

Am I A God 271

Chapter 271: Cross-Dress and Photos

A new item had appeared in the diamond hall.

It was an adorable mini-dress with a cat princess print. It cost five diamonds to use. Putting it on would gift the wearer the ability to use two skills at once for ten whole minutes.

Zhao Yao stared at the dress wordlessly. He closed the Book and let out a dismissive snort.

“Cross-dressing? That’s never gonna happen. I’d rather die,” he thought to himself.

The power the dress afforded was tempting, but he vowed never to use it as he left the extradimensional belly and entered the real world.

He stepped foot into his bedroom, where Baiquan was busy training. He was doing push-up after push-up enthusiastically, his face flushed red from the exertion. Beads of sweat were forming above his brows.

“C’mon, Baiquan. I know you’re dedicated to this, there’s no need to exercise in my bedroom. Jeez,” Zhao Yao commented, “Continue in the living room, won’t you? I need a nap,”

“Yes, Boss. Off I go then,” Baiquan complied.

Hanako looked up from the couch when she heard the bedroom door open. She gulped as Baiquan walked out gingerly, panting and flushed.

“Oh my, that looks intense,” she thought, blushing beet red.

Baiquan noticed her weird expression but did not bother trying to make sense of it. He walked straight into his own room to continue training.

Growing stronger was all he could think about these days. The exercises he did, such as push-ups and sit-ups, were simple, but the result was immense. He was becoming noticeably fitter.

Baiquan was as much the paragon of physical excellence as Matcha was not. The ginger cat was perched on the massage chair again. He put his phone down, extended his paws, then stretched luxuriously.

He let out a huge yawn.

“My, my, my. The view at the top is beautiful, but it sure is lonely,” he sighed dramatically, his eyes on the screen of his phone.

The statistics of his Mobile Legends match was displayed. He had killed a staggering five opponents, a triumph by his standards.

Humming, he started another 5v5 match against a team of AI opponents.

“Humans are far too scheming. I can flaunt my true intellect and skills when I play against computers,” he concluded.

His train of thought was interrupted when his body suddenly froze and tensed. He had, quite unfortunately, grown familiar with this uncomfortable sensation. He knew that it meant he had lost all control of his limbs to a certain ragdoll.

Matcha narrowed his eyes as he involuntarily sprinted towards Elizabeth, phone dangling from the corner of his mouth.

“What do you want, Yeti? Why did you infringe my privacy with your stupid mind-control? he demanded angrily, “I was busy learning!”

Elizabeth did not seem too interested in what Matcha had to say. She was occupied with adjusting her Louis Vuitton purse. She held it in front of her at first, then waved it from her paw, before leaving it on her back.

“Hmm...What’s the prettiest way for me to pose with my purse, do you think?” she asked.

Matcha tilted his head to the side, confused. The poses looked the same to him.

“I don’t know why I bothered asking. Come, help me take some photos. Take as many as you can and I’ll choose a good one later.”

Matcha’s whiskers shook with fury.

“You,” he started, “Made me come here just to be your photographer?! Do you know how busy I am?!”

Elizabeth rolled her eyes at him.

“Busy? You were just playing your game, no? You can always play later.”

“You women know nothing! That’s not just a game. It’s more than that! In fact, it’s my religion.”

“Nonsense,” she dismissed him casually, “Be nice and take some good photos for me. I’ll send you \$10 as a reward after.”

Matcha’s demeanor changed instantly.

“Well, Lizzie, I have to say you have found the perfect cat for the job. Who but I, Matcha Leibovitz, can take the most moving photos? I can turn a dog into a wolf through the lens,” he said confidently.

With that, he raised his phone and aimed it in her direction.

“Tell me what you want, beautiful. Do you want to look cute? Or would a modern look be more you? Or sexy, perhaps? Retro? One set of photos would cost you just \$10. I’ll give you two sets for the price of one. I’ll even photoshop them until they’re nothing short of perfection.”

“Stop talking.”

Elizabeth took a few more shots of her new purse, then turned to Matcha.

“So here’s what you got to do. I must look good in the photo, but so does my purse. Anyone who takes one look at the picture must spot the purse, but it shouldn’t feel like we’re deliberately showing it off. The spotlight should still be on me. Comprendre?”

“Low-key glam, got it,” Matcha nodded, looking intently at Elizabeth through his camera lens.

He held his phone in one paw and used the other to direct her position.

“Look here, Lizzie! I want you to embody subtle beauty in our first shot,” he instructed.

Elizabeth rolled her eyes in a way that was not subtly beautiful.

“What does that even mean, you idiot?” she asked, exasperated.

“I’m not an idiot! I’m Matcha Leibovitz!”

“Whatever, just tell me what to do. Be precise about it!”

“Fine,” Matcha raised a paw into the air, “Look here. Yes, right here. Raise your chin a bit. Your smile can be sweeter. Okay, you’re overdoing it now. Yup, that’s the sweet spot! Show off your tail. Beautiful!”

Rapid clicks could be heard from the camera shutter.

Matcha leaped to away to capture Elizabeth from another angle.

He raised his phone to her, “Turn your upper body toward me and look right into the camera.”

“That makes my back ache.”

“Hang in there, we’re almost done. I just need you to up the melancholy factor. You need to look sad and deep in thought, as if I’ve abandoned you when you’re pregnant with my kitten -,”

His words were cut short when he threw an involuntary punch in his own face.

“She’s completely unprofessional. I’m just helping her get in the zone,” Matcha frowned, rubbing his cheek.

“Fine, then think about how disappointed you’ll be if Baiquan had prepared all your favorite food, but the other cats finished them without you. That’s it. Hold it there. You’re doing terrific, sweetie.”

Click click.

Dust Ball took a look at the duo as she slunk towards them. She let out a yawn and flopped belly-first onto the windowsill.

“Whatcha doing?” she asked.

“Portrait photography, duh,” Matcha responded impatiently, “Since you’re here, you might as well help us with lighting.”

“And why would I do that?”

“Well, if you don’t, I’ll destroy all that catmint you’ve stashed away in the septic tank.”

Dust Ball gritted her teeth.

“Stupid fatty,” she thought angrily, “Looks like I must find a better hiding spot.”

With that, she was enlisted as Matcha’s unwilling assistant.

“Can we move the spotlight further away? It’s blinding Elizabeth.”

“Her hair is all matted. Lizzie, don’t move. Dust Ball, lick her fur clean, please.”

“Where’re the props? Dust Ball, grab the carpet. Seriously, you don’t have a photographer’s eye at all. Keep this up and you’ll stay a lowly assistant forever.”

“Elizabeth, give me your sexiest look. Yes, that’s right, lift that butt and that raise that tail. Show all of you to me -,”

That earned Matcha more punches in rapid succession. He looked at his model begrudgingly through eyes that were swollen shut.

“I don’t mean any offense, Elizabeth. I’m a professional,” he stated.

After a tedious hour, the photoshoot could finally wrap up. Matcha was browsing through the photos with a content smile on his face,

“I think I did a pretty good job. Come see!”

Elizabeth hurried to him eagerly. Matcha was an idiot, but he did seem to know his way around a camera. She was excited to see what he had captured.

Her anticipation soon fizzled into disappointed as she flipped through the hundreds of shots.

“Why do I look so...chunky?” she remarked, brows furrowed.

“And what’s with this lighting? My face is as wide as a 50-inch TV.”

“And this?! Why did you take a photo of me grooming myself when I was having a break?!”

Elizabeth shot Matcha a death glare.

“Matcha Leibovitz? More like Matcha Piece-of-s**t,” she said coldly.

Matcha found himself retreating ever so slightly.

“This is what abstract photography is like,” he murmured.

“Seriously, what use are you? You suck at your stupid games and you suck at taking photos,” she huffed, flipping through the photos quickly.

Only three photos were passable and she sent them all to herself.

Chapter 272: Test of the Armor System

A satisfied smile played on Elizabeth’s lips after she uploaded the three photos.

“Remember to like the photos,” she cast her eyes on Matcha and Dust Ball.

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In the following days, Zhao Yao spent one half of his time managing the cafe and the other in the extradimensional belly. He also made sure that the Sphynx continued to lend his skill to Baiquan.

He did the same for his sister. By combing his own skills with that of Dust Ball and Elizabeth, he could compel the Sphynx to share his skill with Zhao Xue too. Like Baiquan, she put in the effort to train and become more powerful.

The bond between Zhao Yao and the supercats had grown stronger with time.

The belly had become an excellent environment for them, what with a fancy room dedicated to smoking catmint and another lined with computers equipped with all kinds of games and movies. A variety of canned and dried food was available in the pantry. Comfortable pet beds and kitty towers were scattered in every corner.

It may be Dust Ball’s belly, but it was paradise.

With so many supercats living their days out indulgently here, Zhao Yao did not have to work as hard to earn experience points. He received a couple hundred just based on fulfilling daily missions.

At the end of a week, he had accumulated 10 diamonds. The Book has also transformed to Level 5 (2,128 / 10,000).

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In the real world, a clowder of cats was gathered in a large circle. Matcha, Elizabeth, Mango, and Dust Ball were in the crowd too.

