

Gold Chapter 121

Chapter 121 - Investmen

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However, how could he, Zhou Zixu, take advantage of his friend's good will? He persevered, "That's not okay! My Zhenxiu Restaurant has already profited a lot from you, Xiaocao! How could I possibly take your recipe for free? If you refuse to take the money, then Zhenxiu Restaurant will never sell the braised pig head meat or the pig ears!"

Yu Xiaocao was in a very good mood after earning three hundred taels and an extremely valuable jade pendant! She had barely managed to be generous this one time, but the person in question was not grateful at all!! After trying to persuade him, Third Young Master Zhou's bullheadedness came out in full force, and he adamantly disagreed with her.

The head manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant saw that the two people were stuck in a deadlock. He knew his boss's personality very well, so he started to persuade Yu Xiaocao, "Miss Yu, don't feel embarrassed for taking three hundred taels from us. After all, we are businessmen. Using your recipe, Zhenxiu Restaurant can make that money back very soon, and in fact, make even more than three hundred taels in profit. If you don't take this money, it will actually be our loss..."

Yu Xiaocao saw that Third Young Master Zhou was resolute and had made up his mind. She thought for a bit and then said, "Since you say it like that, then I will give you another recipe! For these two recipes, give me five hundred taels! In the future, I might be able to come up with more recipes that are new. If Zhenxiu Restaurant needs them..."

"We need them, we need them, we absolutely need them!" Third Young Master Zhou impatiently blurted out his thoughts before the head manager could reply.

Third Young Master Zhou trusted Yu Xiaocao's cooking talents beyond a doubt. Since she could transform ingredients that other people didn't touch, such as pig head and offal, into food that people clamored for, it was obvious that she could do the same with other ingredients. If pig head and offal could be transformed into delicious braised food, what could she do with ordinary or even ingredients of the highest quality?

When Zhenxiu Restaurant had just been established, the owners of Fulin Restaurant had colluded with a few smaller restaurants to squeeze them out of business. At the time, all of the established restaurants in Tanggu Town already had their regular customers. As for Zhenxiu Restaurant, it could be said that they were just trying to survive on the edges of the restaurant world.

Also, the Zhou Family had also made this restaurant's success into a trial for Third Young Master Zhou. When Zhenxiu Restaurant was being suppressed by their competitors, the family didn't get involved at all. This made the owners of Fulin Restaurant even more rampant and brazen! It wasn't hard to imagine the difficulties that they had encountered.

Things turned around when Yu Xiaocao appeared. That was when they were able to push out a new dish: oyster sauce vegetables. That alone was enough for Zhenxiu Restaurant to reveal its talents among all of the other, older restaurants. In addition, it helped them to attract some of the other restaurant's regular customers—and now they were the regulars of Zhenxiu Restaurant. With that, Zhenxiu Restaurant was able to set down its roots in Tanggu Town and was now striving to become one of the best restaurants.

Third Young Master Zhou firmly believed that with Yu Xiaocao's braised food recipe and her other, unknown recipe, Zhenxiu Restaurant would be able to become the best restaurant in all of Tanggu Town. The one that no other restaurant could surpass. In the future, who needed to care about Fulin Restaurant or the others. None of them would be able to compete with Zhenxiu Restaurant.

In addition, Zhou Zixu's ambitions went far beyond than the three plots of land that Tanggu Town stood in. In his heart, there were a lot more places he needed to conquer. They had already started building a Zhenxiu Restaurant in the capital. If they wanted to become an established, famous restaurant in the capital, then it wasn't enough to rely on the oyster sauce vegetables alone. However, now that they had the two new recipes from Yu Xiaocao, he figured that they may have a better chance now. Therefore, he had to have a good relationship with this gifted chef, Yu Xiaocao, who had the talents that he could only seek but never get.

“Don't get too excited!! Calm down, calm down!!” Yu Xiaocao looked at him with a bright smile on her face, which made Zhou Zixu feel like he was acting like a silly little boy. Furthermore, it gave him the feeling that the person in front of him wasn't merely a nine year old little girl!

Yu Xiaocao stood on her tiptoes and patted his shoulder, “Don't worry! With such a good relationship between the two of us, how could I not think of you when I come up with new recipes in the future? Quickly get some paper and a brush. After you finish writing down the recipe, I still have other things to do!”

After Third Young Master Zhou finished preparing his brush and paper, Yu Xiaocao dictated out the ingredients and methods to make 'Fuliji Roast Chicken'. Zhou Zixu made sure to write every detail down and was concentrated at his task at hand.

Afterwards, Yu Xiaocao grinned, "This chicken will have a shiny outer skin, tender white meat, exquisite flavor, rich aroma, meat falling off the bones, and will taste rich without being greasy. If one chews on the bone, it'll have a delectable flavor. In addition, if you try to lift a leg off the cooked chicken when hot, all of the meat will fall off. In terms of pairing it with other food, both cold or hot dishes will complement it well."

"After hearing you introduce this dish, I can feel saliva pooling in my mouth!" Zhou Zixu smacked his lips and then a flabbergasted expression surfaced on his face. "Xiaocao, I didn't expect that you would be able to speak so eloquently about food!"

"Hee hee!" Yu Xiaocao dryly laughed and then said, "I'm just spitting out what I've memorized before, that's all! I won't hide it from you anymore. I accidentally came across a fragment of a cookbook, and I learned a couple of recipes from it!"

"Ah you! You talk a lot, but it's hard to tell what's true and what's false! It doesn't matter where you learned these recipes from, I only hope that Zhenxiu Restaurant will be your only business partner from now and in the future!" Zhou Zixu had a winsome smile on his face, and it was obvious this thirteen to fourteen year old youth had the potential to grow into a devastatingly handsome fellow in the future.

"Wrong!" Yu Xiaocao smiled craftily, "What you should say is that you, Third Young Master Zhou, will only be my business partner, and no one else!"

"Okay!! I, Zhou Zixu, promise you that!!" Zhou Zixu solemnly vowed.

Yu Xiaocao burst out laughing, "The way you're talking makes it sound like you're trying to elope with someone..."

"Cao'er!!" Yu Hai felt helpless in front of his youngest daughter. Was this something a little girl should be saying? When they got home, he really needed to have her mother teach her some manners!!

"Alright, we can end our talk now! There's still someone outside waiting for us!" Yu Xiaocao knew that she had inadvertently said something inappropriate, so she stuck out her tongue, "If you have any

troubles trying to make the braised food or roast chicken, feel free to find me! I guarantee that whoever I teach will be able to make it!!”

“Okay!” Zhou Zixu nodded his head furiously.

“Oh right, Third Young Master Zhou! You have a wide net of connections, can you keep in mind that I'm looking for some nice, fertile land around Tanggu Town? If there's anyone who's selling any, let me know? Right now we don't lack money, so as long as the price is fair, and the total cost is less than eight hundred taels, we can definitely consider it!”

Since her father couldn't go into the mountains and also didn't have a boat to go out to sea, then they needed to buy a little more farmland. Even if her own family didn't use it for planting, they could still rent it to other people and get a decent income.

Zhou Zixu muttered to himself for a bit and then said, “Do you think your family can handle having that much land after you buy it?”

The land around Tanggu Town was of high quality with fertile soil. Usually a plot of land in this area would sell for eight to nine taels apiece. Winter was especially harsh this year and right now spring was still far away. Thus, it wasn't surprising that there were a lot of people willing to sell some land at prices below the usual. With eight hundred taels, they could likely buy more than a hundred plots of the best land available. From his understanding, out of all the people in Yu Xiaocao's family, the only adult male in his prime was Yu Hai, but even he had an injury to his leg. Why did she think her family would be able to use all of this land?

“If my family can't handle it, then we'll just rent it out! We can hire some tenant farmers to till the land, it should work, ah!!” When she thought that her family would soon become landowners, Xiaocao felt ecstatic inside.

However, Zhou Zixu lightly shook his head and replied in disapproval, “Buying land to rent it out, how long would it take for you to make back your capital?! Take my advice, it's not as good as buying a shop stall. Whether you decide to use it for your own business or to rent it out to someone else, it will give you a better return on your investment than buying farmland!”

“Buy a store? But who in Tanggu Town would sell the stalls that are in a good location? If the location isn't good, then we can't charge a good rent...” Yu Xiaocao had also thought of buying a shop stall but all of the good locations couldn't just be bought with money alone.

Zhou Zixu drawled, “Who told you to buy a shop stall in Tanggu Town? I have some definite information that the government plans on doing a big construction project at the docks to make them into the largest harbor in the north. Rumors say that because they're having trouble gathering enough funds that they will be selling some shop stalls in advance. Thus, it is likely that those empty stores will rise in value over time. You don't need me to say any more for you to understand...”

Yu Xiaocao's eyes immediately lit up when she heard what Zhou Zixu said. The government wanted to develop the docks? This was a once in a lifetime chance bestowed by the heavens! The shop stalls sold in advance would definitely not be too expensive.

After the harbor construction was finished, then those empty shop stalls would definitely skyrocket in value. What was the best way to make money in the 20th century? Speculating in real estate, ah!! If she could grab onto this chance, then one shop stall could definitely be resold for more than twice the buying price!!

“Okay! Then we'll buy store stalls...”

Yu Xiaocao was just about to close the deal when she was interrupted by her father, “Cao'er! How about we go home and discuss this with your mother first?”

“Oh, that was my fault, I got too excited and forgot to ask for your opinion, Father! Father, do you prefer to buy farmland or the stalls?” Yu Xiaocao suddenly realized that the true head of her family was right next to her. She had truly gotten too carried away to even neglect her own father's opinion.

Yu Hai stayed silent for a moment before he replied, “Cao'er, technically since you were the one who earned these eight hundred taels you should be the one making all of the decisions. However, you're still quite young, so as your father I just want to remind you a bit—this thing with the docks, do you think it's reliable? After all, this isn't a small sum of money, what if...”

“It makes sense that you have a few misgivings, Uncle Yu! However, I'm best friends with County Magistrate Wu's son. County Magistrate Wu naturally has to help the imperial envoy from the capital to handle the construction of the harbor. The official documents have already gone to the magistrate's

office. Thus, you should relax. I absolutely wouldn't let you guys invest your money into something that would fail!" Zhou Zixu clearly had a lot of confidence in this idea and had thought things out thoroughly.

Yu Xiaocao tried to persuade her father, "Father, I think buying stalls at the docks is a good idea! With the largest harbor in the north here, in the future there will definitely be way more people around than Tanggu Town has now. We absolutely will not lose money buying these stores! Right now, we're at the mercy of the weather when selling braised food, so it's quite tiring. If we had a store, then we could make our braised food business even larger. Who knows, maybe in a few years our braised food store could even become more famous than Third Young Master Zhou's Zhenxiu Restaurant!!"

"Uncle Yu, Xiaocao is right! Even if you don't use them to create a braised food store, with how large the new harbor will be, you can definitely earn at least three to five hundred taels profit from flipping the store. With that money, you can definitely buy as much farmland as you want. Do you think that's worth it?" In terms of grasping business opportunities, Zhou Zixu was definitely one of the best around

When he heard the opinions of the two, Yu Hai also felt his heart skip a beat. He squeezed his hand into a fist and clenched his teeth before he made a decision, "Okay! Let's use all of the eight hundred taels to buy shop stalls!! Cao'er, you need to prepare yourself mentally just in case all of this goes south. If it does, you're not allowed to cry!!"

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes and remarked, "If it goes south, then it goes south! When you do business, sometimes you win and sometimes you lose! This is nothing new! Then again, even if our luck is that bad, it'll just be as if we didn't make any money today, nothing else is lost!"

Zhou Zixu didn't expect the father and daughter pair to be so adaptable with money, especially since they had both grown up in impoverished conditions. His impression of the Yu Family improved another notch, and he gently chuckled, "I definitely dare to vouch for this business venture! You absolutely will not lose! If you actually do lose out on this, then it's all on me, okay!"

