

## Gold Chapter 111

### Chapter 111

The family went to the carpentry shop to retrieve all of Yu Hang's clothing and other items, especially the one hundred and seventy copper coins—the money was all a symbol of the family's love and concern for Yu Hang, so they absolutely couldn't let Shopkeeper Zhang get his paws on it!

Although the now awake Yu Hang resolutely refused to go, the family still dragged him to Tongren Medicine Hall to have Doctor Sun check his condition. On the way to the doctor's, Yu Xiaocao also made the little divine stone use its spiritual power to heal her older brother, who was lying down on the donkey cart.

When Doctor Sun palpated Yu Hang's pulse again, he was astonished at the boy's recovery ability. Did everyone from the Yu Family have bodies that were different from the rest of humanity? He had diagnosed three of the members, and all of them had originally had death sentences. However, all three managed to survive beyond the odds. For example, Yu Xiaocao had been diagnosed with a weak constitution since birth and had been bedridden but was now skipping and running around like a completely different person. Yu Hai, on the other hand, had his leg completely savaged by a vicious bear, but he had managed to recover completely, except for a little limp. Then there was Yu Hang, who had gotten his internal organs damaged. If it was another person, he or she would have spat up blood and died within hours. However, he only took half a day to come out of his coma and could even talk normally!

All of these miraculous situations were only seen in the Yu Family. Was this a coincidence or did Yu Family have a secret, holy method to heal their bodies?

Luckily, Doctor Sun was an ethical man and squelched down his hesitation and curiosity. He didn't try to investigate further into the Yu Family and instead buried these thoughts deep inside his heart. The Yu Family had already experienced too much suffering so they really didn't need another problem to arise.

With Doctor Sun's permission and Yu Hang's persistence, the family rejected Third Young Master Zhou's well-intentioned offer to have Yu Hang recuperate in one of his other residences and instead brought him home in the donkey cart.

They cushioned the donkey cart with a thick layer of bedding, and Yu Hai, who was driving the cart, tried to have the cart move slower and more smoothly. However, the mountainous roads here were still a bit bumpy, so Yu Hang had to suffer a bit while traveling. Luckily, Xiaocao was there to feed Yu Hang with

some highly concentrated mystic-stone water the whole way back and also had the little divine stone protecting his injuries. Thus, Yu Hang managed to survive the journey home.

Little Shitou had asked for a day off because he was still worried about his older brother. He grumbled when he saw his brother suffering, "The only thing not good about our donkey cart is that the wheels are made out of wood and have no shock absorption. If we could get a set of rubber wheels that would be much better."

"Rubber wheels? Are you talking about the wheels with the black rubber on the outside and you can blow air into them?" Yu Xiaocao would have never thought that this world would already have rubber tires available for carts.

Little Shitou nodded furiously and continued, "In town, the horse carriage that the Zhou Family's patriarch and matriarch use has rubber wheels. When it's pulled, the carriage doesn't bump or jump at all. I heard that rubber wheels were something that our current emperor, Jianwen Emperor, had discovered when he was young.

When Jianwen Emperor was still the imperial grandson, he had built a shipyard, organized a fleet of ships, and sailed the distant seas to the southern regions. He had discovered rubber trees there and used them to manufacture rubber wheels. After experimenting for more than half a year, he was finally able to make a rubber wheel that had the right amount of flexibility to be shock absorbent. It was said that he created these rubber wheels to make it easier for him to go out and travel. Rubber possibly had other uses but no one was currently using it for anything else of importance.

Yu Xiaocao raised an eyebrow at this information. This fellow transmigrator was probably an engineer in his past life as he had not only built ships but also invented rubber wheels. If Jianwen Emperor hadn't transmigrated into the imperial family, then he likely would have become a person primed to become the Chancellor of the Ministry of Works.

The sky had turned completely dark by the time they got back to Dongshan Village as they had to take multiple breaks on the road. In the distance, they could see a slim and stooped over figure at the village entrance pacing anxiously to and fro. Only when they got closer were they finally able to recognize the person as Xiaocao's grandfather, Old Yu.

"How's Xiaosha's condition and injuries? Why didn't you guys get back until now?" Old Yu wasn't faking his concern over his grandson. When he heard the news, his first reaction was to ask for some money

from his wife. As Yu Hai's father, he knew what kind of circumstances his son's family was under. His grandson's injuries were not light, so they likely needed a lot of money to heal him.

But Madam Zhang was a pixiu [1]. Any money that came into her purse was hers alone. Even if the Heavenly Emperor himself came over, he wouldn't be able to pry even half a copper coin from her paws. Old Yu naturally was unable to get any money, so he stayed at home, too ashamed to go into town, and waited in agony.

When he saw Yu Hang's extreme pallor and closed eyes, Old Yu staggered a bit as he thought his eldest grandson had encountered a disaster.

Although Dashan had changed his surname to Yu after Madam Zhang had married again, Heizi still didn't have the Yu Family's blood flowing through him. In actuality, Yu Hang was the true eldest grandson of the Yu Family. After Yu Hang was born, despite Madam Zhang watching them like a hawk, Old Yu was always able to come up with a method to add some extra food for his eldest grandson.

Other than going out to sea or mending fishing nets, Old Yu mostly played with his eldest grandson. As for the rest of his grandchildren, he didn't place as much importance on them as he did on Yu Hang. When he saw his grandson with tightly closed eyes and no movement, tears immediately came to Old Yu's eyes.

"Father, Xiaosha's okay now. Don't feel sad, okay!" Yu Hai gently tucked the blankets around his son as he comforted his father.

Yu Xiaocao didn't have a lot of ill will towards this grandfather of hers, so she supported his arm and quietly said, "Grandfather, my older brother has truly encountered a calamitous event this time. There's not a single part of his body that's not injured. Three of his ribs were broken and his internal organs were severely damaged. Even Doctor Sun at Tongren Medicine Hall couldn't do much for him. Fortunately, my older brother was lucky and was able to keep his life with great difficulty. Grandfather, at that time we weren't in horrible circumstances, so how could we send my brother to that carpentry shop to become an apprentice without even asking about the situation there?"

When Old Yu heard that, he blamed himself continuously, "I'm such a useless grandfather. At that time, I thought that having Xiaosha learn a trade wasn't a bad thing and was convinced by Madam Zhang and Madam Li's persuasions, so I agreed. Who knew that the Zhang Ji Carpentry Shop was a den full of tigers and wolves, ah! My poor eldest grandson almost..."

Yu Hai knew that his daughter was deliberately blackening the reputation of the old hag, Madam Zhang. However, when he saw how repentant and guilty his father looked, his heart immediately softened, "Gossip travels quickly in the village, let's go home and then talk!"

Old Yu's hand trembled as he fished out a string of copper coins and shoved them into his son's hands. His voice was choked with emotion as he said, "I won't go with you guys back to the old residence to avoid that old woman from coming over and making a disturbance again. Father is useless and doesn't have much. Take this money and use it to buy some chicken eggs to nourish Xiaosha's body."

Yu Hai was astonished when he found out his father had also saved up a secret purse. However, he knew that his father's money didn't come to him easily, so how could he take it? The father and son pushed the money back and forth for a bit, but, in the end, Yu Hai was no match for the old man's persistence and finally took the money that was a symbol of a grandfather's good intentions.

A burst of sorrow bloomed within Yu Hai's heart as he watched his father, who had become older with every passing day, walk away. Yu Xiaocao was afraid that her father would become softhearted again and hurriedly pulled on his hand and said, "Father, when our situation at home is better, we should bring Grandfather over and treat him well to show our filial piety! Let's remember Grandfather's good intentions from today! Let's go home now, Older Brother's body is weak and shouldn't be subject to the chilly air."

When the old residence got fixed, they only fixed the major parts of the central building and the two side rooms next to it. Ordinarily, Yu Hai and his wife lived in the central building and the children lived in the rooms on the side. In order to make it easier to take care of their seriously injured son, Yu Hai lifted his son onto their own kang bed to sleep on.

When Yu Hang was placed on the kang bed, he opened up his faintly bruised eyes and, in the weak light, could see that he was in a room that was much more spacious and bright than their old West room at the new residence. He revealed a smile that came from his heart and it brightened up his wasted and pallid face—he was finally home! In the future, he would never have to live feeling scared and on the edge again, afraid that at any time someone would hit him. He looked at the concerned expressions on his parents' and siblings' faces and slipped quickly into sleep again. In the midst of his heart, four words appeared before him—returning home feels good!

"Let's allow Older Brother to sleep for a bit. I'm going to simmer some congee. Older Brother has become so thin that he doesn't even look human anymore, we need to let him carefully nourish his body

for a bit!" Yu Xiaolain wiped away the tears at the corners of her eyes. Her heart was filled with worry, and she wholeheartedly wished she could magically restore her brother's body back to a healthy weight.

Yu Xiaocao urged her mother, whose face was even more pale than her older brother's face, to lay down and rest a bit. She went out of the room with Xiaolian to make dinner together. Yu Hai was in the courtyard cleaning and preparing the pig head and offal they had bought earlier. Tonight, they still had to braise these cuts of meat for the next day.

At the evening meal, the pig head and intestines were already stewing on the stove as the whole family surrounded the kang bed. Madam Liu carefully and gently fed her eldest son some congee. When she saw her son eating the food eagerly, tears began to brim again in her eyes.

"Mother, I'm okay now. Please don't worry anymore!" Yu Hang sensibly lifted up his weak arms and helped Madam Liu to wipe the tears from the corners of her eyes.

Yu Xiaocao also comforted their mother, "Mother, they always say that 'after escaping a calamity, fortune will abound'. Older Brother will definitely have a bright and good future now! Stop crying. If you continue to cry, then our whole kang bed will soon be underwater!"

Madam Liu didn't know whether she should laugh or cry as she gently slapped her daughter's arm and said, "You always say the darndest things! Cao'er is right though. Good days are just ahead of us! In the future, we should never divide our family apart again!"

"Mother! Judging from what you just said, in the future, Xiaolian and I will have to find husbands who will live us, ah!" Yu Xiaocao wanted to lighten up the atmosphere for her family, so she tried hard to amuse everyone.

Xiaolian, who had already turned nine, blushed fiercely after hearing her sister's words. She spat at her and then quickly cleaned up the bowls and chopsticks, and fled into the kitchen to hide.

Madam Liu pinched her daughter, who had slowly been filling out, on the cheek and rebuked her, "You're a girl, so you should be more gentle and refined. Why are you saying things like having a husband live with us? If word of this came out, then will you two have any reputations left here? In the future, will there be a mother-in-law who would want you two?"

No matter what the time period, everyone discriminated against the men who lived with their wives' families. Who would be happy to have a perfectly good son marry a woman and live with her family as if he was a layabout?

Xiaocao finally remembered that she was living in a time period where girls couldn't just say whatever they wanted, especially when it came in regards to marriage. The people here were much more conservative than those living in modern times.

Yu Hai helped his son wipe his face and wash his hands and feet. He gently smiled and placated Madam Liu, "Cao'er is still young and spent seven to eight years of her life lying on the bed indoors. What does she know right now? In the future, you just need to teach her a little more. Don't yell at the child anymore!"

Xiaocao quickly placed an innocent look at her face, as if she didn't know what she had said wrong. She also pouted slightly as if she was feeling wronged.

The rest of the night passed quickly. The next morning, Xiaolian brought Little Shitou along on the donkey cart to sell braised food at the docks. After eating breakfast and chatting a bit with her older brother, she spoke to her parents, "I heard Doctor Sun say that eating snakehead fish can nourish the body, enrich the blood, dispel blood stasis, and improve the healing of the body. I also heard Brother Han say that there is apparently some snakehead fish living in the river just south of the mountain. I want to go over there and see if it's true!"

"I'll go with you!" To get to the southern part of the mountain required traversing through some mountain thickets and climbing a mountain. In the middle, there was even a mass grave to go around. Yu Hai naturally didn't feel that it was safe for his beloved young daughter to go by herself. He put down the fish bait and net from his hands and decided not to catch fish in the pond behind their house anymore.

## Chapter 112

When Madam Liu heard they were going to the south side of the mountain, she immediately became worried, "Stop right there! In the future, none of you are allowed to go into the mountains!"

Ever since Yu Hai had his accident, Madam Liu had no longer regarded the mountain as an area people should go to! In the past, she had also heard the stories about vicious and ferocious creatures living deep in the mountains. However, after living with the Yu Family for more than ten years, Yu Hai had never encountered any of the vicious beasts when he was in the mountain. In fact, he rarely even saw a wild boar, let alone tigers, wolves or other dangerous animals.

But after Yu Hai was ravaged by the bear, Madam Liu felt that the mountain and its thickets were truly a dangerous area. She had almost lost her husband once, so it was natural that she had lingering fears, right? Thus, whenever someone said they wanted to go in the mountain, she had to voice her fear and disapproval!

When Xiaocao saw that her mother's expression had changed significantly, she quickly tried to placate her, "Mother! I'm not going into the mountain!! I'm just going on the trail at the foot of the mountain to get to the south side. Although it's a longer detour, it's not going to be dangerous!"

"You're really not going into the mountain?" After seeing Xiaocao nod her head furiously, Madam Liu finally let out a sigh and said, "As long as you're not going into the mountain, it's fine. Yesterday we caught a lot of fish in the net, so we have more than enough to make pickled fish this afternoon. Just let your father accompany you and make sure to bring more dry rations along. If you're going around the foot of the mountains, I'm afraid you won't get back before it's dark!"

Yu Hang, who was lying on the bed recuperating, overheard their conversation. He struggled to sit up, but a sharp twinge shot through his chest and he grimaced in pain. When Xiaocao saw this, she hastily ran over to support him up. After propping him up using bedding behind his back to allow him to recline slightly, she said, "Older Brother, stop moving around. If there's anything you need, call Mother and she can help you! The most important thing for you to do right now is to let your body heal. Stop thinking about random stuff!"

"Younger Sister, Doctor Sun told me that I'm recovering quickly. There's really no difference if I get to eat snakehead fish or not! We're too far from the southern part of the mountain, so don't bother going there! Don't we already have fish at home? Just use what we have to make a stew and it'll still be very good!" Yu Hang didn't want his family members to run ragged for his sake, so he did his best to persuade them from going.