Two human figures were in the middle of the circle. They were darting toward and away from each other swiftly. Loud blasts could be heard whenever they exchanged blows.

After a particularly thunderous clash, the two stood a few meters apart from each other.

Zhao Yao shook his fist.

“Jesus. You’re almost as strong as me now. Your training is really paying off,” he commented.

“I guess,” Baiquan smiled sheepishly, “It’s all thanks to the Sphynx’s power. It’s too, well, powerful. I just train a little each day, but the results are amplified. I feel stronger.”

In a short week, Baiquan’s had visibly bulked up. The curve of muscles could be seen on his arms. Even his shoulders looked broader than before.

The look he was giving Zhao Yao, however, was far from his masculine physique. There was an unsettling gentleness in his eyes that made the hairs on the back of Zhao Yao’s neck stand.

“What’s wrong with this guy? He’s acting a bit off recently,” Zhao Yao thought to himself.

He pretended not to notice the weird gaze and continued speaking.

“Your strength and speed are not worse than mine. What you need to do is train your reflexes and agility. Do that and you’ll be on par with Superman soon.”

“Okay,” Baiquan nodded his head meekly, “I’ve been eating more now that I’m getting stronger though.”

“That’s to be expected. Don’t worry, eat whatever you want. It’s worth it. With your physical strength and invisibility, the Muscle Society won’t stand a chance.

The Sphinx cat studied the two men from the corner of his eyes. He smirked when his gaze landed on Baiquan.

After Zhao Yao sent Baiquan away, he turned to his captivated cat audience.

“Alright, time to test out our supercat armor!” he announced.

The supercat armor was Zhao Yao’s idea. It was a battle tactic he devised to defeat the Muscle Society.

He had learnt a lot about the cats and their abilities during the time he spent in the belly. He had found a way to maximize their combined powers for optimal impact.

“Activate regeneration!”

There was a flash in his eyes when he switched to Lucifer’s power of rapid healing.

The Sphinx cat raised his head to peer in Zhao Yao’s direction.

“What’s that imbecile up to this time?”

Zhao Yao raised his right arm.

“Assault Arm!” he yelled.

Fujin let out a loud meow, then leaped onto his right hand.

“Assault Arm, fire!”

A loud boom sounded as Fujin’s hair lifted from his body and stood on its ends. He had unleashed a torpedo of wind that rocketed towards a tower of cardboard boxes, which exploded into smithereens.

Zhao Yao then raised his left arm.

“Electric Arm, let’s go!”

That was Uncle Egg’s cue. He meowed before racing forward, then held onto Zhao Yao’s hand like Fujin did.

In that moment, Zhao Yao’s left fist was encircled by a ball of cackling electricity.

“Defence Shield, go!”

Ares rolled his eyes. He was as indifferent as his friends were excited. He sashayed towards him, then climbed up his leg and landed on his chest.

Ares activated his defensive shield, which covered Zhao Yao, as well as the three cats that were on him.

The shield repelled external forces and kept everything within together. It made sure that the cats could be safely balanced on Zhao Yao.

He raised his index and middle finger, which were pressed against each other.

“Funnel swords, let’s launch!” he exclaimed, pointing his fingers into the air.

“Weirdo,” Ares pursed his lips.

Regardless, he manipulated his force fields to form seven invisible swords that surrounded them.

Zhao Yao looked at the rock that he had lugged here beforehand.

“Fire!” he shouted.

In the next moment, the swords darted towards the ill-fated rock, smashing it into tiny pieces in no time at all.

“And now, let’s go into Stealth Mode.”

Roly Poly climbed into Zhao Yao’s back, into the protection of Ares’ field. He then activated his power to make everyone invisible.

A few seconds later, an explosion could be heard from another stack of cardboard boxes. It was as if an invisible giant was on a destructive rampage.

“Reveal Human Form!”

In an instant, Zhao Yao’s physical form was revealed, but the supercats remained undetectable.

“Let’s cast an illusion!”

Elizabeth leaped gracefully onto Zhao Yao’s right shoulder. She transformed his appearance from normal human geek to a futuristic warrior dressed in shining armor.

“Now, Diversion Protection!”

Dust Ball was already perched on his left shoulder, jaw wide open.

“Okay, this is just a dress rehearsal. No need for the real thing,” Zhao Yao said, “When we launch this, you’ll swallow our opponents into the extradimensional belly.”

While Zhao Yao looked epic, he was actually covered in supercats. There was a slight dip in his right shoulder, which was where Elizabeth stood.

“Lizzie’s getting heavy. I might have to watch her food intake more closely,” he mused.

“Okay, time for the finale. The closing act. Our final test. Cannon from Hell!”

No cat approached or climbed onto Zhao Yao at this point. Instead, he moved forward and lifted Mango, whom looked up at him with an innocently sweet expression.

Zhao Yao put the confused cat into the Sphynx’s cage.

The Sphynx was equally confused. He stared at Mango, who stared back dumbly.

“What the hell?”

“Hell is right. Cannon from Hell, fire!” Zhao Yao ordered.

With that, Elizabeth activated her power of perfect illusion. Poor Mango could now feel an overwhelming pain in his tummy that made his paws curl.

Chapter 273: Test Completed, Still Poor

The atmosphere in the reinforced steel cage had changed.

The Sphynx cat was overwhelmed with the explosive need to poop. Elizabeth had barely switched on her power for ten seconds when he collapsed onto the ground, face pale as a sheet of paper.

He felt like his stomach was about to literally explode.

He had experienced a spectrum of emotions in the 10 seconds. It began with surprise, which morphed into rage, humiliation, pain, sadness, then finally, absolute despair.

When Elizabeth lifted her spell of Mango, the Sphynx cat felt both physically and emotionally drained.

Fortunately for him, Mango's unique ability was starting to torment the other cats. If not, Elizabeth would not have stopped so soon.

"What...what was that?" he looked up at Zhao Yao, then Mango.

Zhao Yao ignored him. He reached into the cage and grabbed Mango, a satisfied smirk on his face.

"Good. Very good. The supercat armor test has passed with flying colors. Take a break, everyone! We shall have beef for lunch," he announced.

His words caused Fujin, Uncle Egg, Ares, Roly Poly, Elizabeth, and Dust Ball's eyes to light up. A perplexed expression remained on Mango's face. The silly cat had no clue what was going on.

The supercat armor was a complicated system that relied on telepathy for communication and Ares' defensive shields to protect and hold everyone together. It allowed Zhao Yao to unleash seven powers as he wished, ranging from assault waves, electric bolts, force fields, invisibility, illusions, the extradimensional belly, to Mango's explosive diarrhea.

The skills complemented each other perfectly.

Fujin's assault waves were perfect for attacking opponents that were a distance away, while Ares' fields tackled targets that were meters away. Uncle Egg's electric bolts could tase people that got a bit too close.

Roly Poly's invisibility, coupled with Elizabeth's illusion, made them great support players in the team. Escaping to Dust Ball's belly was the ultimate defence when s**t hits the fan.

As for Mango, well, his area of effect was unparalleled.

Together, they made up an integrated defensive and offensive system.

It was powerful, but Zhao Yao knew that it was not without limitations. For one, the time it took for the armor (i.e. cats) to come together was substantial. Also, it slowed down his response time.

The supercats were not his limbs. He could not just control them instinctively. He needed time to give them instructions telepathically and that compromised the immediacy of his reactions.

The Sphinx cat had belittled them at first. Now, the smug smirk was wiped off his face. Instead, a deep groove had appeared between his furrow brows.

The excruciating pain he felt thanks to the Cannon from Hell was etched in his brain. Just thinking about it caused the surface of his skin to tingle uneasily.

“That shapeless force is both the glue that sticks the team together and the repellant to any external attack. That illusion would scare the living daylights out of anyone who sees them.”

“And that final move...I don't even know what to say.”

The Sphinx cat tried reasoning with and convincing himself to believe otherwise, but he knew what this meant.

“Even the Muscle Society might not beat this guy,” he concluded unhappily.

Roly Poly was in a pensive mood as well. He chewed his steak thoughtfully, sneaking glances at Matcha, whom was rolling on the ground aimlessly.

Roly Poly could not help but grin devilishly.

“Heh heh. Now that I'm an important part of the supercat armor, my position in Zhao Yao's heart must have risen. Matcha, on the other hand, has been completely excluded,” he thought.

He studied the rest of the supercats that formed the armor system.

“These cats will eventually be the backbone of our Cat Nation. I should be the one to bring them together and lead them. We can be called the Poly Gang! Even if the old man passes Matcha his legacy, the Poly Gang would be able to kick him off the throne.”

This prompted him to raise a paw high into the air.

“Shall we play a game together after lunch? he asked, looking from one cat to another with a warm smile.

Roly Poly felt that if he organized more team-bonding activities, the group would grow closer and eventually see him as their leader.

His enthusiasm, unfortunately, was not returned.

Elizabeth acted as if he never spoke. She turned on her heel and went to find Zhao Yao.

Dust Ball muttered about wanting to relax, then headed to the smoking room with Uncle Egg for a bit of catmint.

“Let’s play on our own,” Ares said to Fujin.

