

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

#Chapter 71: Dark Forest [2] - Read Clan Building System: I'm not the Protagonist?! Chapter 71: Dark Forest [2]

Chapter 71: Dark Forest [2]

Deep within the Dark Forest...

The trees loomed taller, darker here, their gnarled roots twisting like the bones of buried giants.

Even the air began to feel denser.

Fang Yuan moved without haste, his youthful face serene, hands tucked behind his back as he stepped over mossy stones and ducked under low-hanging vines.

He looked more like a scholar on a countryside stroll than someone wandering into one of the deadliest places in the north.

Then he stopped.

His gaze narrowed slightly.

A pair of amber eyes blinked from the shadows ahead.

From the underbrush slithered a massive serpent, its body the width of a carriage wheel, covered in lustrous scales that shimmered like wet obsidian.

Its head rose above the grass with elegant lethality, tongue flickering lazily as it regarded him.

A Golden Core realm beast, no doubt, its aura oppressive, like a vice pressing on the lungs.

Fang Yuan tilted his head. "Oh? It's already at the Peak of Golden Core?"

The snake hissed, coiling slightly.

"Good," he murmured. "Let's use this one to test my moves properly then."

He raised a single hand and exhaled slowly.

Golden Shell Armor — First Form: Cowardice.

A soft shimmer of light bloomed around him, and in the next breath, a radiant barrier snapped into place, tight, seamless, and golden.

It wasn't ornate, nor was it jagged or dramatic like so many other defensive techniques.

It simply was.

A perfect dome of spiritual energy encased him, smooth and reflective, like an egg forged from sunlight, or a turtle shell crafted by the heavens themselves.

Elegant, efficient and absolute.

And yet... even as the shell held firm, a faint flicker rippled across its surface.

It was the drain, very constant but subtle. This form was too steep for prolonged use.

Fang Yuan narrowed his eyes behind the barrier and the snake's eyes also narrowed.

Then it struck.

With blinding speed, its jaw unhinged, fangs glowing with poison as it slammed forward with a sonic crack, aiming straight for Fang Yuan's chest.

BOOM!

Its fangs collided with the golden dome—

And bounced off.

The force of the impact shattered trees around them, but the golden shell merely shimmered, absorbing the strike like water absorbs a pebble.

Inside, Fang Yuan hadn't budged an inch.

"Mm. Not bad for a golden core serpent," he said casually.

The serpent hissed louder now, clearly agitated.

"Go on," Fang Yuan said cheerfully, "Try again. I'll stand here."

The snake coiled tighter, preparing for another strike.

And inside his golden dome, Fang Yuan grinned.

The snake reared back, tongue flicking furiously. Its pride was wounded.

It had struck with all the power of a peak Golden Core beast and gotten nothing for its efforts.

But it wasn't done.

With a furious hiss, it lunged again, its muscles coiling like iron cables as it launched forward.

This time, venom laced its fangs, and its speed doubled. The strike came like a lightning bolt.

CRACK!

Fangs slammed into the golden shell once more.

But this time... Fang Yuan moved.

His fingers curled in a subtle, spiraling gesture. His voice rang out, light and playful

"Golden Shell Armor—Fourth Form: Take Back What's Yours!"

A ripple of energy surged through the dome.

The shell shuddered, absorbing the snake's strike like a sponge taking in water and then rebounded.

Not forward but inward.

An echo of the snake's own ferocity was flung back at it, compressed and redirected through the shell's mirrored surface.

BANG!

The serpent was blasted backward, hissing in shock as its body slammed against a thick tree trunk, cracking the bark.

It slithered wildly, dazed.

Fang Yuan let out a satisfied tsk as he dusted off debris from his shoulder.

"That was supposed to return triple the damage you just gave me."

He paused, frowning at his palm.

"Hmm... guess it's still incomplete. Only managed a onefold rebound."

The snake twitched.

It understood now.

This wasn't just some wandering brat with a shiny technique.

This was a monster who hadn't even shown his real strength.

Fang Yuan smiled.

"Let's call it even for now. Next time you bite someone, make sure they aren't me."

He turned leisurely, leaving the battered snake to contemplate its life decisions among broken roots and glowing moss.

"Oh right," he added with a wink over his shoulder, "and thank you for helping me calibrate that form. Much appreciated."

Then he strolled deeper into the forest, humming a cheerful tune.

As Fang Yuan ventured deeper into the forest, he quickly understood why it was called the Dark Forest or more ominously by the locals, the Night Forest.

No light reached this place.

Not a single beam.

The towering trees above stretched endlessly into the sky, their canopies woven so tightly that not even the faintest sliver of sunlight could pierce through.

It was like walking beneath a blanket of ink.

But for a cultivator like Fang Yuan?

That was nothing.

Night vision was the least of his gifts.

Any half-decent cultivator could perceive their surroundings in darkness; otherwise, how could they claim to stand above mortals?

With a touch of qi funneled into his eyes, the pitch-black world around him lit up like noon.

His senses expanded, sharp as blades.

Eyes that saw through the dark.

Ears that caught the flap of distant wings.

Skin that tingled at the faintest shift in spiritual pressure.

At his level, peak Nascent Soul, his body had evolved beyond human limits.

A forest like this was little more than a quiet walk to him.

As he walked, the wild stirred.

Strange beasts peeked out from behind twisted roots and knotted branches, eyes glowing, claws twitching.

But the moment they sensed him, felt the pulse of the qi in his veins, they fled.

The apex predator had entered their home.

Minutes bled into miles; the forest floor softened, each step releasing a wet suck of peat.

Only then did the trees part and a swamp unfurled before him...

Sprawled out underfoot, miles wide and rimmed with thick reeds and eerie willows. Steam clung to the surface.

A low, wet mist curled along the waters like living smoke.

He stopped at the edge and studied it in silence.

Chapter 72: Dark Forest [3]

Just then, Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed as he sensed movement ahead.

It felt human, light-footed and unfamiliar.

With practiced ease, he stepped back into the shadows of a massive root, his qi pulled tight around him like a second skin.

Now, he appeared to have disappeared completely from the spot.

Through the thin veil of hanging moss, he watched.

A girl emerged, dressed in flowing pale robes, a cultivator, judging by the way her spiritual pressure flickered weakly around her.

She wasn't strong. Early Qi Transformation at best which should be dangerous for her to walk around here like this.

She huffed as she gathered her skirt delicately and stepped into the swamp's edge, lifting the hem with annoyance more than caution.

"Stupid dad. Stupid brother," she muttered, kicking at a patch of moss. "I already told them I have someone I love! Can't they understand that? No! I don't wanna marry the person you pick! Go to hell!"

Her grumbling continued as she trudged forward, the water sloshing softly around her calves.

She wasn't afraid of her surroundings, just frustrated.

Definitely a noble girl. One who'd run away from her engagement.

Fang Yuan kept still, watching as she came to a sudden halt.

Her eyes widened.

There, just ahead, was a flower.

It swayed gently on a thin stem above the murky water, petals glowing faintly with an otherworldly purple hue, as though lit from within. Its beauty was unearthly, mesmerizing.

The girl's gaze locked onto it, her breath catching in awe.

She took a slow step forward.

Fang Yuan's eyes didn't follow the flower.

Instead, they drifted, to the left.

There, half-buried in the swamp's edge, a faint bulge in the muck.

