carried no weight?*

His silence grew heavier, his expression unreadable.

Lin Zhaoyue, mistaking it for quiet contemplation, gently pressed on. Her eyes shone with conviction as she looked at him.

"Husband," she said softly, "Tushar Village is part of our Fang Clan's land. We should make use of it, strengthen the clan as a whole, together. Let us not leave it to languish as it is."

Fang Yuan lifted his gaze, his tone calm but carrying the weight of command.

"As long as you don't shed any blood, I'll permit you to do as you like. But ensure you don't worsen the situation."

Lin Zhaoyue's eyes shimmered. She dipped into a graceful bow, her voice gentle, yet trembling faintly with suppressed excitement.

"As per your orders, my dear husband."

When she turned back to the elders, her smile softened, almost childlike, as her gaze found Fang Yin.

Fang Yin, ever simple, smiled and waved back. Lin Zhaoyue's lips twitched, barely suppressing a grin that would've broken her mask before she drew in a slow breath and composed herself again.

Her tone shifted, crisp and formal now.

"Alright, Elder Jingyi, please give us your report."

Fang Jingyi rose and bowed politely.

"Greetings, Patriarch, Matriarch Fang. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to—"

"We don't have all day, Elder Jingyi," Lin Zhaoyue cut her off, her words sharp as a blade despite the smile still painted on her lips. "We should skip the formalities."

"Lin Zhaoyue," Fang Yuan's voice was stern, cutting across the hall, "you're crossing the line."

The effect was immediate. Her body stiffened, then she dropped to her knees in one fluid motion.

Her forehead nearly touched the floor as she spoke, voice trembling with what sounded like genuine remorse.

"Forgive me, husband. I—I have committed a grave crime."

Fang Yuan rubbed his forehead, exhaling deeply. "As the matriarch, you must not show favoritism. Did you not call these elders the pillars of our clan earlier? Then treat them as such."

Her shoulders quivered. She lowered herself again, voice heavy with contrition, "I'm unfit to lead this meeting. Please forgive me, husband."

For a moment, Fang Yuan said nothing. Then he pointed at the seat beside him.

"Come. Sit here. We'll listen to every elder's voice and find solutions together. Is that acceptable?"

Her head snapped up, her eyes gleaming with barely concealed delight.

"Yes, husband. Thank you for your kindness!"

She almost skipped as she went to sit beside him, but at the last second forced herself into an elegant glide, folding her hands neatly in her lap as though she hadn't been a heartbeat away from throwing herself at him.

Fang Yuan waved for his aunt to continue.

Fang Jingyi gave another bow and began.

"Several of our herb warehouses were burnt down in the past few days. Pill production has plummeted, and we are bleeding silver by the hour."

"And the cause?" Fang Yuan asked, his tone calm but edged with steel.

Fang Jingyi bowed her head.

"Our primary suspect is the Wu Clan. But they've denied all accusations. We are still trying to get to the bottom of it."

Fang Yuan's gaze narrowed slightly, and he leaned back in his patriarch's seat.

"Interesting. Tell me all about what the Wu Clan had been up to these past few days I've been away?"

At once, Fang Chen stood, his posture rigid, as though he had been waiting for this very moment.

His voice rang with a mixture of urgency and caution.

"Three months, Clan Head. You were absent for three full months."

He caught the flicker in Fang Yuan's eyes and hurriedly pressed on before a rebuke could fall.

"During that time, the Wu Clan has grown... unusually aggressive in their expansion. But it isn't just them anymore. The Xiao, He, and Zhi clans have all fallen in line under their banner. We have no clue about how they did it but as of now, it is the Fang Family alone standing against the Wu and its vassal families."

## **Chapter 179: 179- Fang Clan Meeting [5]**

Fang Chen's fists clenched at his sides as he continued. "In your absence, the Wu Clan didn't hesitate one bit and began to struck hard and fast, choosing markets and industries that weakened us the most.

At one point, they nearly overtook the entire entertainment sector within the city. Had they succeeded, we would have lost one of our most lucrative revenue streams."

His voice grew louder, tinged with relief and pride.

"But they failed, because Matriarch Fang personally intervened. They must not have expected her cultivation to be at the Nascent Soul Realm. Her appearance crushed their scheme, forcing them to retreat."

Lin Zhaoyue, seated beside Fang Yuan, lowered her lashes and allowed herself the faintest of smiles.

Fang Chen swallowed and finished, his tone sobering again.

"And after that defeat, the Wu Clan went into a complete silence and we slowly took back the market shares we lost. But silence does not really mean peace. Instead, we realised that they've taken to hidden strikes. Sabotage, arson, and ambushes on our caravans. They're trying to slowly bleed us in the shadows and yet we can't retaliate openly because we don't have any solid evidence it's them."

