

Medical 671

Chapter 671 Unbelievably High Price

...

Miss Sunx looked at the two beasts beside her but said nothing. When he glanced into his own heart, Lan Feng sighed. As he thought he could also see the red fog energy belonging to the red wolf, his eyes widened. He could even control the monks' blue energy. Although he couldn't manipulate the energy of other phenomena, the fog energy he had begun to sense excited him greatly.

Before long, the palace came into view. Yan Xiaobao slowed his pace. Although he wished to succeed quickly, he was still aware of the possibility of crusader ambushes along the way. If they rushed in recklessly, they might all die. Slowing down, everyone surveyed their surroundings. Their sharp eyes and noses took in everything nearby, yet as they approached closer to the palace, they detected no movements or scents.

There hadn't been much fighting near the castle. Most residents in the area had fled early without being killed, but the stench of blood lingered heavily in the air. This smell deeply worried Yan Xiaobao.

Upon arriving at the palace, the smell of blood grew even stronger. Yan Xiaobao was fully prepared, knowing he had not brought soldiers or the Emperor by his side. Looking at Miss Sunx, Yan Xiaobao could see she was berating herself as well; this was her army, and her face was riddled with worry and fear. These were her guards—some of these men and women had been with her for thousands of years—but now she and Yan Xiaobao had left them behind. Alone, while there was a massive crusader force present.

The castle had been breached. The walls were shattered, the columns crushed. Furniture lay destroyed as though worthless, and anything of value had been stored in multiple storage stones to divide later. Everything valuable was gone, leaving the castle eerily empty and desolate. As they stepped through the main castle doors, the doors hung precariously on their hinges, but the worst was the overwhelming smell of blood and death.

They were killing them. They couldn't rush through the castle to reach the beasts and the Emperor left in its depths. But they knew the dangers of haste, so they moved cautiously through one room after another, corridor after corridor. The closer they got, the stronger the smell grew. Moments later, the scent of blood mixed with the stench of rotting flesh, reminding Yan Xiaobao of the crusaders they had encountered earlier, a glimmer of hope sparking in his heart. Perhaps they had managed to fight back

against the crusaders. After all, Yan Xiaobao remembered seeing only one hundred crusaders on the walls earlier, while the army the Emperor had left him exceeded five thousand soldiers. There was a possibility they had won the battle, but a small voice inside whispered, "Don't get your hopes up—deep down, you know that's impossible." Yan Xiaobao clenched his fists and prayed to God, begging that they hadn't all perished. Yan Xiaobao silently thanked Lan Feng for maintaining control over his body. He knew that if he had taken control, he would have charged into the rooms, abandoning all sense of caution. Walking through the castle, the silence was suffocating. Although everything reeked of blood, it was evident that the fight had ended. The mingling scents of blood and rotting flesh kindled a flicker of hope in everyone as they rushed into the room where they had earlier left the soldiers and the Emperor.

The sight they encountered froze the entire army in their tracks, even Lan Feng, who controlled Yan Xiaobao's body, paused and faltered. Before them was a room drenched in blood. The beasts lay dead across the floor. Small black cloaks scattered everywhere, indicating that while the beasts had perished, the crusaders had paid an unbelievable price.

In the center of the room sat the Emperor. His face was twisted in terror, tears streaming down his cheeks. He had collapsed onto the ground, trembling uncontrollably, his arms shielding his eyes. Taking in the scene, Yan Xiaobao and Lan Feng were bewildered as to why the crusaders hadn't taken the Emperor away. A moment of contemplation revealed the answer—they simply didn't care about the Emperor. Their orders were likely not to guard anyone but to slaughter as many beasts as possible. Seeing the dead beasts weighed heavily on Yan Xiaobao's heart. His eyes burned, and he once again silently thanked Lan Feng for keeping control of his body. He had failed his soldiers, leading them to their deaths, but he couldn't let himself succumb to self-pity. No one knew if there were more crusaders lurking nearby.

"Pull yourself together!" Lan Feng told him. "We won't wallow in guilt. Even though you've lost some soldiers, you still have others under your command. You owe it to them to stand strong!" Hearing these words, Yan Xiaobao understood what Lan Feng meant. With solemn self-reproach, he was finally able to focus on the events around him.

"Let's first count how many crusaders have died here," he said, and Lan Feng nodded in agreement. Then he approached the corpses of the fallen beasts and black cloaks. Lan Feng moved across the room, counting fifty-eight cloaks, and couldn't help but feel a surge of pride for their soldiers. Among them were two experts wielding Holy Level powers as well as all the ordinary crusaders, whose strength rivaled that of the beasts. While the soldiers far outnumbered the enemy, the Saints Team had clearly bridged that gap. They had fought with tireless effort until the bitter end. If anything, Yan Xiaobao should take pride in his guards rather than pity them. Glancing around, he noticed the expression on Miss Sunx's face. Her eyes weren't wet with tears; instead, they were as hard as stone. Her lips didn't tremble but instead bore a steadfast, somber smile.

Chapter 672 Incredibly High Price_2

"Afterward, we may blame ourselves for many things," she whispered as she walked toward Lan Feng and Yan Xiaobao, placing a hand on their shoulders. "Although we made a mistake, these beasts fought knowing they might die in this war. Losing them is a misfortune, but they fought bravely. Never see them as beasts we killed, but as beasts who defeated the enemy." Her eyes glistened as she spoke. Yan Xiaobao understood that her words were as much for herself as they were for him, yet they comforted him greatly. Lan Feng nodded as well. He, too, knew this was not the time to question anyone's decisions.

"Search the entire room!" Yan Xiaobao shouted, and all the beasts began looking high and low to see if any Crusaders had been left behind. After the search, it was clear there were none. They had once managed to capture the Emperor by following his scent, but now it was impossible since the Crusaders hadn't left a single trace or footprint on the ground.

"Bring all the beasts to the garden and lay them down so we can say our farewells," Yan Xiaobao commanded. Before allowing anyone to take action, he dispatched half the army to check from the room to the garden, inspecting every corner and crevice of the garden itself before granting them freedom to move. Fortunately, it seemed the Crusaders had left the castle before Yan Xiaobao and his beast tribe entered.

....

"Sir, why are we hiding here instead of defending our Emperor?" Li Xiaopeng asked calmly, glancing around the small cavern where they had gathered. Inside, the Great Marshall and about thirty Saints from the Siban Empire sat. No Crusaders were present, nor were there any Saints or members of the Great Marshall's family.

"We are waiting," he said patiently. "The Crusaders have been ordered to destroy the beast tribe, and they will do the hard work without our interference," he smirked. "Once the beast tribe is weakened, we will intervene and wipe them out. When they are gone, we will emerge as the heroes who saved the Siban Empire." His smile widened, revealing pearly teeth that gleamed with a devilish aura in the dim cave light.