"No, we can't take you up on that offer!" Yu Hai waved his hand repeatedly in refusal.

"Ahhh, Father! It's getting late now, let's go back and pick some vegetables for the steward of the Yao Family. Let's hurry, we don't want him to think that we are going back on our promise!" Yu Xiaocao finally recalled that the Yao Family's steward was likely waiting at the backdoor of the restaurant. Almost four hours had passed for this little detour of theirs. If they didn't leave now, they would be losing this opportunity!

Chapter 122 - Retribution

By the time the group of people had arrived at the back door of Zhenxiu Restaurant, the steward from the Yao Family had already been waiting for a long time. If the guard at the back of the door wasn't strict, he would have long barged in to find the person he needed.

“My little lady ah! You've finally come out!!” The steward from the Yao Family had already promised his master that he would definitely make sure to succeed in his mission to buy vegetables. If something went wrong at this point, then he wouldn't know what he could do!

Yu Xiaocao replied somewhat apologetically, “I'm sorry, Steward Yao! I was delayed by something that happened in Zhenxiu Restaurant.”

“Steward Yao, we had a situation come up at Zhenxiu Restaurant that required this girl's help, so we went over our time.” Zhou Zixu had the most perfect smile on his face. “Hopefully I didn't delay your issue for too long?”

“Of course not, of course not!” Steward Yao repeatedly affirmed. What a joke! Just what were the backgrounds of this father and daughter pair that made Third Young Master Zhou, the most capable son of the Zhou Family, personally escort them to the door? And also have him treat them so courteously?

Yu Xiaocao casually waved her hand at Third Young Master and said, “We're leaving!! If you have any other issues, just come to Dongshan Village to find me! Oh right, my family moved back to our old residence. It's at the foot of the West Mountain, so don't go to the wrong place ah!”

“Alright, safe travels!” The smile on Zhou Zixu's face became more sincere when he was interacting with Xiaocao.

Suddenly, Yu Xiaocao remembered how much her family's donkey cart jostled on the road and couldn't help but ask one additional thing, “Third Young Master, would you happen to be able to get ahold of some rubber cart wheels?” Zhou Zixu glanced at her simple and crude looking donkey cart, slightly smiled, and promised, “I got it! I guarantee that I will get you a donkey cart with inflatable rubber cart wheels!!”

“The cart can be more simple, but the shock absorption qualities of the wheels must be very good. You also know that we have to travel through a stretch of mountainous roads. Sitting on our current cart right now is simply just torture!” Yu Xiaocao stuck out her tongue and smartly replied.

“I promise I'll complete the mission!” Zhou Zixu asserted confidently.

After they left Zhenxiu Restaurant, Steward Yao sat in the Yu Family's plain donkey cart. As for the Yao Family's horse cart, there was a small servant driving it, following the donkey cart from behind.

Steward Yao wanted to say something a few times, but instead looked at the father and daughter pair with a complicated look in his eyes.

“Steward Yao, if you have anything to say, just say it! Looking at you right now makes me feel uncomfortable!!” Yu Xiaocao said in an outspoken manner.

Only then did Steward Yao open his mouth, “Miss Yu, does your family have a special connection with the Zhou Family? Why does Third Young Master Zhou treat you guys so intimately?”

Although the Yao Family was also considered to be one of the rich families in Tanggu Town, but compared to the Zhou Family, their information sources were much more lacking. One was a nouveau riche, while the other was a newly promoted imperial merchant. One hadn't held wealth for more than three generations, while the other was a famous tycoon in the previous dynasty. They were not at the same level!

Even the eldest son of the Yao Family couldn't say much in front of Third Young Master Zhou. However, this Yu Family father and daughter pair, who were both plainly dressed, were capable enough to have Third Young Master Zhou treat them well. Steward Yao was also someone who was smart, so he naturally restrained his usual arrogant and high-handed manner.

“Nothing really, just helped Third Young Master Zhou with some small matters before!” Yu Xiaocao mildly replied and had no intention of clarifying the situation for him.

But Steward Yao didn't believe her! Third Young Master Zhou was a business genius that was rarely seen. It was rumored that he had even more potential than his nominal father—the business genius blessed by the Heavens, Second Master Zhou. Whoever could help him, and even have him treat them with respect, was obviously someone who had immense talents.

Just as he was about to say something additional, the donkey cart was blocked by a group of people on the road. Steward Yao felt his anxiety skyrocket. If delays continued to happen, then he would not be able to get back to the residence before it got dark.

Steward Yao jumped off the donkey cart and pulled aside one of the people watching the bustling scene in front of them. He inquired, "What's going up in front?"

"What's going on? Why, the bureau is handling a criminal case right now!" The person who was pulled aside replied exhilaratingly.

Yu Xiaocao stood on top of the donkey cart out of curiosity and stretched her neck towards the crowd to catch a peek. From her height looking down, she could see a few bailiffs using chains to shackle a middle-aged man. They then pushed and jostled him in the direction they wanted him to go. The surrounding crowd also followed them along.

Yu Xiaocao asked inquisitively, "Uncle, who did they catch? What sort of crime did he commit?"

The person standing next to them described the situation in excitement, his face full of astonishment, "You guys haven't heard of it? The person who got caught is Shopkeeper Zhang from Zhang Ji's Carpentry Shop! Hasn't he always bragged about having the nobility from the capital admiring his craftsmanship and buying his wares? Wasn't he so arrogant? Who would have thought that this time he got stuck in a situation that didn't give him glory and instead smacked into a lawsuit?!"

When she heard that Zhang Ji's Carpentry Shop fell into trouble, Yu Xiaocao immediately felt her spirits rise, "Uncle, stop holding back on us. Quickly tell us what's going on, okay?"

"Don't be in such a rush ah! Let me recap the story slowly!" A brilliant smile crossed the man's face. It was obvious he knew that he had come across a piece of juicy and exciting gossip. "The yamen said that Zhang Ji's Carpentry Shop used shoddy wood in their furniture. Apparently, the materials they used had been partially eaten by ants or termites. The noble from the capital didn't use the furniture they made for more than a few days before an accident occurred! I heard, ah, that when the red sandalwood screen fell to the ground it almost injured the princess consort of Prince Jing!!"

"Isn't that right!" An old man next to them, who also wanted to gossip, interjected, "I heard that the princess consort has a weak constitution since she is always worrying about her son who is out at sea!"

After being scared by this event, her health has even gotten worse. Her condition only stabilized after the emperor sent several imperial doctors over to see her!”

“Out of all of the imperial uncles, Prince Jing is the one closest to the emperor. Although he recently withdrew from court due to illness, he still has an intimate relationship with the emperor. Furthermore, his youngest son, Royal Prince Yang, is even more highly regarded by the emperor. You all know that, when the emperor was young, he liked to sail overseas. Thus, he constructed a shipyard to build ships that could travel far. Now that he's the emperor, he no longer can travel as much as he desires, so he must feel a bit dejected. However, Prince Yang is like the emperor and likes to sail overseas too. Now ah, one could say that Prince Yang has inherited the emperor's ambitions and often travels in his stead to explore the world. The emperor also said that it is intolerable to close the country from the outside world, and it is best to remove the restriction against foreign, overseas trade. We need to use these new goods to strengthen our Great Ming Dynasty...”

The original topic of the criminal case of Zhang Ji's Carpentry Shop had already been lost by these two people. Now they had somehow gotten onto the topic of strengthening the country to be prosperous and mighty.

After hearing about this, Yu Xiaocao was completely satisfied with the outcome! That cruel and ruthless Shopkeeper Zhang had gotten his just desserts. Retribution had come——truly, karma always happens for both good and evil deeds. If the consequences hadn't happened yet, then it would come in the future!

Xiaocao played with the multicolored stone on her wrist and silently asked, 'Little Glutinous Dumpling, were you involved in this case?'

Her intuition told her that this event could not be separated from the little divine stone.

Out of nowhere, a mini golden kitten jumped onto her shoulders. The little cat licked its claws and cleaned its ears. It asserted arrogantly, [This divine stone only used its claws a little to create this event! Are you grateful ah?]

In actuality, it was finding it difficult to calm down. After helping its master again, it could truly feel the good effects of its actions. It was convinced that, in the near future, it would be able to restore all of its spiritual power and be released from its shackles, and then return back home next to the Goddess Nuwa. It was so looking forward to that day!!

[Tell me quickly, how did you arrange this to happen?] Xiaocao took the little golden kitten off of her shoulder and placed in the palm of one of her hands. She lightly pinched at its soft and fluffy paws, but the kitten quickly slapped away her hand out of dislike. It wasn't enough force to hurt or tickle. In fact, in other people's eyes, they would have thought that the 'cat' was playing around with its master.

Yu Hai suddenly noticed the little kitten in his daughter's hands and inquired, "Eh? When did Little Glutinous Dumpling get here? How come I didn't see it until now?"

Yu Xiaocao paused for a second before she came up with a plausible excuse, "I'm also not sure how it followed us. Little Glutinous Dumpling often appears and leaves like the wind. Maybe it was hiding in one of the vegetable baskets, taking a nap, and we accidentally brought it into town? Is that the truth, Little Glutinous Dumpling?"

She grabbed onto the little fellow's paw and lightly waved it around. The arrogant little divine stone forcefully pulled its paw back and glared at her fiercely, [Do you think this is a plausible excuse? Sounds stupid to me!]

The two people next to them wound down their conversation and noticed the kitten in Xiaocao's hands. The old man stroked his shaggy beard and smiled, "This little kitten has a bright coat color. It's so rare to see a cat that's so beautiful! It's just too small, must be only a month old right? It's not easy to take care of a kitten that left its mother too early!"

[You're the one that's hard to raise, your whole family is hard to raise! Hmph!!] The little divine stone erupted in anger again and whipped its paws at the old man, revealing its sharp little nails.

Yu Xiaocao gently stroked the little fellow's back and managed to placate it with great difficulty. She was really afraid that the little divine stone would leap up and start clawing the old man's face.

[Alright! There's no use staying angry at a person who does not know he is wrong, so don't lower yourself to his level. Quickly tell me, how did you create this situation?] Yu Xiaocao deliberately changed the topic to catch the little divine stone's attention.

The little kitten arrogantly lifted its head up and snorted coldly, [Hmph! Stupid humans, if this divine stone decided to go to his level, wouldn't that be lowering my status, eh?]

[Quickly tell me! Stop dawdling ah!] Yu Xiaocao kneaded its head.

[Stinky master, you're messing my beautiful fur up!] The little cat used its paws to scratch an ear and forcefully shook its head.

In order to avoid having its master get another chance at rubbing its head, it continued, [In actuality, it was quite simple. That day, when we were confronting him, this divine stone smeared some mystic-stone water on the furniture in his warehouse. After a period of time, it will naturally attract insects! That wooden screen for Prince Jing's estate had been inhabited by termites. Termites are astonishingly destructive, so it's obvious that a wooden screen with termites in it wouldn't stand up for long. That princess consort is quite unlucky, the screen only broke and fell when she was passing by...]

“This Shopkeeper Zhang won't ever be able to dig himself out of this hole after startling Prince Jing's wife! Retribution really came quickly!!” Yu Xiaocao curved her lips up into a smile, which revealed the depths of her happiness.

'You're too cool, Little Glutinous Dumpling! That princess consort is really too unlucky to be an accidental victim in this case! I sincerely hope she recovers soon! After all, I do have some sort of connection with Royal Prince Yang.'

Judgement came down quickly. All of the evil things Shopkeeper Zhang had done in the past had also been revealed. It was said that officials had dug up the old skeletons of some adolescents in the back courtyard of the carpentry shop. All of the families of the apprentices who had been accused of stealing by Shopkeeper Zhang had suddenly become the families of victims. They all wailed and howled for Shopkeeper Zhang to pay in blood.

