

## Great Ming 1431

### Chapter 1431 Bai Yuan and Young Master Bai (Part 1)

New Ming Calendar, Year Ten.

There were only three days left before the grand opening of the Seventh National Workers and Peasants Games.

What had begun as a modest experiment in Year Three had, over the course of seven consecutive tournaments, grown into a nationwide spectacle. It was no longer just a gathering of athletes. It had become a symbol of pride, honor, and regional identity. Provinces treated it as seriously as a military campaign. Athletes trained with grim determination. Officials fretted over medal counts as if they were tallying battlefield victories.

Every delegation arrived with ambition burning in their hearts.

Except one.

The Shaanxi team stood at the train station, their mood heavy, their faces tight with anxiety.

An hour before departure, disaster had struck.

Their star marksman, the pride of Shaanxi, had been involved in a carriage accident on the way to the station. His life was not in danger, but his injuries were serious enough to confine him to bed for at least a month.

For a province that prided itself on its mastery of firearms, this was nothing short of catastrophic.

Governor Hong Chengchou paced back and forth like a trapped tiger, his hands clasped behind his back, his brows knitted into a deep frown.

"What do we do now?" he muttered. "Shooting is our strongest event. If we lose that gold medal, Shaanxi will lose face before the entire nation."

An official beside him hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"There is still one option."

Hong stopped pacing. "Speak."

"We invite the old master."

Hong blinked. "Old master?"

"The one and only. Bai Yuan of Bai Family Fort."

Hong inhaled sharply. The name alone carried weight. It was not merely reputation. It was legend.

"Yes, Bai Yuan," the official continued. "He is still the finest marksman Shaanxi has ever produced. If anyone can salvage this situation, it is him."

Hong frowned deeper.

"But he is already past sixty," he said slowly. "To ask a man of that age to compete in a national tournament. That is not just difficult. That borders on unreasonable."

The official gave a helpless smile.

"At this point, it is no longer a matter of reasonableness. It is a matter of necessity."

Hong closed his eyes for a moment, then nodded.

"Very well. Send someone immediately."

The team could not wait. They boarded the train and departed for the capital as scheduled. Meanwhile, a fast rider was dispatched toward Bai Family Fort with all haste.

Three days later, the capital city.

The stadium was packed to the brim. Flags fluttered. Drums thundered. Excitement filled the air like a rising tide.

"I hereby declare the Seventh National Workers and Peasants Games officially open!"

As the announcer's voice rang out, ribbons and colored streamers filled the sky.

And then, something even more astonishing happened.

High above the clouds, a golden light broke through. Within that light, a massive radiant hand appeared, and seated upon it was the long unseen Saintess, smiling gently as she gazed upon the crowd below.

Gasps rippled through the stadium.

"The Dao Xuan Tianzun is here."

"The Saintess too."

"It has been so long since they last revealed themselves."

"To compete under their gaze. This is the greatest honor."

The athletes grew even more fired up.

"I will win gold and dedicate it to the Dao Xuan Tianzun."

"Sichuan will take ten gold medals."

"Henan will take eleven."

"Shanxi will take twelve."

"Do you all think you can just outdo each other like that?"

Even the team leaders joined the shouting, their voices rising in a storm of competitive bravado.

Amid this chaos, the Shaanxi team leader stood silent.

His face was pale.

Bai Yuan had not arrived.

The opening ceremony ended. Events began one after another without delay.

Soon, it was time for the shooting competition.

The Shaanxi team leader clenched his fists so tightly that his knuckles turned white.

"It is over," he whispered. "We have lost."

The shooting range buzzed with energy.

A Shanxi competitor stepped forward, raised his rifle, and fired.

Bang.

Nine rings.

Cheers erupted from the Shanxi supporters.

"Shanxi! Shanxi! Shanxi!"

Next came the Hebei competitor.

Bang.

Nine rings again.

"Hebei! Hebei! Hebei!"

The judge nodded, then called out, "Next. Shaanxi."

Silence.

The judge frowned. "Shaanxi? Where is your competitor?"

The Shaanxi team leader opened his mouth, but no words came out. His mind was blank.

Then suddenly, the crowd parted.

An old man in white robes walked calmly through the opening.

His hair was completely silver. His face was lined with age. Yet his posture was straight, his presence refined. When the wind brushed past him, his sleeves fluttered gently, giving him the air of a wandering immortal.

The judge blinked in disbelief.

"Master Bai?"

The surrounding athletes also recognized him instantly.

"It is Bai Yuan."

"He actually came."

The old man cupped his hands politely.

"Judge, I am the shooting representative for Shaanxi."

The judge stared at him.

"You?"

"Yes."

The judge struggled to respond.

"You are quite advanced in years."

Bai Yuan smiled faintly.

"The rules specify a minimum age, but they do not specify a maximum."

The judge was speechless.

The crowd murmured.

He was right.

There was no rule preventing a sixty year old from competing.

The Shaanxi supporters quickly seized the moment.

"He is qualified."

"He represents Shaanxi."

"Let him compete."

Under mounting pressure, the judge finally sighed and raised his hand.

"Very well. Bai Yuan is permitted to compete."

The Shaanxi crowd erupted in cheers.

"Master Bai! Master Bai!"

Bai Yuan bowed gracefully to all sides, his demeanor composed and dignified.

Then he reached into his robes and drew out his weapon.

It was an antique.

A relic from an earlier era.

The very first Xia Saibo breech loading rifle ever bestowed by the Dao Xuan Tianzun.

Though outdated compared to modern firearms, it carried immense symbolic value. The moment it appeared, many Shaanxi spectators found their eyes growing moist.

This was history.

This was pride.

Bai Yuan lifted the rifle slowly.

The entire range fell silent.

Bang.

The judge instinctively looked toward the ten ring.

Nothing.

No bullet hole.

A stunned pause followed.

Then someone shouted from the side.

"Hey. Who hit my target?"

All eyes turned.

On the Shanxi target, right at the center, was a perfect ten.

The crowd froze.

Bai Yuan lowered his rifle, peered into the distance, and scratched his head.

"Ah. My eyesight is not what it used to be. That was Shanxi's target, was it not?"

The silence deepened.

Then he sighed lightly.

"It seems the art of shooting must be crossed out from my list today."

The Shaanxi team leader nearly collapsed on the spot.

Just like that, their gold medal was gone.

Bai Yuan looked slightly embarrassed, unsure how to face his fellow provincials.

At that moment, a man came running into the range, breathless.

"Master Bai. There you are. The capital's calligraphy and painting exchange conference is about to begin. Everyone is waiting for you to strike the opening gong."

Bai Yuan's eyes lit up.

"Oh. That cannot be delayed."

He tucked the rifle away without another word and followed the man out, leaving behind a field of stunned athletes and a Shaanxi team that did not know whether to laugh or cry.

In the end, some legends never fade.

They simply change the stage on which they perform.

Chapter 1432 Bai Yuan and Young Master Bai (Part Two)

The Capital Calligraphy and Painting Exchange Conference came to a perfect close under Bai Yuan's steady hosting.

Scholars, artists, and enthusiasts from across the land gathered, exchanged techniques, debated styles, and left with satisfied smiles, each feeling they had gained something valuable. Some carried new inspiration. Some carried quiet frustration. All carried stories.

At the entrance of the venue, Bai Yuan was still busy.

Two young scholars stood before him, each holding out a sheet of clean white paper. Bai Yuan lifted his brush and signed his name in bold, flowing strokes. The characters "Bai Yuan" seemed to leap off the page, vigorous and alive.

He handed the papers back with a warm smile.

"Young men, keep working hard. The Six Arts of a Gentleman are waiting for your generation to carry them forward."

The two scholars exchanged awkward glances.

They loved calligraphy. That much was true. As for the other five arts, they had absolutely no interest. Still, standing before a respected elder, neither dared to say that aloud. They forced polite smiles and nodded repeatedly.

Just as the atmosphere was about to turn painfully stiff, a strange rumbling sound rolled in from the street.

"Wuuuuu..."

A peculiar vehicle pulled up in front of the venue.

It looked nothing like the old steam-powered machines people had grown used to. Its body was sleeker. Its sound deeper. Its presence more aggressive.

The door opened.

A man in his early thirties stepped out.

It was Bai Gongzi.

He walked forward quickly and bowed.

"Father."

Bai Yuan turned, his eyes lighting up.

"Ah, you are here. Is this the special vehicle you built for me?"

Bai Gongzi nodded, unable to hide his excitement.

"Yes. Father, you must be careful with this one. It is no longer a steam machine. It uses the latest internal combustion engine as its core. The power is far beyond anything you have driven before."

Bai Yuan chuckled.

"No matter how powerful it is, what is there to fear? Among the Six Arts, I have always placed great importance on driving."

Bai Gongzi rubbed his forehead.

"Father, this is different. Truly different. Please, sit in the passenger seat first. Let me show you what it can do."

"Fine," Bai Yuan said with a grin. "Let me see just how impressive this engine is, to make you doubt your own father's skill."

The two of them climbed into the car.

Bai Gongzi carefully scanned the road ahead. The official road was wide and empty. No pedestrians. No carts. Safe enough.

He took a breath.

"Father, please hold onto the handle above the door."

Bai Yuan snorted.

"Ridiculous. I have seen battlefields and storms. From horse carts to steam trains, from ships to armored vehicles, what have I not driven? You think I need to hold onto a handle for this? Step on it. Full speed. That is an order."

Bai Gongzi glanced at his father's sixty year old frame and sighed inwardly.

Only experience would convince him.

"Very well."

He pressed the accelerator.

The engine roared.

Not chugged. Not rattled. Roared.

The car shot forward like an arrow released from a bow.

In that instant, Bai Yuan felt something entirely new.