A scale. A twitch.

A viper's eye, slitted and waiting.

His fingers curled at his side.

"Typical..." he murmured silently. "Viper's Seduction Flower."

It was a pretty lure and a deadly trap. Once you bent down to admire or grab the flower, the real viper would attack from behind as you let your guard down.

The girl swooped in like a dancer mid-spin, robes fluttering as her hand snapped forward and plucked the glowing flower from the swamp's edge.

In that exact moment, the viper struck.

A blur of scaled muscle, fangs flashing with venom, jaws wide.

But her legs didn't freeze.

BAM!

Her heel shot out with practiced precision, smashing into the viper's jaw mid-lunge.

The creature's fangs snapped shut with a crack, blood and venom spraying into the swampwater as it was thrown aside with a guttural screech of pain.

The beast writhed, stunned.

She didn't even flinch.

Standing there, one leg slightly raised, the flower in her grasp, she simply tilted her head and smiled faintly.

"Wow..." she whispered, admiring the glow. "It really is beautiful."

As if she hadn't just crushed a venomous predator with her bare foot.

From the shadows, Fang Yuan stared, the scene replaying three times in his head before his mind caught up.

"That kick... that timing... that qi control..."

His eyes narrowed, his pulse skipping a beat.

"A mid-stage Nascent Soul realm?! What kind of spoiled runaway is this?!"

He hadn't sensed it before, she was hiding her cultivation base. *Well. Exceptionally well.*

Fang Yuan exhaled slowly, expression unreadable.

"Looks like I'm not the only one out here trying to keep a low profile..."

Fang Yuan remained hidden, body still, breath shallow.

His eyes tracked the girl's every movement as she stepped forward and casually grabbed the viper by the tail, dragging its twitching body behind her like a laundry sack.

"Hah... even the heavens pity me by sending food," she muttered, almost mournful in tone, then sighed, as if her life were one long soap opera.

With an almost theatrical flourish, she plucked the glowing flower from her fingers and tucked it into her hair, pinning it above her ear.

The subtle shimmer of the petals caught the faint light and only amplified her beauty, turning her from a swamp-stained rogue into something almost ethereal.

And she was still completely unaware of the man in the shadows, watching like a hawk.

Fang Yuan's eyes narrowed slightly.

She walked out of the waterlogged basin with light, annoyed steps, skirts dragging mud and filth.

She looked down, visibly disgusted.

"Ugh. What a mess."

Without hesitation, she tore a strip off the hem of her skirt, wrapping it tightly around her hand like a glove.

Then she sank her hand deep into the viper's gut, the wet sound of flesh parting making even Fang Yuan flinch internally.

She worked quickly, cleanly, there was no hesitations, nor an act of nausea.

A runaway young mistress and a field butcher?

He raised an eyebrow.

Seconds later, she pulled her hand free with a wet pop, holding high a glistening, purple-tinged orb that pulsed faintly with spiritual energy.

A beast core.

Peak Golden Core Realm. And in perfect condition.

Fang Yuan blinked, silently impressed.

Not only strong... but precise. She knew exactly where to dig. No damage to the core at all.

Still crouched in the shadow of a twisted tree root, he rubbed his chin.

Who is she?

And more importantly... why does she look so familiar?

He kept watching. This woman, clearly from a noble or powerful clan, wasn't just wandering blindly.

Just then, the girl's nose twitched.

She sniffed the air once, twice, then stopped.

Her posture shifted ever so slightly. Eyes narrowed, expression sharp.

Fang Yuan felt a chill crawl up his spine.

Ah... crap.

"Who goes there?" she called out, her voice like silk laced with steel.

In a fluid motion, a delicate hairpin appeared in her hand, summoned from her interspatial ring.

Fang Yuan blinked from behind the tree root.

A hairpin? Seriously? That's her weapon?

He almost laughed, almost.

Then...

BOOM.

A thunderous blast tore through the swamp a few meters to his right. Trees snapped, vines disintegrated, and light poured through the canopy in glowing shafts, sunlight.

She just cleared a path so hard the heavens let light through!?

His lips parted. He didn't even have time to comment.

Her voice rang out again, calm, focused:

"Heavenly Timber: First Form—Wood Explosions!"

And then—

CRACK! BOOM!

The tree he was hiding behind detonated, bark and splinters flying like shrapnel.

Not just the tree.

Three others behind him erupted in a chain reaction, roots exploding from beneath, vines screaming as they were torn apart mid-air.

The entire grove howled like a wounded beast.

Fang Yuan was flung forward by the shockwave, boots skidding across the moist ground as he barely caught himself in a crouch.

Leaves fluttered down around him like snow.

He looked up slowly, dust in his hair, expression deadpan.

The girl was standing there, hair slightly tousled, dress still stained, hairpin glowing faintly in her fingers.

She stared right at him.

Fang Yuan dusted himself off and muttered under his breath:

"Yep... definitely trouble."

She didn't attack again.

Instead, she narrowed her eyes, brow furrowing as she stared hard at him through the settling dust and floating leaves.

Her gaze swept over his figure, the casually tied hair, the loose black robes, the faint sword scar on his cheek.

Her head tilted slightly, lips parting in uncertainty.

"...Wait..."

A beat of silence.

Then her eyes widened.

"Fang Yuan?!"

Chapter 73: Lin Zhaoyue [1]

Fang Yuan blinked, clearly startled.

"Do I... know you?"

His eyes narrowed slightly as he took a measured step back, posture shifting subtly into a guarded stance.

She didn't seem hostile but that meant nothing.

Her cultivation was high and her movements were swift. She could always attack anytime she feels like it.

Still... that face? That voice?

He had remember if he ever encountered before.

The girl giggled, a soft, melodic sound that fluttered in the air like petals on a breeze.

"You're joking, right?" she said brightly, brushing a strand of hair behind her ear.

"It's me~!"

She tucked the hairpin delicately into her bun beside the flower, then dashed forward with open arms.

Fang Yuan's eyes widened.

Instinctively, he shifted his weight, one hand moving just slightly toward his sleeve.

But the moment she closed the gap and wrapped her arms around him, he stilled.

There was no malice nor any hint of killing intent. It was just warmth.

...Still, his body remained taut, every muscle coiled, ready to spring into action at a moment's notice.

She nestled against him for a moment, content, before looking up with bright, expectant eyes.

"Don't you remember me, Fang Yuan?"

His lips thinned into a line.

Gently, he raised his hands and placed them on her shoulders, easing her away.

"I don't," he said quietly. "Who are you?"

The light in her eyes dimmed.

Her arms dropped to her sides, and she stared at him, unblinking.

"You... really don't?"

"No," he answered flatly. "Should I?"

For a heartbeat, she simply stood there.

Then she exhaled, stepped back, and smoothed out her skirt with exaggerated calm.

"I'm Lin Zhaoyue," she said at last.

Fang Yuan's brow furrowed, head tilting slightly.

"Lin... Zhaoyue...?"

"Lin Zhaoyue?" Fang Yuan echoed, brows drawing together. "Lin... Lin..."

His gaze drifted, squinting slightly as he searched the corners of his memory like a man flipping through an old, half-burnt scroll.

The girl crossed her arms, a single brow rising in disbelief.

"Seriously?"

She leaned in, a little too close, voice sweet but firm.