Yu Hang had also been summoned by the officials and was accompanied by his family when he acted as a witness in court. All of the scars on his body as well as the testimony from Tongren Medical Hall's Doctor Sun became the ironclad evidence proving that Shopkeeper Zhang cruelly mistreated his apprentices.

Chapter 123

After they returned back home from the yamen, the whole Yu Family felt as if they had narrowly escaped death——If Yu Hang was more unlucky, then wouldn't he also had become one of the skeletons buried in the back courtyard of the carpentry shop?

Finally, the notorious Shopkeeper Zhang had been sentenced to a beheading at the end of autumn. In addition, all of his property was confiscated. After all of the carpenters and apprentices at this shop were investigated and found to be innocent, they were all let go...

Traveling from the town back to their home took over two hours of time. Although Steward Yao was burning with impatience, there was nothing he could do. Luckily, the Yu Family's donkey, which looked very ordinary, had a decent speed and wasn't any slower than the Yao Family's horse cart.

However, after seeing Yu Xiaocao's ghostly white face and an expression that seemed to be a sliver away from vomiting from being jostled in the cart, Steward Yao had no choice but to ask a couple of times whether they should slow down.

"No need!" Yu Xiaocao took out the pouch of water she took everywhere with her and drank a mouthful of mystic-stone water. Her stomach immediately calmed down. She continued softly, "If we hadn't been delayed for so long at Zhenxiu Restaurant, then we would have reached home already. In fact, we might have loaded almost half of the cart by this point! If we're not any faster, then you will have to go back home in the dark."

Seeing her uncomfortable expression, Steward Yao felt both touched and worried, "Miss Yu, if your family frequently goes in and out of town, then you guys really need to get some better cart wheels. However, rubber cart wheels are not only quite expensive but also incomparably rare. It's not possible to get a set with only money!"

"It's really that hard to get a set of rubber cart wheels?" Yu Xiaocao had thought it was like her previous life, something that she could just buy some with money. That being said, rubber trees only thrive in the tropics. Tanggu Town was in the northern part of the Great Ming Dynasty. In ancient times, traveling and shipping goods was not that easy.

Steward Yao nodded his head when she asked the question, "It's said that it is hard to manufacture rubber wheels, and the output is extremely low. All of the high ranking officials and noble people in the capital get first dibs, then the officials in the rest of the country. As for people like my master's family, those with money but no power, they had to run around pulling strings to just buy one set. However, you shouldn't worry too much, Miss Yu. The Zhou Family are imperial merchants, and they have a lot of connections with the nobility in the capital. Since Third Young Master Zhou promised you, he absolutely will be able to get you a set."

Yu Xiaocao wasn't doubting Third Young Master Zhou's reliability. However, in her heart, she did feel like she owed Third Young Master a big favor.

As they were talking, the donkey cart had just rolled into Dongshan Village. Under the old elm tree at the entrance of the village, there were several old villagers chatting. When they heard the sounds of hooves, all of them looked over.

"Old Yu, it's your second son's donkey cart that's come back." An old man swayed as he stood up. He placed a hand at his eyebrows to look in the distance and only then did he squat back down. With a voice that had a hint of envy in it, he said, "Your family's second son is quite capable, ah! After separating from the family for not too long, he bought a donkey cart and started a business selling things!"

Old Yu's eldest brother, Yu Lichun, unhurriedly stood up and slowly replied, "You guys can only see the good side of things, but can you remember their difficulties? When Dahai split from the family, he had been seriously injured and no one knew whether he would be able to keep his leg! Dahai's wife also has a weak body and their Xiaocao has had a bad constitution since birth. A few days ago, Xiaosha had been pummeled until he was at death's door! Luckily both Dahai and Xiaosha were fortunate and weren't fated to die yet..."

Old Yu's face flushed red in embarrassment under the knowing gaze of his older brother and the implication in his words. He looked at the horse cart that was right behind the donkey cart and quickly changed the subject, "I've never seen the horse cart that is behind Dahai. I'm not sure if Dahai and his family need help right now. I need to go over and see!"

"Father! Eldest Uncle..." Yu Hai had also seen them and pulled on the little donkey's reins to slowly cut down the speed until they stopped at the village entrance.

Yu Xiaocao also sweetly greeted them, "Eldest Granduncle, Grandpa! Are you guys chatting here?"

Yu Lichun's face lit up with a kind smile, "Xiaocao, did you go into town with your father? Did you go to Tongren Medicine Hall and have Doctor Sun check you guys out? Your complexion doesn't look too good..."

Yu Xiaocao rubbed at her bright and radiant little face and grinned, "Eldest Granduncle, the donkey cart was going too fast earlier, so I feel a little dizzy from being bumped up and down. Don't worry, I'm perfectly fine!"

"If you don't feel well, you need to tell your father. Don't endure a minor sickness until it becomes a serious illness! If you don't have enough money, Eldest Granduncle still has some!" Yu Lichun couldn't forget what had happened that past winter. The vision of a motionless Xiaocao in her father's arms was engraved into his memory.

Yu Xiaocao felt a burst of gratitude arise in her heart, "Thank you Eldest Granduncle! Xiaocao will remember your words!"

Old Yu took a glance at the properly dressed Steward Yao and pulled Yu Hai aside. He quietly asked, "Who is that person? What is he here for? Did you get into trouble in town?"

Although Steward Yao was only a servant in the Yao Family, his attire was about the same as other prosperous families in town. In Old Yu's eyes, he was not someone that they could afford to offend.

"Father!" Yu Hai helplessly replied, "He's a steward at the Yao Family. Tomorrow is Patriarch Yao's birthday celebration, and they need to pick some vegetables from my house. I'm no longer a strapping young lad, how could I possibly just randomly cause trouble?"

"Picking vegetables? How are there any vegetables to be had in this season? No one has even planted any vegetable seeds!! You're not trying to trick your father, right?" Old Yu still didn't feel relieved. It's necessary to forgive his terrified attitude, after all, it's better to be careful than to make a large blunder.

Yu Hai didn't know what else to say and continued, "If you don't believe me, then come with me to the old residence and check it out yourself, okay?"

"Village elders, we are against the clock right now. Would it be possible to make a long story short and try to finish up?" Steward Yao glanced at the color of the sky and a worried expression appeared on his face.

Old Yu swallowed down the words he was about to say when he heard the steward's remark and repeatedly nodded his head with a smile, "Of course, of course! Then we won't delay you folks anymore!"

Under Steward Yao's eager gaze, Yu Xiaocao waved farewell to her Eldest Granduncle and hopped into the donkey cart again. This time, the horse cart was in front to open the path, so no one else dared to stop them again. However, word quickly went through the whole village. People all said that Yu Hai was seriously too capable to be able to forge a connection with a rich family in town...

The horse cart stopped in front of the gate at the old residence. Yu Hai opened the gate, lifted up the doorsill, and brought the donkey cart into the courtyard. He didn't bother unharnessing the donkey before he asked Yu Hang, who was lying on a long chair getting sun, in a loud voice, "Xiaosha, where's your mother?"

"She's in the backyard doing laundry! Father, what's going on?" At this point, Yu Hang noticed Steward Yao, who had come in behind his father. Out of caution, he somewhat wanted to stand up.

When Yu Xiaocao saw this, she hurriedly said, "Older Brother! Your bones are still too weak, don't move around recklessly!! I'll go into the back courtyard and get Mother to help us harvest vegetables!"

Madam Liu had already heard the sounds of her husband's voice. She shook her dripping hands, walked in from the rear court, and asked, "You're back? How did selling the vegetables go?"

"We sold out! Keep the laundry there for now and help us pick some vegetables first. Steward Yao still needs to hurry back!" A hint of excitement was threaded in Yu Hai's voice. A whole cart of vegetables was sold for twenty taels. If he told this story to other people, who would believe him? His daughter was really too amazing. Selling vegetables at the price of meat, but there truly were people who would buy them!

As soon as Steward Yao stepped into the courtyard, he was stunned by the sight of the lush, green vegetables surrounding him. It was a very large space and had to be at least seven to eight plots of land. All of it was used to grow all different types of vegetables and there was only a small strip of land left as a walkway for people.

All of the vegetables were at their peak, and they revealed their lush vitality. Under the bright sun, the dark green leaves glistened and flickered. Every single leaf seemed to have a tiny life there budding and throbbing. This Yu Family was really a good hand at growing vegetables. Even if you didn't consider the current season, their output was absolutely the top of the top.

Madam Liu noticed the stranger in their yard and politely greeted, "You must be tired, guest. Please sit down inside and drink some water to quench your thirst!"

When Steward Yao had gotten back from the food market, he had directly reported to his master and then immediately went to the stables to get the horse cart. He also had to anxiously wait at Zhenxiu Restaurant's back door for a long time and then rush over with the father and daughter pair from the Yu Family to Dongshan Village. Only now could he catch his breath. After he heard her suggestion, he immediately felt how dry and scratchy his throat was.

However, he didn't enter the building and instead sat down on a large stone in front of the rooms. He smiled, "I don't need to enter your house, sitting here, where I can get some sun, is also quite comfortable."

Madam Liu poured him a bowl of water that had been boiled. Steward Yao stood up to take it and politely thanked her. He didn't even notice how crude and simple the ceramic bowl was as he finished the water in the bowl in one big gulp. Perhaps he was too thirsty, but Steward Yao thought this bowl of plain water was even more refreshing than any tea he had before. He couldn't help but compliment it a bit.

A golden kitten jumped off of Yu Xiaocao's shoulders and rolled its eyes at him—'What a naive fellow! This divine stone's bathing water is full of spiritual energy. Even if it's diluted a bit, it still can't be compared to ordinary water, so of course it tastes good!'

Yu Hang watched as his parents and youngest sister rolled up their sleeves and busied themselves in the vegetable field. Ever since he had come home, he had to watch the rest of his family run around the house day in day out. However, he couldn't help them at all. However, in his heart, he was clear about one thing: the most important thing he could do right now was to let his body recover fully. Afterwards, he would definitely help his family with their tasks! Regardless, he still felt impatient! Especially in times like now, he wished with all his heart that he could stand up and help them harvest the vegetables.

As the little divine stone stepped by gracefully, it passed by Yu Hang. It seemed to sense Yu Hang's inner turmoil and stopped for a short period of time. It lightly leapt onto his knee and had an expression on its

face as if it was conferring the boy a great favor. It let Yu Hang scratch it. The little divine stone inwardly thought: 'Weak and puny human ah, this divine stone is letting you scratch an itch, but this is your good fortune. Appreciate it!!'

Yu Hai, his wife, and daughter Xiaocao were all bustling busily in the vegetable field. The little assistant that came along had also been ordered by Steward Yao to help. Although he didn't know how to harvest vegetables, he was able to help them put the food into baskets or other activities that didn't require much skill.

Old Yu slowly walked into the old residence and was stunned at the sight of the courtyard full of green vegetables. The last time he came over, the whole courtyard was covered completely with mats made of rice straw and wheat stalks. At that time he didn't know what they were for and asked a few times but never got an answer. He never thought that under the grass mats were vegetable sprouts that were planted! It only took around ten days of effort, yet the vegetables were already ready to be harvested?

Old Yu first went to his eldest grandson and carefully asked him about his injuries and condition. After seeing his second son's family bustling without a break, he also rolled up his sleeves and entered the fields to help them!

A bit of time passed and Xiaolian also came back from the docks. The Yu Family's one copper coin per portion of braised food was famous at the docks! As soon as one of them got there, almost all of the food they brought would be sold out after half an hour! Their family's braised food was not only priced well but also delicious beyond imagination.

Now, not only did all of the dockworkers know about them but also the people living in the nearby villages. If one of them had a guest come over, they would especially go over to buy a couple portions. Using the Yu Family's braised food to serve guests was a very welcoming thing to do!

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Had Xiaolian not waited to the ox cart from the neighbouring village, then she would have long gotten back after all of the braised food sold out!

With the addition of Xiaolian, their harvesting speed increased perceptibly. Before long, all of the baskets that Steward Yao brought with him had been stacked full with lush green vegetables that looked incredibly appetizing.