A force pressed him back into his seat. The world seemed to lurch forward all at once. No buildup. No hesitation. Just pure, immediate acceleration.

His hand flew up and grabbed the handle.

"Whoa. Ahhhhh."

But his voice quickly changed tone.

"Magnificent. This is exhilarating."

Bai Gongzi blinked.

He had expected complaints. Instead, he heard praise.

So he pushed harder.

The accelerator went down further. The engine screamed louder. Dust rose behind them in a long trailing cloud as the car tore down the road.

Only when a sharp turn appeared ahead did Bai Gongzi ease off and slow the vehicle.

Bai Yuan exhaled quietly, then immediately shouted.

"Why slow down? Where is the excitement now? Is this how I taught you? Be bold. Be spirited."

Bai Gongzi hesitated for half a second, then committed.

His foot tapped the brake. His hands spun the steering wheel. The car swung sideways in a clean drift. At the same time, he shifted gears and slammed the accelerator again.

The vehicle surged forward once more.

Bai Yuan's voice changed again.

"Ah. Oh. Ahhhhh."

Finally, the car came to a stop.

Bai Yuan stepped out. His legs wobbled slightly. His stomach churned. For a brief moment, it seemed he might collapse.

But he did not.

He steadied himself with one hand on the car, straightened his back, and stood tall. His white robes fluttered in the wind, giving him the air of an immortal untouched by worldly concerns.

In front of his son, he would never show weakness.

He let out a soft snort.

"This vehicle has far greater potential than steam machines. Very good. I accept it."

Bai Gongzi nodded.

"Then please, Father, take the driver's seat. I will guide you."

"Of course."

Bai Yuan climbed in eagerly, touching everything with curiosity.

"What is this lever? I have not seen it before."

"That is the clutch."

"Clutch?" Bai Yuan frowned. "Why would a vehicle need sadness and joy? Will you add anger and sorrow next?"

Bai Gongzi laughed helplessly.

"It is part of the transmission system. It allows you to change gears smoothly. The gearbox has multiple ratios. The clutch disengages the engine so you can shift."

Bai Yuan raised a hand.

"Enough. I do not need the theory. Just tell me how to use it."

And so, Bai Gongzi became a driving instructor.

He explained step by step. When to press. When to release. How to shift gears. How to control speed.

Despite his age, Bai Yuan learned quickly.

He did not reject new knowledge. He did not hide behind excuses. Within a single hour, he had grasped the essentials.

He laughed loudly.

"Excellent. Full throttle. Acceleration is everything. Brakes are for cowards."

Bai Gongzi panicked.

"Father, please do not say that. Safety is the most important thing."

"Do not underestimate me," Bai Yuan replied. "Among the Six Arts, I have always excelled in driving."

Moments later, they reached a bend.

Bai Yuan misjudged it.

The car tipped.

Then flipped.

Father and son tumbled into a nearby field along with the vehicle.

Fortunately, Bai Yuan had not actually been going very fast. Despite his bold words, his instincts had kept his speed moderate.

They crawled out unharmed.

The car, however, lay overturned and ruined.

Bai Yuan looked at it for a long moment, then sighed.

"The art of driving... should be crossed out."

Bai Gongzi scratched his head.

"We will have to walk back and find someone to tow it. Perhaps I should design a special vehicle for transporting damaged cars. A towing vehicle. Yes, that might work."

Time passed.

New Ming Calendar, Year Ten. Bai Yuan first encountered the internal combustion vehicle.

Year Twelve. He won first place in the National Calligraphy Competition.

Year Fourteen. He returned to the shooting event and claimed the gold medal.

Year Fifteen. He compiled and published "The Complete Compendium of Chinese Etiquette," earning recognition as a guardian of cultural heritage.

That same year, he publicly admitted that his mathematical knowledge had fallen behind the times.

"The art of numbers," he said, "should be crossed out."

Year Twenty. At the age of seventy, he funded and established the first large scale automobile racing event in the world. He personally competed and won the championship, becoming the oldest racing champion in history.

Year Thirty.

Bai Gongzi stood before his father's memorial tablet.

He bowed deeply.

Before him were countless awards and certificates, arranged in neat rows. Each one represented a moment in Bai Yuan's extraordinary life.

"Father," he said softly, "you walked toward the light and left the shadows behind you. Not a single stain marked your name."

He lowered his head further.

"No matter how hard I try, I will never surpass the greatness of your figure."

Chapter 1433 Zheng Daniu and Zao Ying

Year 4 of the Xin Ming Calendar.

From the kitchen came the lively sound of cooking, followed by Zao Ying's cheerful voice:

"Da Niu, tonight's dinner is your favorite, braised beef."

Zheng Da Niu's entire face lit up. His reaction was immediate and intense, like a starving wolf that just heard the word "meat."

"Really?! I love that! How much longer?"

"Almost done," Zao Ying laughed. "If you can't wait, eat what's on the table first. Your favorite white-cut chicken."

"I already finished it!"

"Haha, I knew it." Zao Ying sounded smug. "Check the cabinet on the left. I hid another dish, your favorite boiled edamame."

Zheng Da Niu rushed over and pulled open the cabinet. Sure enough, a plate of edamame was waiting there like buried treasure. He grabbed it eagerly, cracking shells open and tossing beans into his mouth, one after another.

"Ever since I married you, I get to eat delicious food every day. This is heaven!"

Zao Ying snickered to herself in the kitchen.

Going to Gao Village Family Technical School to learn cooking really wasn't a waste. Whoever said you win a man's heart by controlling his stomach was absolutely right.

Just then, the side bedroom door opened.

Their son, Zheng Xiao Niu, walked out, muttering as he went:

"Mom, first you said braised beef is Dad's favorite. Then white-cut chicken is his favorite. Then edamame is also his favorite. What's with all these 'favorites'? Does that word even mean anything anymore?"

Zao Ying burst out laughing.

"You silly kid, what do you know? For your father, whatever food is in front of him becomes his favorite. Got it?"

Zheng Xiao Niu: "..."

That explanation was... devastatingly ridiculous.

"With parents like you, there's no reasoning at all," he said, shaking his head. Still, his hand reached for the edamame anyway. Then, trying to salvage his dignity, he straightened up and began reciting:

"From this world of heroes I arise,

Once in Jianghu, time flies,

Imperial glory laughed away,

Life's but a drunken dream."

"Oh ho! My son can recite poetry now!" Zheng Da Niu was overjoyed. "Your old man here is an idiot who only knows how to eat. But you're different! You'll be a scholar someday, right?"

Zheng Xiao Niu puffed his chest proudly. "Of course!"

Zheng Da Niu slapped his thigh. "As long as you're more learned than Gao Zhengjing, I'll go mock Gao Chuwu every day! Hahaha!"

Zao Ying poked her head out of the kitchen.

"Son, what poem was that? It sounded... a bit strange. Which great poet wrote it?"

Zheng Xiao Niu answered without hesitation:

"Gao Sanwa."

"PFFT!"

A single edamame bean shot straight out of Zheng Da Niu's mouth like a hidden weapon and smacked onto Zheng Xiao Niu's face.

Zheng Xiao Niu wiped his face furiously. "Dad! What the hell?! That's disgusting!"

Zheng Da Niu jumped up. "What did you say? That poem was written by Gao Sanwa?!"

"Yeah!"

Now even Zao Ying rushed out.

"You perfectly good kid, why are you memorizing his poems? Why not read proper Tang poetry?"

Zheng Xiao Niu rolled his eyes.

"What's wrong with Gao Sanwa's poems? This one is called Storm of Heroes. It's overflowing with dominance! One day, I'll be like the protagonist in his stories, roaming Jianghu with a sword, cutting down villains one after another. Ahh... I really want to experience that kind of life."

Zheng Da Niu scratched his head and turned helplessly to his wife.

"Wife... what exactly is Jianghu? Our son wants to go there. I don't even know how to explain it."

Zao Ying walked out and looked at her son with a strange expression.

"Son, Jianghu is just fighting and killing. There's nothing interesting about it."

"Nothing interesting?!" Zheng Xiao Niu protested. "Jianghu is amazing! The heroes are free and happy. Way better than being an official."

Zao Ying smiled faintly. "Being an official is better."

"You're lying! Even Gao Sanwa says Jianghu people look down on officials. No one wants to enter the system."

"I'm not lying," Zao Ying said calmly. "Most people in Jianghu dream of getting into the system."

"I don't believe you!"

Zheng Da Niu turned to her. "So... do you beat him, or do I?"

"Beat your head," Zao Ying snapped. "You only know how to hit. That's not how you teach a child."

"Then how do we teach him?"

Zao Ying didn't answer.

Instead, she took out a signal rocket.

With a sharp whoosh, she fired it into the sky.

"One arrow through the clouds, and thousands will answer the call."

The rocket disappeared into the sky... and for a moment, nothing happened.

Zheng Xiao Niu kept peeling edamame, still confused.

Then suddenly, thunderous hoofbeats.

He ran to the door and flung it open.

Outside, a massive group of cavalry had gathered.

He recognized every one of them.

Uncle Zhang. Uncle Zhu. Uncle Li. Uncle Zheng...

These men usually wore military uniforms.

But today, they were all dressed in rough Jianghu outfits, looking like seasoned wanderers.

They shouted toward the house:

"Boss! You sent the signal. What's the job?"

Zheng Xiao Niu froze on the spot.

"What is this...? Uncle Zhu? Uncle Li? What are you all doing?!"

Before he could process it, Zao Ying stepped out.

She had already changed clothes.

Gone was the housewife. In her place stood a Jianghu warrior in fitted gear, a curved blade at her waist.

With a loud laugh, she leapt onto the old horse they used for grocery runs.

That same old horse, usually dull and obedient, now stood tall and spirited, as if something ancient had awakened within it.