They left, leaving Roly Poly all by his lonesome.

He huffed angrily as he tore another piece of steak.

“Go on then! One day, I’ll be at the top and it’ll be too late for you to grovel then,” he thought.

He was busy wallowing in self-pity when something large and fluffy pounced on him.

Lion Head kneaded the back of his head lovingly.

“Honey, you were so cool just now!” she exclaimed.

Roly Poly stifled a dry sob.

“When I’m at the top, the first thing I’ll do is get rid of her!”

On the other side of the room, the trio of ragdoll cats walked towards Elizabeth.

“Elizabeth,” Catherine called out to her estranged daughter, “Have you always been working for King George?”

“We’ll talk later,” Elizabeth replied curtly.

It was obvious that she was occupied. She marched to Zhao Yao, her phone dangling from the corner of her mouth.

“Zhao Yao, look at what other cats are posting!” she demanded.

She presented to him a series of photos she had painstakingly downloaded from WeChat.

Her Louis Vuitton purse photo set had been pretty popular online. The barrage of likes and envious comments she received kept her in a consistently good mood for the past couple of days.

Recently, however, her pal, Sweetheart, had begun to outshine her.

Zhao Yao grabbed her phone and scrolled through dozens of selfies of a beautiful Scottish Fold. She had a coat of long, snow white hair and large, ocean blue eyes.

The background in each of her photos was even more beautiful than she was. In every shot, she was posing in a luxurious setting, from a yacht, to the beach, by the river, and in an opulent bedroom.

“Why are you showing me this?” Zhao Yao asked.

“What do you mean why?!” Elizabeth seethed, “Look at her. She’s not even half as pretty as me, but she gets to live in a house with an ocean view!”

“But you have an owner who’s handsome as sin.”

Elizabeth slammed her phone on the ground.

“Good looks can’t buy me an ocean view!” she yelled.

She looked up at him with a steely glint in her eye.

“Zhao Yao, let’s move to the Tomson Riviera in Shanghai. Think about all the dreams, pressures, joy, and tears housed within the penthouses there. It’s perfect. And, most importantly, that’s where Gu Yuan lived in Tiny Times!”

The outburst rendered Zhao Yao speechless. When he recovered, he asked, “Do you know how much an apartment in Tomson Riveria costs?”

Elizabeth tilted her head to the side innocently, “No.”

“Billions,” Zhao Yao replied, elongating the ‘s’ sound, “I wouldn’t be able to afford it even if I sold your entire family. We live in reality, not some silly movie. Please manage your expectations accordingly.”

The ragdoll pursed her lips with distaste.

“Zhao Yao…”

“Yeah?”

“You’re so poor.”

With that, she turned around and walked away from her flabbergasted owner.

“Zhao Yao is a useless thug who just bums around all day. It’s up to me to make enough money to buy a large house, fancy sports cars, fancier bags, and live the good life,” she thought.

Catherine, Diana, and Caesar moved next to her again.

“Elizabeth, what did you discuss with Zhao Yao?”

“Money. More precisely, how to earn more of it. I’m sure this is a foreign subject to you,” she responded dismissively.

“Who said we don’t know about it!” Diana retorted, “Money is everything. With it, you do whatever your heart desires. I also know that being a movie star is the best way to earn lots of money. You can earn hundreds of thousands just from filming one movie.”

She had learnt this from the mass of movies that she had been watching in the extradimensional belly.

“Diana, language. You sound like a pleb, love. Be elegant,” Catherine reminded.

“Yes, Mother,” she responded.

Diana turned back to Elizabeth.

“It is a most fortunate thing to be affluent. Becoming a movie star is a delightful way to grow your wealth while heightening your status in the world,” she rephrased.

“Movie star?” Elizabeth repeated, her eyes shining from what looked like a ray of hope.

Chapter 274: Muscle Congregation and Power Plugs

The same night, a congregation took place in the remains of an abandoned factory.

A massive man packed with bulging muscles was there. He was wearing a tight pink singlet, his shoulder-length hair pulled into a tiny plait.

The most jaw-dropping about him was not his unusual sartorial choices, but the truck that he was lifting over his head. Arms raised, he did a squat, then got back up again.

Each ragged breath that left his lips was a great rush of air. The cement beneath his feet was beginning to sink from the weight.

The man kept going until he reached a hundred squats. He let out a roar and threw the truck through the air. It landed dozens of meters away, where it flipped multiple times before coming to a stop.

“Goddamnit! It’s useless!” the man cried, punching the wall next to him with one large fist.

He created a gaping hole in the plaster.

The muscle man was the Sphinx’s first apostle. In the Muscle Society, he was second in rank only to the cat. His strength was insane, along with his obsession with training and bulking up.

He was known as the Butcher.

Even though he started training at almost the same time as the Sphinx, he had since grown far stronger. After all, the human body naturally had more potential for development than a supercat’s.

The Butcher persisted as the strongest member of the Muscle Society since its inception.

The commotion he caused drew the attention of three more muscular men. They emerged from the shadows quietly and closed in on the Butcher.

“Our Sphinx has been missing for a week! I’ve not grown any stronger for one whole week! When can you find him?” Butcher demanded, nostrils flaring with rage.

A man dressed in a short, black bathrobe stepped forward.

“Boss, we’ve looked through the surveillance footage from the battle. The assailant wasn’t captured on tape, probably because he can turn invisible. That might have been how he escaped.”

This was the man in black who sneaked up on Zhao Yao during that fateful encounter.

The Butcher's eyes softened as he turned to the man.

"Black Robe," he addressed him, "What about the six rascals? Have you managed to reach them?"

He was referring to Fit Bro and his cronies.

Black Robe shook his head gravely. "The police are on their tail. I dare not contact them now."

"Good. You did the right thing," Butcher said, "We cannot afford to make the authorities our enemy."

He looked from Black Robe to another equally muscular man. He only had on a tiny pair of shorts, so his huge biceps and washboard abs were on full display. Each inch of his body was glistening with oil.

Butcher looked him up and down appreciatively.

"Champion, any news on your end?" he asked.

The well-oiled Champion giggled and lifted his pinky finger in the air.

"Well, I've checked out what Fit Bro and his gang were up to before they disappeared. They followed the plan closely. They were going after the district cat kings in Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Avenue. Oh, they covered Jiangmen University as well. Fit Bro might have been captured by one of the apostles in the districts. I'm sure we'll find them if we go through each one."

"That makes sense. Let's do it," Butcher agreed, eyes narrowed in determination.

He smashed his right fist into his left palm, which produced a loud boom.

"Once we catch whoever's behind this and rescues the Sphynx, we'll let him have a true taste of pain."

The congregation of muscular men looked at each other and smirked.

They then broke into a fit of giggles.

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A few nights later, Zhao Yao was back in his neighborhood's public park. He let out a yawn as he shifted on the long bench he was lying on.

Zhao Xue was a short distance away, sparring with an imaginary King George.

This was how he had been training his sister. He would compel the Sphinx to lend her his power, then he would conjure an illusion of King George to train her.

Zhao Yao watched as she threw a punch at King George. The two met in mid-air, where Zhao Xue unleashed a kick in the cat's direction. Her moves were precise and powerful, but King George managed to subdue her with a kick of his own.

The rumble carried on for a while longer before Zhao Xue asked for a timeout. She was panting heavily, her face flushed and dripping with sweat.

It was a terribly high-intensity workout that threatened to knock the breath out of her.

Zhao Yao's gaze swept from the top of her head to her feet, then back up again.

"Well, she's definitely gotten stronger. Does this mean she'll grow visibly muscular next time?" he wondered.

Images of female bodybuilders flashed through Zhao Yao's mind.

"That looks pretty good. I'm sure Zhao Xue will be happy with her new physique," he nodded to himself.

Zhao Xue did not leave immediately after the session. A troubled look weighed her face down. Her eyes kept darting to King George. She kept opening, then closing her mouth, as if she wanted to speak but could not find the right words.

Zhao Yao watched her with concern. Having grown up with her, he was familiar with that expression. He knew something was up.

“Alright, that’s it for today. We’ll continue tomorrow,” he spoke through the illusion of King George.

Zhao Xue sighed as she watched the cat king’s retreating figure.

“This sucks,” she muttered.

It was obvious that Zhao Xue wanted him to elicit a response from him, but he was not giving in.

“I have a match in a while. I must not stay,” he thought, hastening his footsteps.

“Must pretend that I didn’t hear that.”

Unfortunately, Zhao Xue had grown to be more agile than he was. She caught up with him in a flash.

This time, her sigh was even louder and more dramatic.

“God, I can’t even sleep at night,” she whined.

Zhao Yao pursed his lips. There was no getting away.

“What’s happened?” he asked helplessly.

Zhao Xue did not need to be told twice.

“I keep fighting with my girlfriend recently. I don’t even know why it’s happening! Every little thing sets me off. I’m afraid that we’ve reached the end of the road..,” her voice trailed off.

Technically, her voice did not trail off. Zhao Yao just tuned her out completely. He yawned from time to time, bored out of his mind. Her last statement caught his attention though.

“Do you think I could be bisexual?”