"The Lin Zhaoyue. From the Lin family. The one and only."

Fang Yuan blinked at her.

Twice.

His head tilted slightly to one side, the same way a puppy might when asked to recite scripture.

"The Lin family?" he repeated. "Should that mean something to me?"

Zhaoyue's eye twitched.

Her smile wavered.

For a brief second, her aura actually cracked, just slightly as if her soul took psychic damage from sheer emotional betrayal.

"Unbelievable," she muttered, more to herself than him.

Fang Yuan, completely oblivious to the social catastrophe unfolding in front of him, rubbed his chin and nodded thoughtfully.

"Zhaoyue... nope. Still nothing. You sure we've met?"

The girl pouted, her arms crossed as she stared up at him with big, expectant eyes—like a child waiting for a treat she was promised.

Fang Yuan rubbed his temple. "Lin... Lin..."

Then, suddenly, his eyes lit up.

"Wait! I get it! You're Lin Feng's younger sister!"

The girl blinked, and then her cheeks flushed with the faintest pink.

"E-Eh? Do I really look that young?" she whispered, a soft blush creeping over her face.

Fang Yuan's brows furrowed. "Wait... you're not his sister?"

She smiled.

It wasn't teasing or smug, just soft.

She took a step closer and said, with a conspiratorial glint in her eye:

"I'll tell you a little secret then."

Fang Yuan stayed still, listening.

She leaned in slightly, her voice dropping to a near whisper.

"I was the one who attacked the spirit wolves that day. And we... we both ran away together while being chased by them."

His eyes widened slightly.

Click.

The memory began slotting together.

Click.

She giggled when she saw the realization begin to dawn on his face.

Then she tilted her head, eyes dancing with mischief and nostalgia.

"Remember? When they chased us to the cliff and you fell and got caught by that tree branch?"

Fang Yuan's throat bobbed in a slow gulp. He nodded faintly, stunned.

Her hands rose, gently cupping his face.

She traced a single finger along his cheek, slow, featherlight, until it rested just beneath his jaw.

Her voice was soft now, laced with something tender... and dangerous.

"I thought you'd jumped to your death... so I jumped too. Because if you were going to die, I wanted to be with you. Even in death."

She leaned closer, her breath brushing his ear.

"But instead... we landed in the river. Remember? That old fisherman saved us."

Fang Yuan stared at her, the final puzzle piece falling into place.

His voice was a whisper.

"You... You are Lin Feng?"

She giggled, delighted, as if she'd waited years to hear that from him.

"Yes! I am Lin Feng... but my real name is Lin Zhaoyue."

She pressed her forehead against his, eyes glowing like dusk on water.

"I want you to remember that."

Her voice dipped lower, brushing against his heart.

"My name and only mine. No other girl's name, okay?"

She smiled sweetly.

But the glint in her eye promised that if he did forget... there would be consequences.

Fang Yuan took a step back, eyes narrowing slightly.

"Wait a second... I thought you were a boy back then! And, what are you even doing here?"

Lin Zhaoyue giggled and didn't answer right away.

Instead, she took a bold step forward, reached out, and gently grabbed his wrist.

"Hehe~ I'm very much a girl," she whispered, voice dripping with amusement. "Here, see for yourself."

Before he could react, she tried to guide his hand toward her chest.

Fang Yuan's eyes widened in sheer panic. He yanked his arm back so fast it was like touching a hot stove.

"Wha—! I don't need to verify anything! I can see the truth just fine!"

She beamed, utterly unbothered.

"Good." She nodded approvingly. "Then that settles it."

She clasped her hands behind her back, eyes twinkling.

"Well? Don't you think this is fate? You found your wife right when she was at her lowest~"

Her voice was light and playful, but the word wife rang through the air like a divine thunderclap.

Fang Yuan blinked.

Once.

Twice.

His brain stalled like a broken transmission.

Did... Did she just proclaim herself... my wife?

Chapter 74: Lin Zhaoyue [2]

Lin Zhaoyue leaned in, eyes sparkling with mischief.

"So, husband~ where are we going next?"

Fang Yuan stopped in his tracks, a twitch running down his cheek.

"What husband? Who is your husband? And I'm going deeper into the forest."

His voice was flat, but his brow arched slightly, as if testing her resolve.

"You dare follow me inside?" he asked, tone edged with challenge.

She simply giggled, utterly unfazed.

"You know, in my clan, we have a saying for married couples: Through thick and thin, together always."

Without hesitation, she slipped her arm around his, her smile practically glowing.

"So of course I'm coming with you."

Fang Yuan flinched, instinctively jerking his arm away.

"What are you doing?!"

He took a step back, shaking his head.

"No. We just met, and I don't trust you enough to have you follow me around. Go your way, and I'll go mine."

Her smile didn't falter. If anything, it softened into something gentler... deeper.

Without a word, she reached up to her hair bun.

Her fingers found the slender hairpin, the same one she had used earlier with such terrifying ease.

With a smooth pull, she slid it free.

As she did, the delicate flower tucked behind it slipped loose, drifting silently to the forest floor.

She didn't spare it a glance.

She didn't look at it.

Not even for a second.

To her, nothing in this forest held more beauty, more meaning, than the man standing before her.

Then she reached to her ring finger and drew the spatial ring itself from her finger.

The faint runes along its surface pulsed once, like a heartbeat.

She stepped forward and offered it to him in both palms, her spatial ring, her everything.

"Here," she whispered, eyes steady. "Take it. If that's what it takes for you to trust me... I'm giving you everything."

She looked up at him, her voice softer now, less teasing.

"Is that enough to earn your trust... yet?"

Fang Yuan stared down at the hairpin in his palm, then at the girl standing before him with wide, earnest eyes.

For the first time since she had shown up, he had no words.

Completely, utterly speechless.

Fang Yuan grabbed both and kept walking, but his mind was already drifting.

Trust? He scoffed inwardly. As if.

He wasn't quick to hand that out. Especially not in this situation.

Especially not to someone claiming to be Lin Feng, someone he hadn't seen since he was seven years old!

Seven.

It felt like a lifetime ago.

And maybe it was.

He wasn't exactly a normal child back then, already a transmigrator, already burdened with two lifetimes' worth of memories and thoughts.

At seven, he had the mind of a grown man.

A tired, jaded man who already understood far too well how the world worked.

And he remember that, during that time the Lin family had visited Coldwind City for some business with the Wu Clan.

Back in those days, the Fang family still held a spot in the Five Great Families, though barely.

They were the weakest of the five, but still carried enough weight for their name to matter.

That week had been unusually lively, visits, gifts, ceremonies, pomp.

He remembered the Lin entourage arriving. Refined, proud, arrogant.

The kind of clan that looked down their nose even when smiling.

And then... There was the child. The Lin family's only child.

He remembered seeing him for the first time.

They had no formal introduction.

Just a blur of motion, panic, and chaos.

A pack of spirit wolves was chasing the boy.

A whole pack.

When he saw that, he hadn't thought. He just acted.

He rushed over and then grabbed the boy's arm and bolted, dragging him through the forest, aiming straight for the cliffs.

Why the cliff?

Because the nearest human settlement was too far, and he had a small hideout carved into the rock face.

A place he had found and reinforced himself, tucked away behind a vine-covered ledge—one of the few places he felt safe in those days.