"Older Brother, stop being such a worrywart! Here, drink some water and take a nap. Sleeping helps the body rest and recover a lot!" Whenever Yu Xiaocao made up her mind to do anything, she could not be persuaded otherwise. There was no way that Yu Hang's attempt would sway her mind at all. She poured him a large cup of highly concentrated mystic-stone essence infused water and fed it to him.

The little divine stone had told her that a person wouldn't get into trouble if they drank too much mystic-stone water. The only side effect was that it would make them sleep for a bit. See here, she even used its side effects as a make-shift sleeping pill!

When the little divine stone found out they were going to the southern side of the mountain, it immediately became excited. It had already finished exploring the West Mountain and it hadn't had a chance to explore any farther areas.

With a 'whoosh', it leapt onto Xiaocao's shoulders and enthusiastically rubbed its golden head against Xiaocao's cheek, [Bring me along, I want to go there and play too!]

Yu Hang was perplexed at the sight of the tiny, golden kitten. Although its size made it seem like it had just recently been born, its agile and strong movements implied otherwise. "Ehhh? It's quite rare to see a kitten that's so pretty, where did you get it from?"

"Your younger sister found it in the thickets behind us. It's quite clever, so we decided to raise and have it keep Tiny company!" Madam Liu was cleaning up the room as she watched Xiaocao and her husband's antics with amusement.

Yu Xiaocao was in the middle of trying to convince her father to let her go to the southern side of the mountain on her own. There was a common saying, 'full recovery from a serious injury takes a hundred days'. Even though the little divine stone strengthened and healed her father's leg every day, he had still suffered from a violent injury. To get to the south side of the mountain, they needed to walk a very long distance. She really wasn't sure if her father could do it right now!

But how could Yu Hai, who loved his daughter to death, feel okay in letting his daughter, who was only eight to nine years old, go by herself?

Just as the two of them were mutually stuck in a deadlock, someone knocked on their main gate. Zhao Han stepped in with a hunting knife in one hand and his hunting bow and arrows slung over his back. "Good morning, Uncle Yu! Xiaocao, you didn't go to the docks today to sell braised food, eh!"

When Yu Xiaocao saw the impressive-looking and decked out Zhao Han, her eyes lit up. She ran over to pull at his hand and spoke to her father, "Father, didn't you say you don't feel comfortable letting me go by myself? Then let Brother Han go with me then! Doctor Sun had said that you need to let your leg heal for a little longer, ah!"



Zhao Han grinned when he heard Xiaocao explain what was going on, "What a coincidence! The prefectural magistrate's son is getting married, and he wanted to reserve a pair of wild geese. At the southern side of the mountain is a pond filled with reeds. There should be some wild geese migrating from the north resting there. Since Xiaocao also needs to go to the southern side of the mountain, it works perfectly since it's on the way. Uncle Yu, I'll accompany Xiaocao, so don't worry!"

With the Zhao Han's help, Xiaocao was finally able to convince her father to stay at home after another bout of wheedling. Before they left, Yu Hai warned them continuously to be cautious. In the end, Madam Liu had to intervene, "Husband, if Xiaocao doesn't leave now because of you, she won't be able to come home today!" Only then did Yu Hai reluctantly let his daughter leave.

After she had traveled out of sight from her father, Xiaocao let out a long sigh. When she saw the amusement glimmering in Zhao Han's eyes, she said with a bit of embarrassment, "Having an overprotective father is sometimes quite inconvenient!"

Zhao Han chuckled, "Uncle Yu is just concerned about you. I never would have expected that a big, hulking man like Uncle Yu would be so attentive and worried about his children!"

Yu Xiaocao merely shrugged and didn't say anything more. She followed Zhao Han from behind as they traveled. They arrived at the foot of the West Mountain and there were a bunch of burial mounds messily interspersed in the area. Weeds grew in abundance and grave markers dotted the entire landscape. From time to time, the sounds of feral dogs yelping and crying could be heard.

Yu Xiaocao shortened her stride and didn't dare to glance sideways. She was afraid she might see something inauspicious. Zhao Han had looked back at her without paying much attention to his surroundings and noticed the tight expression on her face. He frowned, thinking that there might be something incredibly dangerous around them, and then realized that Xiaocao was only an eight to nine year old little girl. Normally, her actions and words were too similar to an adult's, so it was very easy for other people to forget her actual age.

Zhao Han slowed down a few steps to allow Xiaocao to catch up until they were walking side-by-side. The top of Xiaocao's head didn't even reach his armpits, which once again served as a reminder to him that the little girl next to him was young and inexperienced.

"Don't be scared. Although the area we're walking through is somewhat isolated and desolate, there won't be anything like an undead monster appearing in the wilderness, if that's what you're worried about. If you're scared, you can hold onto the corner of my jacket!" Zhao Han had been taught from

childhood that a distance between sexes should be kept at age seven and older, so he didn't feel comfortable holding Xiaocao's hand. Thus, he could only suggest this solution.

Xiaocao inwardly rolled her eyes, 'Hold onto the corner of your jacket? Do you think I'm a three year old child, ah?! Let me set things straight, inside, I'm almost thirty years old, an adult. Do you really think I'm worse than you, a twelve to thirteen year old preteen?' In order to prove that she wasn't afraid, she deliberately lengthened her strides and took large steps.

Zhao Han absentmindedly kept up with her and stayed alert to their surroundings in order to keep the tiny girl next to him shielded underneath his wings.

Luckily, the messy graveyard didn't take up a large area, so the two of them managed to quickly go past it and get to the foot of the mountains.

"How about we walk on the large road at the foot of the mountains?" If they traversed across this mountain range, which wasn't considered very tall, they would be able to get to their destination very quickly. On the other hand, if they traveled on the road winding around the foot of the mountain ranges, it would take them at least twice as long. Had Zhao Han been traveling on his own, he definitely would have picked going over the mountain range. However, when he thought about Xiaocao's age and body constitution, he hesitated.

Yu Xiaocao had long thrown her mother's warnings out of her head. She raised her head to look at the mountain range in front of her and thought it wasn't very high. In addition, she could clearly see the mountain trail squiggling through the peaks, which showed that this road was often used by people. She raised her voice and announced grandly, "Let's go! Up the mountains!!"

After she said that, she took the lead and dived into the forest thicket. Zhao Han helplessly followed behind her as he tightly held onto the hunting knife in his hand.

Yu Xiaocao walked as she carefully observed the environment on both sides of the trail. From time to time, she would scuttle into the underbrush and use the rope she brought to set some traps in areas where small animals liked to run. Zhao suddenly interjected after seeing the rope traps in Xiaocao's hands, "Every time I set traps with you, the odds of success increase by a lot, why is this so?"

In the past, when he set traps on his own, he would consider it to be a good day when three out of the ten traps caught prey. However, whenever he set traps with Xiaocao, the odds would increase to around five to six successes per trap. Sometimes, it was even higher! It really made him feel puzzled!

Xiaocao's hands paused for a brief moment before she regained her composure. After all, she had lived for almost thirty years in her past life and knew how to bluff convincingly. She glanced at Zhao Han as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened, and cheerfully said, "Well that's obvious, it's because my moral character is good, ah!!"

Did having a good moral character....really have anything to do with setting traps? Zhao Han started to think that the question he asked was a bit childish. Maybe it was really all just a coincidence!

After she used up all of the rope traps she brought from home, the road they walked on gradually became more precipitous. In some areas, she even had to use both her hands and feet to climb over. Zhao Han was in the front opening the way. From time to time, he would hold his scabbard and let Xiaocao drag on it as she climbed. This way she could save some energy.

The little divine stone had transformed into its golden kitten form and took the lead, running ahead. Occasionally, it would dart into some dense undergrowth or climb onto some branches to swing on or even leap over a boulder...suddenly, it acted as if someone had pressed down on it to keep it still. Its bright eyes stared at a nearby cliff and its nose lightly twitched. Unaware, its tail started to swish back and forth.

"What's wrong, Little Glutinous Dumpling? Did you find something?" Xiaocao had spent more than a half year in constant contact with the little divine stone, and, while she didn't know its every movement like the back of her own hand, she at least had an inkling on how to interpret its body language. After noticing the look of concentration on its face, she knew that there was something to be found.

[Spiritual energy, really dense spiritual energy! Something is giving off a stronger spiritual energy than the lingzhi mushroom or ginseng at Tongren Medicine Hall!! There must be a true treasure in front of us!] The golden kitten's ears quivered, and it scrambled toward the area with the cliff.

"Little Glutinous Dumpling, wait for me!!" Xiaocao had a decent amount of confidence in the little divine stone's sensing abilities. Something that could make it this excited and run so quickly was definitely out of the ordinary. Yu Xiaocao pushed aside the weeds that had reached half a person's height and struggled to follow from behind.

"Be careful!!" Zhao Han swiftly threw out his hand and grabbed Xiaocao's arm just in time to save her from falling into a deep ditch that was hidden in the underbrush. He dragged her back up and said, "Make sure to look where you're going! Be careful not to fall down!"

"Thank you, Brother Han! Little Glutinous Dumpling ran over there and I need to find it and bring it back!!" After receiving a fright, she took Zhao Han's help to surmount that deep ditch and cautiously traversed through the thick weeds.

Zhao Han was in the front, opening up a path. He kept finding ditches left and right, and made sure to warn her. At last, he finally said out of worry, "How about you wait here and I go catch the cat for you? Is that okay?"

Yu Xiaocao slightly frowned and inwardly thought, 'Do you think the little divine stone is a real cat that you can catch just because you want to, ah?'

"Little Glutinous Dumpling is afraid of strangers, so I'm afraid if it sees you, it'll run away even farther! I can see up ahead that Little Glutinous Dumpling has stopped, so let me look instead!" In front of the cliff, she could see the golden kitten glittering in the sunlight under a bit of lush green undergrowth. From afar, the scene resembled a golden diamond surrounded by precious jade.

It took a bit of time for the two people to pass through the thick weeds. When they got to the side of the cliff, they noticed that the little kitten was using its claws to dig at some type of vegetation buried in the ground. It kind of looked like a bustling little groundhog.

#### Chapter 113 - King of Ginseng

Zhao Han watched as the little golden kitten dug at the plant furiously. The top of plant grew a large set of compound leaves and around it were smaller leaves that were all oval shaped. He thought it seemed somewhat familiar and hesitated before he said, "Xiaocao, is your cat a spiritual creature? Looks like it somehow recognizes ginseng?"

"Ginseng? Are you saying that Little Glutinous Dumpling is digging up ginseng?" Judging from the little divine stone's obvious excitement, Xiaocao had a premonition that this stalk of ginseng was definitely out of the ordinary. It was probably older than a hundred years! Hundred year old ginseng...they hit the jackpot!!

Xiaocao scuttled a few steps closer and took out a small trowel from the basket on her back. She carefully helped the little golden kitten to excavate the ginseng. Before long, a stalk of ginseng that was shaped like a human and was about thirty to forty centimeters long came out of the ground.

Zhao Han's voice wavered in emotion, "This ginseng must be at least a hundred years old! Legend says that after cultivating for a hundred years, a ginseng starts to have a human shape. Five hundred years, it'll have a face, and if it goes past a thousand years, it'll become sentient! This ginseng is already human shaped and we can faintly see that it has a face——Xiaocao, this ginseng you dug up can be rated as the king of ginseng!"

The little golden kitten flung the dirt off its claws and then hopped into Xiaocao's hands. It wrapped its paws around the ginseng and had a look of infatuation on its face, [Such a dense concentration of spiritual energy, ah! Let me absorb as much as I can!]

"Be careful" Zhao Han quickly plucked the kitten out and into his own hands. He didn't let the cat go no matter how hard it struggled, "This is a priceless treasure, don't let your cat damage it!"

Xiaocao grinned in amusement when she saw the little divine stone, who had been caught by Zhao Han, baring its fangs at the youth in an attempt to threaten him. She gave it a placating look and spoke to it through her mind, [Don't be impatient, ah, the ginseng won't run away. When we get home we'll discuss it!]

[This stinky human. If I didn't take into account that he has helped you before, I would have torn him to pieces by now!] The little divine stone bared its fangs and claws, but in the eyes of outside observers, it just looked like false front.

Zhao Han felt that the little animal was quite adorable and used his hand to rub its furry head. Due to a moment of carelessness, the little kitten, whose fur was being messed up, scratched him and left two lines of red on his hand.

"Little Glutinous Dumpling, you're not allowed to scratch people!" Xiaocao rushed over and rescued the little golden cat from Zhao Han's hands.

After getting its independence back, the little divine stone agilely flipped over and jumped onto Xiaocao's shoulder. All of its fur was raised up as it angrily howled a couple of times at Zhao Han. To

Zhao Han's ears, its snarls sounded only like a tiny kitten, barely weaned from its mother's milk, throwing a spoiled temper tantrum.

Yu Xiaocao used some long grass to wrap the ginseng and secretly added a few drops of mystic-stone water to help it stay fresh. This was a treasure and was worth a lot of money! She needed to keep it carefully preserved!

Distances could be hard to judge. When she was looking at the mountain from afar, it didn't seem very tall. However, as she was climbing it, it was a different story. Luckily, Yu Xiaocao had over half a year's worth of nourishment with the mystic-stone water, so her body was much stronger than before. In addition, she also had Zhao Han helping her from time to time, so the two of them were able to easily cross through the mountain in a short amount of time.

“Wow! Is this the pond full of reeds that you were talking about?” Yu Xiaocao was mesmerized by the beautiful scene in front of her.

The tall and lofty mountain had hid a tranquil, dark green lake that delighted the eye. Reeds grew on the shoreline and surrounded the lake completely. Sunlight scattered through the reeds and reflected off the water that was so still that the reflection of the plants seemed to be a perfect inverted image.

Clouds of water vapor rose from the surface of the lake and embraced the whole area in a misty wonder. Not far from the water was a tree that she couldn't identify. The branches of tree stretched out widely, and its trunk was tall and straight. The thick, misty fog that enveloped the area created a feeling that they were in a heavenly paradise.