“What?” Zhao Yao/King George violently whipped his head around to face Zhao Xue.

He chose his next words very carefully.

“I heard that,” he started cautiously, “Multi-plug adapters, well, wear out more easily because it keeps changing. I think we should aim to be a bit more stable.”

“But my heart no longer beats like it used to when I’m with her,” Zhao Xue admitted regretfully.

“I hate this feeling,” she murmured.

“Zhao Yao, you better put your sister on the right track before she sinks deeper,” he thought to himself, “But how? Girls her age so rebellious nowadays. Geez.”

He hid his face behind his palms, deep in thought.

“Of course, I don’t know much about this,” he tried again, “I can only tell you what I heard.”

He swallowed.

“You need a power plug and a power socket to create electricity. Only power strips have both plugs and sockets and look how dangerous their lives are. They’re completely exposed to the external environment, so they’ll easily be in contact with water, which is life-endangering. If you stick too many plugs in them, they might overheat, you know? It’s just not ideal.”

Zhao Yao wished he could melt into a puddle and disappear when he saw the glare his sister had shot him.

“I don’t mean any offence. I just think that normal power sockets last longer,” he murmured awkwardly.

Chapter 275: Mud and Soap

Not a word that left Zhao Yao’s mouth assuaged the misery his sister felt. She left the park with a solemn frown firmly in place.

“S**t, I might have made things worse,” he lamented, covering his face with his hands.

While he wallowed in self-pity and blame, he picked up the sound of excited paw-steps approaching.

Roly Poly, Matcha, and Dust Ball were charging towards their owner enthusiastically. Between them, they were holding onto a struggling Dragon Li cat with their mouths.

After a horrific week in the extradimensional belly, Zhao Yao had finally let him back into the world. The fat cat was happy to rid himself of the tumor that was Lion Head, whom was still patiently anticipating his return.

Zhao Yao had tasked the supercats to locate the cat king in their district whenever he trained Zhao Xue. He had to abandon the cat colony in Jiangmen University after all, so he sought to take down the king in his own neighbourhood instead.

Tonight, it seemed that the three musker-cats had succeeded.

Roly Poly, Matcha, and Dust Ball dumped the cat on the ground. His limbs were haphazardly bound together. He rolled around the ground helplessly, mewling.

The Dragon Li cat looked fairly young. Zhao Yao suspected that he was barely a year old. Hurt and fear were written plainly on his small face.

“Let me go!”

“Please don’t eat me! I’ve never groomed myself. I smell really bad!”

“Oh, Mama, how I wish you were here.”

He made a sorry sight.

Zhao Yao pursed his lips as he turned to Matcha.

“This guy’s the cat king in our district?” he questioned.

Matcha nodded. “Yes, that’s him. He’s the only supercat in the neighborhood besides us. We beat him up a little before bringing him here.”

At the mention of this, the little cat let out a sob.

“Why did you guys beat me?” he cried, “I was sleeping when you ganged up on me! And hurt me! You are mean.”

“What?” Zhao Yao narrowed his eyes at the three supercats.

Matcha and Roly Poly spoke simultaneously.

“It wasn’t me, it was Roly Poly.”

“It wasn’t me, it was Matcha.”

Zhao Yao pursed his lips.

“Alright, just go home, all of you,” he waved them off.

The trio immediately sprung towards their home. Matcha turned back when he was a safe distance away.

“Don’t forget the red packets!”

“Yes, yes. I’ll send them in a moment.”

The three cats cheered in unison, then ran away.

“Remember to wipe your feet first! And you can only play games after you’ve eaten,” Zhao Yao called after them.

“Yes, we know!” Matcha yelled back.

Zhao Yao shook his head at their disappearing figures. Then, he bent down and lifted the little cat into his arms. He carefully loosened him from the web of ropes that kept his limbs bound tightly together.

He scratched the back of the cat’s head as a form of comfort.

“Alright, alright. Everything’s fine now. No one’s going to eat you. Speaking of, do you want a bite?”

After he posed this question, he held out a small sausage in front of the cat.

His kind gestures stopped the cat’s pitiful wails, but he still glanced at Zhao Yao warily. He looked at the sausage and instinctively licked his lips, but did not dare to eat it.

Zhao Yao knew that many strays were naturally skeptical of people, so he was patient with the little one. He continued massaging the top of his head while releasing Celestial Beats, which made it easier for the cat to relax.

Half an hour later, amid the noise of a growling stomach, the cat took a tentative lick of the sausage. Having made sure that it tasted okay, he took one massive bite after another. He was practically inhaling the sausage, as if afraid that it would disappear at any time.

“There’s no need to rush. Make sure you chew your food so you don’t choke,” Zhao Yao said soothingly, still stroking the young cat.

Once he was finished, he bumped his head against Zhao Yao’s chest affectionately.

“You’re this district’s cat king, aren’t you? What’s your superpower?” he asked.

The Dragon Li no longer had any reservations around Zhao Yao.

“My power is amazing!” he exclaimed.

The cat’s voice sounded like a young boy’s. It was high-pitched and bright.

He leaped from Zhao Yao’s arms and landed gracefully on the ground. He then raised his butt and shook his body so hard that it looked like he would explode.

“Nnnn...nnn..,” he growled with exertion.

“Wow? Is he concentrating all his energy for his power?” Zhao Yao wondered, “Did Matcha manage to capture him because he needed to take time to unleash his power?”

As his mind whirred with all kinds of possibilities, the cat stopped vibrating as quickly as and when he started. There was a gentle flopping sound that followed. The cat moved away from his original spot, a smug grin on his face.

On the ground was a pile of brownish yellow stuff that emitted a faint odor.

Zhao Yao stared at it wordlessly.

“That’s s**t. That’s just s**t, isn’t it?”

The cat looked up at him brightly, a sparkle in its eyes.

“Yes! That’s my power!” he grinned.

Zhao Yao scratched the bottom of his chin.

“Well, I believe pooping is a natural course of action we can all do. How is it a superpower?” he said matter-of-factly.

“My poop isn’t normal! It’s poisonous!” the cat replied confidently.

Zhao Yao took another look at the pile of s**t, which was beginning to smell downright foul. He had no qualms that the cat was telling the truth. It smelt poisonous.

“Okay, but who’s going to eat your poop? What’s the point of it being toxic if no one will put it in their mouths?” Zhao Yao questioned.

Having verified that this cat was in no way a threat, he started to discuss the Cat King Competition with him.

Useless as his power might be, it turned out that the Dragon Li knew a lot about the contest.

“I hate fighting, so I’ve never intended to take part,” he said in his boyish voice.

“Hey, you shouldn’t give up that chance. Remember that fat ginger cat? He can take your place. But you’ll have to let us know when the competition begins,” Zhao Yao suggested.

“Oh yeah, you don’t know where I live.”

Zhao Yao led the cat to his front door, made sure that he could recognize his house, then fed him a meal.

The stray had never tasted cat food before, much less premium quality ones, so he wolfed it down in minutes, relishing every mouthful.

Zhao Yao continued to pat him as he planted his face in the food dish.

“With that special power of yours, perhaps I should call you Yellow Mud. Yellow Mud, feel free to come back if you need food. Just go through that flap there.”

“And remember to let us know when you receive your invite to the competition.”

“Okay, I got it,” Yellow Mud responded through bites of food.

After he bade goodbye to the little cat, Zhao Yao stretched his back with a yawn. He was exhausted.

“I’ll sleep right after a shower.”

He grabbed his pajamas and walked into the bathroom, where Baiquan was washing his hands.

“Hey, do you need the bathroom? If not, I’m gonna shower,” he said, pulling his top off.

“I’m good, Boss. You go ahead.”

Zhao Yao nodded. He heard the tap faucet turn off.

“Help me close the door when you leave.”

“Okay.”

The moment Zhao Yao had stripped off all his clothes, he heard a succession of sounds.

It started with a gentle thud that sounded behind him. There was a swish as a piece of soap slid towards him and slowly skidded to a stop between his feet.

The door was slammed shut.

The next thing he heard was Baiquan's voice, which was unsettlingly close.

"Boss, can you pick up the soap for me?"

Zhao Yao froze.

Chapter 276: Resistance and Change

Zhao Yao could feel a burning hot gaze centered on his back. Goosebumps were raised on almost every inch of his skin. He looked down tentatively at the soap between his feet.

"This feels weird. This feels very, very weird."

A montage of all the odd glances and gentleness that Baiquan had been exhibiting for the past couple of weeks started flashing through his mind.

"Something is terribly wrong."

Just then, he could feel a wave of hot air against the nape of his neck, causing an explosion of cold chills to prick him from head to toe.

"Boss, won't you help me pick up the soap?"

Zhao Yao exhaled deeply.

"He's managed to sneak up behind me just like that. He's really starting to surpass my physical abilities," he started rambling to himself.

"Okay, Zhao Yao, stay calm."

“I’ll just have to switch to Matcha’s power. I won’t use it first. Perhaps I’m just overreacting.”

“I’ll take it slow and pick up the soap slowly. As long as I don’t expose my -,”

“Boss, what are you doing?”