Zao Ying raised her blade and shouted:

"Move out! Tonight, we rob a corrupt rich man!"

Her old subordinates roared with laughter.

"Alright! Whoever Boss says we rob, we rob!"

Zao Ying grinned.

"We're robbing Gao Chuwu. That brat's been getting too arrogant lately, always bragging about his son. Let's drag his whole family out and make them drink ten bowls of wine!"

"HAHAHA! LET'S GO!"

She looked down at her son.

"Got the guts to come?"

Zheng Xiao Niu's brain completely short-circuited.

"I... you... Mom? What were you before?!"

Zao Ying laughed loudly.

"Your mother? I'm exactly what you've been reading about. A Jianghu figure. The great horse bandit of Northern Shaanxi, Zao Ying!"

Zheng Xiao Niu: "!!!"

"Move!"

At her whistle, the riders surged forward like a storm.

Zheng Xiao Niu scrambled onto a horse.

"Mom, wait! I want to be a bandit too!"

Zao Ying laughed.

"I don't want to be a bandit anymore. I'm already inside the system."

"Doesn't matter! If you went from bandit to system, then I will too! Charge!"

He shouted wildly:

"From this world of heroes I arise! Once in Jianghu, time flies! Imperial glory laughed away—HAHAHA!  
Uncle Gao, I'm coming to rob you!"

The group stormed into Gao Chuwu's courtyard.

Inside, Gao Chuwu and Gao Zhengjing were eating peacefully.

In the next moment, chaos exploded.

The cavalry snatched all the food from the stone table and stuffed it straight into Zheng Da Niu's mouth, while grabbing Gao Chuwu and Gao Zhengjing and hauling them away.

"What are you eating at home for? Come drink!"

Behind them, Xing Honglang stormed out, waving her chopsticks furiously.

"Are you insane?! You want to play? Fine, I'll play too!"

She fired her own rocket.

"One arrow through the clouds, and thousands will answer!"

Soon enough...

A swarm of old salt smugglers rushed in.

"Damn bandits! Stop right there!"

"Come on then! Let's see who drinks who to death!"

Both sides clashed... in a tavern.

The result?

Mutual destruction.

Old bandits and old smugglers alike collapsed, drunk beyond salvation.

Their children rushed in later, carrying their unconscious fathers home one by one.

Zheng Xiao Niu carried his completely wasted mother on his back.

"Damn... Mom and Aunt Xing are incredible... so cool..."

Beside him, Gao Zhengjing was carrying Xing Honglang.

"Brother Xiao Niu, next time, let's have a match."

Zheng Xiao Niu grinned. "Bring it on! Who's afraid of who?"

Gao Zhengjing smirked. "Who Afraid Who!"

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Year 15 of the Xin Ming Calendar.

Zheng Xiao Niu failed the civil service exam for the third time.

He decisively gave up his mother's path and chose his father's.

He began learning cooking.

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Year 16.

Zheng Xiao Niu opened his steak hotpot buffet: Guodi Lao.

Zheng Da Niu charged in as the first customer.

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Year 18.

The first branch opened.

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Year 30.

The Zheng Xiao Niu Group spread "Guodi Lao" across every major city.

Zheng Da Niu, now retired, spent his days eating endlessly at the main restaurant.

As a founding hero of the nation, his constant presence became a legend.

People came from everywhere just to watch him eat.

Without even trying, he became a "food streamer."

And under the combined efforts of father and son...

Guodi Lao conquered the stomachs of the entire realm.

Chapter 1434 Gao Sanwa

Year Seven of the New Ming calendar.

Chengcheng County, Gao Village Family.

With the founding of the New Ming state, most of the old-timers from Gao Village Family had already moved to the capital. The village committee, in particular, had practically uprooted itself entirely and relocated to the imperial city, transforming into the central administrative machine that now kept the whole nation running.

The main fortress of Gao Village Family, once treated with a prestige not unlike the Forbidden City itself, had quietly stepped down from history. Now it was nothing more than an old residence, meant purely for living, its former glory tucked away like an overpraised ancestor in a dusty genealogy scroll.

Very few families still lived there.

But Gao Sanwa and his mother remained, stubborn as ever, with not the slightest intention of moving out.

"San Niang!"

The old village chief's voice echoed down the worn corridor, as if it had done so for decades and saw no reason to stop now.

"Winter's coming, and these old bones of mine can't take it anymore. Bring me a couple of those San Niang brand down jackets of yours."

"Coming right up!"

Gao Sanniang hurried over, almost trotting, carrying the jackets with both hands. These days, she was the CEO of the San Niang Clothing Group, a name that carried weight across the entire New Ming economy, yet in front of the old village chief, she was still the same obedient girl from years ago, all warmth and no airs.

"Uncle Village Chief, you're still as strong as ever," she said sweetly, layering compliments like extra padding in a winter coat.

The old man chuckled. "Strong? Not a chance. I'll be lucky if I last a few more years." Then his eyes lit up with a different kind of energy. "By the way, where's Sanwa's new work? These days, I wake up every morning just hoping there's something new from him."

"You can't call him Sanwa anymore," Gao Sanniang said with a helpless smile. "You have to call him Third Young Master now. He cares about that title a lot. A few days ago, Gao Shan came back to visit and called him Sanwa, and the two of them nearly argued for half a day."

The old village chief burst into laughter. "Ah, the boy's grown up, got himself some standards now. Fine, fine, I'll call him Third Young Master."

He turned toward the study and raised his voice.

"Third Young Master! Got any new work? Let your grandpa take a look!"

A head popped out of the window, drenched in sweat.

"Grandpa Village Chief, please, just call me Sanwa," Gao Sanwa said quickly. "Don't go calling me Third Young Master, I really can't handle that."

The old chief waved it off. "Why fuss over something so small? Back when Dao Xuan Tianzun still came down to play, didn't he call Flat Rabbit 'Lord Rabbit' all the time?"

Gao Sanwa gave a helpless laugh. "I don't have that kind of thick skin."

He passed a manuscript through the window. "Here, Grandpa Village Chief, this is the original draft of my new book. Reading the manuscript is way better than those second-rate printed copies."

The old man's face lit up. He took the manuscript eagerly, adjusted his posture, and read the title.

"Excellent Servant."

His brows rose. That was new.

As he flipped through the pages, he realized something even stranger. This time, Gao Sanwa had completely abandoned his usual style of fights, cultivation, and mystical nonsense. Instead, he was telling a historical story.

A man educated under the new era of Gao Village Family somehow transmigrates into a parallel feudal world... and ends up working as a servant for a young noble lady.

"Oh ho..."

The old village chief leaned back, already hooked. By the time he reached a few chapters in, he was grinning from ear to ear, thoroughly entertained.

"This one of yours," he said, slapping the manuscript with satisfaction, "is going to sell like crazy."

He looked at Gao Sanwa with approval that carried a hint of disbelief.

"You brat, you're getting more and more impressive."

Gao Sanwa scratched his head and grinned. "I'm trying to transform. I can't just keep writing the same old fantasy and immortal cultivation stuff. I also want to write proper novels now, not just picture books..."

"That makes sense," the old village chief said, nodding slowly. "More and more people are getting educated. Literacy is going up. In the future, there will definitely be more people reading novels than picture books."

Then he narrowed his eyes.

"But you little rascal... you didn't study properly back then, did you? Drawing picture books is one thing, but writing novels? Are you sure you can pull it off? What if your prose is complete trash?"

Gao Sanwa laughed. "Plot comes first, pacing comes second, and prose only ranks third. I know exactly what kind of story people like to read."

The old village chief clearly didn't believe him. In his mind, prose was everything.

Even Gao Sanniang quietly felt that her son was about to walk straight into disaster.

And yet...

Year Eight of the New Ming calendar.

Gao Sanwa abandoned picture books and officially entered the novel scene, releasing his first work: "Douluo Continent."

Among traditional writers, it was practically treated as garbage. The leading literary figure of Jiangnan, Qian Qianyi, dismissed it as "shallow writing," criticizing it as flat, lacking descriptive skill, riddled with grammatical errors, and packed with typos.

And yet, in the market, it exploded.

Bookstores across the country sold out almost overnight. Emergency reprints followed, then more reprints, and then even more, wave after wave that refused to stop.

Soon after, storytelling performances, comedic dialogues, stage plays, television adaptations, and even films based on "Douluo Continent" flooded the scene, turning it into a phenomenon that no one could ignore.

Meanwhile, the works of Qian Qianyi and his fellow traditional "literati" were utterly crushed. His meticulously crafted "Chronicles of the Heroes of the Early Nation" couldn't even match a fraction of its sales.

He had no way to fight back.

Seeing his approach validated, Gao Sanwa pushed forward relentlessly, releasing one work after another. "Stellar Transformations," "Shrouding the Heavens," "Slaying the Immortal," "Immortal Reversal," "Sacred Ruins," "Chronicles of the Wood God"...

He wrote at a terrifying pace, producing novels ranging from one to three million words every single year, while traditional authors struggled to write even ten thousand words annually.

This kind of assault was something the old guard simply could not withstand.

Year Fifteen of the New Ming calendar.

There was no longer any space left for traditional literature. Bookstores everywhere were filled with Gao Sanwa's works, along with countless imitations written by authors chasing his style of so-called "simple writing."

A strange debate erupted across the literary world.

What should a novel actually be?

Literature, after all, was something that could only be judged subjectively. There was no objective measure, no definitive answer.

Debates dragged on endlessly, producing nothing.

But sales figures... those were real.

And for professional writers who relied on their work to eat, questions without answers were a luxury they could not afford.

To hell with depth.

All that mattered now was making money.

Making money.

Making more money.

And amid the chaos of the literary world...

Year Twenty of the New Ming calendar.

