

Am I A God 81

Chapter 81: Cuddling Cats

“Welcome to Cat Haven Coffee House!” Baiquan greeted enthusiastically.

He rushed forward to Xiao Qing, eager to begin corrupting students and conscripting them to Zhao Yao’s demon army.

His vision for the cafe was completely misguided, but it motivated him to work extra hard to win over customers.

Unfortunately, his exuberance felt more intimidating than inviting to Xiao Qing.

“Oh, erm, hi,” Xiao Qing said meekly, taking in the surroundings.

Her eyes shone with happiness as she watched them. “There’re so many of them!”

“C’mon, let’s meet them. You’ll just have to put these on and sanitize your hands before you enter the play area,” Baiquan smiled, handing his first customer a pair of disposable shoe covers.

Xiao Qing nodded quickly and did as she was told.

She held her breath when Baiquan unlocked the gate to the pen and ushered her into...paradise.

The moment she crossed the gate, her entire body seemed to come to a complete halt. She felt strangely limp but relaxed.

Her vision was full of nothing but cats. They were grooming themselves, playing with toys, and rolling around on the floor. Her heart was full, and she felt completely at ease. All the stress from school work, aches from gaming for long hours, and even her spinal injury started to float away and dissipate.

It felt like the world around her had suddenly emptied and grown quiet. All she felt was peace. Xiao Qing thought that these adorable cats were the reason behind this.

She was not wrong, but she was not quite right either.

The cats' cuteness did not relax her. It was the wave of Celestial Beats that hit her the moment she entered the area.

Xiao Qing was leisurely studying each cat when her attention was captured by one.

Elizabeth was lying on her side, carefully grooming each of her soft paws.

Xiao Qing was walking towards Elizabeth before she could register her limbs moving.

“Oh wow, isn't this one precious?” she cooed, squatting by the table that Elizabeth was on, “Look at the pattern on her forehead, that fluffy neck, this thick fur! It's a blue-eyed ragdoll, isn't it? That's supposed to be really rare!”

Xiao Qing could barely contain her excitement. She had only ever seen cats as beautiful as Elizabeth online. To have a real one within arm's reach was too much. She absolutely must touch Elizabeth.

“Oh, sweetheart, you're so pretty you can win all the beauty contests,” she continued, reaching for Elizabeth.

Elizabeth narrowed her eyes as the girl drew closer but otherwise remained still.

Xiao Qing took this as a silent invitation to touch the cat. At first, her movements were tentative. She patted Elizabeth on the back, then gently rubbed the top of her head.

Elizabeth seemed perfectly happy with the attention. She grew limp under her touch, her large, blue eyes now partially closed in contentment. Xiao Qing practically radiated joy when she noticed this.

“No wonder ragdolls are called puppy dogs,” she thought, “They’re so affectionate and docile, even to a stranger like me!”

“What’s her name?” Xiao Qing asked Baiquan, who was standing by the gate, flashing his warmest smile.

“This one’s Elizabeth,” he answered promptly.

Xiao Qing nodded, her eyes still firmly fixed on Elizabeth, who had shifted to lie on her back, tummy exposed.

She could no longer hold it any longer. She had to get even closer to the cat.

With a giggle, Xiao Qing buried her face in Elizabeth’s fur. She rubbed the tip of her nose against Elizabeth’s tummy.

Xiao Qing may be bursting with joy now, but Elizabeth was far from that.

Her body instantly turned rigid from the overly close contact. She rolled her large eyes. She was happy to be touched and petted but did not enjoy having someone’s nose in her fur. There was a limit on how much personal space could be invaded.

Elizabeth was about to push Xiao Qing away when Zhao Yao’s voice flashed through her mind.

“Patience, Elizabeth, patience. Suck it up.”

Zhao Yao’s words caused her to freeze mid-push.

“You want to keep your phone, right?” he continued calmly.

Elizabeth’s right eye twitched violently. Owning a phone was of absolute importance. It was a portal to every movie and drama series that this world could offer. Elizabeth was seriously deliberating if she could live without one when Xiao Qing’s constant rubs grew more pronounced and annoying.

Her eye twitched again.

“Oh, screw it,” she thought, placing her paw on the girl, ready to get away from her.

At that moment, Zhao Yao’s firm voice rang through her head again, “If you treat our customers well, I’ll get you a VIP account at the end of the month.”

Once again, Elizabeth stopped in her tracks.

A VIP account would mean watching an unlimited number of movies without any of those annoying commercials. She thought longingly at the list of movies she had yet to start on.