"We don't need the Emperor," he continued. "We've followed his orders for far too long, and he is unfit to be ruler. Just remember how many soldiers were sent into the Divine Domain, losing their lives, including my son's life, wasted in that forsaken jungle."

"All we must do is defeat the Beast Army, and when the beasts within the Divine Domain are completely exterminated, we shall claim the Divine Domain for ourselves! We will become the greatest empire on the African Continent, proving that we deserve it! We will destroy the beast tribe!"

"One could almost believe you've had this plan all along," Li Xiaopeng remarked with a faint, sarcastic smile as he leaned against a wall. His upper body remained wrapped in bandages, and though not all his wounds had healed, he seemed unbothered. The Saints exchanged glances. Some displayed skepticism in their eyes, while others wore smiles of approval. When nods began spreading, it was clear they agreed with the plan. Smirks grew into chuckles and finally laughter as excitement for their future grew among them.

....

While the Great Marshall and his Saints remained hidden inside the mountainous cave, Yan Xiaobao and the beasts carried their fallen brothers into a beautiful garden filled with lilies. From across the city, the corpses of beasts had been brought to the garden and stacked into a massive funeral pyre. Not all beasts could fit inside the garden, so those who could fly perched on rooftops or hovered in the sky, gazing at the ceremonial fire below. Some climbed into tall trees, where they had a clear view. Yan Xiaobao allowed beasts to establish small camps within several gardens of the Imperial Castle and even inside the castle itself, but he ordered no less than four beasts at a time to keep watch over every group, ensuring no Crusaders would sneak in on them.

Yan Xiaobao and Miss Sun finally reunited with Wan Qiao's troops. They both felt as though this had been the longest day of their lives. Exhausted and drained, anxiety over a possible nighttime attack by the Crusaders weighed heavily on them.

"Don't worry," Wan Qiao said reassuringly. "Tonight, I will stand watch with some of my most trusted warriors to guard against any surprise moves." She laid down mats for them to sleep. "I've already recovered today, so my energy has returned entirely. Staying awake through the night won't affect me. After all, I am a Saint," she said with a smile. Yan Xiaobao and Miss Sun were grateful, and as they collapsed onto their mats, their heads barely touched the soft fabric before they drifted off into dreams.

Smiling, Wan Qiao leaned against a tree and sat down, observing the many soldiers around her. She had to admit, despite spending the majority of her life in endless war, there was something enchanting about the constant movement surrounding her. Being part of something larger made her feel good, yet she feared the end of war. She wished she could travel across the land protecting its citizens—such would be her dream: to journey with her army, ensuring no one dared invade her Kingdom and harm her people.

Chapter 673 Incredibly High Price_3

Spent an entire night daydreaming, seeing the astonishing features of this land brimming with beasts, and how she survived her night. During the night, no one heard any alarms, not even the shadow of the enemy was seen. The night passed quietly, while the firepit burned in the background, carrying the scent of roasted meat. Yan Xiaobao slept through the night, without dreams or abrupt awakenings. He managed to sleep until the sun rose, greeted by a strong smell of meat upon waking. Looking around, he saw many beasts waking up alongside him. His back ached terribly from lying in the same position for so many hours. He typically wasn't a person who slept through the night, but this sleep was a welcome guest. Seeing the stiff sun rise, he smiled as if sharing the same back problems with it. He felt that today was a new day, a fresh beginning. He was convinced that things would be better than the day before.

The Emperor was tied to a tree, still waiting for his fate. Yan Xiaobao was unsure what to do with him. He knew they had to kill him and display his body somewhere, but he felt that the dignity of any ruler fell short of their physical existence. However, none of his beast friends cared about a ruler's dignity. They only cared about territory, and the strongest were the survivors. That was the rule of the forest, the rule they followed here. After all, this was their new land.

Looking at the Emperor again, Yan Xiaobao realized they had to kill him. It was improper to let him live when his death was already decided, so Yan Xiaobao walked toward him. His body transformed into a Werewolf, the strongest form he possessed.

"You've come to kill me?" the Emperor asked calmly. His voice didn't tremble, his gaze honest and direct. He seemed to have already accepted his fate before things turned chaotic yesterday. Yan Xiaobao nodded. He intended no deceit toward the man.

"I understand," was his only response. Looking around, it seemed as if he hoped to take one last glance at the sun and the garden before his eyes closed forever. He sighed, then turned to Yan Xiaobao. "You must be cautious," he said. His voice devoid of emotion, seemingly free of hatred. "Tell me, Great Marshall of the beasts, don't you think your army is too confident of victory?" he asked, his eyes fixated on the azure sky. Yan Xiaobao frowned. He too thought this battle seemed incredibly easy for them. Who would deliberately send hundreds of thousands to their deaths just to kill a few beasts? Who would abandon the walls so readily as the Great Marshall had? After some thought, Yan Xiaobao didn't answer the Emperor's question, but his furrowed brows suggested the man tied to the tree might have a point.

"He abandoned the city and took all the Saints of the Siban Empire with him. They are waiting for the right moment to arrive so they can eliminate your last remaining forces. I believe he is relying on the Crusaders to slaughter many of you, but if the rest of you fight as my soldiers did yesterday, then I think

he is in for a nasty surprise." The Emperor's voice began to carry a hint of smugness. "If I must die, I hope he dies with me," he said matter-of-factly. Looking at Yan Xiaobao, the Emperor nodded once, then within seconds, his head was severed.

...

Chapter 674 The Border of the Sun Kingdom

...

Looking at the now-beheaded Emperor, Yan Xiaobao knew they had officially won the war, but he felt neither joy nor relief at the Emperor's death. In fact, he was grateful for the information he received before the Emperor's passing, but regretted that it had come at such a significant cost. No matter how much he had wanted to kill him, it had to be done. Having a beast do the killing for him was not Yan Xiaobao's way. After all, he was the Great Marshall.

Glancing around, Yan Xiaobao took out the Memory Stone that contained valuable items from the castle. He searched through the stones until he found a rectangular box made of marble, adorned with gemstones and gold. He collected the box, placed the Emperor's body and head inside, and shut it. "Qiao!" he called out. Ms. Lin came over to him, curious about what he wanted now. Everyone in the garden had witnessed the Emperor's beheading, but no one truly understood why Yan Xiaobao was now so diligently finding such a coffin. When they saw him place the Emperor inside the beautiful coffin, they were puzzled. To them, the Emperor was nothing more than an enemy, but Yan Xiaobao still hoped the man could die with dignity, and he felt the need to thank him for the information he had given before his demise.