Gao Sanwa suddenly changed his name to Gao Family Third Uncle.

At first, no one thought much of it. He was getting older, after all. Transitioning from Third Young Master to Third Uncle sounded reasonable enough.

But what followed caught everyone off guard.

Along with the new name came a complete shift in style.

He abandoned fantasy and cultivation entirely, and without warning, released a book titled "Grave Robbing Notes."

It felt like a door had been kicked open into an entirely new world.

Readers were stunned.

Year Forty-Five of the New Ming calendar.

Gao Family Third Uncle announced yet another name change.

Everyone assumed he would become Gao Family Third Elder this time.

Instead, he chose something no one expected.

Gao Family Sanmao.

This time, his work shed both fantasy and mystery, returning to something painfully simple.

The story followed a child from the late Chongzhen era. His parents died in a devastating drought. He wandered, begged, drifted from place to place, enduring hardship after hardship. War swallowed the world around him, and he struggled just to survive.

Until one day, he encountered the militia of Gao Village Family.

For the first time, he picked up a weapon.

His story was called "The Wandering of Sanmao."

This time, all those who had once mocked him as a writer of shallow, trashy fiction fell silent.

They read.

They sank into the story.

They said nothing.

And yet...

The sales of this book did not even reach a tenth of his previous works.

Chapter 1435 Zhebu and Er'zhee

Year Three of the New Ming calendar.

Within the Mongolian Wushen Tribe, the last wandering minor chieftain who had stubbornly refused to return finally answered the call of the tribal leader, Zhebu. He brought his followers to the border between Mongolia and the New Ming, settling down in a newly established city that had only just begun to take shape.

With that, every branch of the Wushen Tribe under Zhebu's authority had fully gathered along the frontier of the New Ming state.

At this moment, there was no doubt that the Wushen Tribe stood at the top among all Mongolian tribes. They were wealthy, far more educated than their peers, and equipped with weapons supplied by the New Ming. On the vast Mongolian Steppe, they shone like the brightest star.

"Report!"

A scout came running at full speed and dropped to one knee before Zhebu.

"The Zunghar Tribe has suddenly launched an expedition against Tibet."

Zhebu paused, frowning slightly. "Tibet?"

For a brief moment, he looked confused. Then it clicked.

The Zunghar had ambition. They wanted to make a move, to stir trouble, to expand. But they did not dare attack fellow Mongols, and they certainly did not dare provoke the New Ming, both of which had become iron-hard targets.

So instead, they turned their eyes toward Tibet.

If they succeeded in swallowing Tibet whole, their strength would surge dramatically.

And once they had strength...

Of course they would start eyeing Zhebu's position as the head wolf.

That was how things worked on the steppe. No philosophy, no pretense. Strength collided with strength, and whoever stood stronger became the leader.

Zhebu's expression darkened.

"The Zunghar dared to march on Tibet without my approval, creating a new enemy for both Mongolia and the New Ming for no reason at all. Ridiculous."

He waved his hand sharply.

"Send a messenger. Tell them to withdraw immediately. They must request my permission first. Only after I approve can they proceed with any campaign."

The messenger departed at once.

Several days later, the reply returned.

The Zunghar vanguard had already pushed deep into Tibet. Withdrawal was no longer possible. And besides... Zhebu was not the Great Khan of all under heaven. The Zunghar had no obligation to obey him.

That answer nearly made Zhebu explode.

"Fine," he said coldly. "They want a reason, do they?"

He immediately wrote a letter to Er'zhe.

At that very moment, Er'zhe was nowhere near the steppe. He was out on the southern seas, commanding a warship of what was grandly titled the "Mongolian Navy," fighting Western forces for control of the southern islands.

The warship he commanded was a first-generation steam-powered vessel "gifted" by the New Ming. The technology was already outdated by New Ming standards, but to Er'zhe, it was a treasure beyond compare.

He had personally selected seven soldiers from Mongolia to serve aboard.

These men were masters on horseback, but complete novices at sea. They spent a long time learning how to sail, how to swim, how to survive on water. Eventually, they became barely qualified sailors.

With those seven men, Er'zhe formed what he proudly called the First Division of the Mongolian Navy.

The name sounded impressive.

The actual combat strength... less so.

Because of that, this so-called First Division never dared operate alone. It always moved alongside the fleets of Zheng Chenggong and Shi Lang, relying on them in the southern campaigns.

For Zhebu's messenger to find Er'zhe across such distances was no easy task. After countless detours and delays, the letter finally reached his hands.

Er'zhe, however, had his mind entirely on naval warfare. The affairs of the steppe felt distant, almost irrelevant.

He casually drafted an imperial decree, ordering the Zunghar Tribe to obey Zhebu's command without defiance.

That decree began a journey of its own.

From the southern seas, it drifted back toward the New Ming, then to the capital, where it landed in the hands of Flat Rabbit, the Grand Chancellor in name.

Flat Rabbit, being Flat Rabbit, did not handle it himself and passed it along to Shan Shier, who actually ran things.

More days passed.

At last, Shan Shier retrieved the Mongolian imperial jade seal and stamped the decree.

Only then did it begin its journey back to the steppe.

More days.

By the time the decree finally reached Zhebu, and he slammed it down in front of the Zunghar Tribe...

Everything was already over.

Tibet had fallen.

The effects of the Little Ice Age had not spared Tibet either. While the Ming lands suffered drought and internal chaos, Tibet had faced the same disasters. Population dropped, internal stability collapsed, and the region weakened to the point of near helplessness.

The Zunghar barely had to try.

They crushed Tibet with ease and forced its submission.

With Tibet now under their control, the Zunghar immediately felt bold again.

They mocked Zhebu openly, and even tore Er'zhe's decree into pieces.

"We don't listen to you anymore. So what if you're the Great Khan? Come fight us if you dare."

Zhebu smiled.

He had been waiting for exactly this.

Before, he lacked a proper reason to strike.

Now, he had one.

"Good," he said. "Let's give them what they want."

He marched.

Year Four of the New Ming calendar.

Zhebu launched an expedition into the Zunghar Basin and beat the Zunghar forces into complete submission.

Year Five.

The remnants of the Zunghar fled into Tibet. The basin was pacified and returned to Mongolian control.

By the end of that same year, Zhebu and Er'zhe, together with dozens of tribal leaders, submitted a joint memorial to the New Ming.

The message was simple.

Though the two nations were friendly, the separation between states caused slow communication and inefficient governance. The delay had directly contributed to the Zunghar rebellion.

Therefore...

They proposed merging the two nations into one.

Year Six of the New Ming calendar.

The first agenda of the People's Congress was to elect a new Grand Chancellor.

Shan Shier replaced Flat Rabbit and took the position.

The second agenda was the proposal from Mongolia.

It passed unanimously.

Shan Shier immediately drafted the official decree, incorporating the Mongolian Steppe into the territory of the New Ming as the Mongolian Province.

At last, the northern frontier stabilized completely.

Aside from the distant threat of the Russian state, no enemies remained.

And yet, both sides were held back by the same force.

The frozen wastelands.

Neither the New Ming nor the Russians could effectively operate across the permafrost. The vast frozen plains became a natural buffer, maintaining a delicate peace between the two powers.

"First Division of the Mongolian Navy, charge!"

Er'zhe raised his command sword and roared toward the enemy ship ahead.

A sailor beside him coughed lightly. "Boss... we've merged with the New Ming now. We probably shouldn't call ourselves the Mongolian Navy First Division anymore. Sounds... politically sensitive."

Er'zhe blinked.

Then immediately corrected himself.

"First Division of the Mongolian Ethnic Navy, charge!"

See?

Add one word, and suddenly everything made perfect sense.

Er'zhe had an education now. Studying in Gao Village Family really did make a difference.

Ahead of them was a Western light sailing vessel, likely a scouting ship. It carried only a small number of enemies, which gave Er'zhe and his seven men just enough courage to face it head-on.

"Fire!"

At his command, the seven Mongolian sailors fired their cannons with all their might.

The enemy ship took several hits below the waterline. Water rushed in, the hull tilted, and the captain made a decisive call.

They beached the ship and fled onto a nearby island.

The island looked like paradise itself. Blue skies, white clouds, swaying coconut trees, clear water, and soft sand.

The Western pirates stood on shore, waving their blades and shouting.

"Damn you! Relying on your cannons to bully us at sea. If you've got guts, come fight us on land!"

"On land?" the Mongolian sailors burst into laughter. "That's exactly what we want."

"At sea we're a bit nervous," one of them added, grinning wide. "But on land..."

Er'zhe threw his head back and laughed.

"Good. Let's go ashore. Show them what the Seven Warriors under the Mongolian King can do."

And so they did.

In that battle, the so-called Seven Warriors became a nightmare once more, reminding the Westerners exactly what it meant to face the "Scourge of God."

That engagement would later be recorded as the most glorious victory of the First Division of the Mongolian Ethnic Navy.

Chapter 1436 The Story of Bai Shui Wang Er

At the border between Sichuan and the lands of Tubo, a vast army struggled forward along a narrow path carved into the side of a snow-covered mountain, their formation stretched thin by the terrain as they advanced westward step by step, each movement costing more effort than the last as the thin air gnawed silently at their strength.

At the very front of the army, Bai Shui Wang Er stood still for a moment, his brows tightly furrowed as he looked up at the towering snow peaks ahead, the scale of them pressing down on the human heart in a way that no enemy ever could, and when he turned back to glance at his troops, what he saw made his expression grow even heavier.

Many soldiers were already gasping for breath.

Some staggered as they walked.

Some had to stop every few steps just to steady themselves.

"This is difficult," Wang Er said at last, his voice low but clear, carrying just enough for those nearby to hear. "This campaign into Tubo, the enemy is not what frightens me. It is this land itself."