“I have fallen to the temptation of the Devil,” she sighed.

Defeated, Elizabeth fell back onto her back and exposed her tummy.

“This girl better be done soon,” she grimaced.

Her open body language only served to excite Xiao Qing even more.

“Oh, Elizabeth, do you like me too? You’re so fluffy, I’m going to die!” she exclaimed, giving the unwilling cat the tightest of hugs.

She then whipped out her phone and started taking photos.

This was the beginning of a torturous cycle of photo-taking, excessive cuddling, nose rubbing, then more photos again.

A look of despise crossed Elizabeth’s face every time Xiao Qing got a bit too close. However, for the VIP account, she had no choice but to continue tolerating this assault.

“When will it end?” Elizabeth thought, now in utter despair.

Baiquan, who had been standing by the corner, watching this overwhelming display of affection, came to Elizabeth's rescue eventually.

"Hey, miss? Would you like to order a drink?" he asked.

Xiao Qing looked up, embarrassed.

"I'm so sorry," she apologized, "This ragdoll is just too adorable. I got a bit carried away."

"Don't worry about it!" Bai Quan nodded before handing her the cafe menu, "Here's the list of drinks we serve."

"Thank you," Xiao Qing said politely.

This was not her first foray into cat cafes, so she knew that they could be quite pricey. Normally, you would have to choose a seat, order a drink, then enter the play area to interact with the cats. On top of drinks, you could also order dessert or buy snacks to feed the cats.

She did not expect to be surprised when she looked through the menu, but it left her stunned.

On it was only five or six drinks, each with an exuberant price tag. They were all at least RMB 100, which was easily two times the price of the beverages served at other cat cafes.

"Can I have a latte, please?" she said to Baiquan, handing him the menu.

She leaned back and took in the view before her. She was surrounded by cute cats and felt completely at peace. Sure, this cafe was expensive, but this was money well spent.

"Sure thing. How will you be making your payment?" Baiquan asked.

"Do you take Alipay?"

At the other end of the cafe, Zhao Yao was watching this encounter intently, a lopsided grin plastered on his face.

“Seems like appearances almost matter, even if you’re a cat. Elizabeth has the potential to be our little star,” he thought, amused.

He then turned to study the rest of the cafe, which was empty and seemed a little sad. His grin was replaced with a thoughtful expression.

“This can’t do. Even Elizabeth’s Celestial Beats will be useless if no one actually comes in,” he mused, “Maybe we do need to do a bit of advertising and promotion? But that’s going to cost time and money.”

He continued to deliberate his options as his gaze wandered across the cafe.

That was when his train of thought came to an abrupt halt.

“Hey, where’s Matcha?”

The cat in question was currently skiving in a small room that was converted into a bathroom for cats. Two shelves filled the room wall-to-wall. They were lined with ten self-cleaning automatic cat toilets.

Matcha was hidden in the toilet on the highest shelf, rolled-up tissues cramped into both nostrils. All his energy was focused on a heated match of Mobile Legend.

“Tsk, there’s no way in hell I’m going out there to entertain the guests. Who would want to be molested by unwanted hands and pretend to be a complete idiot? Not me. Not when every penny goes to Zhao Yao,” he complained.

“I might as well play games back here,” he sniggered.

So, while Elizabeth and the other cats were molested by unwanted hands out there, Matcha spent the cafe’s first day of business slacking in the bathroom.

As the morning transitioned into the early afternoon, the golden hour for business drew closer.

Queues have already started to form at Cosy Coffee Cafe.

At Cat Haven Coffee House, however...

Two college students stopped by the entrance. They were both incredibly fashionable – the type of girls that you will see on the Instagram Explore page.

“Hey, is this a new cat cafe?” said the girl carrying the smallest of backpacks, “Didn’t Willow post a photo of her at some cat cafe on WeChat that day? C’mon, we should check it out.”

She turned to her friend, who had long, silky hair and an enviably sharp chin. Her eyes were doll-like thanks to a pair of circle lenses.

“There’s no way there’ll be a decent cat cafe in this part of town. You wanna take snaps to show off online? Let’s go to the cafe downtown. It’s got European flair and style. Totally Instagram-able.”

Chapter 82: Taking Photos

Coco Sun tightened her grip on her tiny backpack.

“I think it’s worth a try. It might just turn out to be super awesome,” she said confidently.

She pointed at the board on the storefront. “Check this out. They use the latest biotechnology from MIT to improve the customers’ well-being. How cool is that?”

Leigh Zhao, the girl with long, silky hair, scoffed.