Fang Yuan's fingers tapped once against the armrest of his seat, his eyes sweeping over the elders, weighing their silence, measuring their fear.

The hall, which had been buzzing, fell into a silence so deep one could hear the dust settling.

Then Fang Yuan spoke, his voice calm but carrying a weight that made it impossible to ignore.

"What if... there is a third party orchestrating all of this? What if someone desires nothing more than to see the Wu Clan and the Fang Clan tear each other apart? What if they were the reason behind all this attacks?"

The words hung in the air like a slow-acting poison, subtle yet potent, infecting the certainty that the elders clung to.

Every pair of eyes in the hall fixed on him, wide, alert, the usual ease of protocol replaced by the prickling awareness of danger.

Fang Chen, who had been so sure of the Wu Clan's guilt, looked utterly confused. "Clan Head, I don't suppose there exists a third party that would—"

**"Silence!"**

Lin Zhaoyue was on her feet in an instant, the command cracking through the hall like a whip.

Her earlier deference was gone, replaced by the sharp, calculating gleam of a strategist who had just seen the entire board shift. Fang Chen flinched back into his seat, chastised.

She didn't even glance his way. Her gaze was distant, piecing together a puzzle only she could see.

"There's this Merchant Association... or the Chamber of Commerce, whatever they're calling themselves these days," she murmured, more to herself than to the room.

This time, Fang Yuan didn't rebuke her for interrupting. He was captivated, his full attention on her.

He leaned forward slightly, his expression unreadable but intensely focused. She was following a thread he had merely hinted at, and her speed was astonishing.

She seemed to pluck the answer from the air, her voice gaining certainty as she turned to address the stunned elders.

"It definitely has to be them. They are merchants, merchants make the most out of the misery of the people. Not only that, I've also come across a particular youth among their ranks who seemed to specialize exclusively in making and selling weaponry. He even offered a lucrative deal to me to take out the Wu Clan, which I at that time declined."

She paused, letting that detail sink in before she posed her next question, her tone turning pedagogical and sharp.

"So tell me, Elders, when are weapons most desired? When do their prices inflate like a bloated corpse?"

A beat of silence. Then, from his seat, Fang Chen muttered the dreadful answer to his own horror: "In times of conflict..."

He sank down, his face ashen, looking utterly mortified by the revelation. The simplicity of it was devastating.

They had been looking for a rival, not a profiteer.

Lin Zhaoyue turned her back on the agitated council and glided to Fang Yuan's side. The fierce strategist melted away, replaced by a woman gazing at her husband with unveiled admiration.

"Ah, husband," she said, her voice softening into a whisper meant only for him, yet carrying in the silent hall.

"I knew you were different from the very second I was born. You instantly saw the trap we were all charging into. You could unravel a scheme meant to bleed us dry with but a single sentence."

She stood beside his throne, her eyes locked with his.

She didn't dare look away, savoring the moment, the respect in his gaze, the proof of their synergy.

She was the blade, and he was the hand that guided it.

Among the elders, the revelation sparked a storm of muttered curses and shaken heads.

Elder Joshua slammed a fist softly into his palm. "I can't believe it! We were being led by the nose!"

Elder Sun simply shook his head in weary disbelief, his aged shoulders slumping.

"The youngsters these days have minds too sharp by half. We old folks can't keep up with these layers of deception."

The younger elders, Fang Mei, Fang Rui, Fang Yang, and Fang Bo, remained silent throughout, the weight of the conspiracy rendering them thoughtful rather than vocal.

They observed while their minds racing to process the political labyrinth being unveiled.

Noting their solemnity, Elder Fang Ra spoke up, her tone deliberately breaking the tension, warm and maternal.

"You kids are also full-fledged elders now," she reminded them gently. "Your words carry as much weight as ours. Don't be so hesitant. We need your eyes."

By her side, Elder Fang Long nodded, a gruff smile touching his lips. "Yes, indeed! Did you not see? Our entire clan was nearly outmaneuvered by a youth who sells swords. If we want to best them at this game, we need your fresh, sharp brains to do the thinking!"

The comment was so blunt, so disarmingly honest, that it cut through the remaining dread.

A few of the young elders like Fang yang and fang Rui giggled, they sounded nervous at first, then slowly shifted to being genuine.

## **Chapter 180: 180- Fang Clan Meeting [6]**

Fang Yuan brushed Lin Zhaoyue's hand from his sleeve and rose to his feet.

Lin Zhaoyue immediately adjusted herself, smoothing the folds of her robe as she settled back into her seat.

She lowered her lashes, her posture graceful, her expression soft, as though she had never raised her voice a moment ago.

*Pretentious*, Fang Yuan thought, his gaze cutting briefly toward her before he turned back to the council of elders.