While the family was harvesting vegetables, Steward Yao had gone to Yu Residence's back courtyard as well as the nearby pond. He saw that there were also vegetable fields in the back that spanned around three to four mu [1]. There were cucumber and string bean vines climbing on vegetable frames. Eggplants and hot chili peppers were all growing vigorously in neatly laid out rows. There were also lettuce and carrots. However, he couldn't see how large the carrots were as they were underground, but the carrot leaves were lush and vibrant green. On the fence surrounding the four sides of the garden, there were hyacinth bean vines and malabar spinach twisted around the wooden poles, which added a bluish-green color to the perimeter. Furthermore, there were still some other vegetables that he could not identify, but everywhere he looked was full of vegetables...

He was convinced that before long all of these vegetables would be ready to harvest. At that time, other people's vegetables would only be tiny sprouts. Steward Yao was very well aware what it meant for Yu Family since they were able to sell vegetables more than a month out of the regular season!

He looked at their simple and crude looking residence as well as the unadorned rooms. As of now, the Yu Family looked destitute and poor. However, with their ability to grow vegetables, they were absolutely about to become rich very soon, right? Steward Yao now really didn't have the guts to scorn the Yu Family.

At last, all of the baskets of vegetables were weighed and moved onto the Yao Family's horse cart. In total, they had bought six hundred and eighty catties of vegetables. Steward Yao knew that Old Master Yao was very picky. If he found out about the Yu Family's vegetables, then in the future they would definitely have many more dealings to come! Thus, he generously agreed to pay for all of the vegetables using the price for romaine lettuce—twenty-five copper coins per catty.

When Old Yu saw that the vegetables, which usually sold for around three to five copper coins a catty, being sold for five to eight times the normal price, his eyes opened wide in shock. He almost couldn't believe his ears, "Dahai, are you not afraid that the rich folk will blame you guys for setting the price of vegetables at the price of pork?"

"Grandfather! We're doing business fair and square. One is willing to buy and the other is willing to sell, why would anyone blame the other?" Yu Xiaocao held up a basin of water to let her grandfather wash his hands and then continued, "The Yao Family is a well-known rich family in town. They've eaten meat all winter and have long been tired of it! If you don't believe me, go ask Steward Yao whether the patriarch of the Yao Family wants to eat meat or does he want to eat our family's vegetables, okay?"

"But...these are merely green vegetables ah! If we're selling it at such an expensive price, isn't that overcharging other people?" Old Yu felt a bit uneasy about all of this.

Steward Yao counted the money as he interjected, "Old sir, this is obviously an example of: 'the rarer a thing is, the greater its value'! Right now, at this season, if you want to eat green vegetables, even if you have money you might not be able to get any! Your family's vegetables are the only ones on the market in town right now. Even at a more expensive price you guys wouldn't have to worry about it not selling!"

As they talked, he took out two large ingots of shiny silver and placed them into Yu Hai's hands. He then said, "Big Brother, this is twenty taels, make sure you keep them safe!"

Yu Hai waved his hand, "There's no need to give us this much. Six hundred and eighty catties of vegetables only comes out to seventeen taels total. You're taking such good care of us, how could we possibly take more of your money..."

"Just keep the extra money for now. Think of the additional three taels as a security deposit. Make sure you leave some of the vegetables in the back courtyard for me, your brother. Don't sell it all to Zhenxiu Restaurant." Steward Yao also knew the value of planning ahead for greater rewards. 'If you guys take my security deposit, in the future it will obviously be very easy to buy vegetables from you!'

Yu Hai still hesitated a bit but Yu Xiaobao had already taken the money away. She grinned, "Since Steward Yao said so, in the future, if you need any vegetables, just give us a holler and we'll deliver them to the Yao Residence!"

Steward Yao nodded his head repeatedly, "That's what I wanted to hear! I know you guys are short staffed, so in the future I will have people bring a cart over to your place to buy vegetables! Xiaosi, remember the route. In the future, you will be in charge of buying vegetables. Make sure you do well and not let me, your adoptive father, lose any face!"

Steward Yao had directed the last part to the little assistant who was driving the cart. That little assistant was also a clever and nimble fellow, so he nodded his head as if he was pounding garlic paste with it. A joyful smile tinged with admiration crossed his face. Going from an assistant who took care of the horses to a person in charge of purchasing was a big change. It not only was a large promotion but also his future treatment and pay would be vastly different.

That was because the purchasing position was one that had a lot of profit involved in it. In the future, he really needed to show his filial respect to his adoptive father. Without his adoptive father promoting

him, how else could he, Xiaosi, possibly get such a position with the multitudes of other servants at the residence?

"Thank you, Godfather! Thank you, Godfather!" Xiaosi continuously thanked Steward Yao as if this was the only way he could truly express the depths of his gratitude.

"Do your job well! In the future, when you have more contact with the Yu Family, make sure to treat them with more courtesy. Especially that little girl. She has a lot of ideas and you absolutely cannot slight her!" On the way back home, Steward Yao gave him some words of advice to help Xiaosi develop properly.

Later on, Xiaosi repeatedly went back and forth between Dongshan Village and Tanggu Town. He always kept his adoptive father's advice close to heart and warmly called Yu Hai and his wife 'uncle and auntie'. In addition, he also helped them to do some work around the house. He had an almost brotherly relationship with Yu Hang, who was about the same age as him. Furthermore, he took care of Xiaolian and Little Shitou as if they were his own younger siblings. Every time he came to buy vegetables and produce, he would always bring some pastries and cakes for them. As for Xiaocao, who looked almost exactly the same as Xiaolian, he had unconsciously developed deep feelings of respect for her.

By nurturing these relationships, Xiaosi never came back to the Yao residence empty-handed, even in rougher times when the harvest was not as good. By successfully managing his tasks, he naturally received more promotions. He rose from a purchasing assistant to an assistant steward in the purchasing department, and then to the head steward in charge of the purchasing department. By the time his adoptive father became the chief steward, he, at the age of twenty, had become the residence's youngest head steward.

At that time, he was still unmarried, and so, the maidservants in the residence all saw him as an ideal marriage prospect. The first ranked maidservants, who had previously disdained him, now all looked at him with a different expression in their eyes. As for himself, he finally had enough courage to request to marry the maidservant he had secretly admired for a long time, Luxiu. She was the personal maidservant of the matriarch. As a favor, the matriarch betrothed Luxiu, who had already reached a marriageable age, to him. After his adoptive father retired, Xiaosi replaced his father to become the chief steward of the Yao residence...

All of these changes started during that fateful bright and brilliant afternoon, when he had gone with his adoptive father to go to Dongshan Village and met the noble person who would transform his destiny for a lifetime...

Of course, these are all future events. Right now Xiaocao was sitting on a small stool and staring at her family's courtyard vegetable fields as if she was caught in a spell. Yu Hang looked at his little sister staring blankly and quietly asked, "Little Sister, what are you thinking about? Why are you so focused right now?"

Yu Xiaocao twisted her head around and looked at him. She arranged the blanket to cover his legs more securely and then turned around to look at the fields again. She exclaimed somewhat excitedly, "Older Brother, have you noticed it too? We've gotten a decent harvest from our fields!"

"Eh? What do you mean by 'decent'?" Previously their family had also planted some vegetables in the front and back of their rooms. The soil there was poor, and they had only planted the most common types of vegetables for their own use. Had they ever bothered to calculate the output from those small stretches of land?

However, in Xiaocao's previous life, her parents had been vegetable farmers before they passed away. At that time, she was already in middle school and often helped them calculate the output of their fields and the amount of profits they made.

There was chemical fertilizer in her past life, so one mu of land planted with vegetables could produce around 2500 catties of harvest. In their courtyard, they had around seventy to eighty percent of a mu of land, and they had already sold around a thousand catties worth of vegetables. From her rough estimate, they had only picked less than half of what was available. In other words, they could probably get at least 3000 catties of vegetables for each mu planted. Perhaps they could even get four thousand catties!! This truly was considered a very high yield!!

After calculating up to this much, she figured that they could get around seventy to eighty taels total for the vegetables grown in the front courtyard alone. The back courtyard was growing vegetables that had a longer life cycle, so they could likely be sold for a higher price. They could easily get around a hundred taels for each mu of vegetables. Thus, this meant that they could get around five hundred taels alone from this early spring harvest!

The more Yu Xiaocao calculated, the more excited she felt. Her eyes seemed to glitter with an internal light and she wished she could kiss the little divine stone a few times in happiness.

The little golden kitten was lying on Yu Hang's knee, enjoying the pleasure of getting pets when it suddenly felt chills run through its body. The fur on its back immediately stood up—something's not right, there's danger approaching!

Just as Yu Xiaocao was staring at their vegetable fields fixedly, as if she had just seen a giant lump of gold, suddenly the sound of a voice no one wanted to hear came through the gate, "Where is everyone? Did you all disappear into thin air? Why is the gate closed in the middle of the day ah? Is it because you guys did something that set off your guilty consciences and are afraid people will come find you?"

Xiaocao quivered and then leapt off of her stool. She rushed towards the gate, pulled open the heavy door, and saw Madam Zhang standing oddly there. The old woman's face was as unpleasant as before.

"Grandmother, why did you come over?" Yu Xiaocao barely restrained the feeling of disgust in her heart and managed to squeeze out a smile.

"What? Did you guys make your door too high that your own grandmother can't come over anymore?" Li Guihua had a self-satisfied look on her face. The copious amount of fat on her face squeezed her eyes until they were a thin line, very similar to a rat's eyes. Her eyes flickered around as if she was a thief.

Madam Zhang pushed Xiaocao aside with an arm and marched into the courtyard. She gloomily looked all around at the stone walls around the courtyard and sinisterly remarked, "You guys don't have money yet you built your walls so high. Are you trying to discourage thieves or are you trying to keep me out?"

'Is there a difference? You're the biggest thieving threat around! Other people are cultivating fortune, meanwhile, you're such a miserly old hag that you would even scrape off whatever profit you could get from the ground full of dirt!' Yu Xiaocao silently roasted the old woman in her heart as she replied, "Our old residence is a bit too close to the West Mountain. In the winter, we're afraid of wild animals searching for food. Won't they come down from the mountain and harm people? Grandmother, don't be so sensitive, these walls are to protect us from wolves! Just look, when we first moved out, we weren't sure if we could save my father's leg. My older brother had been sold off to be an apprentice, so it was only Mother and us weak little girls around. If there really were some vicious wolves around, what were we supposed to do?! So we didn't bother trying to fix the house much and instead used the money my maternal grandmother sent us to lay a taller wall!"

This seemingly simple explanation actually held a lot of hidden nuggets: first of all, you made us split off from the main family with pretty much nothing when my father was seriously injured. In addition, you almost pushed my older brother to a situation where he would lose his life. If this was someone with

thinner skin, she wouldn't even have the face to come to their gate. Next, not a single copper coin out of the money used to build these walls came from you. Thus, do you have any qualifications to voice your unnecessary opinions?

However, was there anyone else in the world who could even compete with Madam Zhang's shamelessness? It was hard to tell whether the old woman really didn't catch on to Xiaocao's silent implications or whether she was pretending, but she only glanced briefly at Yu Hang, who was lying helplessly on the deck chair in the courtyard. She then turned her attention to the wide expanse of vegetables growing in the courtyard.

Madam Li immediately understood her role in this play and stated, "Second Brother-in-law truly has a filial heart ah! He planted so many vegetables but he doesn't know how to properly show his respect to his elders. He's only preoccupied with earning money!"

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"Of course we have to think of all possible ways to earn money! We need money to build a fence and repair the house. Moreover, we also have a lot of debt! It might seem like my father's leg has recovered, but he'll feel unbearable when he uses too much strength. It's alright during the day, but it would be so painful at night that he can't even sleep. He has been able to endure thanks to the painkillers that Doctor Sun prescribed. He can't be the main labor force in our family, and my older brother still owes dozens of taels of medical fees... If we don't think of more ways to earn money to repay the debt, will Grandmother and Eldest Aunt help us pay off our debts?"