"What do you need?" she asked, curiously eyeing the marble box. "I need someone to take this box to the border of the Sun Kingdom. Preferably to a military camp," Yan Xiaobao replied as he turned and surveyed the area. "If they see that he is dead, they'll understand this land now belongs to us," he said, pacing back and forth. "Gather everyone. If we don't manage to eliminate all of the Crusaders, this day will have been wasted, and tonight we will face peril," he continued, shouting commands as everyone began packing up and preparing for the hunt. The atmosphere was charged with anger and resentment. Just hours ago, they had been part of Miss Sunx's army, made up of familiar faces, united in their thirst for vengeance. Though many of them were already dead, though beasts naturally had little affection for one another, after battling together, they started to feel like a family. Yan Xiaobao understood this better than anyone, because he too bore the responsibility for the soldiers who had fallen.

Soon, a Horned Eagle was dispatched to ferry the marble coffin to the border of the Sun Kingdom, while the rest of the army prepared to hunt down the remaining Crusaders. Few Crusaders had escaped, but there was still a chance they had at least one other Holy Name Expert among them. At the very least,

Yan Xiaobao still had thirty-two Saints left, far surpassing his expectations and estimates regarding the Crusaders.

"I hope they haven't received reinforcements," Yan Xiaobao muttered to himself as he led the way, accompanied by Miss Sunx and Wan Qiao. His body had once again been entrusted to Lan Feng. Wan Qiao noticed the change in dynamic between Yan Xiaobao and Lan Feng but said nothing. Miss Sunx also sensed that something was different about the young man, though she couldn't pinpoint exactly what had changed. What she did sense was that the young man seemed no longer to be a King, but a Saint. She had heard of this shift before, particularly when he had battled a towering Saint from the Siban Empire. She had witnessed him achieve the Holy Level, yet now the change felt distinctly strange. Earlier, she thought Yan Xiaobao had risen to an even higher level, but now, although she knew it was him, she didn't feel like it truly was. He seemed more arrogant, stronger, superior to other Saints in certain ways. It was a kind of power no one else could possess—something born from having lived nobly day after day within the body of a magnificent beast.

Lan Feng didn't reveal to Miss Sunx the shift in his personality. He was not keen to let many people know about his secret with Yan Xiaobao, not even those who had fought alongside him for life. Having lost his physical body, Lan Feng could no longer trust others easily. He often claimed he wished everyone could keep their secrets to themselves, though this was something Yan Xiaobao couldn't quite do. Yan Xiaobao wished for those he trusted unconditionally to know his secret, but at the same time, he understood Lan Feng and decided not to force him to share his own secrets with others.

Returning to the desolate city, Yan Xiaobao reflected deeply. He thought about how his army had scattered during the invasion of the city and had to admit that the Emperor had been right. Everything had been too simple—he should have noticed it much earlier. However, it had been impossible for him to do so, as he lacked true combat experience, let alone experience in warfare.

Yan Xiaobao ensured his soldiers remained vigilant now, as he understood they were not only fighting Crusaders but also Saints and the Great Marshall from the Siban Empire. If they fought both at once, it could spell trouble for him.

As they moved through the city, Yan Xiaobao finally realized that if they remained as they were, they would find nothing; thus, he divided his forces into four equal camps. Though separated, they should still be capable of dealing with the Crusaders or at least pinning them down until reinforcements arrived.

Marching through the city, everyone remained silent, observing their surroundings. However, it seemed no one encountered the Crusaders as expected. Yan Xiaobao hoped his army would locate the

Crusaders, though he understood that the chances of this happening were slim. Nevertheless, as he crossed the vast city, he held onto a glimmer of hope.

Chapter 675: The Border of the Sun Kingdom_2

Here's the translated text:

Suddenly, he noticed a particular scent—the smell of decomposing flesh. Turning toward it, Yan Xiaobao immediately recognized what it was. It was the same smell he had encountered earlier.

Xu Yue's thoughts flashed through Yan Xiaobao's mind as he stopped the army behind him. "Have they sacrificed themselves to distract us? Are they trying to lure us into rushing ahead and falling into a trap?" Yan Xiaobao muttered to himself, shaken by the overwhelming stench. He understood it signified the death of Crusaders, but he also knew that his troops hadn't engaged with the Crusaders yet. If they had, he would have heard the sounds of battle easily.

As the scent guided them through a narrow alleyway, Yan Xiaobao and his soldiers became increasingly alert, unsure of what lay ahead. When Yan Xiaobao reached the alley, he stopped in his tracks, completely shocked by what he saw. Inside the alley lay the corpses of all the Crusaders that remained. They were in varying stages of decomposition—bones, ashes, and flesh. Spotting Li Meilin's face lying on the ground, Yan Xiaobao felt a jolt of satisfaction.

He inhaled deeply and noticed four small holes on her forehead, with her body being the most intact among the corpses.

Yan Xiaobao sensed someone watching him. His eyes darted skyward and locked onto a pair of golden eyes. A smug grin adorned the face of the figure seated mid-air, as if sitting there was the most natural thing in the world. Glancing around, Yan Xiaobao quickly deduced that none of his soldiers could see this expert, who sat loftily above them.

Staring at the floating man, Yan Xiaobao remembered seeing him before. Although the man was now hovering above the slain Crusaders, Yan Xiaobao didn't perceive him as threatening. It was as if this person was entirely unbothered by mundane things like war.

"Mrs. Sun, Qiao, evacuate everyone from this alley. I need to handle something," Yan Xiaobao whispered, regaining control over his body, while something deep inside caused hesitation in two

individuals. The women protested. Both immediately began ushering beasts away. Yan Xiaobao spread golden martial power wings until he stood face-to-face with the man with golden eyes.

"I thank you for helping with these Crusaders, but may I ask why you killed them?" he asked politely. The golden boy gazed at him, shrugging as the arrogance on his face remained unchanged. "I hold a grudge against their master," he replied, his words narrowing Yan Xiaobao's eyes. "I didn't do this for you. I simply want to eliminate as many Crusaders as possible until I am ready to kill their master."

"Hey," Yan Xiaobao said with a smirk upon hearing those words. "I'm sorry, but get in line. He's my problem," he remarked, some of Lan Feng's rampant arrogance leaking through. The bird inside his lower dantian roared and shrieked absurdities like, "Who's this fool from nowhere?" "Strength alone doesn't mean superiority," and "That bastard is mine. I've needed to kill him ever since he stole my body."

The man appeared initially surprised by Yan Xiaobao's response. "You aim to kill him?" he repeated, confusion pooling in his golden eyes. "How do you know An Hee?" he asked.

Yan Xiaobao sighed deeply and replied vaguely, "I've harbored a grudge against him for over four thousand years. Even if your disdain for him runs deep, it cannot rival mine."

"Age alone doesn't mean you have priority in vengeance!" the golden boy retorted, his arrogance turning into a childish tantrum. Yan Xiaobao and the floating man glared at each other furiously. Finally, Yan Xiaobao shook his head and sighed. "The point is—we both lack the power to defeat him outright. All we can do is destroy his Undead Crusade to provoke him," Yan Xiaobao sighed, his words prompting the man to nod with a serious expression.