"What I've just spoken is mere speculation, nothing more than only a possibility," his voice carried evenly through the hall.

"Do not treat it as truth and charge forward blindly. Let's leave it at that and for now, tell me. What urgent matters demand the clan's immediate attention?"

Elder Fang Joshua rose without hesitation. His back was straight, his words stripped to their essence.

"Clan Head, it's about the energy wells in the cultivation caves."

That short sentence of his carried weight, and Fang Yuan inclined his head in acknowledgment.

"I understand. I'll refill the spirit wells once more as soon as the meeting ends."

A visible wave of relief passed through the older elder.

"Thank you, Clan Head," Joshua said, his voice gruff with gratitude as he bowed deeply and retook his seat.

The immediate crisis would be averted, thanks to their patriarch's unique abilities.

As the atmosphere lightened slightly from its peak of dread, a younger voice spoke up.

Fang Rui rose, offering a respectful bow to the dais. "Greetings, Patriarch, Matriarch. If I may bring up another concern... the motivation of our cultivating juniors is worrying."

She chose her words carefully, a slight frown on her face. "They have grown... accustomed to the carrot and stick approach. It seems they no longer wish to move unless the carrot is dangling directly in their sight. It appears as if they're only a part of the clan just because you gave them opportunities to exchange for cultivation resources."

Fang Yuan stared at her for a moment, his severe expression unchanged.

Then, a low chuckle escaped him, building into a short, genuine burst of laughter. "Hah! What a good idiom to be using, Elder Rui. You are indirectly calling our future generation a bunch of stubborn donkeys... or perhaps pampered pigs who won't trot without a treat!"

"But," Fang Yuan said, his laughter subsiding into a thoughtful smile, "you do have a point. It is a comfortable complacency, and comfort breeds weakness."

He looked out over the assembled elders, his eyes inviting contribution. "Does anyone have an opinion to share on how to mend this behavior?"

Fang Jingyi rose slowly, her expression heavy.

"It isn't just arrogance," she said, voice soft yet weighted with sorrow.

"It's the lack of loyalty to the clan. Give them the chance, and some of them would gladly abandon us for the sects."

Fang Yin stood up, her usual brightness lighting up her face.

"Elder Jingyi," she began, her tone lilting, almost teasing.

"When we were little, didn't we all hear the same thing? That the great sects are where true cultivators walk their destined paths? That only by stepping into their gates can one see the wider world?"

She glanced around, her smile never faltering, speaking as though she were reminiscing rather than debating.



"It was basically drilled into us like scripture, was it not? That beyond the clan lies the heavens, and the heavens can only be reached through those towering sects..."

Then, at last, her voice softened, the playfulness diminishing away as she delivered her point with disarming clarity. "So if the children now long for the sects more than for home, is it truly their betrayal... or our own teaching that guided their loyalty elsewhere?"

The hall fell into utter silence, broken only by the soft, almost musical giggles spilling from Lin Zhaoyue's lips.

Lin Zhaoyue's voice chimed lightly, almost playful. "She's got a point, you know."

She rose with unhurried grace, her silken steps carrying her to Fang Yuan's side.

Without hesitation, she curled her arms around his, leaning in as though they were sharing some private jest.

"But," she continued, her smile never faltering, though her tone grew taut and edged with steel, "with a peak Nascent Soul realm cultivator seated in our very midst, those children ought to feel nothing but gratitude for being born into the Fang clan."

Her gaze slid from one elder to the next, soft and smiling, but cold enough to make their spines stiffen.

"If the Fang juniors wish to wander off," she went on sweetly, "then my Lin clan children would be more than happy to take their place. I've already ensured their loyalty belongs to no one else but me..."

She tilted her head then, her eyes glittering as they fixed on Fang Yuan, the smile on her lips curving deeper, softer, and far more dangerous.

"...and to my dear husband here."

Fang Yin's eyes lit up at once, her hands clasping together as if she'd just stumbled onto some great revelation.

"Ah, yes, yes—you're absolutely right, Matriarch Fang! I mean, it's one thing to be born into a clan, but it's quite another to realize the fortune of it, don't you think? The little ones, they are running around carefree because they never really stopped to count the blessings placed beneath their very feet.

Perhaps if we just nudge them or outright teach them a hard lesson, maybe they'll grow up carrying that sense of gratitude naturally, as though it were a part of their very bone marrow.

Yes, yes, these childrens ought to be taught a harsh lesson and should be taught to learn just how wondrous it is to bear the Fang Family name!"

Lin Zhaoyue's lips curved into a sweet, almost innocent smile as she glanced at Fang Yin.

Then, leaning closer to Fang Yuan, her voice dropped to a silken whisper that brushed against his ear like a secret.

"Husband," she murmured, eyes gleaming with playful mischief locking in on Fang Yin, "may I... keep a pet?"