In winter, the reeds lay dormant. The feathery tips of the plants gently swayed in the wind, which looked like the plumage of a red-crowned crane dancing in midair. Towards the bottom of the reeds, a few tender, verdant shoots peaked out of the earth and vigorously reached up towards the sky. Multitudes of unnamed birds were in the surrounding area. They sang, jumped around on branches, played, and occasionally tilted their heads to size up these two unexpected guests...

Zhao Han advanced a step and stayed alongside Xiaocao. He gazed into the distance, taking in the tranquil serenity of this utopian land, and said, “Indeed! This field of reeds is bracketed by mountains on three sides, and they shield this area from the biting cold northern winds. Even in the wintry and freezing twelfth month, this area is still as warm as spring. Many of the migratory birds who return earlier will spend some time in this place in early spring to rest.

“Look! There's some wild ducks!! We should search this area and see if we can find any wild duck eggs!” Yu Xiaocao became instantly excited and dove into the reeds.

Zhao Han looked in the direction that Xiaocao was pointing and frowned deeply. He quickly caught up to Xiaocao in about three steps and looked left and right to protect her. He stifled a laugh and said, “Xiaocao, do you know what wild geese look like?”

“Wild geese? Of course I've seen them, but I've only see them when they're flying in the sky. They're up so high, so I can't really tell what exactly they look like! Brother Han, do you know how to identify wild geese? If you don't, how are we supposed to catch some, ah!!” Yu Xiaocao chattered on as she swept her gaze through the underbrush.

Giggles escaped from Zhao Han as Xiaocao looked at him oddly. He pointed towards the 'wild ducks' that she had identified earlier and grinned widely, “Those are wild geese! Wild ducks look very similar to domestic ducks. Male ducks have green plumage on their heads, which is why they're called mallard ducks. Wild geese, on the other hand, have brown outer feathers, white bellies, flat mouths, short legs, and webbed feet. Usually a flock will live near the water. When they fly, they like to arrange themselves into...”

Yu Xiaocao peeked in-between the reeds and carefully observed the wild geese. She pouted, “Ah what! I think they look quite like ducks, ah!! Alright, since you say they're wild geese, then they're wild geese! If we catch the wrong animal, and the prefectural magistrate's son beats you out of fury, then don't blame me...”

When Zhao Han heard her prattling on and on, he laughed and shook his head. He retrieved his unique long bow from his back and placed an arrow on the string. He then took aim at the closest wild goose...

“Wait just a moment, wait!” Yu Xiaocao hurriedly used her hand to push down his bow and frowned, “For his wedding feast, didn't the prefectural magistrate's son want the wild goose to be alive? What if you're not careful and kill it with your arrow? Wouldn't that ruin all of your hard work?”

“Wild geese are very cautious, and most people are unable to approach them closely. They also spend a lot of time on the water, so if I don't use a bow and arrow, how else am I supposed to catch them? I'm a good archer, so as long as I hit the goose's wings, it won't be able to fly off!” Zhao Han confidently raised his bow and arrow again.

Yu Xiaocao still disagreed with his idea, "An injured wild goose won't look good either at the banquet! Give me a second to think of an idea!"

Wild geese lived together in a large flock and were very wary, so they were quite hard to catch. Thus, most people used a swan to substitute for the goose during their wedding rites.

The prefectural magistrate son's fiancée was the youngest daughter of the mayor of the capital. Because her father had an important and high position in the capital, the prefectural magistrate naturally wanted to make sure the wedding rites went off perfectly in order to prevent the in-laws from looking down on them. Thus, even though the date of the wedding was more than half a year away, they had started looking all over the place for some live geese.

However, it was the beginning of spring right now, and most of the migrating geese flocks hadn't flown back north yet. If this bed of reeds didn't have a heavenly terrain, it'd be hard to find some geese feathers, let alone some live geese!

Yu Xiaocao thought deeply for a short period of time and then suddenly clapped her hands together, "I have an idea, but I'm not sure if it'll work or not!"

"What's your idea? Let me hear about it." Zhao Han was in the middle of pondering whether he could go into the water and get close to the flock of geese when he absentmindedly replied.

Yu Xiaocao said, "We can bend my sewing needle into a large fish hook and then place some food that the wild geese like to eat on it. When the goose eats the bait, then we can pull the string and reel the goose on. As long as the fish hook is able to grab onto the goose's neck, it won't be able to run away!"

Zhao Han thought for a bit and then decided there weren't any other options for them, so he might as well give it a try!

Xiaocao heated up her sewing needle until it turned red and used an iron tool to strike it until it formed a hook shape. While she was doing that, Zhao Han was busy catching some fish and shrimp that the geese liked to eat. When he was done, he gave the bait to Xiaocao.



After finishing her simple fish hook, Yu Xiaocao secretly sprinkled some mystic-stone water onto the bait and then had Zhao Han fling the hook with bait towards the flock of wild geese.

The bait landed about three to four meters from the edge of the group of geese. The wild goose in charge of keeping watch squawked a few times. The flock immediately scattered in all directions and some of them even flew into the sky.

Zhao Han beat his hand out of a bit of annoyance as he thought they had failed on the first try. Just as he was about to pull the hook in, Xiaocao stopped him, "Wait a little bit! Catching wild geese is the same as catching fish. There's only one true method, and that's you need to 'wait'! Let's wait and see!"

When he saw how confident Xiaocao was, Zhao Han tampered down his temper and crouched down into the reed bed. He attentively observed the movements of the geese flock.

When the group of geese that scattered realized that there wasn't any danger, they quickly returned. The bait had a large concentration of spiritual energy, and it quickly attracted the attention of a few of the animals that were closer. A large and powerful male goose fanned its wings as it swiftly came towards the bait. It swooped down its neck and snatched the hook in its beak as it proudly looked back at the rest of its competitors.

When some of the wild geese saw that the food had already been taken, they decided not to fight for it. Others, on the other hand, were not to be outdone and flung themselves at the winner, stretching out their necks in an attempt to steal the food from the winner's mouth.

The victor nimbly dodged the losers' attacks and swiftly swam away. It gently dropped the hook with the food on it next to its female companion and used its neck to gently rub the female's body. The male goose also didn't forget to look back warningly at the other geese that were coming over.

The female goose showed her gratitude to her mate before she gracefully dipped her head and swallowed the hook that smelled so tantalizing...

"I almost can't bear to catch them!" She had heard that wild geese lived together only in pairs, which was why flocks only had even numbers of geese, and that when one of the partners died, its companion would have a great desire to commit suicide. Seeing the scene in front of her, compassion rose inside Xiaocao's heart.

Zhao Han also felt touched at the scene and softly said, "Don't worry, after the banquet, these geese will be let go alive."

After he finished talking, he silently reeled in the fishing line. The female goose, who had swallowed the bait, was gradually being pulled over. Her companion also followed behind her and acted like a faithful knight to his princess.

"Let me pull the fishing line, and you can hold onto the fishing net I brought along. When the male goose gets closer, use the net to catch him." Yu Xiaocao explained as she secretly placed another bit of bait that had been doctored with the mystic-stone water in the nearby water around them.

The male goose apparently could sense the spiritual energy that the bait was emitting and swiftly swam closer to them. In a flash, it had entered Zhao Han's hunting radius. With Zhao Han's excellent hunting skills, the male goose naturally would have a hard time escaping. Furthermore, with the female goose also struggling, the two of them were caught like turtles in a jar.

Yu Xiaocao braved the risk of being pecked by the goose and carefully retrieved the fish hook from the female goose's mouth. She was afraid the goose had injured its throat so she stealthily fed it a few mouthfuls of mystic-stone water.

Zhao Han thought the whole situation was very weird. Originally, the female goose had been struggling mightily but when it came into Xiaocao's hands it was more docile than a domesticated duck. It lay motionless in the little girl's hands. As for the male goose in his hands, it was still fighting violently, and his hands had already been pecked furiously by the animal several times. It hurt quite a lot!

#### Chapter 114

Yu Xiaocao couldn't just stand by idly and watch the youth suffer. She lifted the female goose in her hands and walked over. When the male goose saw that the female goose had been caught, it struggled even more mightily. With Zhao Han's bright eyes watching her, Yu Xiaocao couldn't easily use her cheat item, mystic-stone water, to fix the situation, so she had to use the bait that was previously soaked in the water instead. She fed the male goose with it and only then did both geese settle down.

They tied up the geese's feet and then placed the two animals into a basket that Zhao Han had carried over. After covering the basket with a lid, they had completed their mission of the day.

As for catching a snakehead fish, it also took a bit of time even though she had her special fish bait. There was no way around it. Xiaocao's unique fish bait was too popular with everyone. All of the fish fought to eat the bait, and they ended up catching five to six catties worth of carp. The smallest fish was about the size of the palm of one's hand, while the largest was around the size of a grass carp. Without much effort, Xiaocao's fish basket soon filled up very quickly.

Luckily, by the time they almost ran out of bait, they managed to catch a big snakehead fish that weighed around two to three catties. As for the remaining fish bait, Xiaocao didn't plan on bringing it home and used the rest to catch more fish. In the end, she had caught too many fish and needed to have Zhao Han string them up on a rope and help her bring them home.

This time, they not only caught three snakehead fish but they also caught a lot of other fish that made the trip worth it. Xiaocao released the smaller fish back into the lake, but she naturally took the larger ones back home as her 'spoils from war'!

On the way home, Zhao Han carried the majority of their gains, and Yu Xiaocao only had to carry the couple of snakehead fish and the ginseng. Despite having a lighter load, Xiaocao ended up expending a lot of energy to just barely cross that mountain range that looked deceptively easy. By the time they got to the area where they had set their traps, the cotton lining of Xiaocao's jacket was already soaked with her sweat.

"Oh my gosh, I am exhausted!" Xiaocao plopped heavily down on a rock at the side of the road and used the back of her hand to wipe the beads of sweat off her forehead. A trail of gray dirt was left on her face afterwards.

Zhao Han looked at Yu Xiaocao, who looked like a cute, dirty little kitten, and grinned, "Sit down and rest here, I'm going to go to the traps and take a look."

Despite carrying two fat and large geese in his bamboo basket and having both of his hands holding strings of fish, Zhao Han wasn't even winded after crossing over the mountain range. Xiaocao watched him walk with pure envy, 'Ah, he's definitely someone who practices martial arts. The difference between us is just too big!'

Zhao Han placed the bamboo basket and the strings of fish on the ground next to Xiaocao and warned her repeatedly, "Be careful. Even though there shouldn't be any ferocious animals in this area, sometimes wild boars or dogs can appear. If anything happens, scream loudly for me!"

"I have a very good moral character, so my luck shouldn't be that bad, right?" Xiaocao carelessly replied as she stroked the male goose's sleek feathers on his back.

Zhao Han was a little bit confused when he heard Xiaocao's reply. What did a person's moral character have anything to do with coming across a wild boar or another animal? And what was this 'pointy [1]' thing that she mentioned? However, he didn't try to clarify. He was already used to Xiaocao saying random things from time to time that didn't quite make sense.

After making sure their surroundings were safe again, Zhao Han went into the shrubbery that was about half a man's height. He only came back, fully loaded with game, after all of the sweat on Xiaocao had dried up.

She had set a total of ten traps earlier, and, to avoid rousing Zhao Han's suspicions, she only sprinkled mystic-stone water around five to six of them. Naturally, all of the traps she used mystic-stone water on had game. Because she only used smaller traps this time around, the animals she caught were all on the smaller side, like hares, pheasants, and badgers. One of the hares she caught was actually pregnant too!

Springtime was the season for animals to mate and reproduce. Thus, experienced hunters usually didn't choose to hunt in this season. One of the reasons was that the animals raising their children were much more fierce and violent. The more important reason was that there was no reason to kill the goose that laid the golden eggs; that is, they needed to give the animals on the mountain time to multiply and thrive.

"What should we do with this wild hare? Let it go?" Hunters who went out into the woods during the springtime usually would let the pregnant creatures go. Thus, when Zhao Han saw the pregnant female hare hopping and skipping around, he couldn't help but ask what Xiaocao's plan was.

Yu Xiaocao carefully picked up the obviously pregnant hare and used her right hand, which had the multi-colored stone on it, to gently stroke the hare's soft and silky fur.

"Be careful! Wild hares can also bite people when they get scared!" Zhao Han couldn't help but remind her. One time when he was picking up a pregnant hare, the creature fought him vigorously and bit him hard. The resulting wound wasn't serious but it bled for a bit and hurt!

Contrary to his expectations, the hare, which had been struggling frantically, calmed down and stayed in Xiaocao's hands as if it was a kitten that had just eaten its fill. It stopped moving and even closed its eyes, as if it really enjoyed Xiaocao's pets.

"Xiaocao, are you sure you're not the legendary forest spirit or something like that? How come all of the wild animals in these mountains seem to especially like you?!" Zhao Han was astounded at the change in the hare and couldn't help but make a little joke.

There was a reason why he mentioned this. Last year, she had caught a small roe deer in her trap. When the creature saw her, it treated her as if she was its mother, and followed her blindly home. Inside the secret valley, there were a bunch of tiny white fish that were very hard to catch, but Xiaocao was able to catch a whole jar full of them without much effort. And then there was what happened today at the lake. When they were catching the geese, there were a lot of shrimp and tiny fish in the water but the two birds seemed to have a special affinity for her bait.

Yu Xiaocao definitely had a secret! However, Zhao Han didn't plan on asking her about it. Everyone more or less had their own little secrets. After all, wasn't his own family an example of that? He had already thought of Xiaocao as a friend, as a younger sister no less, so he decided to honor her privacy.

When Xiaocao heard his joke, she deliberately opened her mouth wide and pretended to look scary, she sinisterly said, "Looks like you've seen through my disguise, youngster! Guess that means I can't leave you here in this world anymore! Zhao Han, you need to die..."

[Idiot, stop being so boring!] The little divine stone had been laying in the basket, and absorbing the spiritual energy from the mountain ginseng. It rolled its eyes at Xiaocao's antics and changed its position. Then, it continued to hug the ginseng and cultivate.

Zhao Han laughed in delight at Xiaocao's joke but then saw the little golden kitten moving around in the basket. He reminded Xiaocao out of worry, "Xiaocao! That mountain ginseng is quite valuable! Be careful to not have your cat ruin it!"