Yu Xiaocao had long seen through their intentions, so she persistently complained about her family's suffering. In the backyard, Xiaolian blocked her parents and refused to let the two kind and uncontentious people go out to be bullied. She also asked Qian Wu, who was tending the ducks by the pond, to go find her grandfather that the village entrance. Old Yu was the only one who could somewhat keep Madam Zhang in check.

"Alright, alright! What's the point in saying all this rubbish? Hurry up and gather the vegetables for your grandmother. Did you want the old lady to personally get them herself? You tactless person!" Madam Li noticed that her mother-in-law's face was becoming more and more unsightly, so she hastily interjected.

Yu Xiaocao didn't change her expression and kept a fake smile on her face, "Eldest Aunt is right! Grandmother, what vegetables do you want to eat? I'll go gather them for you."

"Let's do this. Give me a basket of each kind!" Madam Zhang was also a good money-maker. She could make out the values of the lush green vegetables just by looking at them. There were four or five

different kinds of greens here. If she got a basket of each, it would be at least four or five catties, which should cost several taels.

In the past, when Yu Hai was around and the family hadn't split, she hadn't noticed his importance. Without the skilled fisherman Yu Hai, not only did they catch less than half the amount of fish compared to last year, but there also wasn't much variety. Several regular customers gradually stopped ordering from the Yu Family because they couldn't meet their needs.

Now, Yu Dashan not only goes fishing in the sea with Old Yu, but he also sells fish at the fish market with other fishermen. When business was bad, half of the fish would be leftover. Their family had been eating fish for more than a week already. They used to be reluctant to eat it, but now they were sick of eating it. The weather was gradually warming up, so if they didn't eat the fish, it would go bad very quickly.

Old Yu and his son were bringing back less and less money, so Madam Zhang's heart was becoming more and more anxious. Her youngest son had sent a letter saying that he wanted to study at Rongxuan Academy and needed money for brushes, ink, and books. Also, the rent for the residence they rented in town had expired and her youngest grandson, Little Doudou, had gotten sick at the beginning of spring... All these matters that required money had piled one on top of another, one after another.

Seeing that there was less and less money in her hands, Madam Zhang felt as if a fire was burning her heart. She couldn't eat nor sleep well, and had a few mouth ulcers. When she heard from Madam Li that the second branch was beginning to sell their vegetables, she briefly pondered and thought of an idea.

However, Yu Xiaocao wasn't like her parents, who were easily bullied by Madam Zhang. She sneered and said, "Grandmother! Aren't you going to eat the vegetables to prevent hunger? With four or five baskets of vegetables, even if you guys eat a lot, wouldn't it take at least twenty days to finish everything? Aren't you afraid that the greens will rot in the baskets and be wasted?!"

"It's none of your business! You grandmother told you to pick the vegetables, so just do as you're told! What's with all your nonsense!!" Madam Li had already impatiently started gathering the vegetables herself. After eating boiled cabbage and radish and mixed grain flatbread for the entire winter, her eyes were already green with greed when she saw all the green vegetables. She had never been so eager to eat stir-fried vegetables!!

"Eldest Aunt!! Be careful not to trample on the vegetables..." Before Yu Xiaocao even finished speaking, Li Guihua had already stepped on the lettuce under her feet. 'Every green vegetable was a shiny piece of silver ah.' Xiaocao's heart ached incessantly.

Right at this moment, a golden light, like lightning, launched towards Li Guihua. With a loud scream, Li Guihua covered her face and sat down in the vegetable field. Her huge butt had slammed into the vegetable garden. If the vegetables were alive, they would surely scream before dying.

"Who... whose cat is this? How can you let it out to scratch people?" Madam Li looked and saw a tiny kitten that wasn't even the size of a fist. It was covered in golden fur and was staring fiercely at Li Guihua with its golden eyes. It showed a fierceness that was disproportionate with its size.

'Little Glutinous Dumpling, good job!!' Yu Xiaocao praised the little divine ceaselessly within her heart.

[She just keeps blabbering and her voice sounds as bad as a pig being slaughtered. She's so freaking noisy!!] The little divine stone licked its claw with dissatisfaction. It glared at Madam Li with hostility as if was about to jump up the next second and rush towards its 'prey'.

"My face!!" Li Guihua took off the hand she used to cover her face, but was startled by the blood on her hand. That damned cat actually dared to scratch her face. What should she do if it scarred?

If Xiaocao could read her mind, she would definitely roast her relentlessly: 'Eldest Aunt, even if your face isn't disfigured, you don't look that good either. You have a face that affects the appearance of the city!'

Madam Zhang bent down to pick up a lump of dirt and was about to throw it at the little golden kitten, but noticed that the kitten had already turned its attention towards her. The little one exuded a terrifying force that made her feel as if she wasn't facing a little kitten but a majestic-looking giant tiger.

Madam Zhang's legs began to tremble. She dropped the chunk of soil in her hand and stammered, "Wicked girl, is this your cat? Quickly take it away!!"

Yu Xiaocao had helpless expression on her face and said, "Grandmother, I picked up this kitten from the mountain forest. It hasn't been long since I brought it home, so it hasn't been domesticated yet and is

still very wild! It doesn't listen to anybody. Xiaolian and I have both been scratched by it. So I don't dare to provoke it."

Madam Li, who was triggered by the blood on her hand, suddenly lunged at the little golden kitten like a crazy woman. As a result, all the vegetables around her suffered a tragic death.

"My vegetables!!" Yu Xiaocao cried pitifully.

The little golden kitten seemed to have sense its master's mood and hastily rushed to the part of the garden that had already been harvested. Its movement was light and nimble. Madam Li's fat figure suddenly plunged into the vegetable garden. Her big face landed first, and she was unable to immediately get up. After struggling for a long time, she finally sat up and noticed that her mouth was full of mud. She spat for a long time in order to get the mud out of her mouth.

[Useless thing! Trying to compete with me, this Divine Stone!! Humph! Humph! Anticipate having a nightmare tonight!!] Yu Xiaocao was the only one who could hear the little divine stone's grim voice. From a place that no one could see, a wisp of smoke-like spiritual power entered Madam Li's nostrils. But she was completely unaware of it!

"Mother, quickly help me catch that damned cat. I'm going to throw it into the firepit and eat it after its cooked!!" Madam Li refused to give up and was hell-bent on catching the kitten.

Thus, Madam Li's plump, ball-like body could be seen jumping, fumbling, rolling, and crawling around the yard. It was a very comedic scene. By the time she was tired and gasping for her breath, she still didn't touch a single hair on the cat.

During a rather chilly evening in early spring, Madam Li's entire body was covered in sweat. With the mix of sweat and mud on her face, she didn't even need to wear makeup to perform in a Chinese opera. She couldn't get up from sitting on the ground, so she smacked her leg and wailed, "Aren't you bullying me right now? I don't care. Your family's cat scratched and scarred my face, so your family must compensate me! Just... pay me five taels..."

"Who would compensate five taels to you? Your face isn't even worth five copper coins, yet you want five taels. Why don't you go rob someone?!" This awesome response came from Old Yu, who had

quickly rushed over. He must be infuriated, otherwise, he wouldn't have made such a harsh remark to his daughter-in-law.

Madam Li wasn't afraid of anything, except when her father-in-law pulled a long face. When she saw Old Yu coming in, she immediately jumped up from the ground. Her agile movement didn't seem like something that a fatty like her could do.

"It was the cat that scratched you, so go get the money from the cat! You can't even handle a kitten that hasn't been weaned, yet you still have the face to ask others for money? Our Old Yu's family doesn't extort money from others. If you want to cause trouble for Second Son's family, I'll go talk with Li Laoshuan about it!" Madam Li's father, Li Laoshuan, was also a very capable man when he was younger. He had earned some properties, so the living conditions of the Li Family was a lot better than the Yu Family.

Madam Li didn't dare to say another word. Although her father doted on her, he was also an old-fashioned and traditional man, who considered a married daughter to be the same as spilled water. He believed that she should listen to everything her in-laws say. If her father found out that she was extorting money from her younger brother-in-law's family, he would definitely disown her. She still needed to rely on her maternal family to support her, so she absolutely couldn't let her father know about this!

Madam Zhang spoke up in her defense, "What's there to talk about? Guihua just said that out of anger. Do you really think that she would take the second branch's money?! Second Son's family's cat scratched someone, but you won't even allow her to say something about it?"

"I haven't even said anything about you yet! What are you doing here? Did you come to ask Second Son for vegetables? Are you really that shameless to ask?" Old Yu looked at Madam Zhang with eyes that were full of disappointment, anger and sadness!

When the second branch were in their most difficult times, she had forced them out of their home. His second son had risked half his life in exchange for the money they got from selling a bear. After they hid the three hundred taels that his second son had risked his life for, he could hardly sleep at night and was full of torment in his heart. On the other hand, as if she had thrown away a huge stone that was on her body, Madam Zhang talked and acted in a much more relaxed manner!

Why didn't she ever think about how Second Son was his flesh and blood! He believed that he had never been biased toward Dashan and always treated him like his own son. When they divided the family, they

had even given the new ship that Second Son bought to their eldest son. Why couldn't she feel for others and treat his children as her own?

Look at what happened! Look at what Madam Zhang did!! She married his eldest daughter hundreds of kilometers away and sold her to a widower as his second wife. His eldest daughter must be completely disappointed in him. After being married for so many years, other than visiting Second Son several times, she was almost unwilling to see him, her father.

His second son was a capable man, so he had thought that Madam Zhang would treat the second branch better for the sake of money. But what happened? When his second son was seriously injured and on the verge of death, Madam Zhang had forced him to propose to separate from the family. She only gave them the rundown old residence and a measly two taels...

Old Yu felt that his tolerance was reaching the limit. He couldn't let Madam Zhang continue to do whatever she wanted. He had to show his authority as the head of the household!!

When faced with her husband's furious gaze, Madam Zhang felt somewhat afraid in her heart. However, she still insisted, "Isn't Caidie's fiancé's family going to send the betrothal gifts over soon? I was thinking about how we don't have anything to serve them at home, and then I heard that Second Son's family has planted vegetables... As a son, what's wrong with paying filial respects to his parents by giving them some vegetables?"

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"Sending the betrothal gifts? Isn't that next month? Didn't we already plow the vegetable fields and plant the seeds? The crops should be ready by next month, so why do we need to ask Second Son for vegetables? It's not like you don't know about the living conditions of Second Son's family. As his parents, even if we can't help him, we shouldn't add to their misfortunes and cause more trouble for our children. What would others say about us?" Of course, Old Yu didn't believe her nonsense and immediately exposed her.

"Shouldn't a son be filial to his parents? What would others say! Do you think that others won't gossip about a son who eats and lives well while his parents barely have enough to eat?" Madam Zhang was an expert at pestering others endlessly.

Old Yu frowned and became even more displeased, "What do you mean by 'we barely have enough to eat'? Although we're not making as much money from selling fish as before, it's certainly enough to feed our entire family. Moreover, you still have a lot of..."

"It's for our third son's studies, so no one is allowed to touch it!" Madam Zhang valued her youngest son the most and no one was allowed to touch him. When she heard Old Yu mention her savings, she instantly startled and glanced at Xiaocao with a guilty conscience.

Old Yu felt even more furious within his heart, "Whenever money is mentioned, you always say that it's for Third Son's studies! Yet you run over to cause trouble for Second Son's family when they have already split from the family! Your heart is seriously too biased!!"

"I'm biased? You're saying that I'm being partial?! After I married you, I gave birth to and raised your children. I don't waste money on food or clothes. Who am I doing all this for? Was it for myself? I just want to foster a scholar from our family so that our whole family can live a better life. Who am I being biased to? Eldest Son is my biological son, have I ever been partial to him? Second Son is more capable than Eldest Son. I also remember all his contributions to the family!! In the future, when Third Son passes the examination to become an official, wouldn't he, as his older brother, also be benefited?" Madam Zhang wiped her tears as she spoke, as if she was the one who had been wronged and taken advantage of.