"Join me," Yan Xiaobao suggested as he prepared to descend again. "If we work together, we can decide who gets the chance to kill him when we reach him. We pose a greater threat together than alone," he chuckled. The tall man hesitated briefly before nodding.

"Hmm, it's good to meet you," he began, shaking hands with Yan Xiaobao, "I'm Cai Jie, a foreigner to this world."

"You come from another world?" Yan Xiaobao frowned. He knew of the existence of multiple worlds, as he hailed from one himself, but he believed one needed to be a God to traverse worlds unscathed. Even

Lan Feng had required the power of death to pull Yan Xiaobao from his own world for reincarnation. Despite the man's formidable strength, Yan Xiaobao was certain he wasn't stronger than a Saint. Yet he had managed to defeat two Saint Fighters from the Crusaders without suffering injury. This man was anything but ordinary.

As Yan Xiaobao stared at Cai Jie, the notion seemed to reflect in the other's thoughts. The white-haired young man smiled politely. "I'm Yan Xiaobao," he introduced himself, adding with a sharp edge, "My grudge against An Hee can only be resolved through his death." Cai Jie chuckled at the fierce declaration. "It seems we are in agreement," he said with a smile. A golden light flashed from his body, temporarily blinding Yan Xiaobao. Soon after, the golden boy continued to smile before him. Both young men descended to the ground. Yan Xiaobao cast one last glance at Li Meilin, igniting a blue flame and hurling it toward the corpse. Seeing the blue fire, Cai Jie raised an eyebrow in surprise but said nothing. Standing side by side, the two of them watched as the corpses burned in the blue blaze.

"Sister Meilin!" someone called from above, prompting Yan Xiaobao to look up. There, he saw the Saint who had once battled Wan Qiao, now arriving on the scene. His eyes brimmed with hatred as his body trembled, clutching the woman's corpse while extinguishing the flames.

"Who killed her?!" he shouted as he turned. His entire body erupted with tremendous energy, fueled by his fury and grief.

"She was a Crusader," Yan Xiaobao said calmly. He sensed Wan Qiao standing behind him, transformed into her bird form and ready for a fight. She awaited Yan Xiaobao's signal. "We returned her to you, unaware of what happened to her afterward," he explained. "You must understand who controls the Crusaders and grants them life."

Everything Yan Xiaobao said darkened Li Xiaopeng's expression further. While he understood Yan Xiaobao's words, he recalled how his beloved sister had changed after returning from the Beast Forest. It was evidently the fault of the beasts, leading to her tragic demise. Consumed by rage, the furious man lunged at Yan Xiaobao.

As shadows loomed over them, both Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie recoiled to avoid the attack. The Unicorn Jasmine Eagle swooped down before them, its talons gripping Li Xiaopeng's arm. She refused to let his attack reach its mark. Li Xiaopeng was clearly at a disadvantage. Though he had once fought Wan Qiao on equal footing, the circumstances now were vastly different.

Scanning the surroundings, Yan Xiaobao raised an arm, signaling Saints to retreat slowly. He sought to ensure Wan Qiao's fight remained unobstructed.

"If he's here, then the rest of the Saints from the Siban Empire are nearby with the Great Marshall. Begin searching the area but stay grouped. There are far more Saints among them than I anticipated, and I don't want to lose anyone else," he ordered. The Saints nodded in acknowledgment, dividing into three groups to thoroughly search the city.

"That guy's as good as dead," Cai Jie remarked calmly, observing the battle between Wan Qiao and Li Xiaopeng. Watching the fight, Yan Xiaobao nodded in agreement. "Being blinded by rage will do him no favors," Yan Xiaobao agreed as the clash unfolded before them. Clutching the corpse tightly with one arm, Li Xiaopeng tried to extract the talons of the Unihorn Jasmine Eagle with the other. His legs gleamed with golden light as he solidified energy around them. He formed a long blade of martial power extending from his leg. As he slashed it toward her talons, Wan Qiao withdrew, ascending into the sky and circling him.

...

Chapter 676: Devoured by Grief and Anger

...

Li Xiaopeng was completely consumed by grief and rage. He furiously decided to turn his anger towards the beasts, even though they were not directly responsible for her death.

Watching the battle unfold before him, Yan Xiaobao slightly raised his head, surprised to find that Wan was struggling to handle the enraged Li Xiaopeng. "I guess the injuries she sustained yesterday were far worse than I anticipated," he remarked. Beside him, Cai Jie nodded. "Makes sense," he agreed. "The Crusaders ranked as Saints are certainly not easy to deal with."

"Yet you managed to take down two without getting hurt," Yan Xiaobao pointed out. A topic he found deeply intriguing suddenly arose. "I focused on killing the Crusaders," Cai Jie shrugged. "It took some time, but they have a weakness. If you manage to destroy it, they collapse. It's a small energy point that allows them to move and remain intact, even when they should have long crumbled into dust. This tiny energy node is placed within them to keep their bodies from disintegrating."

Hearing this, Yan Xiaobao was stunned. It was undoubtedly invaluable knowledge, yet he couldn't understand why Cai Jie would talk about it so casually. If anything, it seemed like it should be a pivotal secret.

Noticing the surprise on Yan Xiaobao's face, Cai Jie smirked smugly. "You want to know why I'm telling you all this, don't you?" he asked. Yan Xiaobao nodded truthfully. "Well, it's really simple," Cai Jie said, his face adorned with a shameless grin. "I want An Hee to suffer as much as possible. I want trouble for him. The more Crusaders that die, the better I feel. By telling you how to kill them, I'm ensuring that you can eliminate every Crusader you encounter. The more you kill, the better I'll feel."

"What did he do to make you hate him so much?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously, his eyes never leaving the two Saints locked in combat before him. Li Xiaopeng managed to shove Li Meilin aside, forcing her away from the fight, but he still carried the same unrelenting fury as before. His bloodshot eyes and labored breathing revealed his anger clearly. His chest was still wrapped in bandages; it was obvious that he hadn't fully recovered from the injuries he sustained in their previous battle.

Though he hadn't fully healed from his wounds, neither had she. Or rather, she had successfully recovered from her fight with Li Xiaopeng, but not from her skirmish with the Holy Cross Army. Bird and man were locked in relentless exchanges of attacks—dodging, striking with beaks, teeth, claws, and high-level abilities in their battle.

Watching the battle unfold, Cai Jie's gaze turned hazy, as though he were staring at something only he could see. The longer he stood there, the tighter his lips pressed, and a murderous aura began to billow outward, his golden eyes darkening like a storm.