"Don't worry! Little Glutinous Dumpling won't ruin it. That being said, without Little Glutinous Dumpling, I wouldn't have been able to find this wild mountain ginseng. Since it likes the ginseng so much, then we should just let it hug it!" Yu Xiaocao, on the other hand, wasn't a bit concerned at all.

Zhao Han took out the two large geese from the basket on his back and placed the game they just caught and the fish into the basket. Luckily, he had brought a large enough basket for this trip!

He held a wild goose in each hand and then glanced at the golden kitten that was dozing with its eyes closed. He smiled, "Your kitten is truly a treasure. It could actually find a ginseng in all of those weeds. I've heard of hunters training dogs to catch prey but I've never heard of training a kitten to find medicinal herbs!"

"I only recently picked up this little kitten, and it usually gets to freely range at home. So I'm actually not very familiar with this cat. Perhaps this is just a coincidence? Have you ever heard of animals that can specifically find medicinal ingredients?" Yu Xiaocao also placed her bamboo basket on her back. One of her hands still held the pregnant wild hare.

She had already made a decision that she was going to bring this hare back home to be raised. It was said that hares and rabbits multiplied very quickly. In the future, even if she didn't go into the mountains, she could still have rabbit meat at home to eat!

Zhao Han looked at her for a long moment and then faintly smiled, "How come I have a feeling that every time I'm with you, coincidences seem to happen more often?"

"Haha! That's because I have a good moral character, ah!" Yu Xiaocao acted as if she had accidentally avoided his gaze and pretended to be extremely happy as she skipped down the road back home.

At home, they found out that Little Shitou had only went back to the town to return to school after confirming that his older brother was okay. Yu Hai had gone with his older daughter on the donkey cart to sell pickled fish at the docks. The only person in the courtyard was Madam Liu, who was darning clothes.

When she saw her younger daughter push the gate open, Madam Liu looked up at the sky and the expression on her face immediately changed, "This child, ah, is really disobedient! Didn't you promise me before you left that you would go on the road that winds at the foot of the mountain, right? How could you be so reckless? What if something happened to you, do you want your mother to live anymore?"

"Auntie, please stop scolding Xiaocao! It was my idea to go into the mountains. I've walked on that trail for multiple times and I know there's nothing dangerous on there. Auntie, if you want to scold someone, scold me instead!" Zhan Han had followed Xiaocao into the courtyard and had heard Madam Liu rebuking her, so he quickly pulled the responsibility onto himself.

The tight expression on Madam Liu's face relaxed slightly but she was still a bit discontented, "Xiaohan, don't blame auntie for making a big fuss about nothing. After what happened with your Uncle Yu last time...Auntie is truly afraid now!"

Zhao Han took the basket on his back that was filled with game, placed it on the ground, and replied in an understanding tone, "Auntie, I know you're trying to do the best for Xiaocao! Don't worry! In the future, I won't bring Xiaocao into the mountains without your permission first. This is the game and fish that Xiaocao caught, please quickly put them away!"

"Oh you silly child, why do you always treat yourself like an outsider? In the past, when your Uncle Yu and your father went into the mountains, they always split the game fifty-fifty! We don't need to get bogged down with who owns what between our two families, okay?"

After receiving Zhao Han's promise that he wouldn't secretly bring Xiaocao into the mountains, a smile finally appeared on Madam Liu's face. She picked up three large fish, two pheasants, and a hare, and stuffed them into Zhao Han's basket, ignoring his protests.

"Mother, leave the wild hare for me! I want father to weave a basket cage and house this pregnant hare with that male hare together. Hares can give birth to a litter after about a month. In the future, we will always have rabbit meat to eat!" Yu Xiaocao hastily took the male hare out of the basket and swapped it for the badger.

After seeing the mother and daughter pair acting like this, Zhao Han knew that if he continued to refuse it would only make things more awkward. Instead, he smiled and said, "Okay! Then I'll just politely accept these. Xiaocao has a good hand at raising animals, so I'm going to leave these two geese at auntie's house. The next time I go into the prefectural city, I will stop buy and pick up the geese to bring to the prefectural magistrate's residence!"

"Oh right, Xiaocao!" Before Zhao Han exited through the gate, he suddenly asked, "Do you plan on keeping that ginseng for now or do you want to sell it? If you want to sell it now, you may not be able to get a good price in town. You should wait until I go into the prefectural city and I can help you inquire a bit!"

Yu Xiaocao thought that with the mystic-stone water, she probably wouldn't need to use this old ginseng and said, "Then I'll have to humbly ask Brother Han to ask around then! You also know our family's current circumstances. If we sell off the ginseng, I think we should completely redo our house and then buy a few more plots of land. With my mother here, we probably can't go into the mountains to hunt anymore. We should just settle down and plant fields!"

"Don't you make good money from selling your food? If you don't farm, do you really think you guys will starve?" Zhao Han lightly joked.

"Oh that's true!" Yu Xiaocao lifted her head proudly, "However, as a family of peasants, it's still better to have more plots of land at hand!"

## Chapter 115

The beautiful spring sun had already leaped out of the horizon at which the sky and the water was merged. Thousands of red clouds overflowed and blended with the morning mist rising slowly from the top of the mountains and turned into a multicolored halo.

Today was a rare sunny day. The sun was warm and cozy, so it felt comfortable to be caressed by its big, warm hands. It had only been five days, but Yu Hang already felt that he was close to recovering from his injury. He only occasionally felt a sore pain around the chest area, where his ribs were broken.

From the window, he saw his youngest sister's busy figure in the courtyard. He slowly sat up from the kang bed and carefully supported himself against the wall. He put on his shoes and slowly walked out the door.

Yu Xiaocao, who was in the vegetable garden in the yard, lifted the straw thatches that were used to keep the vegetables warm, and revealed the green, tender seedlings. About seventy or eighty percent of the land in the courtyard was used as a vegetable garden. Leafy greens with short growth periods were planted in the garden in the yard. In addition, the mystic-stone water definitely had a role in accelerating the growth of the crops. Thus, in less than half a month, the greens, spinach, and leaf lettuce were all ready to be harvested. They appeared verdant and lush under the morning spring sun.

"Older Brother, you haven't recovered from your injuries yet. Why did you come out?" Yu Xiaocao was the first to notice the movement at the door of the main room. She hastily wiped her hands and ran over to help her older brother walk over the threshold.



She found a place in the courtyard where the sun would shine on and brought over a recliner that her father had made in his spare time. After that, she laid a thick mattress on top before she allowed her older brother to lie down.

Yu Hang watched as his youngest sister moved the chair and went into the room to find the mattress. She was bustling about like a happy little bee. He had an apologetic smile on his face as he said, "Little Sister, you should go back to what you were doing! As your older brother, even though I can't help much, but I don't want to give you more trouble..."

"Older Brother! The most important thing for you to do right now is to recover from your injuries. Wouldn't you be able to help out when you're healed? Look, the vegetables in our garden are already ready to be sold. We also can't disregard our business at the docks! You must cooperate well with the recuperation process, so that you don't end up with a lingering illness!"

Yu Hang looked at the vibrant vegetables in the garden, and the distress in his heart seemed to be dispelled by the greenery. He sighed with a smile, "Youngest Sister, this method is really good! At this time, other people have just planted their seeds, but we can already start selling our vegetables! If we take them to town, those noble masters and madams will love them so much!"

In this era, there wasn't any advanced techniques like greenhouse farming. The high officials and noble lords in the capital, who had some hot spring resorts, were able to eat some fresh vegetables in the winter. However, there weren't any geothermal resources around areas like Tanggu Town. Thus, it was very difficult for them to eat fresh vegetables during winter and early spring!

Yu Xiaocao covered his leg with a quilt, and then began to harvest the vegetables. She carefully dug out the greens one by one. After that, she asked Madam Liu, who had just finished tidying the kitchen, to help wash them with clean water, shake them dry, and neatly stack them inside the bamboo basket. The droplets of water on the bok choy made it look so fresh and juicy that she couldn't help but swallow her saliva after gnawing on radishes and cabbages for the entire winter.

"Mother, should we eat hotpot this evening?" She could buy a chunk of pork bone to make a thick soup, and also a few pieces of soft tofu. There were homegrown bean sprouts in the pot and several big fish in the water vat. They also had fresh and tender greens... Ai-ya, she couldn't think about it anymore, or she would start drooling!

"Hotpot?" Madam Liu and her eldest son looked at each other and knew that the little lass had come up with a new dish. However, Madam Liu felt somewhat reluctant since their one-of-kind vegetables would certainly sell for a good price.

Xiaocao was aware of her mother's thoughts and explained, "Mother, why do we work from dusk to dawn to make braised food and earn money? Aren't we doing this so that we can live a good life? If we make money but are unwilling to spend it on our own family, then isn't that the same as being a money-grubber?"

"This child, who are you calling a money-grubber?" Madam Liu rebuked Xiaocao with a glare. But Madam Liu had a sudden realization after hearing her daughter's words. Her daughter was right. Weren't they earning money to ensure that their family could eat well and wear warm clothes and get out of the hard times? If they weren't even willing to let their own children eat their own homegrown vegetables, then what was the point of them working so hard to earn money?

While the mother-daughter pair engaged in small talk, they were also busily working with their hands. After a while, they had filled several bamboo baskets with vegetables.

At this time, Yu Hai came from the backyard with a basket full of fish. He laughed, "Though the pond behind our house isn't very big, there's quite a lot of fish in there! I've been fishing there for over half a month, but there's still a lot of fish. Cao'er, what did you put in the baits? All the big and small fish were crazily fighting for them. It was so gratifying to watch!"

"Quickly put the fish down! You go to town with Cao'er. How can she handle so much vegetables by herself? Fortunately, Xiaolian took the ox cart from the neighboring village to the docks this morning, otherwise it would be inconvenient for you two to go to town!" Madam Liu said as she helped load a basket of vegetables onto the donkey cart.

The donkey named 'Little Gray' had recovered from its illness already. After being nourished by the mystic-stone water, it looked sleek and lively. It was nearly impossible to tell that it was as thin as sticks and barely breathing just half a month ago.

Everyone who had seen the Yu Family's donkey all praised it for being very clever. It didn't need anyone to guide it and would obediently walk along the road by itself. When it encountered pits and holes, it even knew to avoid them. It seriously saved people so much energy and effort!

People who were close to Yu Hai all knew that the donkey was half-dead when they first bought it. They all praised Yu Hai for being an excellent animal breeder. To be able to raise a dying animal until it was plump and strong, wasn't that already the best proof?

Later, because of this, there were people who would persistently request Yu Hai to treat their sick livestock. Fortunately, he had Yu Xiaocao as a secret weapon, so they were able to cure all of the sick animals.

Such sorrow! Ever since Doctor You came back, there wasn't a single person who came to seek Xiaocao for medical treatment! Although Doctor You repeatedly claimed that his little disciple, Yu Xiaocao, had already surpassed her teacher, she was still too young after all. There was a saying: 'Young people can't be trusted with important tasks.' Thus, most people still believed that the white-bearded Doctor You seemed more reliable.

After saving a few animals, Yu Xiaocao suddenly ended up becoming a vet. Moreover, her fame spread far and wide. Even her maternal grandmother on the other side of the mountains had heard about her reputation. Xiaocao seriously felt speechless at how things turned out! However, the reason she studied medicine was merely to hide her secret weapon, the mystic-stone water. She didn't care whether other people believed her, as long as it could benefit her family!

"The sun is winking at me,

The birds are singing for me.

I'm a hardworking and non-clingy little demon.

Don't ask where I came from,

And don't ask where I'm going.

I just want to pick the most beautiful flower,

And give it to my little princess.

The king told me to patrol the mountains,

So I wandered around in the mortal realm..." [1]

Yu Hai enjoyed the first couple lines: 'My daughter's singing is pretty good. She must have gotten it from me!' However, Yu Hai felt that something was off the more he listened to it. Why did his good daughter become a little demon? This child had become so daring that she wasn't even afraid of being taken away by a Taoist master!

"My daughter! What demon? Have you heard too many supernatural stories?" Yu Hai couldn't help but interrupt Xiaocao when he heard her singing the line 'catch a monk for dinner'. The donkey cart had already reached the main road, and there were more and more people on the road.

When facing the curious gaze beside her, Yu Xiaocao giggled and said, "That's right, Father! Grandpa You knows a lot of supernatural stories!"

A white-bearded grandfather, who was riding backwards on a donkey, chuckled and said, "The little girl has a crisp voice, which was very pleasant to hear! The content of the song is also very interesting. I didn't know little goblins can also be so cute!"

This white-bearded old man was white and plump. He had a healthy and hearty appearance. Even though he was dressed in coarse cloth, he was obviously someone who lived a respected and privileged life. There were also the 'filial sons and grandsons' who were guiding the donkey for him and carried the bags. Their clothes couldn't even conceal the bulging muscles on their bodies. When coupled with their alert gazes, they were definitely some sort of guards.

However, Yu Xiaocao pretended to be pure and innocent, and said with a smile, "Old grandpa, are you riding a donkey backwards to imitate Zhang Guoluo [2]?"

"Oh! Little girl, you have also heard the story The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea [3]!" The white-bearded grandfather was obviously in a good mood. He laughed merrily and said, "Come and tell Grandpa, who else do you know other than Zhang Guoluo?"

"I know a lot!" Yu Xiaocao swung the willow twig, which already had some green buds on it, in her hand. She raised her little head up high in a proud manner and replied, "The stories of Lu Dongbin, Li Tieguai, He Xiangnu [4]... I know all their stories!"

Yu Xiaocao remembered that the story of the Eight Immortals originated from the Yuan Dynasty's zaju [5] called "The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea". Thus, she wasn't afraid that this knowledge would expose her identity as a transmigrator.

She continued to talk with the old man with a white beard. The old and young pair happily chatted the whole way to town, so they didn't feel that the trip to town was very far. When they arrived at the town gate, the childlike grandfather with a white beard bit on his little handkerchief and reluctantly said goodbye to Xiaocao, who he had become friends with despite their huge age gap.