This time, Baiquan’s breath tickled his ear, as if he was literally right behind him. Every hair on Zhao Yao’s body stood on its end. He instantly activated TimeFreeze and got as far away from the bathroom as he could in 12 seconds. He was so terrified that he managed to reach his front door with a bit of time to spare.

There, he switched to Dust Ball’s power and fell into the extradimensional belly.

“F**k!” he swore, making a beeline for the reinforced steel cage.

He placed his foot against the Sphynx’s cat’s neck.

“What the f**k is your power? You better tell me everything. Why is Baiquan acting like a lecherous old man? Towards me?!” he demanded angrily.

The Sphynx took a look at him, then started chortling.

“It took you some time to find out, didn’t it? Now you’ve seen the true horror of my power. Those who use it will never be able to reproduce. With that, I can and I will exterminate your kind!” he exclaimed.

“Exterminate my kind?”

“Yes! My power enables you to grow endlessly stronger, but not without paying a price. Once your body starts transforming, your sexual orientation will as well.”

The Sphynx cat cackled deviously.

“As my power spreads and touches apostles everywhere, you will all be doomed to live and die without offspring! You will have no children to pass your powers on to. We will be free from your control. Us supercats will rule the world!”

“You evil little-! God, I don’t even know what to say. Just tell me how to reverse this!” Zhao Yao ordered.

“It cannot be reversed,” the Sphynx revealed, now laughing maniacally, “Once gay, always gay. Your apostle’s never going to be the same again.”

“You’re a cocky little thing, aren’t you?”

Zhao Yao used Elizabeth’s power to unleash a tidal wave of imaginary poop into the Sphynx’s laughing mouth. Within seconds, the cat was reduced to a twitching mess on the floor.

“Who’s laughing now, huh?”

His grim sense of satisfaction did not last. He might have taught the Sphynx a lesson, but that did not change the fact that Baiquan had been, well, changed.

“The problem isn’t that he’s gay. It’s that he’s making unwanted sexual advances towards me! He’s gonna become too strong to fight off one day. This can’t do.”

The Sphynx cat laughed weakly when he watched the myriad of worry and trouble that crossed his face. He launched another vengeful poop attack in response.

“S**t Tsunami!”

The onslaught lasted for 30 disgusting seconds. As it drew to an end, the cat was lying flat on his back, shaking and foaming at the mouth.

The state the Sphynx was in turned out to be a moment of inspiration for Zhao Yao.

“Maybe Baiquan just needs a reminder that he likes girls. An immersive illusion could do the trick. He’s only been training for a couple weeks. I’m sure it’s reversible.”

Zhao Yao narrowed his eyes as he pored through his mental repository for ideas.

Half an hour later, he quietly dived back into the real world. He entered his bedroom stealthily. There was a quiver in his ears as he tried to detect Baiquan's location.

Before he could identify his whereabouts, the door slammed shut behind him.

Zhao Yao swiftly spun around, then took a few frightened steps back.

Baiquan lifted his fingers from the doorknob. He was now dressed in an unnecessarily tight muscle tee that showed off each curve and valley of his muscles.

"Boss? Where did you go?"

Zhao Yao had to stifle the scream that sat at the back of his throat. Baiquan was casting another one of those tender and docile looks his way.

"Don't move. I have something to show you," he said through gritted teeth.

"What is it?" Baiquan asked innocently, tilting his head while batting his eyelids.

Zhao Yao wasted no time in unfurling his latest trick.

It had been specially designed to deal with Baiquan's predicament. Instead of pulling him into just one illusion, Zhao Yao could plunge him into sensory overload. He hoped that would be enough to jolt Baiquan from his induced homosexuality.

Zhao Yao let out a determined shout, then unleashed a barrage of audio, images, and videos into his mind.

tek-06x, ofje-07x, ipz-95x, hodv-2103x, Sora Aoi, Yui Hatano, Kirara Asuka...

Line after line of mysterious file names and women's names, along with the video footage embedded in them, were uploaded onto Baiquan's mind.

The sudden onslaught of information stunned him into immobility.

Zhao Yao knew that it was time to finish him off. He launched himself at Baiquan and cupped his palms against his ears, sending one final blast of sensations.

"Yellow Tsunami!"

Baiquan's eyes grew round like marbles. His body started twitching involuntarily, barely at first, but uncontrollably in no time. Violent spasms continued to course through him as he received a tsunami of film.

Zhao Yao watched as Baiquan collapsed in a heap onto the ground.

"Did it work? That was a decade's worth of my favorites."

After three long minutes, Baiquan woke from the trance of decadence and desire. He got to his feet gingerly, face flushed. He could not look Zhao Yao in the eye when he spoke to him.

"Boss, what did you do to me?"

Zhao Yao recounted everything that the Sphinx cat told him.

Baiquan let out a sigh of relief at the end of the story.

"That would explain why I was feeling so weird recently. I don't know what would happen if you didn't step in, Boss."

"Are you sure you're back to your usual self now?"

"Positive," Baiquan laughed awkwardly, scratching the back of his neck.

Verbal assurance was not sufficient for Zhao Yao. He needed proof that Baiquan was straight as an arrow.

He waved a hand and conjured a photo of a beautiful and skimpily dressed woman. There was a bit of color on Baiquan's cheeks when he looked at that image.

Zhao Yao then showed him a picture of muscular f**kboys in tiny tank tops. Baiquan's facial response was one of judgmental disgust.

"Seems like you're really back to normal," he concluded.

"I am and I'm glad. The side effect of this power is too much. Maybe I should stop borrowing it," Baiquan said.

"No, you should keep training. It's freaking effective! Look at you!" Zhao Yao exclaimed.

He then pounded his chest.

"My Yellow Tsunami worked, so that's how we can work around it. You'll just have to watch porn while you train!"

Zhao Yao paused.

"Let's make it a minimum of two hours of porn a day!" he added brightly.

Chapter 277: Overtime

Baiquan looked uncertain.

"I don't think that's a good idea," he mumbled.

"I disagree," Zhao Yao retorted.

He walked to his study desk and flipped through it, obviously in search of something. It turned out that he was looking for a phone that was wedged somewhere deep within a drawer. There was a smug smirk on his lips as he handed it to Baiquan.

“Don’t say that I don’t look out for you. Within this phone lies a painstakingly accumulated collection of goodies that will ensure that you remain on the straight path in life,” he said, winking.

Baiquan took the phone hesitantly.

“What if this doesn’t work?” he asked.

His mind was still reeling from the transformation he underwent in the past two weeks. He had no intention of ever going through that again. He had tried to make a move on his boss. Just thinking about that regrettable encounter made his balls hurt.

“It will. Whenever you feel that something’s not right, use the phone,” Zhao Yao said brightly.

Unfortunately, Baiquan still looked thoroughly unconvinced. Zhao Yao patted his shoulder firmly.

“Don’t worry, dude. I’ll keep an eye on you. I’ll step in if I have to. You’ll be fine,” he assured.

The moment was interrupted when Hanako opened her bedroom door. She shuffled into the living room, yawning. Every drop of sleepiness dissipated when she noticed that a topless Zhao Yao had his hand on Baiquan, who was wearing the tiniest of tank tops. She lowered her gaze to the tent that had formed in Baiquan’s shorts, a remnant of the porno-power that was unleashed on him.

She gawked at them before spinning around, pressing her hands against her face.

“I’m terribly sorry! Please excuse me,” she stammered incoherently before rushing back into her room and shutting the door behind her.

Hanako leaned against the door and slid down on to the floor. Her heart was hammering against her chest.

“I...I don’t even know... Those two are just too much! The living room?! They did it in the living room while I was sleeping?!”

While she experienced a tiny episode of hysteria, Zhao Yao remained perfectly unperturbed. He looked to Baiquan, whom appeared embarrassed by what Hanako must have seen.

“It doesn’t matter. She’s leaving for Japan in a few days anyway. We’ll never see her again,” he said.

His mission to keep her safe was coming to end soon. He was fully intending to bid goodbye to her then.

As Zhao Yao returned to his bedroom, he thought about the other person whom was affected by the Sphynx’s side effect.

“Does this mean Zhao Xue will become attracted to men now?” he wondered, recalling their awful conversation about power plugs, “Perfect.”

With a satisfied smile, he checked in on the extradimensional belly to make sure that everything was fine, then fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning, he headed to work with the cats, Baiquan, and Hanako.

Hanako kept casting odd looks at the two men as he drove them to the cafe. Every time Zhao Yao returned her gaze, she would look away immediately, face flushed. It was annoying.

At lunch, Xiao Shiyu walked up to him, hands behind her back.

“Zhao Yao, do you know what I just saw?” she asked in a deliberately mysterious tone.

“What?” he asked, not even looking up from his game.

He had no interest in whatever it was she might have seen.

Her face broke into a mischievous grin.

“I caught Baiquan watching porn! He was hiding in the alley out the back door.”

Shiyu was hoping to elicit shock or outrage from Zhao Yao. However, she got none of that.

“Okay, but why are you telling me this? That’s perfectly normal behavior for a young man,” he said patronizingly.

“Well,” Shiyu started awkwardly, “You know Baiquan used to have a crush on me, right? I’m just a little worried about him.”