Old Yu's heart softened when he saw Madam Zhang's tears, but he still persisted, "That still isn't a valid reason to ask an older brother, who had separated from the family, to financially support his younger brother's studies! Stop crying here, or else you'll become a laughingstock. Quickly come home with me!!"

Seeing that she wouldn't be able to take advantage of them today, Madam Zhang dawdled over to the entrance. Madam Li didn't even dare to lift up her head as she dejectedly followed behind her mother-in-law. Her father-in-law was really angry today. He didn't even give face to her mother-in-law, let alone her.

"Ay!" Old Yu touched the head of Xiaocao, who was standing beside him and staring at him with wide eyes. After that, he looked at his son and daughter-in-law, who had only come out from the rear courtyard at this time. With a tired voice, he sighed, "The husband will have less trouble if his wife is virtuous! It was fortunate that I didn't listen to Madam Zhang's decision to have you marry her niece. I have a good daughter-in-law. You guys need to live a good life!"

After that, with his hands clasped behind his back and his body stooped down, he left with heavy footsteps.

"Grandfather! I'll gather some vegetables for you to take back!!" Yu Xiaocao was more or less satisfied with her grandfather's performance today. It seemed like he wasn't a complete fool yet.

Old Yu stopped in his tracks and turned his head to look at her. He slowly shook his head and said, "No need. Keep them to sell for money! This old residence needs to be renovated thoroughly so that it won't be crushed by the snow during winter!"

Yu Xiaocao signaled her father with her eyes. Yu Hai understood her meaning and quickly said, "Father, it's nothing much. This son of yours can still provide you with some vegetables to eat! Cao'er's mother, you go and help Cao'er gather a portion of each vegetables."

He personally went forward to pull Old Yu back to sit on the stone chair in the courtyard, and then poured a cup of water for his father to drink. After drinking the water brought by his son, Old Yu felt much better both physically and mentally. His son still had him, his father, within his heart.

Before he had finished a cup of water, Xiaocao and her mother had already swiftly gathered the vegetables and packed them in a basket. It appeared to be around ten catties of vegetables in the basket. Right now, in the Yu Family, there were only the Old Yu couple, the eldest son's family, and the unmarried youngest sister. Thus, it was enough for them to eat for several days.

However, Madam Zhang wasn't satisfied and felt that Yu Hai's family had given them too little. While she scolded Dahai's entire family within her heart, she took out most of the greens from the basket that Old Yu brought back, and then sent them to her youngest son early in the morning on the next day.

Madam Li, who had a terrible complexion after a night of nightmares, inwardly criticized Madam Zhang for her biasness. She grumbled her complaint to Yu Dashan for several days.

As for Yu Xiaocao's family, who had earned over eight hundred sixty taels today, they were currently discussing what to do with sixty-something taels in front of them.

The head of the family, Yu Hai, was the first to speak. He cleared his throat and solemnly said, "As I have just said, our Cao'er's recipe was sold for eight hundred taels. We have already asked Third Young Master Zhou to help us buy a storefront with the money. I reckon that the shops at the newly constructed port wouldn't be too expensive! We should be able to buy four spaces! At that time, you siblings will each have a shop, fair to all!"

Yu Hang, who was half lying on the kang bed, hastily said, "Youngest Sister was the one who earned the money to purchase the store. As her older brother, how can I take advantage of her? I'll leave my space to Youngest Sister!"

Yu Xiaocao glared at him with widened eyes and said unhappily, "Older Brother, what you're saying isn't right! We're blood-related siblings, so why do we need to be so clear-cut about everything?"

"People say that even real siblings should settle accounts without ambiguity! For example, it wouldn't make sense for Father to buy land and a store for Eldest Uncle." Yu Hang insisted.

Yu Xiaocao snorted and said, "We have already separated from the family now. We won't give them any less of the filial respect that we are obliged to, but we aren't paying for a single penny more than necessary! Older Brother, when you get better, the business at the docks will be handed to you. In the future, when the new port is built, you would be able to expand the business at the docks and earn a lot of money. Would you disregard your younger siblings at that time?"

"Of course not! It's our family's business, so of course the profits should be handed into the family account!" Yu Hang immediately retorted.

"Isn't that the same logic? The money that I'm earning right now is also handed into the family account to be managed. Even if it's not given to you guys now, when we grow up and split from the family in the future, we still need to divide it evenly!" Yu Hang had never won when debating with Yu Xiaocao.

Yu Hang frowned and wanted to decline again, "But... Youngest Sister, you were the one who earned all the money ah..."

"Alright, let's stop talking about this! It's decided!!" Seeing that the siblings were each holding their own ground, Yu Hai spoke up to make the final decision, "Xiaosha, you don't have to feel like you're taking advantage of your younger sister. In the future, your younger sisters will also need their brothers' support!"

Little Shitou, who had returned at dusk last night for his break, put down the book in his hands and laughed, "Father, even if we don't have a store, Older Brother and I will still support our sisters! In the future, if that person mistreats Second Sister, I'll bring her home and take care of her for a lifetime!!"

"You're only going to take care of your second sister? Do you not care about your eldest sister at all?" Xiaolian teased her younger brother with a smile.

Little Shitou hadn't had a chance to correct himself before Xiaocao pinched both his cheeks, "You heartless little fellow. There's so many good things you can say, but instead you're cursing your second sister to be bullied in the future?"

Little Shitou's little face, which had just become more fleshy, was pulled out to two sides by his second sister, and then squashed together again in the middle. His small mouth was squeezed together until it looked like a pig's snout as he struggled to explain himself. He, who would become a high-scoring top scholar in the imperial examination in his teens, was currently being bullied by his second sister.

After Yu Xiaocao played enough with his face, she finally let him go mercifully. Little Shitou covered his face, which had turned red from being pinched, and muttered with a pout, "Second Sister, I'm wrong! Who dares to bully you? You're the one who is going to bully others!"

"Of course!!" Yu Xiaocao had a complacent expression, and then said, "It's decided then, everyone gets a store! It would be better if the shops are cheap and we can buy more. If we have more younger siblings in the future, we can also prepare some for them too!"

Liu Muyun, who was sitting on the edge of the kang bed with a slight smile, heard her words and looked up. When she saw her youngest daughter's teasing gaze, her pale face immediately flushed. She chided, "This child. How mischievous! You even dare to tease your own parents!"

Yu Xiaocao grinned and replied, "Mother, I'm not joking! Last time when Doctor Sun checked on Eldest Brother, didn't he also take your pulse? He said that your health is much better now. I heard that lingering illness from the postnatal confinement period needs to be healed during the confinement period. If you want to restore your body, you should give birth to a younger brother or sister as soon as possible! You don't need to do anything. Xiaolian and I will be responsible for taking care of the little baby!"

Yu Hai was eager to try when he heard that having another child could help his wife heal her body. He had never been someone who was good at hiding his emotions, so when Madam Liu saw his expression, her face became even more red. She quietly pinched Yu Hai's waist, but her husband caught her hand and held it firmly within his own hand.

Little Shitou looked at the sixty-something shiny taels on the table. There was a genuine look of joy on his face as he said, "Second Sister, you're truly capable!! Sure enough, you're someone who have been enlightened by the deities..."

Yu Hai hastily interjected and reprimanded him, "Don't go out and talk nonsense!! Your second sister was able to come up with so many recipes because she picked up a remnant of a recipe book and has some talent for cooking! If someone asks you in the future, just tell them that! Do you guys understand?"

Yu Hang and Yu Xiaolian nodded solemnly. Little Shitou mischievously replied, "Don't worry, I'm not stupid! I won't sell out my older sister!! I heard from my classmate that his hometown was rather ignorant and conservative. They had burned to death an older sister from the same clan because she could see strange things. They said that she was a monster and an ominous person, who would bring disaster to the village..."

Madam Liu was so frightened that she immediately threw down the clothing that she was making. She held Xiaocao tightly within her embrace and nervously said, "My daughter isn't a monster. Our Cao'er will only bring good luck to others! Isn't Cao'er the reason our family's living conditions improved? Little Shitou, you can't speak carelessly in the future! Understand?!"

"I know, I understand!" Little Shitou also realized that the severity of the situation and was so scared that he didn't know what to do.

Xiaocao was reluctant to leave her mother's gentle and warm embrace. With a happy smile on her face, she changed the topic, "What do you guys want to do with this sixty-something taels? Should we save it up, or spend it?"

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The head of the household, Yu Hai, looked down and thought for a moment before saying, "How about this? After spring plowing, let's knock down the old residence and build a new five-room house. We can also widen the yard a little bit... No, it's a newly built fence, so that would waste too much time and energy. It's better to renovate the old residence and build a three-room house next to it, and then enclose it with stones. This way, Xiaosha wouldn't have to worry about the house when he gets married in the future. We can make a door in the middle so that it's more convenient for us to come and go between the two buildings!"

Yu Xiaocao really didn't want to be too close to the two outrageously annoying people, Madam Zhang and Madam Li. She made a different suggestion, "Father, I think we might as well save more money and ask Third Young Master to help us find a residence in town, and then buy some fields around town. Let's just settle down in town! In the future, Little Shitou will be studying for a long time in town, so it would also be more convenient for him to come home!"

Madam Liu was somewhat interested upon hearing her words. Little Shitou had only turned six after the New Year, yet he already had to stay in town to study by himself. As his mother, it was inevitable that she would miss and be concerned about her son at all times.

Yu Hai lowered his head and pondered for a moment, and then slowly shook his head, "Our roots are in Dongshan Village after all. You guys are still young, so you don't quite understand the principle of 'being sentimentally attached to your homeland'. Besides, your grandfather is still living here. No son would enjoy a happy life in town, while leaving his elders to suffer in the countryside."

Little Shitou frowned and muttered, "But Younger Uncle lives in town. He eats good rice and flour every day, and he also often eats meat! Little Doudou's attires are no different than the noble young masters in town. They even have a maidservant attending to him. He can live in town, so why can't we?"

Little Shitou had been studying at Rongxuan Academy for less than a month, but his younger uncle, Yu Bo, had already went to the academy to visit him three times. Although Rongxuan Academy didn't prohibit visits by relatives and friends, if it happened too frequently, it may leave a bad impression on the teachers. Little Shitou has also tried to obscurely remind his younger uncle, but his younger uncle didn't seem to have heard it at all and completely disregarded his feelings.

On one occasion, he happened to meet the headmaster at the entrance of the academy. The headmaster stopped to talk to him cordially and was praising his second sister's culinary skills when his younger uncle came over. After he introduced him to the headmaster, as if he was 'burning the bridge after crossing it', his younger uncle didn't even look at him again and only cared about talking to the headmaster. The headmaster obviously didn't want to talk to Younger Uncle, but he just tactlessly continued to flatter him. It was so freaking embarrassing!

After the headmaster left, Younger Uncle invited him to his house for a meal that day for the first time. There wasn't any coarse grain in their kitchen at all, and was full of polished rice and wheat flour instead. There was a large piece of meat being cured inside a jar and chicken soup cooked in the pot. They were eating better food than the rich families in the neighboring villages!

Before they had split from the main family, their family didn't have enough food to eat and warm clothes to wear, yet they still had to save up money to support Younger Uncle's noblemen-like lifestyle in town. Little Shitou felt very sad when he thought about that. Even the chicken soup and stir-fried meat that he ate at noon seemed tasteless!

"Our family put all hopes on your younger uncle. Your grandmother is anticipating your younger uncle to pass the examination to become an official, and then get her a title of a ranked noble madam. Thus, she naturally wouldn't treat your younger uncle too badly!" Yu Hai gave a somewhat weak explanation.