Yu Hai didn't say much throughout the journey. After they parted with the group of people who were disguised as fathers and sons, he finally said, "Daughter, that old man with a white beard probably has an extraordinary background! If you encounter him again in the future, remember to pay attention to your words and be careful to not get into trouble."

Yu Xiaocao obediently complied, "Father! You can rest assured. I have a sense of propriety!"

Yu Hai recalled that throughout the journey, his daughter was indeed much more attentive of her speech. He also thought about how his youngest daughter was especially sensible and clever, so he finally relaxed his anxious heart.

As they were speaking, they had reached the biggest and busiest food market in town. The father-daughter pair chose a vacant space with a good flow of people and unloaded the donkey cart. The donkey cart was led to a specific resting area for livestock. There were also people there to specially take care of the animals. If they brought their own fodder, then they only needed to pay one copper coin for the service fee.

Xiaocao's family's donkey had already become picky eater after being fed by Xiaocao for so long. No matter how good the fodder was, it wouldn't even glance at it if it didn't have any mystic-stone water in it. Xiaocao took the fodder she had prepared, which was definitely mixed with the important mystic-stone water, from the cart.

Little Gray's eyes lit up with a fervent glow. Instead of rushing to eat the fodder, it first rubbed its big head against Xiaocao's hand. It looked at her with a gentle and reliant gaze, and then ate with relish after hearing her order.

#### Chapter 116 - The Prince

There was a burgundy colored horse tied not too far from Little Gray. At this time, it was no longer interested in the fine fodder beans within its own trough. It craned its neck and tried to eat the coarse hay in front of the little donkey. But its range of activity was restricted by the reins. The feelings of not being able to eat something that it wanted to eat made it feel very grumpy. It could help but kick backwards as it raised its head and neighed ceaselessly.

As soon as its owner came out of pickled vegetables shop, he swiftly strode forward upon hearing the furious cry of his beloved horse. Seeing the scene, the handsome youth laughed and scolded, "Red Cloud, you're seriously acting so shamelessly! Why aren't you eating the fine fodder beans but coveting others hay instead? You're really such a disgrace to be fighting for food with a little donkey!!"

The burgundy horse seemed to have understood its owner's words and made several long augmentative sounds as it struggled hard to break free from its reins. The youth loosened the reins, and the little red horse immediately rushed towards the little donkey. It strongly pushed Little Gray aside and devoured the remaining fodder. It even neighed fiercely at Little Gray with dissatisfaction, as if it was blaming Little Gray for not leaving more hay for him!

Little Gray had a mild temperament and didn't make a scene despite being robbed of its food. It only stared at the burgundy horse with its big, gentle eyes. The burgundy horse seemed somewhat embarrassed and stopped making a fuss. It turned around, with its butt facing Little Gray, and chewed the hay in its mouth several times as if it was savoring the delicious taste of the fodder.

"This beast, you're seriously shameless! If you like hay, then I'll tell the horsekeeper to prepare some for you when we get home!" The youth gently touched Little Gray's polished and smooth hair. He patted it and said, "Sorry about that, buddy! Old man, give my bag of fodder beans to the donkey's owner as compensation later!"

The old man, who was in charge of taking care of the horses and livestock, also smiled merrily and promised.

The youth led his beloved horse, who was still reluctant to leave, out of the food market, and rushed all the way to the capital.

His mother was worried about his younger brother, who had gone on an oceangoing voyage recently. So, her appetite hadn't been very good. They had changed several cooks, but there still wasn't any improvement to her appetite. Madam Wu, whose husband served in Tanggu Town, told them that there were several types of tasty and refreshing pickled vegetables in Tanggu Town's food market. After his mother tried the tasty crispy pickled radish that Madam Wu sent over, she ate one more bowl of congee than before.

After all, Madam Wu didn't bring a lot of pickled vegetables back to the capital. It was only enough for his mother to eat for two days. After finishing the pickled vegetables, his mother returned to the state of not having any appetite. As a dutiful son, he couldn't bear to see his mother get any thinner, so he took advantage of his break and rushed to Tanggu Town. After asking around, he finally found his mother's favorite crispy pickled radish!

In order to ensure that this trip was not in vain, he even packed all the different kinds of pickled vegetables available in the shop! If his close friends found out that he, the dignified son of Prince Jing, had traveled busily between the capital and the small town of Tanggu within a day for the sake of a few crude pickled vegetables, they would definitely laugh their heads off. However, for the sake of his mother, he didn't mind letting them laugh a bit!

Today, they had arrived just in time for the five major markets. Small businesses, vegetable vendors, peddlers... They were all gathered in this food market. As soon as Yu Xiaocao took out the fresh, green vegetables, they were surrounded by a group of people.

"Hey! There are actually fresh greens for sale during this time of the year! Look at this bok choy, it's so tender that water could come out of it! It looks so appetizing!! This big brother, how much is this bok choy?" The person who asked was a well-off matron, who wore a fine cotton jacket and silver hairpin in her hair. She looked as if she came from a family with good living conditions.

On the way to town, the father-daughter pair had already decided on the price for the vegetables. Yu Hai chuckled and said, "The bok choy is twenty copper coins per catty and the spinach cost fifteen coins a catty. It's eighteen copper coins for the leaf lettuce, while the romaine lettuce cost twenty-five coins. Older sister, take a look. Which one do you want?"

"Oh! Your vegetables aren't cheap. It's almost as expensive as pork! The common folks won't be able to afford it!!" The matron's chubby face was crumpled up and she seemed very dissatisfied with the price.

With a smile on her face, Yu Xiaocao sweetly replied, “Auntie, as the saying goes, the rarer something is, the greater its value! As you know, the heavy snowstorms this winter had been disastrous. There were also two more snowfalls in spring! What vegetables wouldn't freeze to death in that situation? So it's quite difficult for us to grow these vegetables!”

Although the onlookers were curious about how these fresh and juicy vegetables survived the early spring snowstorm, no one asked because they knew that only a fool would reveal their own secret money-making method. However, most of the people who came to the market were villagers from the surrounding villages. There were very few people who could afford vegetables that were about the same price as meat.

The fat woman genuinely felt that the vegetables were expensive, but she still had the money to eat them once or twice. Moreover, her pregnant daughter-in-law would vomit whenever she ate and craved for some green vegetables. She also knew that none of the vegetable seeds had been planted yet at this time of the season, so there was no way she could find leafy greens.

She had come out with the intention of trying out her luck to see if she might find them. If she couldn't find any, she was going to buy some garlic and grow garlic sprouts, which could also be considered a greenery. But she hadn't expected to be so lucky and find vegetables. Moreover, it seemed like they had all the different types of spring vegetables.

Although it was expensive, for the sake of her unborn eldest grandson, she gritted her teeth—buy!

Under the envious gazes of the crowd, the fat matron put on a proud smile and pointed at the bok choy, spinach, and romaine lettuce with her chubby finger. As if she was afraid that others couldn't hear her, she raised her voice and said, “Little girl, this, this, and this. Give me half a catty of each! If it's good, Auntie will come back to buy some more tomorrow!”

“Okay!” Yu Xiaocao swiftly weighed the vegetables that the woman wanted. She lifted them up high as she handed them to her and said, “Auntie, it's a total of exactly thirty copper coins!”

“Thirty copper coins ah! That's enough to buy a catty of pork! In the previous years, that small portion of greens would be the same price as one and a half catties of pork. Who would be willing to eat that!”

“That's right, that's right! I originally wanted to buy some for my family to taste, but I didn't expect it to be that expensive! Forget it, I'll just bear with it! We just need to wait one or two more months and there should be vegetables for sale at that time!”



“They're selling them to the rich people! Thirty copper coins is enough to buy around ten catties of coarse grain! It was really cold this winter, so the price for grain has skyrocketed. It was already very fortunate that we didn't die of starvation. We don't have the spare money to eat such expensive food.”

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There were a lot of onlookers, but very few bought anything. An hour had already passed, but Yu Hai and his daughter didn't get another customer besides the fat matron.

“Cao'er, did we set the price a little too high? It's also noon. If we can't sell them, the vegetables are about to wilt. At that time, it would be difficult to sell them for a good price!” Yu Hai felt slightly worried as he looked at the vegetables in the basket.

His youngest daughter had put in a lot of painstaking effort to grow these vegetables. She watered and weeded it every day by herself without needing other people's help. The temperature was low in early spring, so she covered the vegetable gardens with straw thatches in order to prevent them from dying from the cold. In the morning at dawn, she would lift the thatches up again. Every day, she wouldn't miss either of these two steps.

In front of and behind the house, there would be vegetables planted in all the open spaces, which added up to about four or five mu [1]. Cao'er and the other children never said they were tired. They were so sensible that his heart ached for them.

His youngest daughter, in particular, personally took care of making braised food and planting crops. This little girl, whose height only reached up to his waist, had even more things to worry about than him, her father. Ay! If he had worked harder as the head of the family, they wouldn't have to let a nine year old girl shoulder the burdens of the family at such a young age.

Yu Xiaocao didn't know that her father had thought about so much within his heart in such a short time, but she still confidently said, “Don't worry, Father! There's a lot of rich people in Tanggu Town!! At this time, people might not even be able to buy our vegetables even if they have money!”

Her eyes swept across the crowd and saw a middle-aged man, who looked like a steward. She shouted loudly, “Hey, Uncle, do you want to buy some fresh vegetables? We're the only one who sells them in the whole market!”

This man with a goatee was the steward for the second richest household in town after the Zhou Family—the Yao Household. Old Master Yao's sixtieth birthday banquet was in two days, which happened to be at the time when the new crops weren't ripe yet. It was easy to prepare the meat dishes, but the vegetable dishes were a more tricky matter to handle.

As a result of the blizzard this winter, Old Master Yao didn't plan a big banquet and only invited a few close friends and family, who were all wealthy and respectable people. Thus, they could just serve radishes and cabbages, which were simple and humble, to these honorable guests.

The steward was so stressed out by the planning of the banquet dishes that several strands of his hair had turned white. When faced with the approaching date of the birthday banquet, he not only mobilized the servants under him, but he also personally went out to find a solution. He had browsed through most of the food market, but he still couldn't find a solution to the problem. The steward scratched his head in distress!

As the saying goes: 'Heaven never seals off all the exits.' He hadn't expected that there would be a light at the end of the tunnel, and a heavenly voice sounded in his ears.

The steward followed the voice and looked over to see baskets of verdant vegetables. They looked so fresh that he couldn't even take his eyes off of them. The steward's eyes brimmed with tears of joy—he was saved!

He immediately rushed towards Yu Hai and his daughter's stall. Without asking for the price, he pointed at the bamboo basket and said eagerly, "I want all of these..."

"Oh, isn't this Miss Yu!" A familiar voice interrupted Steward Yao's words.

Yu Xiaocao looked over and saw that it was the apprentice of Head Chef Wang of Zhenxiu Restaurant. He was the worker in charge of collecting and purchasing ingredients, Qian Xiaoduo!

"Miss Yu, it's been a long time since I have seen you deliver game to our restaurant. My teacher has been talking about you for days!" Qian Xiaoduo was surprised to see the baskets of green vegetables.

Even for a wealthy family like their boss's, it wasn't easy to be able to have several different vegetable dishes on the table during this season. They had to spend a large sum of money to build a greenhouse in order to grow the vegetables. How did the Yu Family grow fresh vegetables at this time?

“There were some things going on at home... We might not be able to send game to your restaurant anymore in the future. But Uncle Zhao and Brother Han are both skilled hunters. They will surely send enough game to your restaurant.”

In the past month or so, numerous things had been happening one after another in their family. First her father had gotten injured. Then, they separated from the main family and had to repair their new residence. After that, they worked on selling braised food at the docks. In addition, her older brother met with a mishap... After thinking about this, she realized that it really had been a long time since she visited Zhenxiu Restaurant.

“Miss Yu, you're selling vegetables?!” Every family had their own problems, so Qian Xiaoduo didn't ask about it anymore. He looked at the baskets of greens and said, “Seriously, what should I say about you! If you have such rare green vegetables, why didn't you send them to Zhenxiu Restaurant? Our restaurant will take all the vegetables you have. There's no need to set up a stall! Let's go, let's go! Take them all to our restaurant...”

#### Chapter 117

"Wait!" Seeing that Zhenxiu Restaurant's staff wanted to take the basket, Steward Yao panicked and loudly shouted, "You should follow the rule of first come, first served! I have already placed my order on these vegetables! Little girl, take this money. If it not enough, come find me!"

Steward Yao shoved a purse into Xiaocao's hands for fear that she wouldn't accept it. Xiaocao didn't know whether she should laugh or cry as she weighed the pouch with her hands. There were at least twenty or thirty taels inside. For example, the romaine lettuce, which was the most expensive, cost twenty-five copper coins per catty. With twenty or thirty taels, he could buy over a thousand catties of lettuce. There were at most four to five hundred catties of vegetables within their baskets. So how would it cost that much money?

For the sake of their restaurant, Qian Xiaoduo definitely couldn't give up on this opportunity. He didn't back down and said, "Steward Yao, our Tanggu Town has clear law and order and prohibits buying and selling by force! Miss Yu didn't say that she wanted to sell them to you, so it's useless even if you give her the money!"

Steward Yao was so angry that his beard was about to curl up. He pointed at Qian Xiaoduo and shouted, "Who's forcibly buying and selling things? The little girl is selling vegetables, while I want to buy vegetables. This is a fair deal! Even if we take it to the county magistrate, I will still be in the right!! Don't think that just because you have the backing of Zhenxiu Restaurant and the Zhou Family that you can turn white into black with a few words!"

"You're willing to buy, but are they willing to sell? You're stuffing the money into their hands, if that's not buying by force then what is it..."

The two of them continued to quarrel, and they each had their own reasons. From ancient times to present, there was never a lack of curious onlooker wherever there was a dispute. In a short moment, the four of them were surrounded by a tightly packed crowd of people.

Yu Xiaocao and her father looked at each other helplessly. They couldn't let the two of them continue arguing as if they were in a cockfight.

Xiaocao quickly went forward and pulled Qian Xiaoduo back a couple steps, and then said to Steward Yao, "Steward Yao, right? Can your master finish all these vegetables in a day? If they can't finish it, then it won't be fresh anymore!"