“If only he still had a crush on you. That would be a good indicator of whether something’s gone wrong again,” he thought.

Zhao Yao remained silent for a moment as he wracked his brain to come up with a believable excuse. Unsurprisingly, it was difficult to explain why someone was watching porn on the job, so he went with the truth instead.

“Porn helps him with his skill training.”

“What?” Shiyu asked.

She looked cross. The look on her face screamed, “Do I look like an idiot to you?”

“Aren’t you men creative when it comes to finding reasons for watching that stuff,” she narrowed her eyes.

“Hey, don’t drag me into this. I don’t watch that s**t!” Zhao Yao exclaimed.

Shiyu did not bother concealing the look of utter disbelief on her face.

“Whatever it is, just know that he’s watching porn to grow stronger. Just ignore it the next time you see him,” Zhao Yao instructed, hoping to end the conversation.

He massaged his throbbing temples when Shiyu left with a dissatisfied huff. He pulled up his phone and fired a message to Baiquan asking him to be discreet.

The message was barely sent when the bells hung on the cafe's door chimed loudly.

Zhao Yao looked up to see Inspector Ho And Old Man Zhuang strolling in. A posse of men in black, Ah Wei included, was trailing closely behind them.

The two men spotted Zhao Yao as well. They waved at him before settling down next to him, both grinning from ear to ear. Ah Wei nodded respectfully at Zhao Yao and took his position standing next to Zhuang.

"Hello, my boy. I hope it doesn't inconvenience you for us to drop by today," Old Man Zhuang said.

He stretched and extended both arms behind him.

"Your cafe truly is a gem. There's been so much to do lately and I really needed to make a trip here."

Now that the old man was bathed in the Celestial Beats, he could feel his body's tension and stress start to slip away from him.

Inspector Ho patted Zhao Yao on the shoulder. He was wearing a face-splitting grin.

"Waddya think? We fixed the cafe up nicely, didn't we?"

The two men were laughing too much. They were behaving far too happily. It was unnerving.

"What do you guys want from me?" he asked.

"Well, since you asked so nicely, I shall tell you the truth. We've got a couple old pals that are hoping to have a good time here as well. Unfortunately, they can't be spotted out in a place like this. Can you offer them special services after hours?"

Zhao Yao narrowed his eyes at the Inspector.

“Why does everything that leaves your mouth sound so lewd?”

Inspector Ho ignored the comment. He rubbed his bald head, then shot Zhao Yao a raunchy smirk.

“We’ll take you for the night.”

“How much?”

“Ten thousand per night!”

Zhao Yao’s narrowed eyes widened in an instant.

He started calculating if he could work overtime at the cafe. His top priority was still the daily missions, which needed time to complete. Then, he had to help Baiquan and Zhao Xue borrow the Sphynx’s skill so they can train. He also needed time for himself to develop and master his own abilities.

“Oh yeah, how could I almost forget the most important thing? I need at least eight hours of sleep a day. Without sleep, my life would be meaningless,” he thought.

After some deliberation, he came to a conclusion.

“Twenty thousand a night. And I will only work overtime for an hour.”

“Well, isn’t that just some delightful daylight robbery?” Inspector Ho exclaimed, “Aren’t we friends anymore?”

“If we aren’t friends, I wouldn’t even consider extending my opening hours,” Zhao Yao said loftily, tapping his nose.”

“Even if Yui Aragaki, Lin Chi-Ling, or Emma Watson begged me, I would’ve just said no.”

“Yeah, right,” the Inspector gritted his teeth.

Old Man Zhuang simply laughed as he put a firm hand on his shoulder.

“We’ll do as our boy says. Twenty thousand it is,” he stated.

He beamed at Zhao Yao.

“My boy, I heard you can conjure very realistic illusions as well? The kind that you can actually touch and feel?” he asked eagerly.

The old man looked like a child impatiently waiting for the school holidays to begin. All he needed to complete the look was to rub his hands with glee.

“I’m unable to do that kind of magic,” Zhao Yao replied solemnly.

At that moment, a great, white blur darted towards him. It was Roly Poly, who had a handphone dangling from the corner of his mouth.

“Zhao Yao! Zhao Yao!” the cat called out excitedly, “Baiquan stole your secret phone! I stole it back for you. Are you glad?”

Unfortunately for Roly Poly, Zhao Yao was anything but glad because on the screen was a video of two people getting it on.

Chapter 278: Revenue

The moment Roly Poly skidded to a stop, Zhao Yao smacked the phone and its NSFW content out of the way.

Like a meteor, the phone rocketed through the air at the speed of light. The impact it made from crashing into a table caused it to crumble into pieces on the floor.

Roly Poly looked at its dismembered remains in horror.

“Uh, Zhao Y -,”

He gulped down the rest of his sentence when Zhao Yao shot him a death glare. Roly Poly puffed up his fur in fear. With a terrified yelp, he fled the scene.

The entire cafe’s attention was now squarely on Zhao Yao.

He waved them off with an awkward smile.

“No worries. I accidentally hit the phone when I was trying to swat a fly.”

Old Man Zhuang’s brows furrowed. “I thought that cat had something in its mouth.”

“Yeah. It looked like a phone.”

“What? A phone? Must be a trick of the light,” Zhao Yao tried laughing it off.

“Mmm, has my eyesight worsened again?” Zhuang wondered aloud.

“No, I saw a phone too,” Inspector Ho said with certainty.

He scratched his chin thoughtfully. “I believe it was playing quite the interesting video too.”

Zhao Yao let out a loud and unnatural bellow of laughter.

“Is that so? What did you see?” he asked.

The Inspector shook his head. “I can’t say for sure. I saw it for a split second.”

“Oh, okay then. Perhaps we should go back to what we were discussing just now?” Zhao Yao suggested.

A few minutes later, Old Man Zhuang managed to correct Zhao Yao’s misconception on the type of illusion he wanted.

“What kind of sordid and indecent proposal did you think I have?!” he cried, planting both hands on the table, “All I want is to eat meat! To be specific, I want red braised pork belly!”

Zhao Yao pursed his lips. It seemed like he misunderstood the kind of realistic experience the men asked for.

Regardless, he still rejected them with a shake of his head.

“Getting the taste of red braised pork belly right will be tricky. It’ll require a lot of effort on my end.”

Old Man Zhuang cut straight to the chase. “How much money do you want?”

“A thousand for a dish,” Zhao Yao responded without hesitation.

There was a sparkle in his eyes.

This was a fantastic opportunity to increase the cafe’s revenue, which translated into more experience points. Normal customers would never be unable to handle such extortionate prices. This guy, however, could.

“One thousand dollars for one plate of pork belly? Inspector Ho repeated incredulously.

“Don’t say it like that! This ain’t your normal red braised pork belly! You can eat as much as you want without overstuffing yourself or gaining an ounce of weight. It won’t cause high blood pressure or diabetes or any other ailment. Now tell me, is the thousand dollars not worth a piece of paradise?” Zhao Yao questioned.

The inspector had no intention of letting up so easily, but Zhuang slammed one hand on the table, ending the conversation.

“We’ll take it.”

The grin on Zhao Yao’s face was so wide that it looked like it might break his face in two.

“Deal. Please make your payment and your food will come,” he beamed.

Once the promised thousand dollars were given, Zhao Yao waved a hand above the table. Instantly, an enormous pot of red braised pork belly appeared right before the two men.

There was steam pouring out of the pot. A generous serving of pork belly was filled to the brim. It was marinated in a luxurious red sauce that emitted a delectable fragrance. A bowl of rice was placed next to the pot, along with a pair of chopsticks.

The food’s aroma got Old Man Zhuang’s mind reeling.

How long had it been? Since he was diagnosed with a series of maladies years ago, he had been banned from consuming meat and alcohol.

This one dish contained both, which easily made it one of his favorite things in the world.

He did not hesitate to pick up the chopsticks. He plucked a piece of succulent pork belly and put it into his mouth.

There was an explosion of flavor when he took his first bite. The velvety smooth fat complemented the sharp crisp of the meat perfectly. Each surface was glazed beautifully with a tangy sauce that hit all the right notes. It had a satisfying chewiness that made the process of consuming it simply delightful.

For Old Man Zhuang, this was indeed his personal piece of paradise. For years, his doctors and bodyguards enforced on him a strict diet that definitely did not contain red braised pork belly. That was one of a long list of banned foods for someone with diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and fatty liver disease.

He never thought he would be able to taste it again.

A blissful smile spread across his lips.

He took another piece of meat, then raised the bowl of fragrant white rice towards him. He matched each mouthful of pork with one of rice, wolfing down the food like a starving refugee.

The glistening meat was juicy, but not overly moist. It melted on his tongue, where it would leave a layer of full-bodied goodness. The sweetness of the pork belly and the granular texture of the rice was a heavenly combination for all the sense.

“Delicious. Simply delicious.”

His bowl and chopsticks only touched the table when he was done eating every piece of meat and grain of rice. Of course, the gratuitous amount of food was ultimately not real, so he was still hungry and wanting.

Zhuang did not order more food. Instead, he turned to Zhao Yao and asked, “Can you make me feel that I’m full?”