Cai Jie clutched the Golden Man's shoulder with one hand and suddenly snapped back to the present, flashing Yan Xiaobao an apologetic smile. Despite his composed demeanor, it was clear that he was still haunted by the memories he had just been dwelling on.

"I can't live in the same world as An Hee," he finally sighed. "He needs to die for all the terrible things he's done, time and time again." Yan Xiaobao spoke, knowing how Lan Feng shared the same sentiment about An Hee.

"One day, I'll kill him," Yan Xiaobao said with such determination that it caused Cai Jie to look at him in a new light. Initially, Cai Jie was surprised, but that expression quickly shifted into an arrogant smirk. "Unless I kill him first," he remarked, his eyes once again fixed on the battle before them.

Hearing the words spoken by the Golden Man beside him, Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but laugh. "I think I can allow you to follow me now," Yan Xiaobao added, raising an eyebrow as he observed Li Xiaopeng launching an attack on Wan Qiao. The maneuver stunned him. This time, Li Xiaopeng's assault was imbued with extraordinary levels of martial power, transforming into rope-like strands. The strands of martial power wound tightly around the massive eagle, immobilizing her. As she tried to unleash all the strength in her body to break free, her wings trembled. What seemed eternal lasted only a fraction of a second before the golden ropes shattered into thousands of fragments.

"She's incredibly strong, this lady of yours," Cai Jie commented as he watched the battle in front of them unfold. He completely ignored what Yan Xiaobao had said earlier, and the white-haired young man didn't make any effort to bring it up again. He knew Cai Jie had heard him, and the Golden Man would make his own decision. Whether he chose to follow Yan Xiaobao or not, it wouldn't matter. Yan Xiaobao didn't care either way. While he was deeply curious about the Golden Man, he simultaneously knew that getting to know him would not be easy.

Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie observed the battle with intense interest. Wan Qiao now launched a ferocious attack, heading directly for Li Xiaopeng's head. As she hurtled toward the short-statured man, a piercing shriek escaped her mouth.

"Did you know that the Crusaders have four holes in their foreheads?" Yan Xiaobao asked curiously, watching the eagle dive downward. Her descent grew faster and faster, her talons suddenly lunging forward, her wings pausing midair. Li Xiaopeng enveloped himself in martial power before raising his sword. Wu Wei surged into the sword itself, making it gleam brilliantly. It was as though a miniature sun had emerged at the sword's tip—a tiny sun formed as Qi poured into the blade. He stood ready, facing the eagle, his sword held firmly by his side, waiting to swing it at the bird the moment she came within reach.

Chapter 677: Devoured by Grief and Anger_2

"This is exciting," Cai Jie said, and Yan Xiaobao nodded. The entire army was watching, but no one intervened. They understood Wan Qiao wanted to win the battle himself—if Li Xiaopeng died by someone else's hand, no one would dare face an enraged Wan Qiao.

Suddenly, there was a sound from the rear of the army—a commotion and clamor erupted. Yan Xiaobao turned and saw a group of over thirty Saints soaring through the air. They stood to the side, unsure of what to do. As his gaze lifted to the sky, Yan Xiaobao saw his own Saints also hovering above, ready to settle this matter once and for all. Yan Xiaobao smiled as golden martial wings unfurled from his shoulders, propelling him into the sky, followed by the golden youth who seemed to walk on air rather than fly.

Standing side by side, Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie no longer focused on Wan Qiao and Li Xiaopeng. Instead, their attention was entirely fixed on the Saints in the sky.

The appearance of the beasts had changed completely. Yan Xiaobao sighed and awakened the meditative bird in his Lower Dantian. "This doesn't look good," Yan Xiaobao remarked. Lan Feng opened his eyes, observing what Yan Xiaobao was seeing.

"You know, when the war began, we were sure the Xibi Empire only had a handful of Saints," Lan Feng said. "Li Meilin claimed there were very few. But now, it boils down to this—when it comes to Saints, their numbers are almost comparable to this nation. Where did they come from?" Lan Feng mused aloud, controlling his own body, which sent a shiver through Yan Xiaobao.

"I don't know," Yan Xiaobao sighed. "They're here. I have to trust Li Meilin's mistaken information—or maybe they simply emerged from unknown places. Perhaps they are mercenaries hired to support them."

"What do you think Saints are?" Lan Feng mocked. "They're no mere mercenaries; they're the pinnacle of power. But who cares—I need to save your little butt." He laughed, and suddenly Yan Xiaobao felt his Qi energy surge from the Red Beast Core within his Dantian Cave. The energy entering him slowly began to transform. To Yan Xiaobao's astonishment, his body didn't sprout red fur; instead, blue feathers began to emerge on his skin. His hair turned to feathers, his legs transformed into talons, and his arms became wings. His ice-blue eyes gazed heavenward, surrounded by small golden feathers. The transformation left everyone stunned.

The beast tribe knew Yan Xiaobao as a red wolf. He had transformed into that shape repeatedly, yet here he became a massive Blue Phoenix shrouded in a Saint's aura. A resounding screech burst from his beak, sending tremors through the earth littered with beast corpses. Even Wan Qiao, deemed the strongest, trembled. Lan Feng—the Blue Phoenix, the son of the Vermilion Bird, and the sovereign of birds—stood before them. While he wasn't the mightiest Saint, he was certainly not one to be underestimated. Witnessing this transformation, even the Golden Man beside him was shocked by Yan Xiaobao's complete change in aura, power, and appearance.

"Time to play a little!" Lan Feng declared in a voice markedly different from Yan Xiaobao's. The Saints among the beasts began screaming, roaring, or howling. Every Saint could feel they were in the presence of a Divine Beast—a sacred creature believed to have been annihilated by An Hee's hand thousands of years ago. Yet here it was, a Phoenix resurrected from the ashes of war. The Phoenix

bolstered the Saints' willpower. Everyone's spirits soared, and although humans were not few in number, they were overwhelmed by the surge in strength displayed by each beast.

"It's because of that useless bird over there!" the Great Marshall shouted. He was no Saint but was brought by one to watch the battlefield. His gaze was steady, but fear was unmistakable in his depths when he witnessed the chaos caused by the foolish Blue Bird.

"Attack him! Kill him, and you'll win this war!" the Great Marshall bellowed, pointing at Lan Feng. He spit as froth bubbled from his mouth. "He's just a beast! Go kill him! Attack him!" His voice reached feverish intensity, his eyes bloodshot, foam splattering everywhere. At this moment, the Saints team hesitated, uncertain whether to follow the crazed orders of the clearly unhinged Great Marshall.

"This is not what he promised us," one Saint declared, as he looked around at the gathering beasts near Yan Xiaobao. "He said we could easily handle these beasts and take riches from the Divine Domain. But all we've done is fight endlessly. We've even lost some brothers," one complained, and others silently agreed.