Steward Yao was so anxious that his forehead was sweating, "Little girl, I'll tell you honestly! Our old master's birthday banquet is tomorrow. Everything else is already prepared, but we just urgently need these greens for the banquet!"

How respectable would it be if they were able to bring out fresh vegetables for the banquet during this season? Steward Yao thought that if he could accomplish this task, his master certainly wouldn't treat him too badly. The head steward was already getting old and it was about time for him to retire. Maybe he could take this opportunity to make further progress towards a promotion!

With that thought, Steward Yao's tone became even more urgent, "Little girl, being sincere and honest is very important in business. Let's be honest, didn't I come first and said that I wanted to buy these vegetables?"

Qian Xiaoduo was also anxious. County Magistrate Wu's son personally reserved a table at Zhenxiu Restaurant and said that they were entertaining a distinguished guest from the capital. He asked the kitchen to be extremely alert and be sure to prepare an impressive meal for the guest.

The manager said that, with County Magistrate Wu's background, the identity of the guest must be incredible to be addressed as a 'distinguished guest'. Zhenxiu Restaurant was famous for its oyster sauce dishes. But oyster sauce was usually used for vegetable dishes. Where would they find leafy greens at this time? He also came with the mentality of trying, but he didn't expect that he would actually find them.

However, someone else already claimed the vegetables that he had been worried about before him! Fortunately, the vegetable vendor was an old acquaintance of Zhenxiu Restaurant and had a good relationship with their young boss. Thus, he summoned his courage and brazenly fought over the greens with the other person.

Seeing Yu Xiaocao's gaze, he could only tell her the truth, "My little lady ah! We also have an urgent need for them!! The honored guest of County Magistrate Wu will be at the restaurant soon!!"

As soon as Steward Yao heard that Zhenxiu Restaurant was buying the vegetables to serve the honored guest of County Magistrate Wu, he was also at a loss of what to do. He could only look at Yu Xiaocao and her father in hope that they would make a fair judgment.

Yu Xiaocao bit her lower lip and thought for a moment, and then said, "Steward Yao, your old master's birthday banquet is tomorrow, so let's do this! Let's give these vegetables to Zhenxiu Restaurant first since they need them for the feast at noon. Steward Yao leave us your address. We'll go back and pick up a batch of vegetables, and then send them to you. Is this alright?"

Steward Yao understood the principle of 'a commoner shouldn't fight with an official'. He had already lost all hope when the staff of Zhenxiu Restaurant revealed their use for the vegetables. However, when Yu Xiaocao said that her family still had vegetables at home, the spark of hope rekindled again.

He thought about it and said, "Miss Yu, I won't bother you to deliver them to us. Why don't you just wait a moment and let me go get a horse carriage? I'll go back with you."

'Leave an address? If you don't deliver them to us, where would we go to find you guys?' Since there were still more of the vegetables, they could do a favor for Zhenxiu Restaurant.

"Alright! Steward Yao, we'll wait for you at the back entrance of Zhenxiu Restaurant!" It was quite a far distance from Dongshan Village to town, so of course Yu Xiaocao was happy that she didn't need to make an extra trip.

Steward Yao nodded and quickly left. He had to act swiftly in case they got annoyed from waiting and leave first. If that happened, he wouldn't even have any more tears to cry!

Seeing that he had gotten the greens, Qian Xiaoduo was in a very happy mood. At this time, someone asked about the price of the vegetables, so he waved his hand and shouted, "Sorry, our Zhenxiu Restaurant has already bought all the vegetables. Please come earlier tomorrow!"

He didn't need Xiaocao to say anything and tactfully moved the baskets onto the donkey cart. By the time Yu Xiaocao came back with the little donkey in her left hand and a bag of fodder beans, which came from an unidentified person, in her right hand, the four or five hundred catties of vegetables had been neatly stacked on the donkey cart.

Qian Xiaoduo laughed flatteringly and said, "Miss Yu, you've got a good donkey. It probably cost a few taels, right?"

Yu Xiaocao pulled the donkey cart and walked to Zhenxiu Restaurant. From time to time, she would chat with the enthusiastic Qian Xiaoduo. This fellow usually seemed like a quiet person, but as if a switch was turned on today, he had turned into a chatterbox!

Fortunately, Zhenxiu Restaurant wasn't too far away. It only took a few minutes to get there. When the donkey cart entered the backdoor, the manager, who had heard the news, rushed over with surprise.

"Aiya! Big brother, Miss Yu! You guys are seriously our Zhenxiu Restaurant's big lucky stars! These vegetables came at just the right timing!! You guys quickly unload the vegetables!" The manager's overly enthusiastic attitude felt too overwhelming.

The manager smiled like a chrysanthemum flower as he watched the baskets and baskets of vegetables being moved into the kitchen, "Quickly come rest in Third Young Master's private room! Xiaoduo, make a pot of our restaurant's best tea to let Brother Yu and Miss Yu quench their thirst."

Yu Hai felt very uncomfortable with the manager's keen attitude. He waved his hand and said, "No need, we still have to rush back..."

"It's almost noon. You can't go back on an empty stomach! Our third young master went to the dock early in the morning and should be coming back soon. If he found out that I let you and your daughter go home hungry, he will definitely blame me! Go, go! Have a taste of Head Chef Wang's new dish!" Without letting them refuse, the manager pulled on Yu Hai's arm and led the father-daughter pair to Third Young Master Zhou's private room.

They had come out early in the morning and stayed at the food market for half of the day, so Yu Xiaocao was really somewhat thirsty. She blew on the tea, drank it in one gulp, and smacked her lips—the tea's pretty good and very fragrant!

The manager watched as Yu Hai and his daughter, who were oblivious to the worth of the tea, drank the excellent tea that cost a dozen taels per ounce without any thoughts. However, he didn't dare show contempt and hastily refilled their cups. When the manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant served the high officials and noble lords, he usually acted neither humble nor arrogant. But at this time, he engaged in small talk with Yu Hai and his daughter in a very approachable manner.

In the middle of their conversation, the door of the private room was pushed open and Third Young Master Zhou came in with an oiled paper bag.

"Fortunately, I came back just in time, or else I would have missed you guys again!" Zhou Zixu handed the oiled paper bag to the manager and continued, "I have been busy with the factory after the new year. I thought that I could meet you at the docks, but it was always your twin sister selling the braised food. Oh right, how's your older brother's injuries? It's a crucial time for the factory right now, so I haven't had time to visit."

Yu Xiaocao put down the cup in her hand and looked at the familiar oiled bag in the manager's hands. She replied, "My older brother can get out of the bed already. Thank you for your concern, Third Young Master!"

"You're acting as if we're strangers!" Zhou Zixu noticed that Yu Xiaocao was looking at the oiled paper bag that he brought back, so he smiled and said, "Your family's braised food is absolutely amazing! I've become addicted to it after trying a couple times! My favorites are the pig snout and pig ears. If you don't tell them, who would have thought that such delicious delicacies are made from ingredients that other people usually don't want?"

Yu Xiaocao said with a smile, "If Third Young Master likes to eat it, I can bring some for you the next time I come over!"

"Sure, that's great! You don't know how hard it was for me to buy the braised food. It took so much effort for me to squeeze in there and grab a few portions. Now that I think about it, it's really not easy!" Zhou Zixu made a perturbed expression and successfully amused Yu Xiaocao.

Yu Xiaocao laughed and said, "In order to appease your wounded heart, I will be merciful and personally make 'spicy sliced pork ear' and 'pig head meat with mashed garlic' for you. I guarantee that you will want to eat more after trying them!"

"Sure, I couldn't ask for more!!" Zhou Zixu followed Yu Xiaocao to the kitchen.

In order to entertain the esteemed guest from the capital, County Magistrate Wu had reserved the entire Zhenxiu Restaurant. Thus, the whole kitchen was busy prepping for the mysterious guest in the most luxurious private room.

When Head Chef Wang, who had been promoted to executive chef, saw Yu Xiaocao coming in, he greeted her with a smile, "Miss Yu, long time no see! I developed a new dish again. Taste it and give me some advice when you're free!"

"Uncle Wang, you're a famous chef in Tanggu Town. I don't dare to show my slight skill in front of an expert!" Yu Xiaocao washed her hands and busied herself in the kitchen unreservedly.

For the two dishes, besides taking a little more time to mix the chili oil, everything else were ready-made. Moreover, she had the help of the kitchen's staff who all competed to be her assistant. Thus, in a short time, the mouthwatering 'spicy sliced pork ear' and 'pig head meat with mashed garlic' were completed!



Head Chef Wang, of course, didn't miss the opportunity to learn. He stopped the work in his hands and inwardly memorized all of Xiaocao's steps for mixing the chili oil. Not only did he blatantly learn the secret methods, but he also asked questions from time to time, "Can the chili oil used for the pig ears also be used for other cold dishes?"

"Of course! With Head Chef Wang's intelligence and wisdom, you can definitely make more and more delicious dishes!" After Yu Xiaocao finished making the two cold dishes, she left the kitchen to avoid delaying the kitchen from doing their work.

## Chapter 118

After leaving the back kitchen, they were just about to go up to the second floor when they encountered a group of well-dressed people. They were all clustered around an old man, who had a healthy glow and wore a bright yellow belt around his waist, and they were also about to go up the stairs.

"Ah-Xu! You're back?" County Magistrate Wu's son greeted him and looked towards Yu Xiaocao who was behind him. He frowned slightly and whispered, "Ah-Xu, didn't I ask you in advance to clear out the restaurant? Why are there other people here?"

Before Zhou Zixu could answer, he heard a resonant voice saying, "Oh? Isn't this the little demon who patrols the mountains? What? Did you also come to eat?"

Yu Xiaocao felt as if she had heard this voice somewhere before, so she looked over. The fat old man wore an ivory headdress, a dark brown brocade gown, and had a bright yellow belt with jade inlays fastened on his waist. Wasn't he the white-bearded grandfather who had talked with her about the Eight Immortals Cross the Sea all the way to town this morning?

So, he was the honored guest of the county magistrate! She had guessed that he had an extraordinary background, but she hadn't expected that he was a member of the imperial family from the capital! It would be a foolish question to ask how she knew that he was part of the imperial family. Other than members of the imperial family, who would dare to wear a bright yellow belt on his waist? Wouldn't that be like starting a rebellion?

County Magistrate Wu was a middle-aged man with elegant features and refined manners. He was slightly stunned as he looked at the little girl who was dressed in coarse cloth. She had a young appearance and was short in stature. It was inevitable that he had some doubt within his heart: 'How did the emperor emeritus know someone from the countryside?'

However, his confusion was resolved when he recalled how the emperor emeritus and his entourage were dressed this morning. The emperor emeritus was born and raised in poverty, so he had always been friendly to the commoners from the same poverty-stricken backgrounds. Thus, it wasn't surprising for him to become acquainted with a few commoners when he travelled incognito.

"Oh? Aren't you the old grandfather who rode the donkey backwards this morning?" Yu Xiaocao feigned surprise and asked.

The retired emperor walked forward with a laugh and stopped two steps away from her. He nodded and said, "That's right! We just parted this morning and met here again; we really have a predestined relationship!"

He looked around with his big, bell-like eyes and clicked his tongue, "County Magistrate Wu, this restaurant that you recommended doesn't seem that great ah! It's already lunch time, but there's no other customers beside us and this little girl. It seems that their food doesn't taste very good! Should we go to another restaurant?"

Third Young Master Zhou and Yu Xiaocao exchanged eye contact and had imaginary black lines on their heads: County Magistrate Wu had already reserved the entire restaurant, so how would there be other customers?

County Magistrate Wu couldn't just say that he had reserved the entire restaurant in order to entertain him, the emperor emeritus. The retired emperor hated being treated with the extravagant bureaucratic style the most when he travelled incognito. Thus, Magistrate Wu didn't know how to respond for a moment.

At this time, Yu Xiaocao spoke up to defend Zhenxiu Restaurant, "Old grandpa, the food here tastes delicious. You will know after trying it!"

The imperial guards and servants of the emperor emeritus inwardly sneered and thought: 'You're just an ignorant and inexperienced little girl. Do you really think that your words will sound convincing? It's better to not say anything at all.'

The emperor emeritus was in a good mood and wanted to tease the little girl, "Oh? Then tell me, what delicious food do they have here?"

Yu Xiaocao didn't think and immediately listed, "There's a lot! Listen to me... steamed lamb, steamed bear's paw, steamed deer's tail, roasted duck, roasted, chicken, roasted goose, braised salted duck, marinated chicken, cured pork, preserved eggs, smoked pork belly, deep-fried dried pork, sausage, assorted meat, smoked chicken, boiled pig tripe, steamed eight treasure pig, glutinous rice stuffed duck, pheasant in clay pot, pot cooked quail, assorted braised food, braised duck, stewed shrimp, braised prawn, fried shrimp..."

She counted her fingers and recited the tongue-twister that she used to enjoy all in one breath. She listed them one by one without taking a breath. Third Young Master Zhou widened his eyes and wondered if there were that many dishes in his restaurant. How come he didn't know?

"Oh my! You're quite an articulate speaker! You have practiced the "Announcing the Names of Dishes [1]" very well. Little girl, are you a staff of the restaurant?" When the emperor emeritus heard the familiar tongue-twister, he had to conceal the elation within his heart. He had never thought that there would be another transmigrator in this world besides him and the little brat in his family!

'Calm down. I have to calm down. I can't slip up and reveal myself, lest this clever little bunny gets startled and runs away!'

But Yu Xiaocao was already shocked by what he said: 'How did he know that I was reciting the tongue-twister, "Announcing the Names of Dishes"? Could it be that the old grandfather in front of me is also a transmigrator? Shit, what's wrong with this world? This world is being penetrated so much that it's going to turn into a sieve!! Calm down, I must be calm! Whether the other party is a transmigrator or not, I still can't let him notice anything!!'

She showed an innocent and pure expression and replied with a smile, "Old grandpa, didn't you ask me what tasty dishes they have? I just listed the names of the dishes for you! Well, is there any that you like?"