“Don’t you want me to conjure more food?” Zhao Yao asked in surprise.

“No, not now,” the old man waved a hand, “That was good. It was almost too good. If I kept eating like this, I’m afraid I could never go back to the healthy s**t they feed me. I’m telling you, my boy, it really tastes as nasty as a pile of s**t.”

Zhao Yao pursed his lips.

“Why does he talk like he’s had s**t before?” he thought to himself.

He tapped his index finger in Zhuang’s direction. A satisfying feeling of fullness and warmth settled in the old man’s tummy. He rubbed it happily and lay on his back.

“This feels good. I miss it. Being able to eat such excellent meat is in itself a great joy in life,” he sighed.

He closed his eyes to relish the moment. When he opened them, he was looking at Zhao Yao.

“My boy, we’ll be coming here every night after closing hours starting from tomorrow. I’ll have to trouble you to prepare a great meal for us.”

Zhao Yao was more than happy to do so since he was getting paid good money.

“Don’t worry,” he assured the man, “As long as you pay for our services, I’ll cook up anything at all that you want, even if it’s s**t you ask for.”

Old Man Zhuang chuckled.

“Well, I’m not going to hold back then. Tomorrow, let’s have a seafood fiesta. I want grilled scallops, shrimp stuffed tofu, steamed sea bass, spicy tiger prawns, squirrel mandarin fish...”

Zhao Yao was thrilled that the man seemed to be checking off a very long list wish list. The more dishes he ordered, the more revenue went into his pocket and the more experience points he clocked.

However, he had to raise a hand to stop him.

“Hold on, hold on. I’ve never had any of those dishes. I can only create realistic illusions if I’ve tasted them before,” he stated.

“Oh? Is that so?” Old Man Zhuang looked to the men in black, “Ah Wei, arrange for the head chef to prepare the dishes that I want our boy here to create. Send them to the cafe before each evening.”

Zhao Yao’s eyes widened. “That’s too troublesome. I can’t accept it.”

Zhuang brushed him off with a casual wave. He repeated his instructions to Ah Wei, then asked him to transfer food money for this month to Zhao Yao.

Just like that, his bank account gained an additional 26 thousand dollars.

Zhao Yao did the math quickly.

“With this money, it shouldn’t be hard to hit 50 thousand dollars of profit by the end of the money. That would mean 500 experience points that I can double to 1,000 in total. Not bad,” he mused.

This new route to revenue made Zhao Yao a very happy man. He walked Old Man Zhuang, Inspector Ho, and their posse out the door in high spirits, then dived straight into another round of PUBG.

Chapter 279: Cooking and Interrogating

In Xiao Shiyu’s eyes, all Zhao Yao ever did was laze around and play computer games.

It irked her.

She could not help but march up to him and asked, “Boss, can you please help out a little and clean the cafe?”

Zhao Yao slammed one hand on the table dramatically.

“Hey! Why do you make it sound like I do nothing around here?” he cried, outraged, “Didn’t you see that I just secured a big deal for us? It’s hard work. I deserve a break.”

Shiyu pointed at Mango, whom was a short distance away.

“Unfortunately, Mango’s business has not taken a break,” she said glumly.

The silly cat had pooped himself again. There was a large s**t stain that covered his bum and soaked through his long fur. He was like a huge, saturated paintbrush that smeared poop all over the floor when he sat down. Customers were fleeing from him and his golden trail.

“Oh my God!” Yan Xiao Qing yelled, running to Zhao Yao with Elizabeth in her arms, “Boss, you have to do something about Mango!”

“Yuck!” Coco Sun stuck out her tongue.

She pulled her roommate, Leigh Zhao, towards the furthest corner in the cafe.

“It stinks!” she shrunk against the wall.

Mango eventually became the sole inhabitant of the cafe’s center. He looked around curiously at the dispersed crowd, completely unaware that it was him everyone was avoiding. He did not even notice that the lower half of his body was stained with brown.

Zhao Yao’s head was starting to hurt. He looked at Mango, then at his hands, then back to Mango again.

“Matcha,” he called out telepathically, “Take Mango to the bathroom.”

“Why me? Ask Roly Poly to do it,” Matcha retorted.

He had escaped to the highest platform on a kitty tower to get away from Mango and his s**t.

Roly Poly was currently holed up beneath a table.

“I can’t catch Mango! I’m too fat to outrun him,” he said.

He chuckled deviously to himself.

“There’s no better time to use my invisibility than now!” he thought triumphantly.

Zhao Yao looked from one cat to another.

“Elizabeth’s mind control has never worked on Mango. As for Dust Ball...”

The moment he turned to the tiny cat, she shook her head violently.

“No way am I cleaning that up,” she declared.

“Horrible cats. I can’t rely on any of you!”

Zhao Yao narrowed his eyes at Mango, whom was still roaming around carefreely, dripping s**t wherever he went. He sighed, then headed for the cat, whom he carried into the bathroom.

After he bathed Mango and thoroughly disinfected the cafe, he slumped back into his usual seat.

“Today was pretty tough. Time for a break!”

The next afternoon, Ah Wei arrived at the cafe bearing plate after plate of exquisite dishes. These were the food that Old Man Zhuang and his friends wanted to have tonight.

It was going to be a seafood fiesta as planned. The grilled scallops, shrimp-filled tofu, steamed sea bass, spicy tiger prawns, and squirrel mandarin fish were all in attendance.

Zhao Yao had a great time tasting each delicacy with Hanako, Shiyu, and Baiquan.

The moment Shiyu bit into the mandarin fish, she was blown away by how the meat remained crispy even though it was bathed in a zingy, hot sauce. She looked pleasantly surprised.

“This is so good! I’ve never had squirrel mandarin fish like that!” she exclaimed.

Hanako was enjoying herself as well. Her eyes were closed in contentment like a cat’s would. She took another bite of the tofu.

“This is the best meal I’ve had in China.”

Baiquan gave no comments. His strict training torched calories, so he constantly needed to consume a lot of food to maintain his energy levels. He quietly wolfed down most of the food with a smile on his face.

When the cafe closed for the day, Baiquan, Shiyu, and Hanako busied themselves with cleaning up. Zhao Yao, on the other hand, had some overtime duties to complete.

He greeted Old Man Zhuang at the door. Tonight, he was accompanied by one man in black and two elderly gentlemen. Zhao Yao had no clue who they were.

It was obvious that they were plagued with maladies like Zhuang did. When they were within reach of the Celestial Beats, their faces lit up visibly. A look of relaxation and relief then took over.

Bowls and plates brimming with delicious-looking food magically appeared on the table when Zhao Yao waved a hand. The men gawked at him, eyes round as marbles.

Surprise morphed into satisfaction as they tasted each and every one of the dishes.

“I finally...I finally have a chance to eat these again!”

“My dear boy, could you conjure some wine for us?”

“Come, Zhuang, have another one.”

“We’ve not got together in too long.”

“We’re all that remains of our gang now.”

Perhaps Zhao Yao’s illusions were overly realistic, or perhaps the men have not felt so relaxed in ages. Whatever it was, they were getting tipsy within 10 minutes.

“Ah Song was only 14 years old. 14. He attacked first because I hesitated. It’s all my fault.”

“Zhuang, look at my grandson. Just look at him! Ridiculous little thing. He’s this ruthless capitalist. When I die, how can I explain this to our leader?”

As the men got more intoxicated and started divulging more private information, Zhao Yao decided to leave.

“Don’t you dare vomit,” he mumbled.

As he settled back into his seat downstairs, he could hear muffled sobs and shouts coming from the drunk men. Zhao Yao threw a dirty look at the stairs.

“Boss, do you need me to ask them to turn it down?” Baiquan offered.

“It’s alright. I doubt they’ve had a chance to be like this in a long time,” Zhao Yao said, putting on his earphones.

“Alcohol’s the perfect excuse for being who you truly are unapologetically,” he mused.

After all, his illusions were merely realistic, not real. There was no alcohol served tonight. The men just needed a catalyst for release.

An hour later, both of Old Man Zhuang’s guests were sleeping soundly on the couch. Zhuang himself was laughing cheerily as he approached Zhao Yao.

“I’m sorry about this. They’ve not had a drink in a while, so they got drunk rather quickly.”

The old man continued to invite his friends to the cafe on the following nights. They brought with them a steady stream of extra revenue and experience points.

Combined with Zhao Yao’s diligence at fulfilling his daily missions, the Book soon reached Level 5 (4,828 / 10,000).

However, even though every one of the cats’ requests had been fulfilled, the main mission to raise the happiness index in the cat nation remained incomplete.

This inspired Zhao Yao to conduct a happiness survey that night.

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A few minutes later, Zhao Yao was in the carton-filled no man's land of the extradimensional belly. He was seated behind a desk. Airplane was opposite him, eyes squinting from the flashlight that was pointed directly at him.

"I need you to be honest with me, boy. Are you unhappy with me?" Zhao Yao demanded.

Airplane was shaking with fright. "No...no, of course not."

"Then, what do you think of the Village of Dreams?"

"It's the best place ever!" he responded a little too quickly, "Everyone gets along and we have enough to eat and so much to do. I love it there!"