He remembered looking back at the kid when they reached the edge.

Back then, he thought Lin Feng was a boy.

Scrawny, stubborn, wild-eyed.

He'd said, "You have to trust me. I'll jump first. When I call out to you, then you jump. Got it?"

And that kid...

With the most carefree, insane grin said,

"Let's hold hands and jump together."

Even now, the memory gave him chills.

Who says something like that at a time like that?

Especially who would expect something like that from a seven year old?! Wanna die so soon? Already?

He'd refused, of course. "No. I jump first. Then you follow when I shout 'Jumo'. Understand?"

The boy had nodded, still grinning. "Got it. I'm Lin Feng."

He'd nodded back, "Fang Yuan," and leapt.

He remembered grabbing the vine, swinging around the rocky edge, reaching the little ledge that served as his shelter.

He was still catching his breath when he turned to shout, ready to jump back out with the vine and catch the kid mid-air.

Only...

The boy had already jumped.

Without waiting.

Just... launched off the cliff with a laugh.

Fang Yuan hadn't even had time to swear.

He dove after him, swinging wide with the vine, catching the boy mid-fall and the two of them plummeted straight into the river below.

Cold. Sharp.

And yet, somehow they survived.

He remembered surfacing, coughing up water, dragging the kid to shore.

They'd gotten caught in one of the local fishermen's traps, tangled in nets.

The fisherman had pulled them both up and offered shelter.

Fang Yuan, so relieved that they were alive, had even promised a reward.

He carried the kid back to Coldwind—drenched, cold, but alive.

And that's when it all fell apart.

The moment they stepped foot into the city, a group of uniformed cultivators, Lin family guards had spotted them.

They didn't wait for his explanations. There was no exchange of greetings. Nor did the guards made any inquiry.

Just "Kidnapper!" and a flurry of attacks.

He'd been too shocked to respond properly, barely escaped, and never saw Lin Feng again after that.

And now...

He glanced over his shoulder.

That girl, Lin Zhaoyue or whatever she called herself now was happily skipping after him like this was a stroll in the countryside.

She caught his gaze, waved, and smiled brightly.

Fang Yuan turned back around with a sigh.

Is she mental? he muttered under his breath.

Chapter 75: Lin Zhaoyue [3]

Fang Yuan turned his attention to the items in his hand.

The hairpin was simple at first glance, sleek, elegant, but clearly crafted with precision.

There were faint engravings along its length, subtle enough to be missed by an untrained eye, but to Fang Yuan, each stroke shimmered faintly with spiritual resonance.

The spatial ring, on the other hand, was more traditional, black with a silver inlay of coiling clouds, its weight deceptively light for the power it held.

From beside him, Lin Zhaoyue leaned in slightly, her voice a sultry whisper, teasing and soft:

"Wanna know what the artifact's for?"

She gestured toward the hairpin with a delicate finger, the smile on her lips curling like the end of a mystery novel waiting to be spoiled.

Fang Yuan didn't look at her. His gaze remained fixed on the hairpin, but his brow arched slightly.

"What's an artifact for if not to kill."

She giggled, swaying a little as she clasped her hands behind her back.

"Mmm~ yes, that too. But that's just the boring part."

Her eyes gleamed as she leaned in close again, her voice lowering into a breathy whisper.

"The longer I hold it close to me, the more likely I am to... fertilize."

Fang Yuan nearly dropped the hairpin on instinct, jolting like he had touched a cursed object.

She laughed, the sound bright and unbothered.

"Of course it only works on females, silly~."

Fang Yuan shot her a blank stare.

Then, without a word, he turned and began walking deeper into the forest.

In one hand, he still held her spatial ring and the cursed hairpin. Supposedly her prized possessions.

But even as he walked, his spiritual essence stirred.

He activated Golden Shell Armor: Second Form – Bravery, the invisible shield cloaking him like a second skin.

Subtle and invisible.

Constantly tracking danger behind his back.

It drained his qi slowly but not fast enough to worry him. His reserves were vast.

And even if it wasn't, his life was far more worthwhile.

Precautions were simply the smart thing to do.

Especially with her at his side.

She followed behind at an even pace, humming a little tune, as if they were on some romantic stroll.

And then, she suddenly spoke.

"Can I walk in front?"

Fang Yuan's steps slowed.

Walk ahead?

Fang Yuan's steps slowed.

She wants to walk ahead now? Why?

Does she know? Can she sense the Golden Shell? Maybe she's been probing me this entire time, looking for weaknesses...

His gaze flicked toward her subtly, just enough to observe, never enough to provoke.

First she gave me her weapon. Her ring. Now she wants to lead? No. No no no. This isn't right.

What am I even doing? Letting her follow me? Am I insane?

His fingers twitched.

They say a single moment of carelessness can cost a cultivator their life. And now I'm just walking through the forest with some lunatic girl who calls herself my wife?

He clenched his jaw.

So what if she says she's Lin Feng? That was a lifetime ago. I was seven. She could've read my memories for all I know! There are soul-reading techniques. Hypnosis scripts. Hell, even illusion arrays!

His breath hitched, barely but it was there.

I don't trust her.

I don't know her.

And finally, he stopped walking.

He turned, movements slow, deliberate.

His expression was unreadable, flat, calm but his eyes were cold and distant.

He held out the spatial ring and hairpin, steady as a blade.

"Here," he said quietly. "Take them back."

His voice was firm and final.

"And please, leave me alone. If you truly want to meet again, you can visit the Fang family estate. Officially."

There was no edge to his tone.

Just cold boundaries.

Lin Zhaoyue looked stunned.

Her arms didn't reach for the items.

Instead, she stared at him, eyes wide, shimmering with something deeper.

"You still don't trust me?" she whispered.

Her voice cracked, just slightly.

As if tears threatened but didn't fall.

Fang Yuan turned his head away, his gaze slipping off her face like water off stone.

No. Because this doesn't add up.

What are the odds? Truly?

You wander into a forbidden forest, one of the most dangerous in the region and just happen to run into someone you haven't seen since you were seven years old?

His brow twitched.

Seven. That's over two decade ago.

Both had no communication. No sightings of each other. There were no news. And now, out of all places and all times, she just... appears saying she's him?

How is she even certain that he was Fang Yuan unless she tracked him from the very beginning?

He scoffed under his breath.

What kind of fantasy world logic is this?

He shook his head slowly, more to himself than to her.

I'm terrible at math, sure. But even I know the odds of this aren't just low, hey're abyssal. They have to be hundreds of zeroes after the decimal point. Like digging through a mountain and finding a single hair.

Just then—

Movement.

A rustle of grass. The distinct, measured footsteps of several men.

Fang Yuan's head snapped toward the sound, footsteps, rustling, the soft grind of boots against undergrowth.

A cold clarity settled into him, quiet, razor-thin, like the edge of a freshly honed blade.

As the shadows stirred and the figures stepped into view, Fang Yuan's mind began to churn.

Damn it...

So that's how it is.

This Lin Zhaoyue, what a cunning little fox.

Got me talking, lowered my guard, dangled old memories like bait... and all the while, steering me exactly where she wanted.

Gaslighted and delivered right into her trap. Tch.

Without hesitation, Fang Yuan moved, three light steps back, smooth and measured putting a clean distance between himself and Lin Zhaoyue.

