

Carefree Path of Dreams

Chapter 9: Guest

"Sizzle!"

In the middle of a clearing within Spirit Valley, a fire was lit. A whole chicken was being roasted on a spit, its golden brown skin crackling with oil. The aroma of chicken meat filled the air.

"Keke!"

By the fire, a large white ferret moved about impatiently.

"Relax! It's still early!"

Fang Yuan rotated the spit gingerly, sprinkling salt and pepper on the meat at intervals.

Ever since the deal, Fang Yuan had gradually grown accustomed to the presence of the white ferret.

After drinking the Questioning Heart Tea brewed via the Meditative Tea Ceremony, and eating a few Questioning Heart Tea leaves, the white ferret immediately lost interest in the Questioning Heart Tea tree. But the ferret also required Fang Yuan to brew tea for it daily.

In return, the ferret would bring spiritual fertiliser to Fang Yuan. Even better, the ferret would sometimes offer pheasants and rabbits that it had hunted down to Fang Yuan as tributes.

Fang Yuan was not stingy with the ferret either. He had planned to share half of his meat with the ferret after it was done roasting on the spit.

The ferret was used to ripping into its prey raw and had never eaten cooked food before. The taste of the cooked meat was complemented by the seasoning and Fang Yuan's roasting technique. Before long, cooked food became the white ferret's obsession.

These days, Fang Yuan would open his door every morning to find that the ferret had lain wild game on his doorstep. He would never be in want for fresh meat again.

"Come on! The meat is ready!"

Fang Yuan tore the roasted chicken meat in half and threw it to the white ferret. The white ferret was ecstatic and in the blink of an eye, it had ripped into the meat and guzzled it down. It then licked its muzzle. It was apparent that it wanted more.

"Wow, that was fast..."

Fang Yuan was speechless. He bit into a chicken wing.

"Ahh, this tastes wonderful!"

The roasted chicken was not only aromatic, but the meat was tender and juicy. The chicken in question must have been living on pine nuts, hazelnuts and the like, for its meat had a herbal quality to it. It was no wonder that even Fang Yuan, a half-baked cook, was able to achieve such a great taste.

"You want some more?"

Fang Yuan took notice of the pleading gaze of the white ferret and threw him a piece of chicken thigh meat. The ferret received it excitedly and dug into it with great fervour.

"Don't just eat meat all the time. It's not very nutritious..."

Fang Yuan then took out the Crystal Rice and a few dishes. The white ferret could not withstand the sumptuous sight and beg for another bowl of rice. Fang Yuan was convinced that the white ferret's stomach was a bottomless pit.

Having eaten his fill, Fang Yuan crept up to the ferret, still preoccupied with its food, and traced his hand along its back.

The white ferret had the softest fur, smoother than silk of the highest quality, and Fang Yuan could not help but run his hands over its fine, velvety hair over and over again. Also, he was secretly glad that the ferret had begun to see him as a friend.

"Such a majestic and fearsome beast. If I manage to tame it, it would become a great protector of the Valley. No one would ever dare to trespass again!"

Fang Yuan had not forgotten that he had an unexpected enemy in the outside world.

"There is no other post-meal beverage better than tea..."

After finishing the last of the roast chicken, Fang Yuan smiled and went back into his hut to fetch a teapot.

The white ferret's eyes lit up immediately when it saw the teapot.

To the ferret, the roast chicken only satisfied its appetite, but the Questioning Heart Tea would heighten its senses and give it a new lease of life.

"Sizzle"

Tea, clear to the point of transparency, flowed into the teacup and gave off an amazing fragrance.

Fang Yuan cleared his sight and mind, settling into a familiar set of processes. The white ferret seemed to understand the importance of this procedure and sat cross-legged solemnly.

"Please help yourself!"

Fang Yuan offered the white ferret a cup.

Man and beast thus sat facing each other and had tea together. Both were enjoying it immensely.

"Hmm, I can sense the ferret's purity of heart. It seems as though it knows how to appreciate Master's Meditative Tea Ceremony..."

Fang Yuan was overjoyed.

This was reflective of Master Wenxin's joy at seeing Fang Yuan comprehend the teachings of the Tea Ceremony for the first time all those years ago.

"So this is what it means to pass on the torch. No wonder they say that civilisation is inherited."

Fang Yuan exhaled and unexpectedly came into mental contact with a consciousness that was not his own. He sensed ignorance and curiosity, and he turned his head only to meet the questioning eyes of the ferret.

"Wow, I can actually feel the emotions of the white ferret?"

Fang Yuan suddenly snapped out of his trance and found that he was unable to re-enter this mysterious state of mind.

"If I could hold on longer to this mental state, perhaps I might be able to communicate with you directly one day!"

Fang Yuan ruffled the white ferret's crown and sighed.

It was a pity that Fang Yuan was a long way off from mastering this supernatural skill.

"Alright let's go! We need to add some fertiliser to the tea tree!"

Having sat down and contemplated for a while, Fang Yuan stood up and clapped his hands.

"Luckily you fetched me the Spiritual fertiliser, or we would not be able to enjoy this much tea with the natural yield of the tea tree..."

Fang Yuan walked to the tea tree and undid a pouch. He then reached into it and sprinkled bits of Spiritual fertiliser onto the base of the tea tree.