“Seriously, Coco, you’re falling for that? It’s utter bull.”

Her words fell on deaf ears. Coco was not to be deterred. She was extremely curious about this cafe and its lofty claims, so she dragged Leigh inside despite her loud protests.

Leigh's frown deepened at the sight of the play area, which was devoid of customers if not for Xiao Qing. None of the cats were particularly interesting. They were mostly the kind of tabby cats that roamed the streets.

"Oh em gee, Leigh! Look at that cat!" Coco exclaimed, holding onto the girl's arm, "She's beautiful. She's purrfect. Don't deny it."

Leigh's gaze followed Coco's pointed finger and landed on Elizabeth, who was currently being cuddled by Xiao Qing. She raised a perfectly arched eyebrow in surprise.

"It is pretty cute," she admitted, "What breed is that?"

"That, ladies, is a ragdoll cat," Baiquan announced, approaching the two girls with jest, "Her name is Elizabeth."

He was quite delighted by their appearance in the cafe. Coco and Leigh were the type of popular girls he would never have had a chance to talk to under normal circumstances.

He motioned for them to enter the playpen.

The moment they stepped foot in it, a rush of relaxation coursed through their bodies, spreading from the tips of their fingers to their ends of their toes.

"What's happening? I feel...good," Coco's voice trailed off as she basked in the soothing sensation.

Leigh nodded once in agreement, eyes widened in surprise. All morning, she had been suffering an annoying bout of cramps. It went away the moment she entered the play area. It was like magic.

"What's going on? Like, I can literally feel good vibes radiating from me right now," she looked to Baiquan for an explanation.

This was, of course, a result of Elizabeth's Celestial Beats. The sound waves were capable of restoring balance and harmony in the body. They could soothe any ailment or malady in existence.

Unfortunately, there was no way Baiquan could divulge this truth to the two girls.

He could, however, mislead them with an intricate and carefully weaved web of lies.

“Well, our cats aren’t just normal cats. Only the best were selected as kittens. Since birth, they’ve been fed the most premium food, even nano-pharmaceuticals...” he started.

Baiquan layered one lie over another with absolute confidence. This was not his first rodeo after all. He had single-handedly convinced dozens to join his Troll-Faced Demon cult before.

Persuading people was his forte.

He used hand gestures to emphasize certain things and paused after important points. The girls did not stand a chance.

Leigh was the first to buy into his ridiculous stories.

“This improves my complexion?” she asked, eyes shining.

Baiquan nodded sagely, “If you visit frequently enough, it’ll slow down your skin cells’ aging process.”

Technically, this statement was not a lie. Celestial Beats made people happy. Maintaining a good mood was crucial for good immunity, hormonal balance and, consequently, a healthy rate of skin regeneration.

Pleased with what she heard, Leigh took a seat and ordered a cup of coffee. Unlike Xiao Qing, she did not bat an eyelid at the extortive prices.

Coco Sun was delighted as well. While rapid skin regeneration sounded good, her main reason for being here was to play with the adorable cats.

One of them had just moved to sit by her feet. It looked up at her with a vacant expression.

“Hello, kitty. Whatcha looking at?” she cooed, squatting down so she could rub Mango’s head.

Mango continued to stare at her with a blank look. Instead of backing away from her touch, it burrowed the top of its head into her palm.

Coco was bowled over by this gesture. It looked like Mango was yearning for more pats.

In one swift motion, she scooped Mango into her arms and held it close to her chest.

“You really like me, don’t you?” she laughed, patting its head lovingly.

The more she looked at it, the cuter it seemed. She was bewitched.

This amused Zhao Yao, who was still in his corner, watching the girls with a knowing smile.

He understood cats. He knew they made really popular pets because their natural habits were often misinterpreted as signs of affection.

For Mango, rubbing against humans was for the very practical purpose of territory marking.

To Coco, however, it was seen as a lovely show of adoration and endearment.

After playing with Mango, she then started taking photos with it. Leigh was doing the same. They each held a cat to take selfies alone, then wefies together. Everything was uploaded on social media.

“Oh? Who knew that ragdoll cats would cost so much?” Leigh remarked, looking up at her phone.

“They’re expensive, huh?” Coco asked, taking a peek at Elizabeth.

She had wanted to play with the beautiful ragdoll the moment she spotted her, but Xiao Qing had been hogging her.

Leigh nodded, “I just checked. Each one costs, like, five digits at least.”

She followed Coco's gaze, which was still on Xiao Qing.