But when he looked at her,

She wasn't smiling, nor did she look like she was scheming.

Her entire demeanor had shifted.

Gone was the teasing glint in her eyes.

Gone was the flirtation.

Her expression had turned sharp and furious.

Her lips pressed into a thin line. Her fingers hovered near the hairpin she had just relinquished.

Her aura flared.

Fang Yuan narrowed his eyes.

She's... angry?

Chapter 76: Lin Zhaoyue [4]

Why was she angry?

Fang Yuan stared at her for a long moment, his gaze searching her expression trying to decipher whether this was another one of her absurd games... or something real.

But there was no teasing glint this time.

No smug smile tugging at the corners of her lips.

Only a tight jaw, a coiled tension in her stance, and eyes fixed with open hostility, not at him, but at the shadows emerging ahead.

He followed her gaze then stiffened as a dozen men stepped out from between the trees, dressed in matching armor engraved with a delicate orchid motif, emblem of the Gu family.

Each one radiated Golden Core realm cultivation, steady but unremarkable.

The man at the center stood just a step higher, peak of the realm, the clear leader.

He wore robes a little too refined for someone skulking through a swamp and waved an ornate fan lazily, despite the damp chill in the air.

Purely for flair as the forest was damp enough to freeze water....

"Lady Zhaoyue," he called with a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes.

Lin Zhaoyue's voice rang out sharp and clear, her posture rigid.

"Did my brother send you? Or was it my father?"

The man chuckled, ignoring her question.

Around him, the others began drawing weapons and talismans with practiced ease. Quiet clicks. The soft hum of Qi gathering.

"Come now," the leader said, voice silky. "Why run off like this? You were supposed to warm my bed tonight, remember?"

He tilted his fan coyly, as if expecting her to blush.

She didn't.

She clicked her tongue and stepped forward instead.

"Heh. You dare covet another man's wife?"

That one sentence hit Fang Yuan like a bolt of lightning.

He felt it.

That creeping chill up his spine.

Wait—what?

Before he could even blink, Lin Zhaoyue turned her head sharply toward him.

And just like that... the Gu family's leader finally noticed him.

Fang Yuan stiffened.

Up until now, he had been ignored. Blessedly, beautifully ignored. Like a rock, or worse, a mortal.

And now, thanks to this lunatic he was in the spotlight!

His expression stayed composed. His spiritual aura remained contained.

But inwardly, he cursed every god who had ever lived.

"This girl really brought their attention to me..."

Still, Fang Yuan didn't lose his calm.

He cleared his throat and gave a light, almost indifferent cough.

"I don't know who you are."

His tone was flat and dismissive.

He even took a step back, as if putting distance between himself and a passing stranger.

But Lin Zhaoyue didn't flinch.

She just raised her hand and pointed directly at him at the hairpin glittering in his grasp.

"Oh, husband~" she sang sweetly, eyes glowing with mock affection. "You're holding my hairpin and my dowry in your hands. Don't be shy~ Let's show them how much we love each other."

When she mentioned the hairpin, the young master from the Gu family suddenly paused mid-step.

His gaze sharpened.

And sure enough, there it was.

The spatial ring and the hairpin of Lady Lin Zhaoyue, glinting faintly in the hands of this unknown stranger.

One of his close confidants leaned in, whispering with growing urgency.

"Young Master... isn't that the hairpin Lady Lin Zhaoyue always wears?"

A beat passed.

More whispers followed from the group behind him.

"Didn't the Oracle say..."

"That the one fated for her, the man blessed by the heavens would be the only one aside from herself to hold her hairpin?"

"Wasn't that supposed to be our young master?"

A ripple spread through the group, murmurs rising like wind before a storm, all of it converging on Fang Yuan.

Every single gaze turned to him.

Especially the Gu family's young master, whose features twisted with fury, his expression like stone cracking under heat.

Fang Yuan, however, simply sighed internally.

It was already a nuisance before, but now? This had spiraled completely out of hand...

He clenched his jaw.

A dozen Golden Core cultivators. One peak among them.

Not even worth breaking a sweat.

He was a peak Nascent Soul. A realm above. A world apart.

Even Lin Zhaoyue, the only one present who could pose even a remote threat, didn't seem inclined to fight him at all.

And so, he decided to end this farce swiftly.

Fang Yuan took a step forward, his expression unreadable, and then he spoke.

His voice dropped, deepened with a touch of spiritual resonance.

Easy enough. Changing voices was child's play.

What came out was no longer the smooth, youthful voice of a wandering cultivator but the cold, aged tone of a seasoned powerhouse.

"Young boy," Fang Yuan said, his voice rolling through the trees like distant thunder.

"Leave this place. I have no time for fools like you. It's dangerous here."

A hush fell.

The Gu family disciples instinctively tightened their grips on their weapons.

And then—

"Ah~ my hubby~" Lin Zhaoyue moaned, the words drawn out like honeyed poison.

The young master's face contorted, a vein popping visibly at his temple.

He clenched his fan so hard it bent slightly.

And in the middle of this slow-burning disaster, Fang Yuan swore...

He swore he definitely saw Lin Zhaoyue giggle.

She definitely giggled.

With a twinkle in her eye, she then turned her head ever so slightly toward him... and winked.

The young master from the Gu family took a step forward, ignoring Fang Yuan's warning entirely.

He raised his chin arrogantly, fan snapping open again despite the biting chill in the air.

"I am Gu Zhen, first son of the Gu family! My father and grandfather are both Nascent Soul realm masters!"

His voice boomed with pride, as if the very trees should bow in acknowledgment.

"Hand over the hairpin, the spatial ring, and whatever wealth you carry. Do that... and I'll let you crawl out of here alive."

Behind him, the twelve cultivators shifted.

Subtle, but deadly, ready to strike at a moments.

Fang Yuan's gaze swept over them, calm, unbothered, already calculating ten different ways to flatten them before they could blink.

He opened his mouth to respond when—

[Ding! 🎉 Congratulations! 🎉🎉]

[Your family descendants have won the Championship in the Coldwind City Tournament!]

[Rewards: +100,000 SP

+1 Saint-Grade Cultivation Manual]

A chime echoed in his mind, bright and festive.

For the briefest moment, Fang Yuan blinked.

Then, silence.

Not because of the tension.

But because of a single, deeply perplexed thought in his head:

"...Why the hell isn't it Divine Grade?!"

Chapter 77: Khai Sang

Divine Grade.

Yes. The reward was supposed to be Divine Grade!

Not Saint Grade!

Fang Yuan's brow twitched slightly.

"What kind of scam are you running system. What is this?"

Still the system made no comments as it simply watched him rant, he made a mental note to review it later.

Maybe it had hidden conditions. Maybe he missed something.

"Hell, where I come from, saints go to heaven and eventually become divine, right? Or wait... is it divine first, then saint? Ugh. These ranking names make no damn sense."

His thoughts spiraled further:

"Saint-grade... what's next? Pope-grade? Oracle-level? Can I get a 'Heavenly Bureaucrat' tier?"

Yet before he could be buried in his thoughts the Gu family attacked.

Swords rang out as they surged forward in unison, flashing blades catching the dull light of the forest.

Twelve men. One target.

But Fang Yuan was already moving.

His body flowed like liquid shadow, slipping between blades and fists.

A sword slashed down from the left, he twisted.