"Is that so?" Zhao Yao narrowed his eyes.

He brought the light closer to Airplane's face.

"Why are you nervous, Airplane? Are you hiding something? You better come clean right now and tell me what's wrong with the Village of Dreams."

"Sir, everything I've said is true. The Village of Dreams is a wonderful strategy. We're all thankful for your leadership and King George's foresight. Under you, even strays like myself can lead a beautiful life full of games, food, and even catmint. Long live the Village of Dreams!"

Chapter 280: The Same Kind

A few minutes later, Airplane left the container as a horde of supercats, including Lion Head, Uncle Egg, and Ares, scurried over and surrounded him. With their foreheads furrowed together, they pelted Airplane with a storm of questions, "What happened? What did he talk to you about?"

“What did you guys talk about?”

“Is Zhao Yao intending to chase us away?”

“Gaia, it’s all your fault! Who told you to shit outside the toilet! This must have infuriated King George and Zhao Yao which is why he’s chasing us away!”

Airplane was holding in his laughter before a smile crept up his face, “Don’t worry, we just talked about some useless stuff. All you have to do is to nod your head and agree with whatever he says. Just act along and say that the Village of Dreams is the best. In that case, our rice, catmint and gaming would resume as usual.”

All the supercats could finally breathe a sigh of relief upon hearing the good news. Airplane cocked his head towards Sausage and informed him, “Hey, you are next in line.”

Sausage’s body shook like a leaf upon hearing this dreadful news. Tens of pairs of eyes stared at him as he slowly made his way into the container.

Sausage’s trembling did not stop but rather intensified as he stood opposite Zhao Yao. Zhao Yao noticed how flustered he was and began processing all the information about him.

Sausage was a stray cat by birth. Prior to staying in the Village of Dreams, he used to serve as Airplane’s number one henchman. He used to belong to the southern campus of Jiangmen University. He was the quintessential bootlicker during his time serving Airplane. His ability was similar to a Porcupine’s. He could turn every strand of fur into a sharp needle.

Zhao Yao had finally assembled a complete picture of Sausage in his head before he started asking, “Sausage, how do you feel after spending so much time inside the Village of Dreams?”

Sausage immediately replied, “It is great!”

“What’s so good about it?”

This question left Sausage stunned. After some deliberation, he finally mustered a stupid answer in a doubtful voice, “I no longer have to bury my shit after shitting?”

....

In front of the vibrant computer screen sat Ares, Diana and Catherine huddled together with their eyes glued to the movie and their body immersed in the effects of catmint.

Ares reached his arm for a handful of catmint before squeezing all of them into his mouth at one go, “I’ve already told you that this was some random questioning that Zhao Yao came up with. Nothing is going to happen.”

Catherine nodded her head to Ares’s wise words, “Mr. Ares, you are the most knowledgeable cat I have ever met.”

Catherine’s words were music to Ares’s ears as he bellowed in laughter, “It’s nothing. It’s just because I’ve spent a far longer time here than any of you. Naturally, I know a thing or two about Zhao Yao and King George’s behavior. All he knows is to shout. He would never lay a finger on us.”

Throughout the course of the movie, Ares did not forget to flaunt his humorous side from time to time, leaving the mother-daughter pair cackling happily.

Unbeknownst to them, while they were engrossed in the enthralling plot and the amusing banter between them, a pair of angry eyes were staring at them. The owner of these eyes was none other than Caesar.

This unknown uncomfortable sensation tugged at him continually as he observed the three cats relishing in this wonderful moment. Silently, he crept up to Ares’s side and whispered into his ears, “Brother Ares, come with me. I have something that I wish to consult you.”

The two of them nearly jumped out of their skins when Caesar appeared next to them, out of the blue.

After realizing that it was just her husband, Catherine pulled at his paws and asked, “Caesar, what brings you here? Come join us for an episode of Downtown Abbey. It’s so good.”

Sadness had already clouded Caesar's features as he shook his head and replied, "There is something

I would like to discuss with Ares alone."

Ares's pupils constricted and replied, "Alright, let's go."

The pair of Diana and Catherine were perplexed by Caesar's abnormal behavior as they observed Caesar leading Ares to a remote corner of the belly. Caesar took in a deep breath before asking, "Ares, have you fallen in love with Diana?" He only reached this conclusion after observing their behavior all these time. He had always kept this suspicion to himself but decided to confront him today.

Ares was struck dumb by Caesar's question and thought, "This guy actually suspects that I am interested in Diana?"

Caesar throbbed with anger when he noticed how shocked Ares was upon hearing his question. Caesar instantly burst out shouting, "I treated you as my brother and you want to bed my daughter?"

A moment of silence ensued before Ares finally let out a sigh and explained, "Hmph, I never intended to hide this from you. However, things have already advanced to this stage. You will not be able to set your mind at rest unless I explain everything to you."

Caesar grew even more suspicious when he heard Ares's words.

Ares shut his eyes momentarily as his chest rose and sank. He mustered all his courage before saying, "My loyal brother, actually ... I like male cats."

"Huh?" Caesar's fur stood on ends and he could not believe a single thing Ares had said, "What did you just say?"

Ares buried his head in his chest and dared not make eye contact with Caesar, "Since young, I have grown up alongside Fūjin, Gaia and the rest. You know that all of them are male cats. To tell you the truth, I didn't even know about female cat's existence in the past. Hence, I have already shared an intimate relationship with them long before I met you guys."

Caesar pressed his forehead against his paw and tried his best to digest this seemingly impossible piece of information. His eyes drifted from Fūjin to Rakshasa, then to Gaia before they finally stopped at Lucifer.

He noticed the American Shorthair turning his paws into a pair of metal claws before slamming them incessantly against Lucifer's body.

Lucifer's body was already twitching from this bout of abuse. However, he shouted, "Come, give me an even harder slap. A fiercer one! Come on, use your strength!"

Caesar could feel the cold sweat accumulating on the back of his head as he thought, "Don't tell me that Lucifer and Rakshasa are also?"

Ares was engulfed in grief as he continued, "By the time we learn about the existence of female cats, it has already been too late. We were no longer aroused by them anymore."

Caesar felt ashamed for suspecting Ares and took a few steps back. He tried comforting him by saying, "My loyal brother, I'm so sorry. I never knew that you had such an unspeakable story .. I'm so sorry ..."

"It's not your fault, it's ours." Ares cried out, "I was always afraid that you would look down on me if you learn the truth."

"No! Why would I do that?" Caesar stretched his arms across Ares's shoulders and started consoling him.

However, a sheepish smile crept up Ares's face the moment Caesar left him alone. He thought, "I guess that fool has fallen for my lies. This would buy more time for me to be with Catherine and he will never suspect a single thing about us."

Suddenly, Ares acutely felt a wave of cold wind blowing against his back. This was not ordinary ones but those that could send shivers down your spine instantly. Goosebumps appeared all over his body.

He immediately turned his head around and stared in the direction of the metal cage. He saw the Sphynx Cat staring at him with an amiable smile on his face.

Ares was so confused by his actions and started blinking to ensure his eyes did not play a trick on him. He had never spoken to this cat before. However, the Sphynx Cat started blinking his eyes back at him.

An unknown fear sprang into his head the moment Ares noticed his blinks. He immediately turned around and made a run for it,

The Sphynx Cat stared as Ares disappeared into the seas of supercat. A faint smile appeared on his face as he muttered, "I never expected to meet someone so similar to me in this place." By utilizing his heightened sense of hearing, he had managed to eavesdrop on their entire conversation.

Meanwhile, Sausage was jumping up and down, filled with unbridled happiness. He exclaimed, "It is so easy! Just pacify him with a few yeses. Oh yes, Gaia, it's your turn."

The seas of straycats turned their heads in unison towards Gaia. All they saw were a pair of blood-shot eyes adorned with dark circles, staring intently at the screen. He had no intentions to leave his seat at all.

Uncle Egg frowned and asked, "How long has this guy been playing for?"

Baozi answered, "I have no idea. But he has been playing since the moment I opened my eyes.

Sausage shook his head and commented, "Anyway, he has been playing when I was having my meals before I sleep and even after I wake up. That's practically the entire day."

Uncle Egg's right eyebrow shot up as he exclaimed, "Maybe this cat's superpower is that it doesn't need to sleep!"

Airplane rushed towards Gaia and tapped on his shoulders, "Hey kid, it's your turn!"

Gaia turned a deaf ear to Airplane's words. With both eyes glued to the screen, he began muttering, "My ... my ... my ..."

Meanwhile, Uncle Egg had slowly crept behind Gaia and produced a small current at the tip of his paw before jamming against Gaia's neck.

Following a series of violent convulsions, Airplane and Gaia instantly collapsed to the ground.

Uncle Egg waved his hands when he noticed that both were unconscious and exclaimed, "Bring him in!" Baozi and Sausage immediately dashed over and brought Gaia into the container.

Zhao Yao's forehead creased together when he observed this strange sight of Gaia being lifted in and asked, "What happened to him?"

Baizi replied, "He refused to come in because of that game. Uncle Egg had to knock him unconscious so that we can bring him in."