"Let's get a couple of shots with her when she's done."

This excessive photo taking was great news for Zhao Yao. Pretty girls like Coco and Leigh were always popular in school and online. Their selfies will be shared with tons of followers, which equated to many potential new customers for the cafe. This was free publicity. He loved it.

His good mood, however, did not last. It was disrupted by the glaring absence of a certain supercat.

"Where is Matcha?" he wondered, running his thumb across his chin thoughtfully.

As if on cue, Roly Poly scuttered out of the cat bathroom, a sneaky expression on his face.

"Zhao Yao," he said telepathically, "I just saw Matcha playing Mobile Legends in the bathroom."

"That brat..." Zhao Yao pursed his lips, getting on his feet.

As he made a beeline for the bathroom, Roly Poly followed up with a gentle reminder, "Zhao Yao, please don't tell on me."

Two minutes later, he emerged from a room, a chubby LiHua cat in his arms.

Coco, Leigh, and Xiao Qing watched as Matcha violently struggled to get out his grip.

"That doesn't look right."

"That cafe staff is, like, super rough with that cat."

"Seriously, what's wrong with him?"

While the girls looked on with disgust, Matcha was throwing a massive temper tantrum telepathically.

“I don’t want to work!” he whined, “Why must I work? I wanna stay home all day to play games!”

“You need to work to earn money. You need money to survive. Do you know that cat food, internet access, mobile games, and even air-conditioning all need money?” Zhao Yao retorted.

“Well, that’s none of my business! I’m just a cat! Have you ever seen a pet cat with a job? What’s wrong if I don’t wanna work?” Matcha continued defiantly.

“You rascal! If you still refuse to entertain the guests, I’m destroying all the emblems you’ve painstakingly collected in that stupid game of yours.”

This shut Matcha up. He stopped struggling and fell limp in Zhao Yao’s grasp.

“Alright, I’ll do it,” he conceded, crestfallen.

His despondence made Zhao Yao feel a tinge of guilt.

“Okay, how about this. As long as you do a good job, I’ll get you a monthly card as a reward,” he offered, rubbing Matcha’s chin gently.

“Sure,” Matcha responded half-heartedly, pursing his lips.

He was still glaring at him from the corner of his eyes.

This was not the response Zhao Yao had hoped for. He had assumed that the cat would be delighted and energized by this promise.

“Fine, fine” he gave up, “If you don’t slack for the rest of this month, I’ll buy a character skin for you, okay? We’ll get one of those fancy ones.”

“Really?” Matcha asked, eyes bright and innocent.

“Of course,” he replied, rubbing the cat’s furry ears.

This boosted Matcha's spirits immediately.

"Alright!" he announced, "Just watch me. I'll show these humans what true cuteness looks like. Every girl in this college town will go crazy over me. They'll never know what's coming!"

Chapter 83: Star of the Cafe

Just as the girls thought that the LiHua cat was in for more manhandling, the cafe staff unexpectedly lowered him to the ground.

The cat pranced forward, a spring in each of his small steps. He stopped before Coco and purred demurely. He looked up at her with an innocent expression, raising his white paws as if to show off.

"Heh heh," Matcha chuckled to himself, "With my round face, snow-white paws and large eyes, these girls don't stand a chance!"

Unfortunately for Matcha, that was far from the reception he received.

"Oh my god, Leigh. This cat is trying way too hard," Coco laughed.

She tightened her arms around Mango. "My kitty is still the cutest."

Matcha froze. He glared at Coco, thinking, "Tasteless peasant."

Leigh, who had been staring at the screen on her phone, looked up at Coco. She had been reading about Russian Blues after Baiquan told her that it was the breed Mango belonged to.

"Interesting," she said, "Turns out Russian Blues are, like, grey."

Matcha now turned his efforts towards her. She was his new target. He put on his most irresistibly innocent face and stared at her, trying to catch her attention.

Leigh was not interested. To her, every one of these cats had a price tag floating above each of their heads. The tag above the beautiful Elizabeth was RMB 30,000. The one above Mango was RMB 3,000.

As for Matcha, Leigh deemed him to be a mere RMB 10.

She returned Matcha's hopeful look coolly.

"What an unexceptional cat," she stated.

"Hey, Coco," she continued, stretching her arms towards her, "Let me hold your cat. Apparently, it's worth a few thousand dollars."

Matcha could only stare, dumbfounded, as the girls ignored him and started taking selfies with Mango.

He was in complete disbelief. "How is this possible? Why would they prefer that imbecile over me?"