From behind him, Bai Mao hurried forward, lowering his voice as he came closer.

"Brother, do we really need to fight this battle?"

Wang Er did not hesitate, and the moment the question was asked, the weight in his expression sharpened into resolve.

"We do," he replied. "The remnants of the Dzungar tribe have fled into Tubo. If we do not pursue them, their influence will spread, and Tubo will eventually turn against us. If that happens, our borders will never know peace again."

Bai Mao did not immediately argue, but his gaze shifted toward the soldiers behind them.

"But the men cannot endure this much longer," he said quietly. "The steam vehicles cannot reach this altitude. The technical unit says there is not enough oxygen, the coal does not burn properly, and the engines cannot produce enough power to climb. Everyone has to walk, and this kind of march... it is too harsh. Look over there, another one has fallen."

Wang Er turned his head.

A soldier had just collapsed onto the snow, his body giving out without warning, and two nearby comrades rushed to his side, lifting him up while trying everything they could to revive him, pressing at pressure points, forcing water between his lips, calling his name as if sheer will could pull him back to his feet.

For a brief moment, Wang Er said nothing.

Then he stopped walking altogether and climbed onto a large rock nearby, the effort alone enough to make his breathing rough as the thin air pressed against his lungs, forcing him to pause for several seconds before he could steady himself.

He drew in a deep breath, then another, forcing his body to obey, and only when his breathing had settled did he raise his voice.

"Brothers," he called out, his voice carrying across the wind, reaching far more ears than those nearest to him, "I know this march is hard, and I know many of you are suffering from the high altitude, and perhaps some of you are already thinking of turning back."

The soldiers looked up at him.

Some with exhaustion.

Some with doubt.

Some with something that had not yet faded.

"But ask yourselves why we are here," Wang Er continued, his voice growing steadier with each word. "Are we here for ourselves? No. We stand here for our country, for our people, and for the families behind us who deserve to live in peace. If we allow Tubo to be swayed by the Dzungar remnants, then wave after wave of conflict will fall upon our borders in the years to come."

A faint light began to appear in the soldiers' eyes.

Wang Er clenched his fist.

"Tubo has been weakened by disaster and internal strife. This is the moment when it is at its weakest. If we miss this opportunity, then the cost of future campaigns will be far greater, and far more lives will be lost. If we endure a little more hardship today, then those who come after us will bleed less."

For a heartbeat, there was silence.

Then the response came.

A roar.

"OOOH!"

Men who had nearly collapsed forced themselves upright.

Men who could barely walk took another step.

Even those who had fallen struggled to rise again, driven not by strength alone but by something that refused to yield.

The spirit of the army surged.

And when Wang Er saw that, a faint smile finally appeared on his face.

Then, without warning, the sky changed.

The clouds parted as if pushed aside by an unseen force, and from above descended a massive golden hand, radiant and impossible, its presence overwhelming enough that every soldier instinctively froze, their earlier exhaustion forgotten in an instant.

Seated upon that hand was Gao Yiye.

Wang Er, Bai Mao, and every soldier present reacted at once, their voices rising in disbelief and joy.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun!"

"The Holy Maiden!"

"It is the Tianzun and the Holy Maiden!"

Their cheers rolled across the mountainside, louder than the wind itself.

Gao Yiye looked down at them, her expression gentle, yet carrying a clarity that cut through the excitement.

"Your determination is admirable," she said, her voice calm yet reaching everyone present, "but when facing difficulties, determination alone is not enough. If you rely only on willpower, you will invite unnecessary sacrifice."

She pointed toward several soldiers in the crowd.

"You, and you, and you, I am speaking to all of you who are clearly suffering from altitude sickness yet still forcing yourselves forward. If you continue like this, you will die."

The soldiers straightened instinctively.

"We are not afraid of sacrifice," someone shouted.

Gao Yiye could not help but laugh, though there was a hint of exasperation in her voice.

"That does not mean you should go looking for it."

For a moment, no one knew how to respond.

Then she continued.

"Dao Xuan Tianzun has seen your loyalty to the nation and your sincerity, and today he has chosen to bestow upon you a divine tool that can save your lives in this highland."

The soldiers blinked in confusion.

"A divine tool?"

Gao Yiye smiled slightly.

"Oxygen cylinders."

The moment she finished speaking, a massive object descended from the sky, landing before them with a presence that was both strange and awe-inspiring, and before anyone could fully process it, numerous large plastic bags followed, falling one after another like an oddly mundane rain.

Then, before their eyes, Dao Xuan Tianzun demonstrated its use.

A bag was placed over the opening.

A simple press.

A soft hiss.

In an instant, the bag filled with oxygen.

The filled bag was then handed to a group of soldiers suffering from altitude sickness, who hesitated for only a moment before inhaling deeply, and the effect was immediate, their expressions shifting from pain to relief as if they had been pulled back from the edge.

"Remarkable!"

"It is filled with immortal air!"

"One breath and you live forever!"

Gao Yiye pressed her forehead lightly, clearly caught between amusement and disbelief.

"Stop talking nonsense. It only relieves altitude sickness. It will not grant immortality."

Wang Er quickly took control of the situation, issuing orders for the soldiers to follow the demonstration, and soon the army was working methodically, filling bag after bag and distributing them across units, repeating the process again and again until each company had its own supply.

Only when this was done did Wang Er step forward, cupping his hands toward the sky in respect.

"With such a divine tool, pacifying Tubo will be within our grasp. Please watch over us."

Gao Yiye smiled warmly.

"Wang Er, you have worked hard."

Then she turned to Bai Mao, her expression shifting slightly as if she had nearly said something else.

"Wang Xiao... Bai Mao, you have also worked hard."

Bai Mao smiled faintly.

"In the past, being called Wang Xiaohua would have angered me, but over the years I have learned to take things more lightly. There is no need to avoid the name. You may call me that if you wish."

Gao Yiye laughed softly.

"That is good. Very good. Everyone has grown, it seems. Only I remain the same, still foolish as before. Even in the heavens, I spend my days doing silly things."

Wang Er, Bai Mao, and the soldiers exchanged glances, curiosity overcoming restraint.

"Holy Maiden," someone asked, "what is the Heavenly Realm like?"

Gao Yiye's expression softened, and a quiet happiness appeared in her eyes.

"The Heavenly Realm is not so different from the human world. Wherever the one you love is, that place is heaven."

For a moment, no one spoke.

The wind moved gently across the snow.

Then Gao Yiye waved her hand lightly.

"Farewell."

The soldiers raised their hands in return, watching as the golden hand slowly withdrew into the clouds, disappearing as suddenly as it had come.

In that same year, Wang Er led his army into Tubo, and with the aid of the oxygen cylinders, not a single soldier died from altitude sickness, allowing them to swiftly eliminate the remnants of the Dzungar forces while also bringing the Tubo nobility under control.

In the following year, Tubo was incorporated into New Ming as the province of Tibet, and Wang Er was appointed as the commander of the western military region, remaining there for many years to maintain order and stability.

As for the other side of things, when Dao Xuan Tianzun withdrew his hand from the box, what had once been a tiny figure transformed instantly back into her original size.

Li Dao Xuan, who had been supporting her with one hand, found that the weight was no longer something he could easily hold, and before he could react properly, Gao Yiye had already leaped forward, wrapping her arms around his neck with practiced ease.

The movement was smooth.

Familiar.

As if the two of them had repeated it many times before.

Chapter 1437 The Story of Flat Rabbit (Part 1)

New Ming Calendar, Year 7, Spring.

In the remote mountains of western Sichuan, far from the main roads and far from the reach of ordinary travelers, Flat Rabbit arrived alone after a long journey across ridges and valleys, his figure cutting a solitary path through terrain that most people would never even attempt to cross.

Less than a year had passed since he stepped down from his position as Chief Minister, yet the man who now walked into this forgotten corner of the world looked nothing like a former high official, because he wore simple jianghu attire suited for travel and hardship, with his ancestral sword hanging at his waist and a heavy pack slung across his back, carrying everything he believed these people might need.

The village he had come to was known as one of the poorest in the region.

Poverty in such places was never just about lacking food or money, but about distance, isolation, and the quiet reality that help rarely arrived, because even those who wished to help often could not reach it.

But Flat Rabbit had come anyway.

At the entrance of the village, a small girl stood staring at him, her face smudged with soot so that only her bright eyes seemed alive, her expression caught somewhere between curiosity and fear as she looked at this stranger who had appeared out of nowhere.

Before she could say anything, a woman rushed out from a nearby grass hut, scooped the girl into her arms, and retreated back inside, shutting the door with hurried force as if the outside world itself were something dangerous.

Flat Rabbit did not react with annoyance or impatience, because he had seen such reactions many times before, so he simply walked up to the door and knocked gently, making sure his voice carried calm rather than pressure.

"Elder sister, I am a volunteer. I came to help your village. You do not need to be afraid."

From inside the house came the woman's voice, tense and defensive.

"My husband is working in the fields nearby. He is very capable."

Flat Rabbit could not help but smile at that, understanding immediately that she was trying to warn him away, and he shook his head slightly before speaking again in a tone that remained patient.

"I am not here to cause trouble. I only came to help. Wait a moment, I will leave something for you."

He removed his pack and took out a sack of rice, placing it carefully in front of the door, then stepped back several paces to give them space before speaking again.

"Please take a look. I have left a small gift."

The door opened just a crack, and a hand quickly reached out, grabbed the sack, and pulled it inside before the door shut again.

Time passed.

Then, slowly, the door creaked open.

The little girl ran out first, her earlier fear already gone, replaced by excitement.

"Wow, uncle, you are a good person."

The woman followed more cautiously, her expression still guarded but no longer closed.

"Thank you for the rice."