'This kid! Pretend, just keep pretending!!' The emperor emeritus scolded her as a 'little fox' in his heart but didn't expose her. He continued to cooperate with her and said, "Well... you listed too many dishes earlier. This old man doesn't have a good memory, so I couldn't remember most of them! How about this? Just pick several of the best dishes in the restaurant and serve them!"

Third Young Master Zhou instructed the manager, "Go, serve all the specialty dishes of the restaurant! I hope you, our honored guest, will give us more valuable advice!"

"Little girl, you should stay and introduce the dishes to us!" The retired emperor smiled like a big gray wolf who was luring a little white bunny.

Yu Xiaocao rubbed her nose and apologized, "Sorry, I'm not a server in this restaurant, so..."

"This girl! You just recited so many alluring dishes and aroused this old man's appetite, yet you're suddenly taking back your words... Are you making fun of me, Fifth Lord?" The emperor emeritus performed his special face-changing skill. In an instant, the originally friendly and childish old man had turned into a powerful and domineering superior. His companions couldn't help but be covered in cold sweat due to his formidable aura.

Yu Xiaocao was alarmed in her heart and suddenly realized that the dignity of the imperial family was inviolable. She recalled that the mood of the royals and high officials in the novels were always uncertain. They could be laughing happily a second ago but take someone's life in the next. In an instant, her little face turned ghastly pale with fear and her eyes reddened.

Zhou Zixu, in the face of the esteemed guest's force, opened his mouth to plead for her, "Fifth Lord, please take into consideration that Xiaocao is still a child and spare her! I'm willing to guarantee with my honor that Xiaocao has no intention of making fun of or being disrespectful to you..."

"Haha... You're the third son of the Zhou Family, right? You're quite a sentimental one and much better than that eldest uncle of yours!" The emperor emeritus couldn't maintain his grim expression for more than three minutes and smiled broadly again. He softly said to Xiaocao, "Little fellow, you must have been terribly frightened, right? You must remember this lesson in the future. There are some people that you can't offend!"

Yu Xiaocao's anxious feelings suddenly relaxed and she couldn't help but feel sad: No matter if it was in ancient or modern times, a little commoner like her could never live free and happy life. There would be privileged classes everywhere.

Seeing that the little lass had tears in her eyes, the emperor emeritus couldn't help but touch her head. His voice became even more gentle, "Ay! You're crying. It seems like you're really still a child who gets

easily frightened. Zhou Xiaosan [2], serve the little girl a few good dishes and remember to put them on my bill!! Stroking your hair, so don't be afraid anymore..."

County Magistrate Wu and his son were stunned by the emperor emeritus's ever-changing attitude. The emperor emeritus was usually smiling and very approachable, but once he showed his authority, even he, a county magistrate, nearly wet his pants, let alone a little girl. The little girl was already very brave for not crying on the spot from the fright.

In the next moment, he saw the emperor emeritus turn back into a kind old man. He was caressing the little country girl's head and comforting her. If it weren't for the great disparity of their attire, they could almost be considered grandfather and granddaughter!

Yu Xiaocao tried to force back her tears and forced a smile, "Old grandpa, you were really scary just now. It's even worse than when my grandfather gets angry... I won't delay your meal anymore. Xiaocao shall leave now..."

As she spoke, she bent her knees slightly and took a few steps backwards. After that, she swiftly returned to the back courtyard as if she was being chased by a wolf. She finally breathed a sigh of relief—oh my god, that was so scary! In the future, she should obediently stay at home and try her best to avoid interacting with influential officials!

Zhou Zixu stayed to personally entertain the esteemed guest. After the manager arranged for the distinguished guest to sit in the private room, he instructed the kitchen to serve the food. When he saw Yu Xiaocao, who still had a lingering fear, in the middle of the yard, he lightly tapped her head a few times and said, "You, you! In the future, be careful with what you say. If you offend someone that you shouldn't offend, nobody can save you!!"

The manager was several years older than Yu Hai. He really liked this clever little girl and treated her like a junior in his family. As for what happened earlier, he also broke out in cold sweat for her. It was fortunate that the noble lord wasn't someone who was picky and vengeful. Otherwise, even this little girl's family would have to suffer with her.

Yu Xiaocao obediently nodded her head and asked in a low voice, "If I go up now, would I run into them?"

"No, the honored guests are already seated. Quickly go back upstairs. Brother Yu is probably anxious from the wait!" After the manager replied, he entered the kitchen.

Yu Xiaocao, like a little mouse avoiding a cat, crept up to the second floor. But she ended up being shocked by the county magistrate's son, who pushed open the door and came out.

"What are you doing? You're acting like a thief." Young Master Wu was quite impressed by this little girl who had good cooking skills. Last time, even that picky fellow, Yuan Yunxi, drank two big bowls of the fish stew that this little girl made. Earlier, if Third Young Master Zhou hadn't plead for her, he almost couldn't resist speaking up for her.

Yu Xiaocao was somewhat embarrassed as she awkwardly touched the back of her head. She cautiously looked at the closed door behind Young Master Wu. She placed her index finger in front of her mouth and made a silent gesture, and then she pointed at the private room that she was going to. After that, she waved at Young Master Wu and continued to creep towards her destination. When she arrived at the door, she rapidly opened the door and went in, as if she was driven out by a burglar.

Young Master Wu, who watched her series of movements, felt that the little girl was very interesting. She was a lot more interesting than those pretentious noble ladies! He shook his head with a smile on his face.

#### Chapter 119

All the staff of Zhenxiu Restaurant placed great importance to this banquet. Since they had made adequate preparations, the dishes were served very quickly.

First came eight appetizers: steamed chicken with chili sauce, cold boiled pork with garlic puree, soy braised duck tongue, pickled goose feet, spinach salad, sour and spicy black fungus, cold jellyfish, and shredded kelp in chili oil...

As he listened to Third Young Master Zhou's introduction, the emperor emeritus, who was the guest of honor, tasted each dish one by one, and nodded frequently to express his satisfaction. Suddenly, his eyes focused on two dishes that should have not appeared on the table. They were so familiar and nostalgic.

County Magistrate Wu followed his gaze and frowned, "Didn't you say that it was eight kinds of cold dish? Why are there two more?"

Zhou Zixu also saw the two dishes and felt alarmed in his heart—Weren't these the Yu Family's braised food that he brought back from the docks? Didn't he tell the servers to bring them to his own room? Why did they bring them here?

He recalled the main ingredients of these two dishes—pig head and pig ear. Disregarding the people of rich, noble families, even ordinary folks didn't like to eat these stinky things. Yet they had served it to an esteemed guest from the capital. This was considered a great disrespect to their guest. If they weren't careful, they might lose their heads! At that thought, Zhou Zixu's back was immediately covered in cold sweat.

He smiled flatteringly and said, "The waiter must have made a mistake. I'll take it away..."

"Wait!" The emperor emeritus immediately stopped him. Pig head meat with wine was his favorite when he was still a general in his previous life. It had been decades since he had eaten it. He missed it so much that he had even dreamt of himself gnawing on pig head meat!

When he was still the emperor, he had also ordered the imperial chef to make braised pig head. But none of them tasted the same as the one in his memories. The more he couldn't eat it, the more he wanted to eat it. He was already approaching seventy years old, so he really wanted to eat an authentic braised pig head before dying!

The emperor emeritus's eyes were about to be glued to the pig head meat with mashed garlic. He decided to think of a high-sounding reason to keep the dish, "Since they're already here, just leave them! Tell me, what are these two dishes called?"

Cold sweat seeped out of Third Young Master Zhou's forehead as he slightly stuttered and said, "Fifth... Fifth Lord, these two dishes... aren't very suitable for this occasion. Why don't..."

"Why is this considered unsuitable! It looks pretty good! Let me try the taste..." The emperor emeritus had long been eager to move his chopsticks. Thus, he used this perfect chance to reach towards his favorite food—pig head meat!

However, County Magistrate Wu didn't dare to let 'this great Buddha', the emperor emeritus, try the dish. He hastily moved the plate of pig head meat with mashed garlic in front of himself and said with a smile, "Fifth Lord, why don't I try it first? If it tastes good, let's keep it!"

The emperor emeritus watched as the fatty meat that was about to enter his mouth moving away from him again. He furrowed his thick brows and scolded, "Why are you being such a busybody? Are you going to let me eat or not? This isn't the imperial palace! There's no need to be so troublesome over trifling matters!!"

'My lord ah, it's precisely because this isn't the imperial palace that we have to be extra careful! With your status, if something happens in Tanggu Town, I, the county magistrate of Tanggu Town, won't be able to compensate even if my entire family is beheaded ah!' County Magistrate Wu cried incessantly within his heart!

"My lord! Why don't this old servant test the dish for you?" The fat old man behind the emperor emeritus, who had a pale and beardless face, asked humbly in a slightly feminine voice.

He was the head steward court eunuch of palace affairs that had served the emperor emeritus for decades. When the retired emperor had just ascended the throne, there were a lot of people who wanted his life. Hence, the food-testers had been frequently changed one group after another. In the end, Head Steward Liu Fusheng, who was later promoted to the head steward of palace affairs, was the only one who remained by his side. He ended up accompanying the emperor emeritus for over thirty years!

Head Steward Liu still had a lot of face in front of the emperor emeritus. Although the emperor emeritus's expression didn't look very good, he had acquiesced in his request.

Head Steward Liu picked up his chopsticks and swiftly got a piece of pig head meat and pig ear from each plate. He put them into his mouth one after another and chewed them carefully for a moment. The unique taste almost made him want a second bite. This was something that he had never tasted before in the thirty or so years that he had served the emperor emeritus.

A moment later, the emperor emeritus impatiently picked up his chopsticks and said with slight anger, "See, didn't I say it was okay? You people are just being overly cautious!"



As he spoke, he had already grabbed a thick slice of pig head meat with his chopsticks. When he was about to put it into his mouth, he was interrupted again by Third Young Master Zhou.

"I say Zhou Xiaosan ah, Zhou Xiaosan! Are you going to let me, Fifth Lord, eat or not? If you don't give me a valid reason, see if I don't punish you!" The emperor emeritus had almost flipped the table, but he took into account that his favorite pig head meat was on the table and suppressed his rage.

Zhou Zixu was on the verge of tears, but he summoned up his courage and said, "Fifth Lord, these two dishes are pig head meat and pig ears... They're not suitable to be eaten by someone of your status!"

'Of course this old man knows that they're pig head meat and pig ears! They were this old man's favorite food in the past!' The emperor emeritus suppressed his anger and did his best to convince him, "Xiaosan ah, there's no distinction between high and low status for food. The only thing that matters is whether it suits one's taste! Back in the days, when this old man was fighting for power... cough cough, when this lord fought alongside the emperor emeritus, I had even eaten grass and tree bark. Even a mouse tasted delicious to me at that time!! So, what's wrong with pig head meat? Pig head meat is also meat! When natural disasters occur, you wouldn't be able to find meat to eat even if you want to..."

After a moment of reminiscing his bittersweet memories, the voice that kept interrupting him finally stopped. The emperor emeritus was finally able to taste his favorite pig head meat—please don't let him down.

With this bite, it was so delicious that he almost cried. It was the taste that lingered in his mind and he had always dreamt of: The rich and fragrant glutinous taste just melted in his mouth. The oil and marinade exploded within his mouth at the same time filled his mouth with a fragrant taste and made it impossible for him to stop eating.

"Good, good, good!!" The retired emperor praised that it was 'good' three times, and then stuffed a piece of pig head meat that had a good ratio of fatty and lean meat into his mouth and carefully chewed it. He savored the taste for a long time, unwilling to swallow it, "The meat is delicious and has a rich and aromatic flavor! It's fatty but not greasy! The person who made this is definitely an expert in braising food!!"

The emperor emeritus ate half a plate in one breath, and then gradually slowed down to carefully savor the fragrance and crispiness of the shredded pig ears in chili oil. During this meal, he had one more bowl of rice than usual. The two dishes were mostly eaten by him. He barely ate any of the hot dishes that came afterwards, except for a few tasty and refreshing vegetable dishes.

After the meal, the emperor emeritus rubbed his bloated tummy and still wanted more as he recalled the authentic taste of the braised pig head meat: 'I finally got to eat pig head meat that actually tasted authentic!' Those imperial chefs all enjoyed an undeserved reputation. They only knew how to make fancy things, but for decades they still couldn't get the flavor that he wanted. Today, he had finally gotten his wish. What an unprecedented satisfaction! It was even better than when he conquered the country and ascended to the most supreme position!

"The pig head meat and cold shredded pig ear are both very good and suits my taste! Call out the chef who made these two dishes. I, Fifth Lord, want to reward him!"

The retired emperor was pondering about how to take the chef away. If necessary, he would show his identity. Even if he had to oppress others with his power, he still needed to get the chef!!

However, Zhou Zixu just stood there with an awkward expression on his face. County Magistrate Wu slightly wrinkled his brows and asked, "Nephew, didn't you hear what Fifth Lord said? Hurry up and call the chef over for a reward!"

"Fifth Lord, to tell you honestly, these two dishes weren't made by the chefs of Zhenxiu Restaurant!" Zhou Zixu finally answered after careful consideration.

"How dare you! You actually dared to give Fifth Lord food from an unknown origin to eat!! Do you know your crime!!" The leader of the imperial guards was astounded, and then he went forward angrily and shouted.

The emperor emeritus, whose heart was filled with thoughts about how to take the chef away, was extremely disappointed by the news. He stopped the leader of the imperial guards from flying into a rage and solemnly asked, "Xiaosan ah! Do you know who made these two dishes?"

"Yes... Fifth Lord has also seen the person who made these dishes." Seeing that Fifth Lord was already showing an impatient expression, Zhou Zixu had no other choice but to reveal the truth.

"This lord has also seen before?" The emperor emeritus creased his brows and then suddenly relaxed them again, "It's the little girl just now, isn't it?"

'Ha, little lass, seem like I just caught hold of your little secret. Yet you're still pretending! I knew it. Only our fellow folks from several hundred years later can make the most authentic taste of our hometown! However, since you don't want others to know your identity, this lord will be merciful and not expose you. But, I need to get some benefits!'

"Fifth Lord is wise!" Zhou Zixu felt slightly worried. He didn't know whether this was a blessing or disaster for Xiaocao. He decided that if the lord placed blame on her, he would do his best to protect her to the end!