Half an hour later, the girls' attention had shifted from Mango to another cat.

No, the cat was not Matcha. It was Elizabeth, who was being fussed over by all three girls. They were either hugging her or petting her or taking photos with her.

Elizabeth was undoubtedly the star of the cafe.

Mango did not mind at all. It was playing in the corner, happy to entertain itself.

Matcha, on the other hand, was grumpily sprawled across a platform on one of the kitty towers. He was staring daggers at Elizabeth.

The afternoon brought it new customers. Some left when they saw that the play area was filled with ordinary tabby cats. Only one couple and three high school girls stepped into the pen. There, they were relaxed by the Celestial Beats, which prompted them to stay.

Almost every girl crowded around Elizabeth, taking turns to run their hands down her back, tummy, and head.

Matcha, who had been watching glumly from a distance, grew increasingly jealous.

Despite Elizabeth's popularity, the cafe still only had eight customers at the end of the first day.

What they lacked in numbers, they made up for with duration. All the customers stayed throughout the afternoon and into the evening thanks to the Celestial Beats' soothing effects.

The high school girls only left when their parents started nagging them to come home. Coco Sun left for dinner but returned for a latte after that. She stayed until the cafe's closing hour.

"Hey, don't you think you guys close too early? It's only 6 pm," she told Baiquan, who was busy cleaning up.

"Well, you can always come back tomorrow," he smiled.

"I can't," she lamented, "Your prices are too high! I'll have to spend at least RMB 100 each time I'm here."

Coco planted a sad kiss on Elizabeth, "Guess I'll see you in a few days."

"I've had enough of this woman," the cat complained to Zhao Yao telepathically, "My entire body is covered in her sweat and saliva."

"Suck it up, Elizabeth," he responded, "Patience and tolerance are essential for good customer service."

"You keep telling me that! Why don't we switch places? Let's see how long you can stand this nonsense."

"Me?" Zhao Yao started, but was interrupted by a cackling Dust Ball.

“Even if he wants to switch places, I doubt anyone would want to hug him,” she giggled.

The moment Coco left the cafe, Elizabeth let out a long sigh of relief. She started to carefully groom herself, starting with generous licks across her body. She absolutely had to get rid of the stench from the girls.

Baiquan approached Zhao Yao, ready to report the day’s activities.

“Master Zhao,” he started.

“Hang on a second. Don’t call me Master Zhao. From now, I’m your boss,” Zhao Yao cut in.

“Yes, boss,” Baiquan said obediently, “Many of our customers said they would like to buy cat food to feed the cats, but we don’t offer that.”

“That’s taken care of,” Zhao Yao said confidently, “I’ve order canned food and snacks online. We’ll sell them the moment they arrive.”

“Some guests want fruit juice or tea instead of coffee,” Shi Yu chimed in, “Perhaps we can do that too?”

“That’s done too. I’ve ordered instant powder.”

“Instant powder again..?” Shi Yu thought with disapproval.

Despite serving only instant drinks, the cafe’s business climbed steadily as the days went by.

The Celestial Beats’ power was proven to be irresistible. Anyone who entered its reach was overcome with a wave of relaxation and joy. It could ease all kinds of aches, ranging from pain in the back to tension in the neck. It could alleviate the worst of migraines.

In fact, it felt like it was even strengthening your body from the inside out, starting with your bones and reaching your muscles.

Put simply, it was invigorating.

Naturally, those who experienced it once kept coming back for more.

Coco and Leigh came from relatively affluent backgrounds, so they could afford to drop by daily.

Coco visited because she adored both Mango and Elizabeth. Plus, the atmosphere in the cafe never failed to put her at ease. She found that even the stiff neck she earned from playing excessive computer games went away when she was there.

As for Leigh, her dedication to the cafe was purely motivated by reasons related to health and beauty. She found that spending a day there guaranteed a restful night of sleep later on. This was a godsend for her insomnia.

Now that she had enough sleep, she could focus better in school. The dark circles under her eyes were gone. Even her pesky laugh lines were gradually fading.

This was why the two of them would lug their laptops, iPads, and chargers to the cafe and stay there the entire day.

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Five days after the Cat Haven Coffee House opened, the owner of Cosy Coffee Cafe dropped by.

She had deliberately made a pit stop there to see how well, or rather, how badly, it was doing.

Ms. Mayer was certain that the cafe would be a ghost town devoid of customers. For starters, it offered nothing more than tabby cats that looked like strays. The outrageous prices on the menu were also nothing short of shocking.

Imagine her surprise when she looked through the glass windows of the cafe.