Flat Rabbit did not step inside but simply sat down near the doorway, taking out more food from his pack and handing it over, watching as the woman and the child accepted it with gratitude that was both simple and sincere.

"Call everyone in the village," he said. "I brought enough to share."

The woman's face lit up with surprise and joy.

"I will go right away."

She had barely taken a step when the world itself seemed to break.

A deep rumble rose from beneath the earth, followed by a violent tremor that shook the ground with terrifying force, throwing her off balance as she fell hard onto the ground.

"An earthquake," Flat Rabbit said, his expression changing instantly. "This is bad."

He reacted without hesitation, lifting the little girl into his arms while pulling the woman back to her feet, his voice rising with urgency.

"Run. Move to open ground."

All around them, the village began to collapse.

Grass huts crumpled easily, their damage less deadly, but wooden and stone structures shattered with far greater violence, and from within them came cries of fear and pain as people struggled to escape.

Yet the collapsing buildings were not the worst of it.

In the mountains, earthquakes often brought something even more dangerous.

From the surrounding slopes, rocks began to fall.

At first a few.

Then many.

Then too many to count.

Flat Rabbit moved as quickly as he could, placing the mother and daughter in the widest open space at the center of the village before turning back without pause, rushing toward a collapsed wooden structure where he forced his way under a fallen beam, straining with all his strength to lift it just enough to drag a trapped man out.

"You, you, and you," he shouted at several young men who were still able to move. "Stop running aimlessly and come help me."

There was something in his voice that left no room for hesitation, and the young men responded almost instinctively, gathering around him as they began pulling survivors from the wreckage under his direction.

The ground continued to shake.

The air filled with dust and cries.

Flat Rabbit moved from one place to another without rest, digging through debris with his hands, dragging people out from beneath collapsed walls, pulling others from shallow pits where they had been buried by falling earth.

Under his relentless effort, more and more villagers were brought to the open space, until most of the survivors had gathered there, their injuries varied but their lives preserved.

At last, the trembling subsided.

The earthquake passed.

What remained... was ruin.

The village was gone.

And worse still, the only path in and out had been completely blocked by landslides, sealing them inside as if the mountains themselves had decided to close their grip.

The villagers looked at Flat Rabbit.

Not as a stranger anymore.

But as something else.

Someone they could rely on.

Flat Rabbit studied the blocked road, his eyes narrowing slightly as he assessed the situation, already understanding the difficulty, because landslides like this created unstable masses that could collapse again at any moment, making excavation extremely dangerous.

The villagers were few.

Many were injured.

Hope, under such conditions, could disappear quickly.

But Flat Rabbit did not allow that to happen.

"Once the aftershocks stop," he said firmly, "we clear the fallen houses and gather whatever food remains. Mix it with wild vegetables, bark, roots, anything edible. With what I brought, we can last for a while if we ration properly. Treat the injured with herbs and hold on."

He paused, then added in a steady voice.

"I will cross the mountain and bring back a rescue team."

The villagers stared at him in shock.

"You will cross the mountain now?"

"It is too dangerous. The slopes could collapse again at any moment."

Flat Rabbit laughed, the sound carrying a confidence that felt almost reckless.

"A landslide like this cannot kill me. This Rabbit Lord's sword shines cold across the land, and my blade's energy spans thousands of miles. Climbing a mountain is nothing."

The villagers looked at the sword at his waist, at the certainty in his expression, and something inside them chose to believe.

Under their watchful eyes, Flat Rabbit stepped toward the slope.

A rock came tumbling down from above.

He shifted lightly and avoided it with ease, then turned back with a grin.

"You see, something like that cannot touch me."

"Impressive," the villagers murmured.

Then, without warning, another stone struck his shoulder with a heavy thud.

This time, he did not avoid it.

His body dipped from the impact, pain spreading through half his frame, but his expression did not change, and he let out a laugh as if nothing had happened.

"That one was dispersed by my internal energy. It cannot harm me."

"Rabbit Lord is mighty!"

They believed him.

Because they needed to.

Flat Rabbit understood that better than anyone.

If he showed fear now, their hope would collapse.

So he did not allow even a trace of hesitation to appear.

"This Rabbit Lord is off."

He climbed.

Using both hands and feet, moving quickly but carefully, advancing step by step as rocks continued to fall around him, each movement carrying risk, each step taken with no guarantee of safety.

From below, the villagers watched in silence.

He moved like a large, stubborn rabbit, scrambling up the slope, sometimes leaping, sometimes clinging, sometimes slipping but never stopping, his figure awkward at times yet unwavering.

At last, he reached the summit.

He turned back once, standing at the highest point, raising his hand toward the village below as if to say something, but his words were lost to the wind.

Then, without hesitation, he disappeared over the other side.

## Chapter 1438 Flat Rabbit Arc (Part 2)

Flat Rabbit trudged along the mountain path, step after step, stubborn as ever.

The spot on his shoulder where the rock had struck him throbbed more with every movement. The pain had deepened into something dull and heavy, the kind that made you quietly suspect a crack in the bone. But there was no time to check, no time to rest, not even time to complain.

He just kept moving.

All the food had been left behind in the village. He carried nothing now.

Not that it mattered.

Back in the day, he had endured far worse. Thirst meant drinking from mountain springs. Hunger meant grabbing a handful of grass.

He was a rabbit, after all. Eating grass was practically tradition.

Three full days passed like this.

Only then did a small town finally appear ahead.

But the moment he got closer, his heart sank.

This place had not escaped the disaster either. Half the buildings had collapsed, and the entire town was wrapped in fear and confusion. People wandered like lost souls, their eyes hollow.

Flat Rabbit did not slow down.

"Where's the town chief? Where is he?" he shouted the moment he entered.

The townsfolk took one look at him, his foreign appearance, the sword at his waist, the aura that practically screamed "important person," and did not dare delay. Someone immediately ran off to fetch the town chief.

The chief arrived in a hurry. The moment he saw Flat Rabbit, his eyes widened.

"Rabbit Lord?"

"Good, you recognize me." Flat Rabbit gritted his teeth. "I'm injured. Haven't eaten in three days. I need food."

The chief wasted no time. Food, water, medicine, everything was brought out at once.

Flat Rabbit ate quickly, carelessly applied some medicine to his shoulder, and before the others could even suggest rest, he was already standing again.

"You stay here," he said. "I'll go call for rescue."

The town chief panicked. "Rabbit Lord, in your condition, you should rest here. I'll send someone in your place."

"No." Flat Rabbit's voice was firm, almost cutting. "Whoever you send might not be taken seriously. It's only year seven of the New Ming. The outside world is still half old, half new. If I don't go personally, they might brush it off."

The chief fell silent.

Because he knew that was the truth.

A small-town official sending a plea for help might receive nothing more than a polite dismissal, or worse, a lazy excuse.

But Flat Rabbit was different.

He had once stood at the very top. Even now, no one would dare ignore his words.

After a brief rest, Flat Rabbit set off again. This time, the chief gave him a small, stubborn donkey to ride, along with some food. It was, at the very least, an improvement.

Still, the dangers of western Sichuan were no joke. One man and one donkey against these mountains, it was not exactly a comfortable journey.

Another three days passed.

At last, the mountains began to thin, and the land opened up. Ahead lay the outskirts of the Chengdu Plain.

And there, a large city stood.

Dujiangyan.

Even from a distance, it was obvious the city had suffered. Collapsed buildings dotted the landscape.

But this place had something the others did not.

Factories from Gao Village Family.

Massive hydraulic engineering works were under construction here, along with a hydropower plant. It was not yet complete, not yet operational, but the presence of countless blue helmets and yellow helmets meant something far more important than machines.

It meant manpower.

It meant organization.

It meant hope.

The donkey, however, had reached its limit. Stubborn to the end, it refused to take another step.

Flat Rabbit jumped off and stumbled forward on his own two feet, rushing toward the gates of the hydropower plant.

"Someone! Get over here!" he roared.

The shout brought a crowd running. Blue helmets, yellow helmets, workers and engineers alike gathered around him.

"Rabbit Lord?"

"What happened to you?"

"Quick!" Flat Rabbit did not waste a second. "Organize rescue teams immediately. Head west. A vast mountainous area has been hit by the earthquake. Many villages... are gone. The people are waiting."

One of the blue helmets hesitated, his face tight with discomfort.

"Rabbit Lord... we've also been hit here. We're rushing to repair the equipment. We don't have enough manpower or resources to spare."

Flat Rabbit's eyes flared.

"Don't just focus on the cities. The people in the mountains matter too. If you squeeze your resources, you can always find something to send."

The blue helmet lowered his head, pained. "It's not that we don't want to... we really are stretched too thin."

Flat Rabbit studied him carefully.

Then his expression shifted.

This man was not lying.

"This bad?" Flat Rabbit asked quietly.

The blue helmet nodded. "Worse than you think. The disaster area is huge. Multiple cities and villages have been destroyed. Our rescue teams are already overwhelmed. It's not that we're ignoring the mountain villages... we just don't have the capacity."

Flat Rabbit clenched his jaw.

"Understood."

He turned.

"I'll call upon Dao Xuan Tianzun."

The blue helmet nearly jumped out of his skin. "What? Call... Dao Xuan Tianzun? Since the first assembly, he said the world is ours to govern. He only appears occasionally, and no one knows where. If you disturb him, he might not respond... he might even punish you."

Flat Rabbit did not hesitate.

"I don't care. If he wants to punish someone, let him punish me alone."

He scanned the area.

"Where's the bell? A city like Dujiangyan must have one."

"Yes... we do."

They led him to the center of the hydropower plant.

There, standing silent for years, was a massive bell.

Ever since Dao Xuan Tianzun had declared his departure after the first great assembly, no one had dared to ring it again.