Xiaolian pursed her lips and muttered in a low voice, "Younger Uncle relies completely on the family's support, yet he can still live in town. So why can't we buy a house in town when we make our own money?"

"...Actually, our Dongshan Village is close to the mountains and sea, and the villagers are simple and warmhearted. Everyone will help each other out when needed. Isn't that better than living in town and being unfamiliar with the people and surroundings?" Yu Hai was still a little reluctant to leave the village that he was born and raised in.

Yu Xiaocao had already arrived in this world for over half a year. She knew that people in ancient times had an extraordinary attachment to their homeland, so she didn't continue to insist. She thought about it and said, "Then let's built the house first. After we sell the vegetables in the backyard, let's buy a house and farmland in town!"

"Almighty Second Sister! Second Sister is like a nouveau riche!" Being influenced by Yu Xiaocao, Little Shitou would throw out a couple of strange terms from time to time. This was something that everyone was already used to.

As usual, all the money was kept and managed by Xiaocao. Yu Hai pretended to be dispirited and heavily sighed, "Ay... It seems like I might lose my position as the head of the household very soon. Someone is trying to seize power!"

Xiaolian giggled and said, "We can all rest assured since the money is being kept by Younger Sister! She is just an accountant at most. Father and Mother still makes the decisions in our family!"

"Really? Why do I feel like Cao'er makes the final decision more often?" Yu Hai feigned an aggrieved expression, making the entire family laugh. Yu Hai laughed so much that his ribs started to hurt, but he still couldn't stop.

Little Shitou joined in the fun and exclaimed, "We'll listen to whoever is right! Second Sister is our family's cash cow right now, so in terms of making money, we can't go wrong as long as we listen to Second Sister!!"

Everyone burst out in laughter again and teased Little Shitou for being a little money-grubber...

Yu Xiaocao really liked the atmosphere at home. Her father didn't have the autocratic and dictatorial characteristics of a feudal parent at all. He would just be somewhat pedantic occasionally. Her mother was completely devoted to her children. Her gentle motherly love and tolerant feelings provided the children with enough freedom to mature. The genuine concern and friendly affections among the siblings let her gradually forget her previous life, and truly regard herself as a member of the family.

The following days were busy and fulfilling. Every night, they had to work overtime to make braised food and pickled fish to be sold the next day, which Xiaolian and Xiaocao took turns to sell at the docks. On the days that she didn't need to go to the docks, Xiaocao would plow the fields that had been harvested and plant new vegetables seeds.

The current temperature was more suitable for growing vegetables. With the addition of the little divine stone's strengthened powers, the mystic-stone water's ability to accelerate growth had enhanced. Hence, they could almost harvest a batch of vegetables every ten days. In other words, when other people's vegetables were still small seedlings, the Yu Family was already selling their second crop of vegetables.

Along with the new batch of crops, the vegetables with slightly longer growth periods, which were planted in the four mu of land in the backyard, were also ready to be sold at the market. String beans, cucumbers, eggplants, and hyacinth beans... The Yao Residence would almost come over daily to buy vegetables. Sure enough, the person responsible for purchasing the vegetables was Xiaosi, who was familiar with the Yu Family!

Last time, the Yao Family had gotten the limelight during Old Master Yao's birthday banquet. Most of the guests were rich landlords in and around town. Which household had the financial resources to grow vegetables in a greenhouse? In Tanggu Town, those who could eat green leafy vegetables could be counted with one hand.

At the Yao Family's birthday banquet, not only did they have a variety of vegetables, they also provided a sufficient quantity of the greens to ensure that the guest ate to their heart's content. Furthermore, the vegetables that had been watered by the mystic-stone water not only tasted better but also contained a light amount of spiritual energy, which made people want to eat more and more. After that, the Yao Family never stopped purchasing vegetables from them. Although there was spiritual energy in the vegetables, it might be apparent when eaten only once or twice. However, if people continued to eat them for a long period of time, they would gradually realize the benefits of eating these vegetables.

Old Master Yao was getting old now. He also went through a lot of hard work when he was young, and thus ended up with a lot of pain and illnesses. Ever since he began eating the vegetables bought from the Yu Family, not only did he become more energetic, his health was also getting better and better. In the past, there was a chilly sensation in his bones and joints during rainy and cloudy days. It had been raining continuously this spring, but his rheumatic pains didn't act up. Recently, many of his old pals said that he appeared much younger after seeing him!

As the temperature got warmer, there was an increase in vegetables being sold in the food market. The steward who was currently in charge of purchasing goods and necessities felt that it was unnecessary to travel so far to buy vegetables every day, so he instructed his subordinates to go buy the vegetables at the food market. But the members of Yao Family immediately noticed the difference of the vegetables after their first bite. They summoned the servant responsible for buying the vegetables and found out that it wasn't vegetables from the Yu Family.

The old master flew into a furious rage. Even though he didn't fire the purchasing steward for this incident, he assigned an assistant for him. The assistant turned out to be Xiaosi, who often traveled between Dongshan Village and town. The head of the Yao Family immediately ordered, "In the future, only buy vegetables from the Yu Family! It doesn't matter if it's more expensive because the Yao Family doesn't lack that kind of money. It's fine as long as the old master is happy!"

As a result, the Yao Family became Xiaocao's family's first regular client!

Their second regular client was none other than Zhenxiu Restaurant. In the absence of new crops, Zhenxiu Restaurant was still able to provide fresh greens. As a result, they had another increase in patrons. Right now, Zhenxiu Restaurant could be described as 'filled with guests every day, full house every day!' A lot of times, when people wanted to go eat at Zhenxiu Restaurant, they still needed to make an appointment or wait in line!

Of course, this wasn't all due to the Yu Family's vegetables, but also partly because Zhenxiu Restaurant introduced a new dish—roasted chicken!

Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken was absolutely delicious! Rongxuan Academy's Headmaster Yuan was a renowned gourmet. After tasting it, he commented, "The meat is tender and chewy, and comes right off the bone. With a brilliant color, the whole chicken is round and full. It has a perfectly savory and delicious taste. A unique taste with a lingering fragrance!" Not only did he finish an entire roasted chicken alone, he also packaged several back! His action caused his grandson, Yuan Yunxi, to feel extremely speechless.

Speaking of this roasted chicken, Head Chef Wang had wasted around twenty chickens as he tried to perfect the recipe. However, he was still unsuccessful after many attempts. With no other choice, Third Young Master Zhou personally took him to Dongshan Village to 'learn from the teacher'.

There were more than ten procedures when preparing a small roasted chicken. It needed to be slaughtered, scalded, massaged, washed, plucked, simmered, blanched, dried, fried, braised, and more. Each step needed to be carried out in strict accordance with the cooking instructions. The ingredients for the roasted chicken also needed to be meticulously prepared. In addition, it was also very important to have an accurate grasp of the duration and degree of heat when cooking the roasted chicken. Therefore, Yu Xiaocao had to personally demonstrate three times before Head Chef Wang finally mastered the skill.

As soon as the roasted chicken was introduced, it quickly created a new trend. 'If you haven't eaten Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken, then you're too behind on the trend!' Anyone, who had a bit of money and status, would be too embarrassed to go outside if they hadn't tried this delicacy from Zhenxiu Restaurant because they were afraid of being asked! The greetings from friends and neighbors become, "Have you tried Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken? It tasted..."

Oftentimes, except for the ones reserved for the private rooms, Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chickens would be immediately sold out right after they were taken out of the pot. It had actually reached the point when the demand exceeded the supply. The reservations for the roasted chickens had already reached next month! For a period of time, it created a situation in which it was difficult to even get a chicken!

As a result, Zhenxiu Restaurant's private room had also become very popular. This was because only the customers dining in the private rooms wouldn't have to line up to eat the authentic roasted chicken. With that said, was it even possible for Zhenxiu Restaurant's business not to be flourishing?

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The popularity of the roasted chicken also led to the increase of people raising chickens in the villages around Tanggu Town. An example would be Xiaocao's family's neighbor, the Zhou Family, who had raised one to two hundred chickens in their home. They didn't sell very well during the New Year, and thus caused Madam Fang to be so worried that she didn't even eat or sleep well.

No one would have expected that after Zhenxiu Restaurant came out with the hot-selling dish, roasted chicken, it would also cause the demand for chickens to increase day by day. The price of chickens was also nearly 1/3 higher than usual. As a result, Madam Fang didn't have to worry about not being able to sell her family's chickens at all. They had over a hundred chicks hatched at the beginning of spring, and they were still going around to buy more chicks. She had heard from Shanhu that their family was planning on raising four to five hundred chickens this year, which would all be supplied to Zhenxiu Restaurant!

As for the connection between the Zhou Family and Zhenxiu Restaurant, it was all thanks to the Yu Family! Like the Yao Family, Zhenxiu Restaurant also sent a carriage to transport the vegetables that they bought from the Yu Family every day. Zhenxiu Restaurant would purchase a large quantity of vegetables and the Yu Family was too busy, so Madam Fang would bring her two daughters over to help out.

Zhenxiu Restaurant's purchasing staff, Qian Xiaoduo, mentioned that the restaurant's roasted chicken was selling very well. The other staff, who was responsible for buying the chickens, had been running around all the surrounding villages so much that his legs had slimmed down.

Yu Xiaocao took this opportunity and mentioned the Zhou Family, "Auntie Zhou's family raises hundreds of chickens! Older Brother Xiaoduo, when you come to buy vegetables in the future, you can also get the chickens and bring them back with you!"

Did it really matter where they bought the chickens from? With the current hot demand for Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken, one or two hundreds of chickens could be sold in just a few days! Qian Xiaoduo was certainly willing to do this favor for Xiaocao and immediately agreed. The next day, he brought some people over to bring back most of the Zhou Family's chickens!

The Yu Family's other neighbor, Madam Mao, was green with envy. It was unknown how she found out that Xiaocao was the one who came up with the recipe for Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken, but one evening, she came to their house with two plump ducks and a basket of duck eggs.

"Oh! Brother Dahai, you know how to make this too?!" As soon as Madam Mao entered the courtyard, she saw Yu Hai weaving a bamboo basket under the faint light of a lantern.

Yu Hai skillfully braided the bamboo strips together in a crisscross pattern. He looked up upon hearing the sound and saw Madam Mao. He stopped what he was doing and greeted her with a smile, "Oh, it's Older Sister-in-law Qian. Quickly come inside and sit down. Muiyun, Older Sister-in-law Qian is here..."

"Brother Dahai, is Xiaocao home?" Madam Mao looked into the main room and only saw Madam Liu, who came out after putting down the clothes she was sewing, and thus she asked.

Yu Hai nodded and said, "Yes! She's in the east room. Older Sister-in-law Qian, do you need Xiaocao for something? I'll go get her for you."

"No need, no need! I'll go find her in the east room... Our family raised these two ducks ourselves. Here, take them to eat." Madam Mao looked around, and then simply took the ducks and duck eggs into the Yu Family's kitchen.

Yu Hai raised his eyebrows in surprise, 'This Madam Mao has always been someone who would haggle over every penny, and no one should even think about getting a single penny out of her hands. But of course, she also rarely took advantage of others. Although she spoke rudely at times, she wasn't someone difficult to get along with. Why was she suddenly so generous today, to send gifts to my family?'

Madam Liu quickly went forward and declined, "Older Sister-in-law Qian, it's not easy for you to raise these ducks at home. We can't accept them!"

"Our family's ducks don't cost much money. You see, when your family moved in, our family was busy and didn't come over for the housewarming. We live close by and close neighbors are better than distant relatives. So, we'll be interacting and helping each other more in the future. Moreover, your family's Shitou and our family's Qian Wen goes to the same school. They're as close as brothers. So, what's wrong with giving a few ducks to the children to eat?" Sure enough, Madam Mao was an excellent speaker, who spoke without even pausing as if she was pouring beans.

Madam Liu picked up the ducks that Madam Mao put down, and then stuffed it back into her hands as she said, "Older Sister-in-law! Your family isn't well-off either. You should keep these ducks and duck eggs to sell!"