The cafe was far from empty. About 20 people were seated in the modest, 150 square meters space.

This was considered a decently sized crowd for a cafe.

However, for a cafe that had only been in business for five days, this was quite a feat.

Ms. Mayer was unable to make sense of this.

“Are you kidding me? Are these people fools?” she thought to herself.

As she craned her neck to observe the customers, she noticed a group of girls crowded around a remarkably large cat with long fur.

The cat was beautiful.

Ms. Mayer wanted to run her hands through her shiny coat of hair.

“I’m pretty sure that’s a ragdoll. It is adorable, but even then, it can’t possibly be why so many people are in there,” she furrowed her eyebrows.

As a cat owner, she knew about the different breeds and could appreciate how special ragdolls were. However, she could not wrap her head around how this lousy little place could be so popular.

Chapter 84: Matcha in Despair

On the other side of the window, Matcha was posing before the gleaming mirror.

“This doesn’t make sense.”

“Why is this happening?”

“Am I not the perfect balance of cute and handsome?”

“Aren’t my adorable white paws attractive?”

He could not wrap his head around why he was receiving zero attention from the customers.

Matcha turned around to observe them. Apart from the ones playing mobile games or doing work, most of the other guests were fawning over Elizabeth. A couple of them were playing with Mango. Even Roly Poly was in the loving arms of a little girl.

It was a depressing sight.

As his mood took another nosedive, he noticed Ms. Mayer.

She was still like a statue, her mind whirling with questions about the cafe's popularity.

Sensing an opportunity, Matcha pounced forward and placed his paws against the window. He widened his eyes, dilated his pupils and put on an angelic expression for the middle-aged woman.

All Matcha asked for was some attention, but he continued to fail in receiving it.

Ms. Mayer was too consumed with making sense of the cafe's inexplicable popularity to bother with the LiHua cat staring creepily at her.

She rolled her eyes and stormed off, wondering, "Are there a lot of cat lovers now? Is that why these cafes can command so many customers?"

Her eye roll felt like salt rubbing against Matcha's emotional wounds. Crestfallen, he watched her retreating figure in defeated silence.

"Maybe...I'm not cute at all?"

In truth, Matcha was cute. However, he did not exist on the same level of cuteness as Mango and Elizabeth. The two cats belonged to pedigree breeds. They were rarer and more beautiful, and this was especially pronounced when they were among a bunch of common tabby cats.

Of course, Matcha did not understand this. He ambled forward, each step slow and heavy, hoping to hide under a table for the rest of time. As He thought that all hope was lost, he heard a voice call out.

“Hmm? This cat is, like, pretty cute if you take a closer look.”

The girl’s voice broke Matcha’s depressive spell. His eyes lit up as he raised his head to see Leigh Zhao bent forward, looking in his direction.

Matcha was ecstatic. He literally jumped for joy as he thundered towards her, ready to give her, or rather, her calf, a huge hug.

“Go away, Ginger,” she demanded before Matcha could reach her, “Don’t block my view.”

With that, Leigh used her leg to push Matcha away.

The cat fell to the ground and watched in despair as Leigh lifted Dust Ball, who had been behind Matcha, into her arms.

“You’re a tiny thing!” she giggled, “Baby animals are truly the cutest ever. You’re, like, the size of my palm.”

Dust Ball was not having any of this fondling. She shot Leigh a cross look, then squeezed out of her grip. She hissed at her and bared her sharp, angular teeth before jumping out of her hands and onto the ground, darting from view.

Leigh laid her hands on her chest in surprise, “This kitty is super fierce.”

“Even stupid Dust Ball is more popular than me,” Matcha wailed, scrambling towards the cat bathroom, “I will never talk to a human ever again! I hate all of you! I hate this superficial world!”

Roly Poly, who was at the other end of the cafe, was having a much better time than Matcha. He remained expressionless as the little girl scratched his tummy. However, he was actually trying his hardest not to burst out laughing from the ticklish touches. He took so much effort that his tummy was contracted into folds.

Matcha, true to his word, remained hidden in the bathroom until the end of the night.

After the cafe was closed for the day, Zhao Yao sat down to calculate the profits and expenses.

In five days, Cat Haven Coffee House had earned close to RMB 4,000. He thought this was a decent amount since the cafe was still new and needed time to cultivate a good reputation.

As he expected, the Celestial Beats were effective in motivating customers to return time and again. The repeat customer rate was already more than 90%. This could only get better and draw more customers over time.