Not once in seven years.

Flat Rabbit picked up the heavy hammer.

He raised his voice.

"Heaven, open your eyes!"

Then he brought the hammer down.

GONG!

GONG!

GONG!

The sound rolled into the sky, deep and vast.

Everyone nearby stood frozen.

Seven years.

Seven whole years, and no one had dared to strike that bell.

Only Rabbit Lord had the audacity.

Moments later...

Across the entire New Ming, the embroidered image of Dao Xuan Tianzun on the chests of high officials opened its eyes.

A decree descended.

"Mobilize the entire nation. Support the disaster zone."

The entire nation.

The words hit like thunder.

Sichuan mobilized immediately. Neighboring regions, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Hunan, Hubei, Yunnan, Guizhou, all poured in volunteers without hesitation.

Countless iron vehicles carried endless supplies, rushing toward the disaster zone from every direction.

Flat Rabbit, his shoulder wrapped in bandages, still smelling faintly of medicine, stepped forward without a second thought and took up the role of frontline commander for disaster relief.

He threw himself straight back into the chaos.

Days later...

Back in that poorest village.

The little girl held the last bit of food in her hands. She did not want to eat it. She kept glancing at the adults around her.

The adults, meanwhile, stared at the blocked mountain road.

The food was almost gone.

The road was still buried.

So this is it, isn't it...

That Rabbit Lord... he couldn't bring help after all...

Just as that thought began to settle—

A strange, low-hanging cloud drifted into the sky above them.

From within it, a gigantic mechanical arm extended outward, ending in a massive excavator bucket.

It swung down.

One scoop.

The blocked mountain road was instantly cleared.

"Ahhh!" The villagers dropped to their knees. "A divine miracle!"

On the other side of the newly opened road, Flat Rabbit appeared, sitting atop his stubborn donkey, waving at them.

"Didn't I tell you? I'd bring help."

The villagers stared in awe.

"The help you brought... is a god?"

Flat Rabbit threw his head back and laughed.

"Hahaha! Dao Xuan Tianzun takes good care of me. I'm a rabbit favored by heaven!"

Year 8 of the New Ming.

Flat Rabbit founded the Charity Rabbit Society.

Year 18.

It gained a new name. The International Red Cross.

Year 32.

One of its managers embezzled donations. Flat Rabbit personally executed him with the Heavenly Rabbit Severing Tyrant Sword. For that act of killing, he was imprisoned.

Officials and commoners alike petitioned for leniency. Combined with his age and good behavior, he was released after two years.

Year 34.

The sword was placed in the main hall of the foundation. People jokingly called it the "Imperial Sword of the Charity Rabbit Society," meant to cut down those who dared to steal from the needy.

Year 48.

On his deathbed, Flat Rabbit spoke softly to the orphans he had raised.

"Do good... without asking what comes next..."

Year 98.

A later president misused funds. He was executed by his own subordinate with that very sword.

Year 142.

Another president personally beheaded eight corrupt subordinates in one stroke of justice after another.

...

From then on, anyone who dared reach for charitable funds would first glance at that blade.

To see if it was still sharp.

To wonder if somewhere in this world, there was still someone like Flat Rabbit.

Someone willing to pay any price, even imprisonment, just to cut down corruption.

The Heavenly Rabbit Severing Tyrant Sword...

Had become a legacy.

Chapter 1439 The Story of Wu Shen and Shi Kefa

New Ming Year 5, shortly after the Fifth People's Congress.

In a teahouse within the capital, two old friends finally sat face to face after many years apart, their reunion quiet yet warm, as if the long separation had merely been a brief pause in a conversation that had never truly ended.

Wu Shen, known these days as Wu Qianwan, lifted his teacup with a relaxed smile, while across from him sat Shi Kefa, still carrying that familiar upright bearing, though now tempered with the weight of responsibility that came from serving in the new order.

They had not seen each other in years.

Ever since Wu Shen had taken up his post as Governor of Shanxi and Shi Kefa had gone to Anlu, the two had only maintained contact through letters, their lives moving along different paths that rarely crossed.

And yet, as the saying went, the friendship of gentlemen was like water, light yet enduring, and so when they met again, there was no awkwardness, only an easy familiarity that returned as naturally as breathing.

Wu Shen chuckled as he leaned back slightly.

"Brother Shi, that program of yours, Shi Kefa Explains the Law, I have been watching it quite faithfully, you know. Every time I sit before the Immortal Mirror and watch it, I feel like I can see your face right in front of me."

Shi Kefa burst out laughing.

"Hey now, that phrase you used just now sounds like you are talking about someone already dead."

Wu Shen slapped his forehead and laughed along.

"Ah, you are right, that wording is not quite appropriate, I will punish myself with three cups for that mistake."

Shi Kefa waved his hand dismissively, still smiling.

"Speaking of that program, I will not have much time to continue filming it. Ever since the new nation was established, my duties have only increased, and I can hardly spare the time anymore, so I intend to hand it over to someone else."

Wu Shen raised an eyebrow with interest.

"Oh? And who will take over?"

Shi Kefa's lips curled slightly.

"Pan Du'ao."

Wu Shen paused for a moment, clearly searching his memory.

"Pan... who?"

Shi Kefa laughed.

"The strategist of the Eight Kings' army."

Wu Shen's eyes lit up in recognition.

"Ah, that scholar who was driven into rebellion because corrupt officials seized his land, right? He ended up imprisoned and sent to labor reform."

Shi Kefa nodded.

"He has been released. With the recent general amnesty, even the former emperor walked free, so someone like Pan Du'ao, whose crimes were not severe, naturally qualified as well. He turned to banditry because of the collapse of law and order in the old Ming, but during his time in prison he studied diligently, and I visited him often. Now that he is out, I have brought him in to take over the program, and it will be renamed Pan Du'ao Explains the Law."

Wu Shen let out a long breath, nodding slowly.

"That is good. Very good."

Shi Kefa continued, his tone turning more thoughtful.

"Our Legislative Committee is also being formed, and I intend to join it. I will bring Pan Du'ao along as well. Someone who has personally suffered injustice understands better than anyone the importance of law, and he can help us build a stronger legal system."

Wu Shen raised his thumb in approval.

"Without rules, there can be no order, and law is precisely that framework, so it must be handled with utmost care. However, there is something I wish to say."

Shi Kefa leaned forward slightly.

"Oh?"

Wu Shen's expression grew more serious.

"The reason the Great Ming Code was reduced to chaos was not because the law itself was flawed, but because those who enforced it failed to do so properly. The law was sound, yet the officials did not uphold it. That is the true root of the problem."

Shi Kefa's smile faded, replaced by a solemn look.

"What you say is entirely correct."

Wu Shen tapped the table lightly.

"When drafting new laws, you must also restrain those who enforce them. That is all I will say."

Shi Kefa leaned back, lifting his gaze toward the sky beyond the teahouse roof, his voice quieter now.

"As long as Dao Xuan Tianzun still appears from time to time, then we live with the awareness that there is something watching above us, that actions have consequences beyond human judgment. Those who enforce the law dare not act carelessly under such watch... but what concerns me is the day when he truly withdraws completely. When that day comes, will our enforcers still remain just and fair?"

Wu Shen followed his gaze upward and let out a soft sigh.

"He is a deity, after all. He cannot remain with us forever, playing at mortal affairs. His withdrawal is inevitable, it is only a matter of time. Before that day arrives, we must strengthen the legal system as much as possible."

Shi Kefa nodded firmly.

"Then we will do exactly that."

After a brief pause, he turned the conversation.

"By the way, Brother Wu, what have you been doing lately? I heard you resigned as Governor of Shanxi. Are you planning to retire and enjoy a quiet life?"

Wu Shen grinned, looking almost sheepish.

"Well, I am not getting any younger. It is about time I take things a little easier."

Shi Kefa narrowed his eyes.

"You do not look like someone who can sit still."

Wu Shen scratched his cheek, then laughed.

"Fine, I will be honest. I have left officialdom and gone into business."

Shi Kefa nearly choked.

"You did what? Leaving office to become a merchant? That is quite the reversal. Most people strive to do the opposite."

Wu Shen spread his hands helplessly.

"I have spent my whole life in the political arena, rising and falling with the tides, and I am simply tired. I want to see what it is like on the other side."

As he spoke, he reached into his sleeve and pulled out a book, placing it proudly on the table.

"Take a look. This is something I wrote."

Shi Kefa glanced at the title.

Wu Qianwan's Guide to Getting Rich.

He blinked.

"And what exactly is inside this book?"

Wu Shen's eyes sparkled with pride.

"It explains how to earn your first hundred thousand taels, then how to turn that into a million, and then into ten million. It is selling quite well, I might add. Inside are dozens of business strategies, all gathered from top merchants across various industries during my time as governor, compiled carefully into one volume."

Shi Kefa stared at him, cold sweat forming.

"Brother Wu... do you truly not realize where your own wealth came from? That money was not earned through business at all. This book of yours... I fear..."

Wu Shen waved his hand.

"That is exactly why I intend to test it myself. I must be responsible to my readers, and I must stand behind my own work."

Shi Kefa leaned forward urgently.

"You must reconsider. Do not act rashly."

Wu Shen shook his head, determination clear.

"My mind is made up. I have already resigned. There is no turning back now."

Shi Kefa inhaled sharply, unable to find words.

New Ming Year 7, Wu Shen invested several thousand taels to establish a steam-powered textile factory.

That same year, Shi Kefa and Pan Du'ao joined the Legislative Committee.

In Year 8, Wu Shen's textile factory collapsed, and his investment was completely lost.

That same year, Pan Du'ao Explains the Law premiered, and Shi Kefa withdrew from the program to focus fully on governance.