"I joined because he promised me beast slaves. Those beasts fetch a high price. But now, should I risk my life for a few slaves?" another chimed in.

"Who cares about slaves—I was promised an ancient cultivation method that could reach God's rank. He claimed beasts possessed such methods. What have I gained? My brothers died fighting those who should've been weak!" A third spoke angrily, and soon, all the Saints filled with discontent as they realized each had been promised rewards—some worldly riches, others techniques, or high-level abilities.

"I refuse to fight in this war against beasts," a Saint declared, raising his arms in the air. "I've spent far too much time trying to win, and now, seeing even the Crusaders fail while Saints are lost left and right, I won't risk myself for this greed-driven Great Marshall anymore," he added, looking at Yan Xiaobao. His gaze was conflicted with complex emotions. "I hope if we meet again, there will be no bad blood between us," he said to the gathering Beast Saints before bowing to Yan Xiaobao. Turning briskly, he made his way toward the sky. Viewing the unfolding tension, some Saints on the side of the Spanish Empire hesitated before bowing to the beasts, then flew away, never once glancing back.

Within minutes, the Xibi Empire lost about thirty Saints, leaving behind only four. Among them was Li Xiaopeng, still locked in fierce combat with Wan Qiao. He paid no attention to the happenings in the sky, fixated solely on avenging Li Meilin.

Scanning the battlefield, the Great Marshall's panicked gaze fell on Li Xiaopeng. A manic grin spread across his lips. "It doesn't matter if the Crusaders failed or Saints abandoned me!" He started pacing erratically, screaming incoherently, leaving even Saints struggling to keep him airborne. "Li Xiaopeng is a Saint capable of rivaling General Frozen!" he shouted. "Li Xiaopeng—the Xibi Empire's secret weapon! Thanks to Li Meilin's loyalty to the Empire, he can handle all of you! Don't think I'll let you leave!" He cried out, but terror soon flooded his eyes as his body plummeted to the ground. The Saints no longer bothered to catch him. "No! Don't let me fall! We can win! The Xibi Empire is mine!" he shouted, but none of the beasts made an effort to save him.

Everyone watched as the Great Marshall hit the roof of a building. The crack of his bones breaking echoed throughout, and his screams of agony pierced the air. He rolled off the roof onto the ground, and abruptly, the screaming stopped. There was no sound as he lay there lifeless. Two beasts approached to gauge the Great Marshall's condition, and upon checking his pulse, both shook their heads. The Great Marshall was dead.

Apart from Wan Qiao and Li Xiaopeng, everyone momentarily paused as they looked at the fallen Great Marshall. His death was pathetically anticlimactic—he had simply dropped to his demise. Yan Xiaobao couldn't help but think the man deserved such an unceremonious end—nothing extravagant, just a quick death to conclude a life marked by greed.

...

Chapter 678: Repositioning Oneself

...

Yan Xiaobao took a moment, his lips curling into a smile. The only thing he needed to do now was defeat Li Xiaopeng. Once he was defeated, then the Siban Empire would belong to the beasts. They could at last attain the freedom they had fought for. Knowing that everything now rested on Wan Qiao and her battle with Li Xiaopeng, Lan Feng steadied his movements. He soared into the sky before turning toward the men and women who were currently locked in combat.

Though Yan Xiaobao was intensely focused on observing the battle on the ground, he couldn't help but notice Lan Feng's euphoria while flying through the air. He circled above the battlefield, repositioning himself again and again. For the first time in four thousand years, Lan Feng had revealed his true form. His longing was so palpable that Yan Xiaobao was certain the arrogant bird was cheering with glee.

Yan Xiaobao said nothing, allowing Lan Feng to cavort through the skies. His gaze swept over the beasts below, who were watching the battle between Wan Qiao and Li Xiaopeng with a mix of shock and awe. Observing the fight, Yan Xiaobao was surprised to see that Wan Qiao wasn't attacking the shorter man; instead, she was only defending herself. Something about it was completely out of character for her.

"Is she waiting for her opponent to exhaust himself?" Yan Xiaobao muttered to himself, his chin resting on his hand as he focused on the fight in front of him. "If she loses energy, she'll gain nothing... Will she run out first?" He continued complaining. "She should be stronger than him. She was just healed. Why won't she take action?"

Just as Yan Xiaobao was filled with questions, Wan Qiao transformed into her usual beautiful form that Yan Xiaobao had grown accustomed to seeing. "What is she doing?!" he shouted again, but no one answered him. Lan Feng was too caught up in his emotions to hear Yan Xiaobao's words, and no one could hear him as he resided within his Lower Dantian.

"This fight is pointless!" Wan Qiao shouted as she dodged yet another attack. This time, it came in the form of a golden, dragon-shaped lance, its incredible power evident from its sharp and deadly tip. Seeing it, Yan Xiaobao was convinced it was sharp enough to pierce through stone.

Wan Qiao's declaration left all the beasts stunned. None of them had expected her to denounce the fight. "Look at your precious sister!" she continued, though Li Xiaopeng seemed intent on continuing the battle. However, her words caused him to pause and glance at his sister.

"She's wearing the black uniform of the Crusaders. There are four holes on her forehead. She was found among a horde of Crusaders. Now tell me, how can we trust her while standing side by side with Crusaders?" Wan Qiao attempted to reason with the angered Saint before her. Though her earlier words had fallen on deaf ears, they now held weight. Li Xiaopeng's hand trembled as he slowly touched the four holes on his sister's forehead, his brow furrowing deeply.

"This is all your fault from the beginning," he replied, though he didn't attack Wan Qiao. Instead, he picked up his sister and began walking away. "She came back terrified. Don't tell me this had nothing to do with you!"

"I admit we might have frightened her, but when we could have killed her, we treated her as a guest. We warned her about the war so you could prepare in time. We even sent her back to your border without letting anyone harm her," Wan Qiao retorted, her words ringing true to Li Xiaopeng. He understood that the responsibility lay with the Emperor who had sent his sister to the Divine Domain.

The beasts who could have killed her treated her well, only for the Siban Empire to deliver her to the Crusaders.

These thoughts left him conflicted. Though his anger didn't subside, he couldn't shake the sense that the beasts might be in the right. After standing in hesitation for a while, he finally nodded at Wan Qiao before soaring into the sky, disappearing in the opposite direction of most of the Saints.

Lan Feng descended to the ground beside Wan Qiao and sighed, relinquishing control of the body back to Yan Xiaobao. Once the transformation was complete, his feathers and beastly form gave way to his human appearance. He quickly grabbed a robe from where it had been stored on a stone, draping it over himself.