“Maybe one day, we can even time the visits. One drink only buys you one hour at the cafe. If you want to stay longer, you’ll have to buy another,” he thought gleefully.

The only downside of the cafe’s expanding business was the reduced amount of time he could spend on his daily missions.

Recently, he could only patrol his neighborhood with either Matcha or Elizabeth in tow. Training and play for the supercats could only be restricted to the confines of the cafe.

However, today, he had a different plan in mind.

First, he dropped Shi Yu off at the public bus stop. Then, he drove Baiquan and the four supercats home. After some rest, he headed to the zoo with Elizabeth and Matcha.

“Carnivores spotted partying in the zoo?” he laughed, scrolling down the information recorded on his phone, “Jeez, someone even saw a tiger dancing.”

He never once imagined that supercats would appear in the zoo.

Elizabeth was curled up in the shotgun seat of the Panamera, grooming herself religiously. She could still sense the scent of the customers in her fur.

Matcha had flopped down in the leg space beneath the seat, unmoving and expressionless.

Zhao Yao pursed his lips when he spotted Matcha in such low spirits.

“Silly cat, when are you going to stop wallowing in self-pity?” he started, “I know you’ve spent the whole afternoon hidden in the bathroom today. If you do that again tomorrow, I’ll count you as absent. That means no character skins or rewards at the end of the month.”

Matcha turned his head to face his owner, a doleful look on his face.

“It doesn’t matter. No one likes me anyway. None of the guests wanted to hug me or touch me. I’m better off hidden in the bathroom.”

“Tsk,” Elizabeth shot Matcha a side-eye, “I agree, Zhao Yao. Useless cats can just stay at home. No one would want to play with them anyway. The cafe can just rely on me.”

Matcha did not retaliate. Instead, he raised his paws to cover his head, as if trying to hide from view.

“Actually, Matcha,” Zhao Yao said, “There are ways to be more popular.”

The ginger cat did not respond. However, there was a twitch in his ears, so he was listening.

Zhao Yao took this as permission to continue.

“Elizabeth and Mango are so popular because they are pedigree cats. They are meant to take part in championships, so they were bred to be beautiful. They’re also rare.”

“Tabby cats are a lot more commonplace, no? People like rare things, so they’re more excited to see Elizabeth and Mango,” he finished.

Zhao Yao’s words only served to inspire more despair in Matcha. He flipped onto his back like a dead fish and looked at him miserably.

“Just leave me be,” he moaned, “I’m just a useless cat. Just let me rot at home and play Mobile Legends every day.”

“You little rascal! You’re still thinking about slacking at home?” Zhao Yao thought to himself.

He kept these comments to himself. To Matcha, he suggested, “You may not be a pedigree cat, but you can pretend to be one.”

Matcha’s furry ears twitched again.

Even Elizabeth turned to him, swishing her tail. “You can pretend to be one?”

Zhao Yao laughed.

“You’ve seen Scottish Folds, yes? Matcha, that’s what you can pretend to be. I know you can control your ears. They stick flat to your heads like the wings of a plane when you’re scared, excited, or relaxed. Just flatten your ears like Scottish Folds. I think that’ll work.”

Chapter 85: The Zoo

Elizabeth’s jaw dropped as Zhao Yao concluded his proposal.

“Seriously?”

Matcha’s response was far more dramatic. He had gotten to his feet and climbed into their line of sight, ears folded flat against his head.

“Zhao Yao, you’re the only one to see my potential,” he marveled, pawing his transformed ears gently, “From now on, my name is George Matcha! I hail from an exotic line of Scottish Fold crossbreeds. I disguise myself as a domestic tabby to evade detection and attention.”

“Idiot,” Elizabeth muttered, glancing at Matcha one more time before returning to grooming herself.

Zhao Yao could not help but took a look at Matcha as well.

“This silly cat sure recovers quickly,” he mused, “He should be able to entertain customers tomorrow.”

Soon, he pulled over at a parking lot a distance away from the zoo. He would rather trek there than get caught trespassing again. Elizabeth and Matcha were in the cat carrier that sat on his shoulders.

The two of them were not happy with the arrangement. They had both grown in size significantly over the past months, so it was a bit of a squeeze. Elizabeth took up a particularly large amount of space because she was larger and was covered in layers of long, thick fur.

“You’ve gotten fatter again! The bag can’t fit you anymore, you shaggy ragdoll!” Matcha complained.

“How many times must I repeat myself? I’m not fat, I just have a fluffy coat of fur,” Elizabeth retorted.