In Year 9, Wu Shen invested two thousand taels to open an electric fan factory, imitating the design invented by Mo Li.

In that same year, Shi Kefa and Pan Du'ao compiled the New Great Ming Code based on the old laws, establishing it as the foundation of the new legal system.

In Year 10, Wu Shen's electric fan factory went bankrupt, losing everything once again.

That same year, Shi Kefa revised the Marriage Law, significantly reducing disputes.

In Year 11, stubborn as ever, Wu Shen invested another one thousand five hundred taels into a generator factory.

In that same year, Shi Kefa revised the Civil Code, bringing order to countless civilian disputes.

In Year 12, the generator factory also failed, and Wu Shen lost his remaining funds.

That same year, Shi Kefa personally paid one thousand taels out of his own pocket to help Wu Shen settle his debts.

In Year 13, Wu Shen publicly declared through the Immortal Mirror that his book was complete nonsense, urging readers not to follow its advice, and offering a sincere apology.

That same year, 3,232 merchants who had become wealthy using his book jointly wrote to him, insisting that his teachings were sound and that they had changed their lives because of it, urging him to stand tall and not apologize.

New Ming Year 14.

The two old friends sat together once again, drinking.

Wu Shen let out a long sigh, staring into his cup.

"I finally understand now. The book is not the problem... the problem is me."

He paused, then shook his head with a bitter smile.

"Knowing is easy. Doing is hard. Knowing is easy... doing is hard."

#### Chapter 1440 Old Nanfeng Arc

In Puzhou, inside the bustling compound of the Flourishing World Talent Agency, the entire place had been swallowed by a kind of urgency that only appeared when something truly important was about to be completed, and yet no one dared to call it chaos because every movement, every shouted instruction, and every hurried step carried a purpose that was both clear and heavy.

Stage backdrops were being raised piece by piece, long curtains adjusted and readjusted until they fell just right, lanterns and lighting rigs were tested again and again while assistants argued in low voices about angles and shadows, and scattered among all of this movement stood a crowd of performers whose names alone were enough to make ordinary people fall silent.

Chen Yuanyuan was there, as composed as ever, while Chen Qianhu stood nearby speaking with the director in a tone that sounded casual but clearly was not, and Cai Lin moved between groups with practiced ease, checking details one by one; and at the center of everything, watching without appearing to rush yet somehow controlling the entire rhythm of the place, stood Old Nanfeng.

Not far from them, the so-called special guests had also arrived, although calling them guests was something of a joke, because each of them carried their own weight in this world, and none of them were people who could be invited lightly.

Shan Shier had already taken a seat but his eyes kept wandering across the set as if judging everything in silence, Bai Yuan leaned against a pillar with arms crossed and an expression that revealed nothing, Cheng Xu spoke occasionally with the crew, Gao Chuwu stood quietly but missed nothing, and Flat Rabbit had somehow found a comfortable place to sit despite the chaos, looking entirely too relaxed for the situation.

Every single person present understood one thing clearly, which was that what they were making was not just another film.

It was a work that would stand as a conclusion.

The title of that work was "The Founding of a Nation."

Because of that, no one dared to take even the smallest detail lightly, and the weight of that seriousness pressed down most heavily on the director and the cameraman, especially the latter, whose hands had begun to tremble despite his best efforts to remain steady, not enough for others to openly mock him but enough that he himself could not ignore it.

Fortunately, the camera he was operating did not care about such small human weaknesses, because it was not an ordinary device but a divine artifact bestowed by Dao Xuan Tianzun, something they called a miniature camera even though it stood like a monstrous construct with a diameter of nearly two meters, so large and heavy that even if the operator's hands shook slightly, the image it captured would remain stable.

At least, that was how it was supposed to be.

"Dialogue scene, thirty-second sequence, scene thirty-two, begin."

The director gave the order, trying to sound firm, and the filming officially started.

Chen Yuanyuan, now fully within her role as Gao Yiye, stepped forward with a decisive motion and ascended the watchtower balcony of Gao Village Family, her figure rising above the others as she looked down with a commanding presence that seemed to merge perfectly with the character she portrayed, and when she spoke, her voice carried both authority and clarity.

"By order of Dao Xuan Tianzun, the entire army shall..."

Before she could finish, a sharp cry suddenly cut through the air.

"This is bad."

The cameraman's voice no longer tried to hide its panic, and when he spoke again, it carried a weight that made everyone's heart sink.

"The divine camera is broken."

For a brief moment, the entire set fell silent, as if even the air had stopped moving, and then all at once people turned and rushed toward the machine, their earlier focus shattered as concern replaced performance.

Old Nanfeng was among the first to reach it, his expression already darkening as he looked at the device and then at the cameraman.

"Broken again?"

The cameraman nodded, his face pale as he pointed toward the side of the machine.

"It will not turn on at all. The light is dead."

That simple statement was enough to make the surrounding atmosphere grow heavy, because everyone present understood what it meant even without further explanation.

"Check it immediately," someone said.

"Do we still have spare parts?"

"Find out what failed first."

Voices overlapped, but none of them carried confidence.

Since the first year of the New Ming Calendar, when Dao Xuan Tianzun had ascended and no longer intervened in the affairs of the mortal world, the divine artifacts left behind had begun to fail one after another, and among them, the most fragile had always been these complex devices whose inner workings no one truly understood.

In the past, such problems had never mattered, because any broken artifact would simply be returned to the heavens and replaced with a new one, but now that path no longer existed, and wishing for it was nothing more than foolishness.

What remained to them was a crude method that everyone relied on without pride, which was to dismantle broken artifacts and salvage whatever parts still functioned, using those pieces to repair others in a constant cycle of loss and temporary recovery that could not last forever.

Old Nanfeng raised his hand to quiet the discussion, his tone steady even though his eyes revealed a trace of fatigue.

"Technicians, determine which component has failed and search the storage for a replacement. Someone else, bring out a backup camera so we do not lose time."

One of the technicians hesitated before speaking, his voice low.

"We only have two backup cameras left."

The words settled heavily over the group, because everyone knew that the number would not increase again.

Old Nanfeng tilted his head slightly and let out a long breath, his thoughts clearly not limited to the camera in front of him, because across the land, the massive divine mirrors placed by Dao Xuan Tianzun were also failing one by one, and unlike these smaller devices, they could not even be repaired, as their construction was far beyond anything the people of this world could comprehend.

"When they are all gone," he said quietly, "this agency will also reach its end."

For a moment, no one responded, but then his expression changed, and the hesitation that had briefly appeared vanished as something firmer took its place.

"Before that happens, we finish this film properly, because this final work must not carry any flaws."

This time, the response came quickly and loudly, as everyone present straightened and answered with renewed determination, their earlier unease transforming into resolve.

Work resumed soon after, and the rhythm of the set returned, although now there was a sharper edge to every movement, as if time itself had become something they could no longer afford to waste.

Cai Lin approached Old Nanfeng quietly and nudged him lightly, her voice lowered so that only he could hear.

"When the agency closes, are we really going to retire?"

Old Nanfeng smiled at once, as if the question pleased him.

"Of course. We have earned enough. From now on, we live freely and spend without thinking too much, letting others earn our money while we enjoy the world as we please. That has always been my dream."

Cai Lin did not immediately smile back, because her thoughts had already moved elsewhere.

"What about everyone here? If we stop, they will lose their work. We cannot simply leave them like that."

Old Nanfeng followed her gaze and saw not just employees, but familiar faces from years long past, men who had once stood beside him on the frontier and shared dangers that could not be easily forgotten, and the idea of abandoning them without thought did not sit well with him.

"You are right," he admitted after a pause. "So what should we do?"

Cai Lin answered without hesitation.

"If films are no longer possible, then we return to stage performances. We may not be able to record them, but we can perform live for audiences."

Old Nanfeng stared at her for a moment, then laughed, not because the idea was strange, but because it was so simple that he felt foolish for not thinking of it sooner.

"That is true. Before the divine mirrors existed, that was exactly what we did. It seems I have grown too used to convenience."

After laughing, he nodded decisively.

"Once this film is finished, we will begin preparing stage productions."

Cai Lin smiled, her expression soft but amused.

"In that case, your dream of living as a foolish rich man will have to wait a little longer."

Old Nanfeng's grin returned immediately.

"That kind of life can start at any time. Tonight, we go to the most expensive restaurant in Puzhou, and when we order, we choose only the most expensive dishes. That should be enough to qualify as being foolish with money."

Cai Lin could not help but laugh at that.

"That is not foolishness. That is simply enjoying life."

Old Nanfeng threw his head back and laughed, clearly satisfied with that answer.

"Then we will enjoy life."

Two years later, in New Ming Calendar Year 10, "The Founding of a Nation" was finally released, at a time when only a handful of divine mirrors across the land still functioned, and yet people were willing to travel great distances by train just to reach the cities where they could watch it.

Countless viewers wept in the theaters, and many stood to sing the national anthem with tears still on their faces.

In Year 11, the Flourishing World Talent Agency officially shifted its focus from film production to stage performances, traveling across the country and gaining widespread popularity among the people.

By Year 15, the stage business had matured, and operations had stabilized to the point where Old Nanfeng felt he could finally step away, handing control of the agency to a trusted subordinate while he himself entered retirement, receiving dividends but no longer managing daily affairs.

In Year 16, Old Nanfeng and Cai Lin began what he proudly referred to as a life of reckless spending, although in truth it was simply the comfortable and enviable life of wealthy retirees.

In Year 40, the two of them passed away one after the other, and when their son, Nanhai Qing, reviewed their inheritance, he discovered that aside from property and shares in the agency, almost no cash remained, because the two of them had spent it all.

To live was to live fully.

Before his death, Old Nanfeng had said only one thing.

"The children will have their own fortunes. I have no interest in worrying about them."