Another jabbed for his chest, he stepped aside and let it slide past like mist.

One came at him with a roar, overhead strike blazing with Qi.

Crack!

Fang Yuan's palm slammed into the man's ribs, sending him flying back into a tree with a wet thud.

Another sword came swinging for his head.

It was fast and precise, one hit and it could actually kill.

But Fang Yuan ducked low in a blur of motion, letting the blade whistle just inches above his hair.

And then..

He pivoted.

His body twisted with the momentum, right leg chambered. ..

Directly aiming in the groin.

A flawless, bone-crushing strike to the family jewels.

The cultivator didn't scream.

He wheezed.

It was the kind of sound one made when life re-evaluated its worth in a single heartbeat.

His blade slipped from his fingers.

His knees buckled like bamboo in a storm.

And he collapsed forward, clutching himself with both hands as his pupils rolled back into his skull.

And Fang Yuan shouted,

"GOAL!"

With his shout what followed next was silence.

Everyone shared a unified and a horrified silence.

The remaining Gu cultivators didn't charge.

They froze.

All eleven of them.

Their eyes widened.

And like synchronized dancers of pain, every man present subtly cupped his own groin.

A silent, instinctive gesture of universal male solidarity.

You didn't need spiritual sense to feel it, just eyes and a soul.

Fang Yuan straightened with a slight wince of sympathy.

"Sorry, brother. But your ancestors won't have descendants now."

He turned, cloak fluttering.

"Alright. Who's next?"

Around him, the Gu family hesitated.

Several looked down at their swords, then back at Fang Yuan.

Is that how cultivators were supposed to fight?

What kind of men is this, that's dirty! Cheating.

Even Gu Zhen, fan still in hand, took half a step back.

Fang Yuan didn't wait for a response.

He simply started walking, slowly, deliberately toward Gu Zhen.

Each step crunched softly against the mossy earth, but to Gu Zhen, it might as well have been the tolling of a funeral bell.

The fan in his hand trembled.

"Y-You... Don't you know who I am?" Gu Zhen stammered, voice rising like a squeaky flute in a death march. "My father is Gu Jian! Clan head Gu Jian! A Nascent Soul powerhouse! He'll kill you if you lay a finger on me!"

But Fang Yuan didn't stop.

He didn't blink.

He didn't even respond.

Gu Zhen took a step back.

Then another.

The air grew thick, heavy with pressure, not spiritual, but psychological.

The kind that made even peak Golden Core cultivators instinctively sweat beneath their robes.

"G-Get him!" Gu Zhen shrieked.

The Gu cultivators surged forward, all except one.

The poor soul whose balls had been sent to the afterlife lay curled on the ground, moaning softly to himself, lost in a pain that only the grave could numb.

The rest, eleven in all rushed in.

Talismans blazed to life.

Swords glinted coldly.

Spiritual light exploded in bursts of fire, wind, and ice.

Fang Yuan exhaled, a long breath, eyes like still lakes.

Golden Shell Armor—First Form: Cowardice.

The shimmering dome of light bloomed instantly, golden and absolute.

Blades and spiritual attacks slammed into the barrier and were instantly repelled, bursting apart like waves hitting stone.

Fang Yuan stepped forward through the storm, casual, almost annoyed.

He reached out, palm glowing with golden essence.

Crack!

He backhanded one cultivator into a tree.

Bang!

Another was grabbed mid-leap and slammed into the ground so hard the swamp trembled.

Three tried to coordinate, attacking in tandem but they met a boot.

Spinning mid-air, Fang Yuan landed a brutal kick straight into one man's gut, flipping him back into his allies like a bowling ball of human pain.

The rest faltered.

Eyes wide.

Breathing heavy.

The difference in realms, in pressure, in intent, it was now painfully obvious.

Fang Yuan dusted off his robes.

"You're sending Golden Core fish to fight a Nascent Soul shark," he said, finally speaking, tone dry as bone.

Then he turned his gaze back to Gu Zhen, who had stumbled and fallen on his backside.

"I don't care who your father is," Fang Yuan said, voice cool and low, each word a blade honed to silence.

"But if he wishes to avenge you, tell him to come to Sword Twin Mountain... and send a challenge to me, Sword Demon, Khai Sang."

The words dropped like a guillotine.

For a heartbeat, silence fell across the forest.

Then gasps echoed around, so audible as it was a collective one.

Even the birds seemed to go mute.

Weapons clattered to the forest floor.

Every single Gu cultivator froze. Their pupils dilated, breath caught, postures stiffened. Even the wind paused as if listening.

"S-S-Sword Demon?!" one of them stammered.

"Y-You're that Khai Sang?! The one from the massacre at Ghost Cliff Pass?!"

"The one who soloed the Crimson flame Sect's entire inner court?!"

Fang Yuan didn't confirm or deny.

He just stood still.

Chapter 78: Meet the Saberfang [1]

Gu Zhen's lips trembled, then his entire jaw. His limbs buckled as reality shattered around him.

"N-No, please—Senior! Forgive me! This junior didn't know it was you!"

He dropped to his knees, bowing so low his forehead struck the ground with a loud thunk. Again. And again.

The smell hit before anything else.

Gu Zhen had pissed himself.

Right there, golden core or not, his pride, dignity, and pants were all soaked.

"I-I was wrong... so wrong... please have mercy, Senior Khai Sang!"

Fang Yuan kept up the act.

His eyes swept over the trembling Gu cultivators one last time, the corner of his mouth curling just slightly in disdain.

"Scram now," he said coldly.

They didn't need to be told twice.

Gu Zhen was already halfway into the forest, still dragging wet footprints behind him.

His men followed like frightened rabbits, weapons forgotten, pride shattered, their retreat nearly tripping over itself in the haste to flee the so-called Sword Demon.

When the last of their shadows vanished between the trees, a soft hum sounded behind him.

Then came a hop. A skip. A playful voice.

"Wo!"

Fang Yuan didn't even turn.

"Go away."

"Aww, don't be like that," she pouted dramatically, spinning once and halting in front of him. "I came to help you, didn't I?"

He gave her a look, unreadable but firm.

Unbothered, she leaned in with a giggle and whispered, "I may or may not have found a Hollow Yeklo Grass."

Fang Yuan's expression stiffened but her perceptive self already noticed.

Her smile sharpened.

"Oh~? Hit the mark, didn't I?" she said, twirling a strand of her hair around her finger.

"You're here for the Hollow Soul Pill, right? Which means you're preparing for the Hollow spirit realm, which means you're just a step away from Hollow Spirit Realm... Ah how exciting, husband~."

Fang Yuan said nothing.

But his silence was already an answer.

Of course he was searching for the grass.

It was one of the rarest main ingredients in refining Hollow Soul Pill.

And of course, this fox found it first.

Yet he didn't speak and instead just stared at her, still guarded.

She tilted her head, as if catching the flicker of mistrust.

"Oh, come on~. Still don't believe me?" she whined sweetly.

"Fine. How about this, I'll swear an oath with your family's truth artifact. You know... the heirloom ring you always wear?"

Fang Yuan's brows furrowed.

His voice dropped, quiet but heavy. "...How do you know about that?"

That ring wasn't some random trinket.

It was a soul-bound artifact passed down through his bloodline for generations.

A tool designed to reveal truth from lies but only with consent.