She used her paw to pat Matcha’s tummy, feeling the rolls of fat vibrate in return.

“And please, before you criticise me, take a look at that pot belly of yours,” she continued smugly.

“Oh, are you unhappy with me?” Matcha mocked, using both his paws to squeeze Elizabeth’s face, “I have a bit of a tummy because I’m storing fat for the winter. Jiangmen city Scottish Folds like myself tend to get on the chubby side at this time of the year.”

“Stupid cat. That’s not a real breed,” Elizabeth argued, reaching for Matcha’s artificially folded ears, “Stop folding them! You look ridiculous.”

Zhao Yao could feel the cats squabble. The backpack was rocking from their fight, making it difficult for him to move forward. He impatiently rapped on the hard case of the backpack a few times, “Alright, alright. Stop moving, or I’m cutting internet access for both of you.”

That shut them up. Now that they have stopped writhing around, Zhao Yao could pick up speed as he made his way to the zoo.

The cats weighed close to 30 pounds combined, but Zhao Yao had no difficulty with that load on his shoulders. Their powers had strengthened him considerably over time. The aura of the Celestial Beats had made him stronger as well. He marched steadily onwards, never once out of breath.

He started using time freeze as he got nearer to the zoo. He darted forward for six seconds, then hid behind trees and in the shadows during the cool down period. Carefully, he inched closer and closer to his destination.

*

While Zhao Yao continued to move with quiet stealth, the carnivore zone in the zoo was erupting with roars and hisses.

A dozen tigers had taken to circling a man. They took turns to snap their powerful jaws and snarl, taunting him.

The man was a bald, muscular black man. He had on a pair of boxing shoes, red exercise shorts and a black tank top.

With his ripped biceps and broad shoulders, he did not look at all like the kind of guy you would want to mess with.

He chuckled as the tigers started closing in on him.

“Still hiding, are we?” he said in fluent Mandarin, “You know that these kitties are no match for me. If you don’t want them to get hurt, make them leave. Now.”

Whoever he was speaking to did not respond. The tigers did not flee either. Instead, their eyes shone with ferocity. There was a sense of impatience in each step they made as if they were just dying to attack.

“I warned ya,” the man said, rolling his shoulders.

His lips curled into a cruel smirk.

“I’ll show you what real power looks like.”

With that, he cocked one large arm back, then swung it forward in a powerful punch. Its force was so great that it rippled the air, sending a gush of energy forward.

It sent five tigers flying across the zone at once. They growled in pain when they were hit, blood spilling from their mouths.

The remaining tigers charged towards the man in a fit of rage.

He was unfazed. As before, he shot them a vicious grin. Then, he sent both his fists forward with a thunderous roar. Tornadoes spun towards the tigers, gaining speed and momentum as it approached them.

“I will show you who the real king of the beasts is.”

The tornadoes tunneled through the throng of tigers mercilessly. Within a minute, they all plummeted to the ground, severely hurt.

A thin trail of blood had appeared on the man’s chest as well. He pulled the tight tank top over his head, then flung it away.

Just then, he spotted a rustling in the woods ahead.

“You can’t run,” he smirked.

A loud crack split through the air as he shot forward, propelling towards the escaping shadow like a missile

*

At the edge of the carnivore zone, a small four-wheel drive was meandering through the entrance.

Jin Jia Jia was in the backseat, cellphone raised, ready to begin her live stream. Xiao Ming was seated next to her, peering out the window curiously. This was his first time visiting the zoo at night.

The staff in the front passenger seat spoke to him.

“Mr. Xiao, a lot of our animals are nocturnal, so you’re in for quite an experience. I’ve asked the staff to delay feeding hours specially for you. Would you like to watch the feeding later on?”

“No, that’s alright. I’m just here to take a quick look around. I don’t wish to disrupt your work,” Xiao Ming responded, brows furrowed.

“Disrupt? Why, you’re causing none of that!” the middle-aged man added quickly, “Your presence is an honor to us.”

Xiao Ming awkwardly exchanged a few more words with him. The staff eventually fell silent when Jia Jia began her live stream.

She flashed a bright smile at the camera before turning it to capture the gates of the carnivore zone.

“Hello everybody! Welcome,” she greeted cheerily, “Tonight, we’re on the hunt for nocturnal animals. I’m actually at the zoo right now. I’ve never been here at night. I could get in today thanks to Xiao Ming.”

Jia Jia’s popularity online had gone through the roof with his help. Their adventure live streams had accumulated a fan base.

The session had barely started, but these loyal viewers were already joining in one by one.