"Reward! This lord ate very happily today! There will be many rewards!!" The emperor emeritus couldn't wait to see that little girl. Should he confer to her the position of imperial chef and take her back to the capital?

However, an eight or nine year old little girl as an imperial chef might not be very convincing to the public. Or maybe... he could let his third son accept her as his god-daughter and bestow her the title of royal princess. Then he could request for her to accompany him, her god-grandfather, in the temporary imperial residence. That wouldn't be too unreasonable, right?

While the emperor emeritus contemplated how to abduct the little girl, Yu Xiaocao had knocked on the door and came in. She was followed by the restless Yu Hai.

"This commoner, Yu Hai, greets the lords!" Yu Hai respectfully saluted County Magistrate Wu.

Only then did Yu Xiaocao follow her father and kneeled down behind him: 'In the vicious old society, civilian at the bottom of the society had to kneel when they saw influential figures. I seriously can't get used to this! Well, I'll just take it as going into temples and worshipping Buddha!'

Yu Xiaocao was in the middle of making endless unspoken criticism when the emperor emeritus waved his hand, "Don't stand on ceremony! Give them seats!"

"I don't dare, I don't dare!" He was someone that even the county magistrate didn't dare to speak in front, so how would Yu Hai dare to casually sit down? It was probably better to answer him while standing!

When the emperor emeritus noticed that his easygoing attitude didn't dispel the anxiety of the father and daughter pair, he didn't continue to insist. Instead, he used a homely tone to ask the slightly more cautious Yu Xiaocao, "Little girl, were you the one who made the braised pig heat meat and pig ears?"

Pig head and pig ear? Didn't Third Young Master Zhou buy them for himself to eat? He wouldn't have served them to the important guest, right? She couldn't afford to take responsibility if something bad happened after he ate her food!

Yu Xiaocao glared fiercely at Third Young Master Zhou, and then meekly replied, "Yes... it was made by this commoner!"

"Don't be nervous! The braised pig heat meat is very good. It really suits this lord's appetite, so I wanted to reward you! Tell me, what kind of reward do you want?" The retired emperor pondered inwardly whether it was somewhat inhumane to make such a young child leave her hometown and her parents.

#### Chapter 120 - Reward

Yu Hai was afraid that his daughter, who wasn't afraid of speaking her mind, would make an outrageous request, so he hastily interjected, "My daughter's skills are unremarkable, so she is fortunate to have pleased your gracious self. We cannot accept your reward!"

The emperor emeritus was in an extremely good mood as he stroked his long white beard. The expression in his eyes as he looked at Yu Xiaocao seemed akin to the one that an old fox who had spotted its prey would sport. He said, "This old man's words are always worth nine sacred tripods, if I say I want to reward you, then I have to reward you! Little girl, tell me whatever you want. There's nothing that this old man can't do!!"

When Yu Xiaocao saw the old man acting like a rascal again, she immediately forgot her previous interaction with him and became brave again. She pouted slightly and said, "Fifth Lord, you're boasting a little too much!"

With one glance the emperor emeritus stopped the lead imperial bodyguard from flipping out. The genial smile remained on the old man's face as he said, "Girl, tell me exactly how I'm boasting, okay?"

Yu Xiaocao saw that Fifth Lord didn't have any signs of being angry, so she gave her father a reassuring look before she smiled innocently, "Fifth Lord, earlier you said that you would give me whatever I wanted. If I wanted the imperial sword that would give me the power to bring down an incapable ruler

or nobles and that would let me kill without question, would you have that? What about the golden medal that would allow me to avoid the death penalty three times, would you have that? What about a jade pendant that would represent the emperor himself in person, would you have that?"

"Xiaocao!! Stop joking around!!" Yu Hai almost fainted on the spot after he heard his daughter's daring words.

The emperor emeritus, however, didn't seem to mind at all and casually flipped his hand, "The words of children carry no harm! Little girl, did you read too many novels? Do we have an imperial sword that lets you kill without license or a gold medal that allows you to avoid the death penalty in the Great Ming Dynasty? If we did, I would definitely give it to you!!"

Yu Xiaocao noticed that her father's lower lip had turned white out of fright, so she stopped challenging his heart's ability to keep up with her antics. She revealed a bashful smile, "That's right! All of the protagonists from the novels say the same thing, right? I guess all of the books are full of lies!"

"They're not necessarily trying to trick people. In the unofficial histories, it is written that Old Matriarch She [1] had a dragon staff that had the power to bring down an incapable ruler or corrupt officials! Mhm, mhm! It really could switch the ruler hm..." The emperor emeritus sank into his thoughts and contemplated, 'Should I create a controlling device for that stinky brat at home, hm?'

County Magistrate Wu apparently noticed something and cautiously said, "Fifth Lord! The unofficial histories are only unofficial, so there might not be actual truth to the stories. Then again, wasn't the reason why an official had the power to 'bring down an incapable ruler or corrupt officials' because the emperor at the time of the Song Dynasty knew his offsprings' personalities too well? So he needed some officials to supervise and spur them on? The current emperor is wise, brilliant, and well versed in all the arts. Is there a need to do more than is required?"

The magistrate's flattery hit the spot! The emperor emeritus was quite pleased by his words. Although the stinky brat was a bit unwilling to take the throne at the time, as a ruler, he was much better than he ever was. All of the people said that he was the horseback emperor and was only fit for conquering the country. Although that stinky brat at home had his own mountain of problems, he was much better at keeping the country within his grasp than he was!

“Alright, there's no point in talking about these trivial matters! Little girl, do you actually want this reward or not?” The emperor emeritus's eyes shifted as he reflected on that flavor and taste of the braised pig head meat again.

Under the pointed stares of County Magistrate Wu and the lead imperial bodyguard, Yu Xiaocao didn't dare to be flippant and obediently said, “Fifth Lord, whatever you want to reward me with is fine! I'm not picky!!”

“Haha! Glad to hear you're not picky!!” The emperor emeritus guffawed heartily and said, “Your personality suits this old man, how about...I take you as my adopted granddaughter...”

“Absolutely cannot be done!”

“Fifth Lord, think it over a bit first...”

County Magistrate Wu, the head steward, and lead imperial bodyguard all spoke out to stop him at the same time.

What a farce! If the emperor emeritus adopted a granddaughter, then the lowest rank she would receive would be a royal princess. It was unfathomable that a little girl who was born in the rural countryside could go across the wide social gulf in one step to become a royal princess just by cooking two dishes that the emperor emeritus liked to eat. If this story came out, wouldn't the people denounce the imperial family?

Yu Xiaocao had already pretty much guessed Fifth Lord's true identity, so how could she have the courage to become his adopted granddaughter? She hastily replied, “Fifth Lord, this commoner does not dare to climb the ladder! How about you reward me with some money instead, a tangible benefit. Heh heh!”

At this moment, Third Young Master Zhou had come in from the outside just in time to see Yu Xiaocao's shameless expression as she asked for a reward. It was quite funny but he also thought she was quite cute like this.

The emperor emeritus didn't know why everyone made such a big fuss about him adopting a granddaughter. Why did they all think it was a bad idea? Argh! The same problem! When he was the

emperor, he could no longer come and go as he pleased, or live a leisurely life. Now that he wasn't the emperor, why didn't he have freedom either?!

He held onto his temper and looked at his attire. He casually took off a mutton-fat jade pendant from his waistband and held it in front of Yu Xiaocao. He made a face and said, "This is for you, take it and amuse yourself with it!"

"Thank you very much, Fifth Lord! This commoner will definitely treat this jade pendant as a family heirloom. It will only be passed through the male descendants of my family who will remember your grace for all eternity!!" Wow! Wow! She hit the jackpot! It was an authentic mutton-fat jade pendant, ah! In modern times, such a piece of jade would be invaluable!!

The emperor emeritus was tickled by her reaction, and the dark expression on his face brightened as he grinned, "Little girl, you know what's good! This is a genuine mutton-fat jade piece, so it is definitely worth becoming a family heirloom!! Okay, little girl! So this recipe of yours for the braised pig head meat, is it a secret recipe that can't be given to outsiders?"

"Fifth Lord, if you don't think this commoner girl's braised food is too crude, then I will gladly offer the recipe to you!" There was not a recipe out there in the world that was more valuable than this type of mutton-fat jade pendant! That being said, if a high ranking official took a liking to your recipe, one had to weigh the consequences if one wanted to conceal it.

"However...in the future, can this commoner girl still sell braised food?" Yu Xiaocao didn't want to renounce her business at the docks. Although they didn't make a lot of money from selling braised food, the business had still helped her family past their most difficult time.

The emperor emeritus smiled, "Keep selling your braised food! This old man won't be using your recipe to make money in the future!"

Yu Xiaocao picked up a brush and then remembered she didn't know how to write traditional characters. Luckily, the previous owner of this body was originally illiterate. She awkwardly held the writing brush and looked imploringly at Third Young Master Zhou as she laughed dryly.

Zhou Zixu understood without needing to hear anything and took the brush from her. He dipped the brush into ink and glanced at Xiaocao. At once, Xiaocao told him the ingredients needed for braised pig

head meat as well as the instructions. She made sure to dictate all of the details for him. Although Zhou Zixu's handwriting was a bit youthful, his writing still had a strength of character, so it was obvious that he had spent some time practicing his writing.

All of the young masters of the Zhou Family started classes at three and learned how to write at age five. Although Third Young Master Zhou was still quite young, he had already spent eight to nine years practicing his calligraphy! It was clear that his efforts were not in vain!

When the emperor emeritus received the braised meat recipe, he was so happy that he grinned until his eyes disappeared into his face. He commanded the head steward to carefully store it and then looked him in the eye, "I won't be taking this recipe for free! Steward Liu, take out three hundred taels, we will be buying this recipe with that money!"

Yu Hai felt like his heart had gone for a ride on a tiny boat in the rough seas today. It had been going up and down his throat the whole day. At any time, he felt like they could be condemned to eternal damnation. The final outcome, however, had truly stunned him silly.

His reckless, younger daughter must have had a god protecting and blessing her. Her earlier brazen and audacious requests didn't offend these nobles but instead she received expensive rewards beyond his imagination. In addition, they also made a lot of money from selling their braised food recipe. Could it be possible that his daughter had really been transformed by the God of Fortune's magic?

After they sent off the noble guests, Zhou Zixu pointedly stared at Yu Xiaocao with an inscrutable expression on his face. He looked at her for so long that she thought that she might have something weird on her face, so she even used her sleeve to roughly wipe it. When she saw nothing came off, she asked him in puzzlement, "Third Young Master, what are you looking at?"

"It feels like the longer I know you, the less I can understand your thoughts! Sometimes, you give off a feeling that you're just a little sister next door who's good at cooking. Other times, in situations where other people wouldn't know what to do, you seem to have no trouble! Tell me the truth, did your family pick you up from the side of the road? Are you actually a maiden from a noble family who had gotten lost among the people?" Zhou Zixu felt like his head was going to explode, so he couldn't help but ask her.

Yu Xiaocao opened her clear and limpid eyes widely and glared at him for a second. She replied somewhat unhappily, "You're the one who was picked up from the side of the road! I'm a true blooded maiden from the Yu Family. If you don't believe me, my father is right there, you can ask him!"



Yu Hai's eyes, which were very similar to his daughter's, were also opened wide as he spoke in a low and muffled voice, "My Cao'er is related to me and her mother by blood and bone!! How could she possibly be a child we picked up from the side of the street? Young Master Zhou really likes to make jokes!!"

Zhou Zixu also realized that he was being a bit rude and smiled, "Apologies, I didn't think before I spoke! However, Uncle Yu, do you think your Yu Family is the descendant of some previous noble family that had lost its luck? Or possibly descendants of an imperial cook?"

Yu Hai shook his head and stated with certainty, "All eight generations of our Yu Family were poor peasants, and we have all relied on fishing to make a living. There is no way we could have any relation to a noble family! As for my Cao'er's culinary talents, I can only say that she has a natural gift for it. She came up with most of the recipes by herself!!"

Zhou Zixu thought that this was inconceivable. For a little fisherman's girl, who wasn't even nine years old, being able to eat her fill would already be considered quite good. How could she possibly come up with a braised food recipe that required such a complicated ratio of spices? Yu Xiaocao saw Third Young Master Zhou looking over at her again with an assessing gaze that seemed to be full of disbelief. She shrugged casually and said, "If I said that all of these recipes came to me in a dream, would you believe me?"

Zhou Zixu unexpectedly nodded his head and firmly asserted, "Of course I'd believe you. Why wouldn't I believe you?"

Yu Xiaocao was stunned for a moment before a bright smile bloomed on her face, "Then doesn't that answer your question? Perhaps the God of Food or the God of Cooking in heaven saw that I, Yu Xiaocao, had an astounding culinary talent. Thus they were intrigued and liked it, and decided to give me some pointers in my dreams!"

Zhou Zixu raised an eyebrow. In his heart, Yu Xiaocao had just become even more mysterious.

Alright, might as well get back to business, "Xiaocao, Zhenxiu Restaurant would also like to buy your braised pig head recipe from you! In the future, other than your family, don't tell anyone else! Here, I'm giving you a banknote worth three hundred taels, so make sure you take care of it!"

“I already sold the recipe once, so how could I sell the recipe to another? Luckily, that noble person only bought the recipe for his own use and didn't restrict me from selling it to other people! If you think it's useful, then just take it!”

Yu Xiaocao was not necessarily a person who was overly greedy for money. From her perspective, it didn't matter how much money she had, none of it was equal to having a close friend stepping forward bravely in a moment of crisis. As for Third Young Master Zhou, at the present time, he was worth being friends with!

The admiration Third Young Master Zhou had for Yu Xiaocao increased significantly. From his standpoint, the thing the Yu Family lacked the most was money. Their business at the docks was good but it was still a small scale business. In one day, they only made around a hundred or so copper coins.

In order to earn three hundred taels, they would need to sell braised food at the docks for a few years, and even then they might not make that much. However, Yu Xiaocao had refused his offer like it was not a big deal, almost as if he was offering her three copper coins instead. Where else would he find a friend who was as generous and shrewd as her?