And that flaw made it nearly useless in hostile situations.

He didn't have any occasions where he needed to use it, so its usage has been zero so far.

Still, he wore it because it was one of the last relics tied to his parents.

A silent bond with the family he lost.

And yet... this girl knew.

Lin Zhaoyue's smile widened, her lashes fluttering playfully as she took a slow, deliberate step closer.

Her movements were fluid, almost feline in their grace as she leaned in just enough to invade Fang Yuan's personal space, voice dropping to a honeyed whisper.

"I might or might not have... kept a little tab on you here and there~. Just a glance or two. Over the years," she said, twirling a loose strand of hair around her finger with an air of innocence that fooled no one.

Her eyes sparkled with mischief.

"I mean, how could you possibly expect me to remember you after twenty-three years without meeting even once?" she continued with a mock-pout, her tone rich with exaggerated offense.

"It's not like I have a photographic memory or anything~."

Then her expression shifted, smirk deepening, voice dipping into that dangerous territory between seductive and deranged.

"That's why I followed your whereabouts. Listened for rumors here and there. And racked down a few contracts you took in the outer provinces. It was not that hard, really. You're kind of famous, you know~."

She leaned in even closer, lips brushing dangerously near his ear.

"And I may or may not have watched from a very safe distance while you bathed—"

Fang Yuan froze.

"...You what?"

His voice was flat, but his eyes snapped toward her like a drawn blade.

She giggled, full, unashamed, and completely unfazed.

"I said from a safe distance, silly~! It's not like I barged in. I just watched and admired, ofcourse I was collecting data as well."

Fang Yuan's mouth parted slightly, but no words came out. A rare event.

Her hands clasped behind her back, she took another step, circling him now with slow, deliberate steps.

"Don't look at me like that. How else was I supposed to confirm if you'd grown up handsome?"

"You're insane."

"Am I?" she beamed. "Or dedicated. Depends who's judging."

Fang Yuan didn't answer.

But the way his foot subtly shifted and his qi rippled just slightly told her he was this close to putting her to sleep for a week.

She giggled again.

That only seemed to excite her more.

"Just kidding~! ...Or am I?" she added with a wink.

Fang Yuan stared, deadpan.

"...That's stalking and being a pervert."

Lin Zhaoyue gasped and placed both hands on her chest as if wounded.

"Excuse you! I wasn't the one stalking. It was my subordinate. I'm completely innocent. I just watched what they sent me, organized the files, and rewatched the footage five or six dozen times..."

"What the hell."

She giggled.

"But isn't it sweet~? You got a wife who's very loyal to you and only you."

Fang Yuan massaged the bridge of his nose.

This girl was mad and unhinged.

But she also knew about the Hollow Yeklo Grass.

And she was willing to make an oath on his heirloom ring.

Which meant she was confident.

He still didn't trust her but he also couldn't ignore the bait.

And Lin Zhaoyue?

She just smiled wider, eyes gleaming with affection, obsession, and something far too dangerous to name.

"Shall we start then~? Or are you planning to fall for me here instead of the cliff we jumped from twenty-three years ago?"

Chapter 79: Meet the Saberfang [2]

Fang Yuan raised his left hand, fingers brushing the ancient ring that sat snugly at its base.

The band was simple, worn by time and legacy, a deep obsidian metal etched faintly with silver filigree, looping patterns of dragon breath and ancestral flame.

It pulsed faintly as if it recognized the tension in the air.

He slid the ring off slowly, not because it was difficult.

But because this wasn't a casual gesture.

This was a ritual.

A piece of his family's soul, passed through generations and if used, it required respect.

With the ring resting in his palm, he stared at Lin Zhaoyue, his tone even and quiet but laced with something sharper than steel.

"Do you know the cost of being caught lying after willingly binding yourself to this?"

Lin Zhaoyue nodded with an almost bored enthusiasm. "Yes yes, of course," she replied, waving one hand playfully.

"The soul lash and the backlash. I know. One flicker of dishonesty and boom, instant spiritual damage. There's a risk of potentially crippling. I've done my homework, dear husband~."

Fang Yuan narrowed his eyes.

"Then you also know that even intent to deceive counts. Not just the words you say, but the spirit behind them."

She smirked, stepping forward like it was a wedding ceremony instead of an interrogation.

"Go ahead. I'm ready to bind."

Fang Yuan paused only for a moment, watching her carefully.

Then, slowly, he infused the ring with a thread of his qi. The band glowed faintly, soft golden light weaving between the carvings.

"Place your finger here," he instructed, pointing to the circle of light on the band.

Without hesitation, Lin Zhaoyue pressed her fingertip to the glow.

The ring pulsed once.

Then again.

And then a ripple of transparent energy spread out in a perfect sphere around the two of them, barely visible, like sunlight refracted through still water.

Fang Yuan exhaled slowly.

It had begun.

The ring now recognized Lin Zhaoyue as the one bound to truth.

He started slowly.

"Are you really Lin Feng?" he asked.

Her eyes sparkled. "Yes," she replied simply.

The ring remained quiet. No light nor signs of a backlash.

"And your real name?"

"Lin Zhaoyue," she smiled.

Still, the ring remained inert.

"Were you the one who jumped off the cliff twenty-three years ago?"

"I didn't hesitate," she answered. "I thought you were dead. So I believed we would be together if I followed you into death at the same time, if it meant one more moment with you."

Fang Yuan's throat tightened slightly. But the ring gave no protest.

He stared deeper.

"Have you stalked me over the years?"

"Absolutely," she said with a wide, unrepentant grin.

The ring glowed lightly... but not in rejection, it was confirmation.

She wasn't lying.

Fang Yuan was in disbelief for a second there but he continued the question.

"Have you tried to manipulate me since the moment we met today?"

This time her brows rose.

"Manipulating you? No. I wanted you to remember me on your own."

There was no pulse or a lash.

She was... telling the truth.

Fang Yuan frowned deeper now.

His final question lingered in the air, and when he asked it, his voice was low and almost too quiet.

"Do you mean me any sort of harm?"

Lin Zhaoyue's smile softened, not teasing, not deranged.

Something almost too human glinted behind those eyes.

"No, absolutely not," she said. "Not unless you meant to reject me forever."

The ring dimmed, but did not spark. It didn't reject her words.

It accepted them.

Which meant...

She wasn't lying.

Even that madness, that obsession, was rooted in real truth.

Fang Yuan said nothing.

He simply slipped the ring back onto his finger, exhaled, and stared at the woman who, by all logic, should not be trusted and yet had passed a test older than kingdoms.

Lin Zhaoyue beamed, clasping her hands behind her back like an innocent maiden.

"Satisfied~?"

He looked at her. Truly looked.

And said, voice low and unreadable:

"...We'll go to the Hollow Yeklo Grass. Lead the way." View the correct content at .

Lin Zhaoyue giggled as if she had a small victory and behind her smile, behind her playful steps... there was a flicker of something dangerous again.

Fang Yuan walked in silence, the forest quiet around them save for the occasional rustle of leaves and the maddening hum of Lin Zhaoyue's presence beside him.

Then her voice chimed, light and honeyed as ever, "Husband~ what will you do if the Saberfang guarding the grass happens to be a peak Nascent Soul realm beast?"

Fang Yuan didn't so much as flinch, his voice cool and flat.