The ferret did its part by loosening the soil with its claws. Man and beast had achieved a comfortable rapport with each other.

To others, this was indeed a sight to behold.

"Ferret, shall I name you?"

"Keke?"

"Yeah. I remember from my dreamscapes a legendary ferret that was very powerful. It was a magical beast from the epic Investiture of the Gods. It was said to resemble a white rat, was the size of an elephant and had wings, sharp teeth and claws. It was a ruthless beast and was a scourge to mankind. They called it the Flower Fox Ferret. Shall we call you that?"

"Keke?!"

"I'll take this as a yes, Flower Fox Ferret! Haha!"

Fang Yuan was extremely happy and he laughed heartily.

Beyond the Valley.

"Uncle Lin, does the Master that you speak of live here?"

The Zhou Siblings that Fang Yuan had met before were trekking in the forest with their house servants and Minister Lini. It was a long and gruelling trek indeed.

Zhou Wenxin, the spoilt young mistress of her noble household, was on the verge of tears. The mountain roads were winding and they seemed to never end.

"Ah Sister, you should have stayed at home and waited for my updates. There was really no need for you to come along."

Second Young Master Zhou (Zhou Erge) could not bear to see his sister suffer.

"I only wanted to do my part for Papa..."

"Hehe...my dears, we will arrive at the Valley shortly!"

Minister Lin looked as though he was in the pink of health, not breathless in the slightest. He chuckled.

"Master Wenxin was a true master. We regret that he has already passed on. However, he has left behind a disciple, who has at least inherited some of Master Wenxin's healing skills. He might not be the best physician there is, but he is pretty good..."

In truth, Minister Lin was not very confident of Fang Yuan's competence either.

However, he was aware that Master Wenxin and his disciple were both adept as botany, and given that they lived in the mountains, they must have gathered some valuable herbs and spices over the years.

Minister Lin hoped to shamelessly acquire some of these medicinal resources for the Zhou Family so that they would owe him a favour.

"Lei Yue was accepted into the Spirit Returning Sect recently. I must get into her good books!"

Minster Lin had other things on his mind as well. Considering the state of his relations with Fang Yuan, it would be extremely awkward for them to meet.

"What? Only one disciple?"

Zhou Wenxin felt her anger rising, and was immediately held back by her brother.

"Uncle Lin has our best interests at heart. Have faith in Uncle Lin. Don't be rash!"

Zhou Erge then turned to Minister Lin sheepishly.

"I apologise on my sister's behalf. Please don't hold it against her!"

"Haha...your sister is such a bright and lively young lady. You must be proud of her!"

Minster Lin laughed outwardly in response, but he was secretly relieved that his few daughters were unlike Zhou Wenxin, or he would never enjoy peace in his household.

As conversation wore on, the group finally found themselves at the entrance of the Valley.

"My dear lad!"

Minister Lin had been hardened by his life experiences and was thick-skinned as a result. His loud and clear voice was carried by the wind into the distance.

"Oh? What is Minister Lin doing here?"

Fang Yuan was clearing weeds in the Red Cornfield and was baffled when he heard the call.

"I shall go take a look. Hide, Flower Fox Ferret! Remember, don't eat any of the corn sprouts!"

The Flower Fox Ferret was a magical creature. Fang Yuan saw it as his trump card and did not intend to alert anyone to its existence.

"Keke!"

The white ferret cocked its head to one side and glanced at the Valley entrance with disdain before disappearing into a nearby garden.

Fang Yuan watched the white ferret go before tidying himself up. He then went over to the Valley entrance to greet his guests.

"Ah, Uncle Lin. What brings you here again?"

"My dear lad. Let Uncle Lin introduce you to my two companions. This is..."

Minister Lin kept a wide smile plastered on his face as he spoke, but Zhou Wenxin's voice pierced the air without warning.

"You little thief!"

"Thief?!"

Minster Lin and Zhou Erge were stunned.

"Second Brother, it's him! He's the fellow who took advantage of me!"

Zhou Wenxin's features were coloured in a violent shade of red. She was so mad that she became incoherent.

"Young lady!"

Fang Yuan frowned. He obviously recognised this difficult young woman.

And her choice of words was misleading! How had he taken advantage of her if he had not even laid a finger on her?

"What are you guys waiting for ...get him!"

Zhou Wenxin exploded.

"Yes, Missy!"

The manservants moved forward aggressively.

"Wait! This must be a misunderstanding!"

Minister Lin rushed to position himself between the potential clash and calmly reasoned.

"I watched this young man grow up. I can vouch for his character!"

"You are...the kid who peddled the Red Mountain Ginseng the other day?"

Zhou Erge had recognised Fang Yuan too.

Second Young Master Zhou had sent men to get to the bottom of things that day and had been dumbfounded when he pieced together the whole picture.

To be fair, Fang Yuan was indeed blameless.

"Hehe...it must have been a mistake..."

Seeing that Minister Lin was trying his best to defuse the tension, Zhou Erge chipped in.

"Yes yes, let's talk this over!"

He was used to tolerating his sister's obstinate behaviour, but he had to proceed with tact this time round because he needed Fang Yuan's to do him a favour.