"That's not like you," he remarked, his gaze fixed on Wan Qiao. The comment made the eagle momentarily blush, but she quickly cleared her throat and refocused. "I know," she replied, her voice trembling slightly. "I understand his emotions," she sighed. "I lost someone important in this battle too, and I know the urge to kill those responsible," she confessed. Tears began to form as her eyes reddened slightly. Yan Xiaobao knew she was thinking of Lord Pan, and he placed a supportive hand on her shoulder. "He'll be reborn somewhere, becoming a great hero," Yan Xiaobao reassured her with a sorrowful smile. He had liked Lord Pan as well.

Hearing Yan Xiaobao's words, a faint chuckle escaped Wan Qiao's lips, and she nodded. "We've just won a war. We can't let ourselves be too disheartened!" she exclaimed, and Yan Xiaobao nodded with a smile. "We did win this war," Yan Xiaobao sighed, feeling as though a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders. "Thank you for your hard work, Great Marshall!" One by one, the Saints approached Yan Xiaobao, expressing their gratitude for his help. Those who had once treated him as an equal now regarded him as a superior being far above them. Yan Xiaobao remarked, "I don't think being a Divine Beast matters," but his statement only earned a huff from Lan Feng. "Of course, they respect me. Only four Divine Beasts of direct bloodline are considered true Divine Beasts. When I and the others were exiled and deceived, I was sure all our descendants had been killed or enslaved. It has been four thousand years since the last Divine Beast appeared. For me to be here now should be impossible, yet here I am. They would celebrate my return."

Chapter 679 Re-positioning Oneself_2

Yan Xiaobao pondered for a while, but he quickly agreed with what was said. After all, Divine Beasts were the sovereigns of beasts. They were the most awe-inspiring and the strongest creatures. They carried the bloodline of Gods, and possessed abilities that others could only dream of.

Even the golden young man gazed at Yan Xiaobao with a complicated expression. Unfortunately, it was impossible for Yan Xiaobao to decipher the thoughts hidden within his mind.

Now, Yan Xiaobao stood in the center of the city, astonished by the outcome of the war he had just finished. Comparing the actual event to his expectations, the war turned out to be unusually straightforward. It was something he owed to the enemy's Great Marshall. His certainty of victory was once challenged by the Crusaders, but in the end, both the Emperor and the Great Marshall fell into the hands of the beast tribe. With their downfall, the Spanish Empire also suffered setbacks, and now it belonged to the beasts.

...

"My lord, the victor has been decided," the maid stepped forward, looking at the air in front of her. She dared not gaze at her master directly, knowing well his dislike for being looked at by servants like herself.

"I regret to inform you that under the assault of the Beast Army, the Siban Empire was unable to prevail. Even the Crusaders you sent seemingly perished in the battle."

As these words were spoken, a scoffing noise came from the seat beside her. "I don't care who wins this war," An Hee said with a grin, spinning a small sphere between his lips—a globe resembling his very own miniature asteroid. "I'm no longer part of this world. I am beyond the notion of time that binds you. You weaklings are akin to creatures dwelling in the fields; this realm is your universe, but none of you can see it, nor comprehend what exists beyond it. I encompass this realm; I am everywhere at once. I am your yesterday, and I am your tomorrow. I am the only one who has departed from this field, and the world outside is my stage, never to be confined by this pitiable small plane."

The maid fell silent, stepping back patiently to await her master's next command.

...

Yan Xiaobao and the beasts soon located the mansion they had been waiting for within the Siban Imperial Capital. Some armies returned to the Divine Domain with good news, allowing the beasts to commence their migration to their newfound lands. The Beast Army remaining within the borders of the Siban Empire moved to the frontier to ensure no other armies could strike them unexpectedly. They expelled those who couldn't coexist, transforming it into a haven for the beast population.

Although Yan Xiaobao had anticipated the completion of the army's responsibilities following their victory, he quickly discovered they knew very little about governance. Subjects like taxation and organizing military forces were unfamiliar to them. Yan Xiaobao explained tax systems to them, trained them in matters concerning armies to help establish their own, and introduced the role of officials. Miss Sunx particularly found all of this information highly intriguing and was eventually chosen as the governor of Siban.

During Yan Xiaobao's time in the capital, he noticed Cai Jie hadn't departed. Instead, Cai Jie selected a house he fancied—a residence right next to Yan Xiaobao's. He attended every meeting, without a single member of the beast tribe questioning his presence, as everyone seemed convinced he was a friend of Yan Xiaobao's.

Yan Xiaobao spent a whole two months teaching Miss Sunx everything she needed to know. At long last, when she had grasped all the necessary information, he let out a sigh of relief.

"That's it, isn't it?" Cai Jie remarked with a smile. Initially suspicious of the golden young man, Yan Xiaobao soon wore a smile as well. "I need to bid farewell to Wan Qiao," he shrugged. "But I agree. It's time for us to leave the Beast World and return to the human realm."

The white-haired and golden-haired youths exchanged smiles as they walked toward the house claimed by the Unihorn Jasmine Eagle. The eastern city gate of the Sun Kingdom's capital was perpetually bustling. Merchants appeared in caravans with goods primed for sale or returning after selling their wares in distant cities. Mercenaries streamed into the city after completing missions or hunting Magic Beasts. Adventurers arrived in the city, taking short rests while training and enhancing their Inner Energy and Martial Arts in their journey through the Kingdom.

Usually, the city gate teemed with energy and commotion as people surged through. But today was different. The summer sunlight warmed the ground, yet the typical vitality was absent; instead, the crowd had been divided into two distinct groups, with an empty space left between them. Only two figures stood in this desolate gap, drawing the attention of everyone present.

All the mercenaries, merchants, adventurers, and even ordinary citizens sported tanned skin, dark hair, and almond-shaped eyes. Though their appearances varied slightly, these traits were shared among all but two. In the midst of this barren void stood the pair of youths.

One was a young man with flowing white hair, skin as pristine as fallen snow. His ice-blue eyes radiated tranquility, while his lips bore a faint smirk. His frame was tall and imposing. Gazing upon him, one

couldn't help but sense an aura of strength—the kind of presence that brooked no dissent. This young man exuded a leader's aura, one far beyond his years.

Beside him stood the golden-haired youth. His locks were like the purest gold, his eyes shimmering like twin suns. While he radiated a powerful aura as well, his exuded arrogance in comparison. His bearing bespoke absolute confidence in himself and his abilities. Even though he accompanied the white-haired youth, he appeared unwilling to let anyone dictate his fate.

"The people are staring at you," Yan Xiaobao pointed out as they headed toward the gate without queuing. "They're not staring at me," Cai Jie retorted. "It must be your white hair and pale skin. You're so ghostly pale, you might be mistaken for a corpse. Won't you get sunburned in this weather?" Yan Xiaobao snorted softly, offering no further response. Neither Yan Xiaobao nor Cai Jie seemed perturbed by the crowd's reactions. If anything, they conducted themselves as though it were entirely natural.

Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie had been journeying for five months, traversing the defeated Spanish Empire. Recently, they crossed the border with numerous refugees into the Sun Kingdom, ultimately reaching the Sun City—Muchuan.

"This isn't the first time people have stared at something novel," Yan Xiaobao sighed finally, as he and Cai Jie approached the gate, prepared to enter only to find guards stationed before it, barring their path. The pair quieted as they exchanged glances with the guards, surveying them intently as they came to a halt, frowning impatiently while awaiting an explanation.

"Apologies, sir. I'd like to offer you an invitation to the City Lord's mansion for a banquet. This banquet is hosted weekly, and tonight happens to be the occasion. The Lord enjoys hearing tales from adventurers like yourself. I presume you're newcomers to the city. I imagine esteemed experts such as yourselves have much to share with His Lordship," the guard stammered, his words tinged with nervousness, as his hands trembled slightly. Hearing this, both Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie were taken aback. The pair had assumed they were being stopped due to the commotion they had caused at the gate—it had occurred numerous times. But to be stopped for an invitation was a first.

Exchanging glances, the duo waited for one another to decide. Seeing Cai Jie remain indifferent, Yan Xiaobao shrugged. "We'll accept the invitation. We have friends in the city, so we'll meet with them first. We can make our way to the City Lord's mansion in time for dinner to meet His Lordship."

It was the most reasonable compromise Yan Xiaobao could offer. He was curious about the City Lord, uncertain of what the man truly wanted from them. Yan Xiaobao speculated the invitation might stem

from the City Lord's intrigue in news from wandering travelers. He couldn't help but smile, wondering if this might be related to the chaos he had stirred in Liluo City.

...

Chapter 680 Additional Guest

...

Hearing his answer, the two guards bowed to the young man, stepped aside, and cleared the path for them to enter the city. As they entered the city, neither Yan Xiaobao nor Cai Jie paid attention to the guards. Their eyes were brimming with excitement, a kind stirred by different things.

Apart from the friends he had left behind in the "Shrine," Yan Xiaobao couldn't think of anything else, much less the friends he hadn't seen since departing Liluo City. Although he had sent them a letter saying he was alive, he hadn't spoken to them nor knew when he would see them again. He imagined the happiness his friends would feel upon seeing each other and broke into a smile.

"How will you introduce your dazzling friends?" Lan Feng asked curiously, raising an eyebrow as he and Yan Xiaobao both turned their gazes to Cai Jie. Back in the capital of the Siban Empire, Lan Feng hadn't mentioned that he would follow Yan Xiaobao, but when the time came to leave, he indeed followed the white-haired young man. Yan Xiaobao welcomed the extra traveler on their long journey. Although they bickered during their passage together, they secretly enjoyed the trip.

Yan Xiaobao had known from the very beginning that Cai Jie was no ordinary person. Though he bore the appearance of a young man, his eyes were deep, filled with profound knowledge hard-earned through years of hardship. Cai Jie had shared some of this knowledge with Yan Xiaobao, though only about the Crusaders or the intelligence he had gathered regarding An Hee.

Cai Jie never mentioned why he held animosity toward An Hee, and Yan Xiaobao remained clueless about the topic. They exchanged glances and shared smiles while accepting their unspoken agreement. Without needing to fully understand each other, their insistence on staying together significantly boosted their chances of success.

"I think I'll just give a brief introduction," Yan Xiaobao shrugged as he walked past a densely packed crowd. Despite most people already leaving for the outskirts of the city, the streets were far from empty. Narrow lanes crowded with carriages, street vendors, and citizens left little room for

maneuvering. Yet, despite standing out due to their peculiar appearances, the pair blended effortlessly into the crowd. It was only when people were right next to them that they noticed their extraordinary traits, but by then, it was too late.

"You do know where your friend lives, right?" Cai Jie asked casually, observing the enormous city as they moved along. They traversed the lower districts, slums, and markets before arriving in the upscale areas where affluent merchants and noble families resided. Yan Xiaobao glanced at his surroundings and nodded. "They're at the Royal Academy," he replied. Though he had never been to the capital before, he assumed the Royal Academy was located near the castle along with other courts. Yan Xiaobao wasn't certain if his assumption was correct, but he continued heading toward the castle. Cai Jie hadn't mentioned whether he had been to the capital before either; he simply followed Yan Xiaobao's lead. Both of them eagerly anticipated reuniting with their other friends.

When Yan Xiaobao thought about how he hadn't seen his friends for years, he couldn't help but feel an ache in his heart. He missed Deng Wu's foolish antics, Sha Yun's pride, Rong Xing's mediocrity, Gao Yan's focused personality, and Rong Ming's recklessness. But most of all, he missed Wang Julong's gentle smile, which always made him feel as though he could soar. Cai Jie could see the joy on Yan Xiaobao's face, a sight that drew a subtle smile on his own lips. Whatever the mysterious golden-haired young man was thinking remained unknowable.

Finally, after hours of walking, they arrived at the Imperial Palace. The palace had numerous entrances, some designated for nobles frequenting the court, others for soldiers and guards returning after completing their duties. One specific gate led to the Royal Academy. Standing before this gate, Yan Xiaobao noticed that the young men guarding it didn't seem like ordinary guards; rather, they were likely students.

Fixing their gaze on Yan Xiaobao and Cai Jie, the two guards couldn't help but break into a cold sweat, knowing they had a job to do. "E-e-excuse me," one stammered nervously, "I-I'm sorry, but non-students are not allowed to enter the campus." Keeping his head lowered and eyes fixed on his feet, the guard's heart raced with fear, dreading that the pair might become angry and retaliate.

"I understand," Yan Xiaobao said calmly, rubbing his chin thoughtfully while looking around. "I need to speak with Rong Xing and Rong Ming." He nearly chuckled when he saw the visible sigh of relief from the guard.

"Yes, sir! I'll fetch the Rong twins immediately!" the guard responded hurriedly, bolting away without even taking the time to ask who needed to speak with them. The thought of his friends' astonished faces made Yan Xiaobao smile. His demeanor left the remaining guard shifting nervously from one foot to the

other, unsure whether he should converse with the two striking men or remain silent. Ultimately, he decided to stay put and guard the gate quietly.

Yan Xiaobao couldn't wait for the reunion, and finally, after what felt like an eternity, two very familiar figures emerged from behind the guard, trailing after him with puzzled and uncertain expressions. "Listen, Zheng Jun, I know you're a guard, but could you at least tell us why you've rushed to the gate? Who is this mysterious guest?" A voice brimming with irritation echoed from inside the academy. It was a voice Yan Xiaobao would recognize anywhere. Hearing it widened his grin, and even Cai Jie's expression turned intrigued as he shifted his gaze from Yan Xiaobao to the source of the voice.