"Don't call me husband."

"Aaah~ you're so cruel!" she whined dramatically, clutching her chest as if physically wounded. "My fragile heart... broken in pieces... again."

Fang Yuan said nothing, eyes forward, tone detached as always.

She sniffled loudly, then leaned in with a mischievous glint and whispered something just low enough to stir the hairs near his ear.

"Hey, husband... I was the one who spread the rumors that you were gay." View the correct content at

Fang Yuan stopped walking.

There was a moment of absolute silence.

Then his head turned slowly, brows furrowing, eyes wide in blank disbelief.

"...The heck—?"

She giggled, twirling a strand of her hair as she leaned a little closer, voice soaked in playful affection.

"Oh dear husband, no other woman needs to know that you're into women," she beamed sweetly. "I alone am enough for you~."

Fang Yuan didn't respond, but his eye twitched slightly.

She clasped her hands behind her back, her expression turning mock-serious, chin tilted in confidence.

"Trust me," she added, lowering her voice like she was about to reveal a divine secret,

"All women are like snakes. I'm the only exception."

Fang Yuan turned his head slightly, lips parted just enough to speak.... but no words came out.

His mouth closed again.

"...What kind of logic is that?" he finally muttered under his breath.

The sheer narcissism. The unshakable self-belief. The audacity.

She smiled wider, completely unbothered, as if she had just spoken a universal truth.

And Fang Yuan could only stare at her for a moment, utterly speechless.

Chapter 80: Meet the Saberfang [3] [pt.1]

"Oh, look!" Lin Zhaoyue chirped suddenly, her voice light and melodic as she pointed toward a narrow clearing nestled between the gnarled roots of a towering silverwood tree.

"There's the Hollow Yeklo Grass!"

Fang Yuan's eyes snapped in the direction she pointed, narrowing instinctively.

And there, resting between braided roots, partially cloaked in spiritual mist were ten glowing sprouts of greenish-gold.

Their leaves shimmered faintly, a gentle hum of spiritual resonance pulsing from them in tune with the air itself.

Even from this distance, he could sense the unique qi rhythm tied to the Hollow Spirit Realm, subtle and steady, like a breath waiting to be drawn.

There it was.

Hollow Yeklo Grass.

A treasure beyond value.

A step closer to breaking through to hollow spirit realm.

Fang Yuan didn't hesitate. His boots cracked through the moss as he darted forward.

He was not going to risks. No, he should not delays.

Last time, he'd found one, only for it to wither before his very eyes, devoured by the Saberfang that guarded the grass.

Not this time.

He landed by the herb, careful not to damage the roots as he knelt.

He pulled out a precision blade and dug slowly, carefully, extracting the soil along with the herb.

Lin Zhaoyue strolled after him, arms folded behind her back, eyes lazily observing.

"My, my, why the rush, husband?" she asked with a smirk. "Scared someone else might pick your little treasure?"

Fang Yuan wanted to snap back, 'Last time I found one, it was eaten by a damn beast five seconds later' but he swallowed the memory.

Instead, he remained quiet, breath focused, eyes sharp. He slipped the grass into a protective crystal container and tucked it into his spatial ring.

Then he rose, satisfied.

Lin Zhaoyue beamed, leaning in slightly.

"Am I not useful, husband~?"

Fang Yuan gave her a long look... and finally nodded.

Just once.

"Mn."

That seemed to please her more than a full poem would have.

But before he could enjoy even a second of peace, the system buzzed in his mind again.

[DING!]

[Host, you haven't claimed your Coldwind Tournament reward. Please access it now to optimize your cultivation path.]

Oh right.

That notification again.

He was about to pull it open when....

"Husband," Lin Zhaoyue's voice came again, unusually casual. "What are you daydreaming about?"

He blinked.

Then she added, almost cheerfully:

"Look. Four Sabertooths coming our way."

"...What?"

He whipped his head around...

Thump.

Four massive shadows emerged from the brush, silent as death.

Saberfang Spirit Beasts.

Fangs curved like sickles. Bodies large enough to crush trees with a swipe.

Two of them were at mid-stage Nascent Soul Realm.

One was late-stage.

And the last one... was terrifyingly calm, its fur streaked with silver-blue.

Peak Nascent Soul.

His pupils contracted.

"What the hell....."

Without hesitation, Fang Yuan grabbed Lin Zhaoyue's wrist.

"Run!" he barked.

Lin Zhaoyue blinked as Fang Yuan's fingers wrapped around her wrist, his grip firm, urgent.

And then, she smiled.

A slow, sultry smile that did not belong to someone currently being chased by four monstrous spirit beasts.

"Mmm~ so sudden, husband~," she whispered breathlessly, a small shiver running up her spine. "You're grabbing me so forcefully... I like it."

Fang Yuan didn't even dignify that with a response.

His focus was locked ahead, spiritual energy flooding to his legs as he tore through the underbrush, yanking her along with him.

Behind them, the Saberfangs roared, the ground trembling with every step of their pursuit.

BOOM.

A tree splintered and collapsed as the peak-stage Saberfang leapt clean through it, maw wide, glowing qi threads around its fangs slicing through branches like paper.

"Stop talking," Fang Yuan growled, ducking under a low branch.

"Focus on running, or we're both going to be spirit beast snacks."

But Lin Zhaoyue only giggled, eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Oh come on~ don't be so cold! I'm treasuring this moment, you know? Hand in hand, life and death, running from beasts, so romantic. I wish this moment last forever."

He glanced sideways, deadpan. "You've got issues."

"Maybe~," she cooed, her steps light despite the chaos. "But you're holding me tighter than any man ever has. So I must be doing something right."

Behind them, the air howled as one of the mid-stage Saberfangs slashed out with its claw, sending a compressed wave of qi that split the ground apart.

Fang Yuan dodged to the left, pulling Lin Zhaoyue with him.

The impact landed where they had just stood, throwing dirt and stone into the sky like an explosion.

The late-stage Saberfang howled, its eyes glowing as it began gathering a beam of condensed soul qi in its throat.

Fang Yuan clicked his tongue, his body twisting mid-air as another devastating qi slash narrowly missed his shoulder.

The wind screamed past his ears as he landed and rolled, never stopping.

"If you have any tricks," he snapped, "use them now!"

Lin Zhaoyue, unfazed even with four monstrous Saberfangs on their tail, only grinned like she was being invited to a dance. "Oh, I've got plenty."

"Then what are you waiting for?!" Fang Yuan barked, launching himself sideways as a tree behind him was ripped in half by the peak-stage Saberfang's swipe.

This wasn't a joke anymore, if it ever was.

That thing wasn't just big. It was fast, unnervingly intelligent, and brimming with so much soul qi that Fang Yuan could feel his blood vibrating from just being near it.

He was a peak-stage Nascent Soul cultivator, powerful by mortal standards... but even he knew the truth.

A mid-stage Saberfang would give him a hard time.

A peak one?

He'd be lucky to die with a whole corpse.

As he landed again and prepared to throw a talisman, he heard Lin Zhaoyue's voice ring out behind him.

"Heavenly Timber—First Form: Wood Explosions!"

The world shuddered.

All around them, the trees suddenly pulsed, faint runes glowing along their bark, and then—

BOOM. BOOM. BOOM.

They detonated in rapid succession.