With the mention of selling ducks, Madam Mao's face was covered with a cloud of sorrows. She sighed heavily and said, "I'll speak honestly with Younger Sister-in-law. The heavy snowstorm at the beginning of winter has also negatively affected the sales of our ducks. Raising ducks for nearly a year, not only cost efforts, but it also requires a lot of food. If we can't sell them, we will be losing a lot of money and time. We still owe half a year of Wen'er's tuition... Also, these duck eggs, the townsfolk think that the eggs taste fishy and don't like to eat them. So I can only helplessly watch as they go bad."

Every family had their own problems. Madam Liu listened with deep sympathy, but she could only console Madam Mao with feeble words.

"Younger Sister-in-law, I heard that Zhenxiu Restaurant got the recipe for the roasted chicken from your family. The head chef of Zhenxiu Restaurant had personally come to your house to learn it. Furthermore, you guys were the ones who recommended Zhou Family's chickens to Zhenxiu Restaurant. Is that true?" Madam Mao stared fixedly at Madam Liu, full of anticipation.

Madam Liu glanced hesitantly at her husband. She didn't know what Madam Mao, who wouldn't do anything without benefits, meant by asking this question.

Yu Hai walked over slowly and lowered his voice to say, "I won't hide it from Older Sister-in-law! The recipe for the roasted chicken really did come from our family's Cao'er. But no matter how you found out this news, please don't spread it out to others."

With an expression that showed she understood, Madam Mao also spoke with a lowered voice, "Brother Dahai, rest assured. I, this Older Sister-in-law, isn't a blabbermouth! But there's something I don't quite understand. With such a good recipe, why didn't you guys set up your own roasted chicken business, but instead benefitted Zhenxiu Restaurant?"

Yu Hai thought about it and said, "We have been doing business with Zhenxiu Restaurant for some time now. Zhenxiu Restaurant's Third Young Master Zhou usually takes good of us. As for the roasted chicken business, we are short on manpower and also afraid of bringing trouble to our family. Thus, it's better to sell the recipe!"

The Yu Family were only ordinary people, who had no power or status. Based on the current popularity and excessive demand for the roasted chicken, had it been the Yu Family selling the dish, it would have definitely attracted devious people who would want to obtain their recipe. At that time, not only would they not be able to keep the recipe, their entire family might be ruined if they encountered someone ruthless.

Madam Mao had also straightened out her thoughts. She nodded thoughtfully, but a moment later, she couldn't resist asking, "Did you guys sell the recipe to Zhenxiu Restaurant for a good price? Don't be deceived by others!"

Of course, Yu Hai wouldn't be so foolish as to reveal his family's financial situation to others. He answered vaguely, "The young boss of Zhenxiu Restaurant is an honest person, so he offered us a reasonable price..."

Madam Mao also realized that it was inappropriate to ask him this question, so she hastily apologized, "Just look at this mouth of mine. Why am I being so nosy? Oh right, Xiaocao isn't asleep yet, is she? I need her help with something."

"Nope! Shitou came home for break, so the siblings are learning how to read from him!" His youngest daughter said that if their business got bigger in the future, they would need to replenish their stocks, do bookkeeping, and sign contracts. So, it was absolutely out of the question for them to not be able to read and write. Everyone in the family, including him and his wife, had to learn how to read and write.

As Madam Mao followed Yu Hai and his wife and headed to the east room, she said, "Your children really love learning. Our family's Qian Wu would throw a tantrum whenever we tell him to study. I understand now that he's not suitable for studying. In the future, he won't even be able to enter an ordinary school in town, let alone Rongxuan Academy!"

"Wuzi is still young, so he hasn't matured yet! It will be better later!!" Madam Liu pushed open the door of the east room as she comforted her. The children were currently using water to write on the table with their hands under the light of the oil lamp.

Madam Liu chided them upon seeing this, "Didn't we buy paper and brushes for you guys to practice writing with? Why aren't you using them?"

Xiaolian lifted her head and smiled at her, "Don't we have to use money to buy the paper and brushes? We want to wait until we're better at writing before practicing on paper! Mother, when you gave birth to Xiaocao, were you biased and gave all the good qualities to her? She was born to hurt our ego!"

"What's wrong? Cao'er, did you bully your older sister?" With a bright smile on her face, Madam Liu glared at Xiaocao and asked.

Yu Xiaocao pouted and had an aggrieved expression on her face, "I didn't! Mother, you're falsely accusing me!"

Yu Hang was able to sit up now. He was holding a book and working hard to read the characters on it. Seeing this scene, he smiled and said, "Mother, Xiaolian is blaming you for giving birth to such a smart younger sister, who simply remembers everything with one look. It makes us seem really stupid in comparison."

"Is it my fault that I'm smart?" Yu Xiaocao felt that she was being excluded. She blinked her big eyes and stared at her mother pitifully, requesting for comfort.

"Younger Sister-in-law, your children have such a good relationship! Unlike my three children. The eldest is slightly better since he has matured after going to school. But Wuzi and his younger sister fight every day. It seriously gives me a headache!" Madam Mao wanted to ask them for a favor, so she was very generous with her compliments. She was desperately giving out praises as if they were freebies.

"Hello, Auntie!"

"Why did Auntie come over?"

"Auntie, quickly come sit on the kang bed."

The kids all greeted her at the same time.

"You don't have to get up. Xiaosha, it seems like your injury has gotten a lot better. Auntie brought over two ducks and a basket of duck eggs. They're good for nourishing your body." Madam Mao was quite skilled in conducting herself.

With a warm smile on his face, Yu Hang replied in a well-behaved manner, "Thank you Auntie! I have troubled you."

Yu Hai turned to tell Xiaocao, "Cao'er, your Auntie Qian is looking for you..."

"Auntie, what's the matter?" Yu Xiaocao was somewhat puzzled. Did the sun rise from the west today? Madam Mao had actually sent their family a present. Moreover, it wasn't just some small gift. It was two ducks and a basket of duck eggs. She had really gone all out. So it turned out that 'no one ever visits a temple without a reason' ah!

Madam Mao looked at the other people in the room and seemed a little embarrassed to speak. Xiaocao considerably got off the kang bed and took her to the courtyard. She whispered, "Auntie, if there's something I can help you, you can tell me directly!"

Madam Mao told her about the poor sales of her ducks and how they didn't have enough money to pay for her eldest son's tuition after the New Year. After that, she stammered, "Look, can you come up with a good dish that uses duck as the main ingredient?! If not... using duck eggs would be fine too! It's best... it's best if it's a dish that Zhenxiu Restaurant will be interested in..."

In the darkness, Madam Mao's face was burning hot. She really didn't ask for favors very often, especially when the other party was a child who hadn't even reached the age of ten.

Immediately, a series of dishes, such as salted duck, osmanthus duck, pipa duck, duck seasoned with soy sauce, and roasted duck, emerged with Yu Xiaocao's mind. It was easy to handle duck eggs too. They could be used to make delicacies like century eggs, tofu with century eggs, and congee with lean pork and century eggs.

But she didn't immediately agree to her request. She only promised to try it out and made it clear that it may not necessarily succeed.

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Madam Mao breathed a sigh of relief and said, "Thank you very much! Even the famous chef of Zhenxiu Restaurant praised you for your great talent in cooking. So you will definitely be able to make a delicious duck dish. You can experiment with these two ducks first. If it's not enough, Auntie can bring more over. Xiaocao, I'll leave this matter in your hands then!"

"Auntie, with our families' relationship, there's no need to be so courteous. But, let's make things clear first. If it's successful, the recipe belongs to me. As for the sales of your family's ducks, I can help recommend them to Qian Xiaoduo." Yu Xiaocao made things clear beforehand.

Madam Mao wasn't someone unreasonable, so she repeatedly nodded her head, "Yes, of course! It should be so! Auntie is already very grateful that you're willing to help me sell my family's ducks. Would I still be considered a human, if I were to covet the recipe that you came up with?"

After sending away Madam Mao, who was expressing her gratitude over and over again, Yu Xiaocao entered the house. When faced with a room full of 'interrogating' eyes, she honestly gave a brief explanation of the purpose of Madam Mao's visit.

After hearing that, Madam Liu sighed and said, "As fellow villagers, even if they didn't bring gifts over, we would also help them out if they had encountered difficulties. But, Cao'er, can you really come up with a dish that uses duck as the main ingredient?"

Yu Hai stopped her and said, "Muyun, don't give the child pressure! Our Cao'er isn't a short-sighted person. If she didn't have any ideas at all, she wouldn't have easily accepted those ducks and duck eggs!"

Xiaolian laughed and said, "Youngest Sister, have a good sleep tonight. Perhaps someone will teach you how to prepare the ducks and duck eggs in your dreams!"

The whole family laughed and chatted together, and from time to time, a burst of cheerful and sweet laughter could be heard.

In the end, the head of the family, Yu Hai, ordered, "Everyone, quickly go to bed! Spring plowing will begin tomorrow. Xiaocao, take Little Gray when you go to the wharf tomorrow morning. Your mother, Xiaolian, and I will go plow the three plots of sandy land!"

"Father, are we still planting sweet potatoes in the fields?" Yu Xiaocao asked casually.

Yu Hai stroked her soft hair and replied in a gentle voice, "What else would we plant other than sweet potatoes? Other crops can't produce much on sandy soil!"

Yu Xiaocao abruptly asked, "Sandy soil is the best place to grow watermelons. Father, can we somehow get some watermelon seeds?"

"Watermelon? Never heard of it. How about... tomorrow I'll go to the grain store in town and ask?" Yu Hai trusted his daughter unconditionally. Even if it was something he had never heard of before, he would still do his best to help his daughter achieve what she wanted.

Yu Xiaocao didn't hold much hope. Watermelon wasn't a grain, so why would the grain store have the seeds?

The rest of the night quietly passed by. The next day, when the first light of the day shone on the seedlings in the garden, all the members of the Yu Family had already gotten up. Yu Xiaocao wanted to wait for Qian Xiaoduo, and then ask him to send a message to Third Young Master Zhou. So, it was still Xiaolian who went to the docks. Third Young Master Zhou was someone who had even been to the capital so he must be experienced and knowledgeable, and thus he should know what a watermelon was. It would be even better if he could help her buy some watermelon seeds.

Yu Hai thought that it wasn't a good idea for no one to be home since there would be people coming to buy vegetables later, so he left his youngest daughter at home. (Yu Hang: Am I not a person?)

Shortly afterwards, Madam Fang came over with her two daughters. She entered the gates and asked, "Are you guys still harvesting the crops in the backyard today?"

"Auntie Zhou, I feel so apologetic to see you coming over to help every day!" Yu Xiaocao expressed her gratitude in a very polite manner.

"Xiaocao, you're being too courteous! It's only right for neighbors to help each other out. If it hadn't been for you, we wouldn't have been able to sell our family's chickens. There are only a few hens and chicks at home now, so we don't have much work to do. Since we're so free, we might as well come over

to see if there's anything we can help out with!" Madam Fang was a very close friend of Madam Liu. So Xiaocao didn't know what to say anymore when she spoke in the manner of 'no need to treat one family as two'.

Zhou Linglong smiled quietly, picked up the bamboo basket in the yard, and went to the rear courtyard. The younger sister, Zhou Shanhu, joked, "Xiaocao, if you feel bad about it, you just need to send us a bowl whenever you make delicious food in the future!"

The little lass still remembered the delicious taste of the 'tofu and chicken blood soup' that she ate last time. She felt that even her mother's best dish, stewed meat, wasn't as good as that dish, which was made of simple and crude ingredients. She was also a lurking little glutton.

Just as they were speaking, Madam Mao also came. Her bright and clear voice could be heard even before she had entered the courtyard, "I'm not late, am I? Are you guys about to begin gathering the vegetables?"

"Madam Mao? Why are you here?" Madam Fang asked curiously. Madam Mao had never taken the initiative to help others. Was the sun rising from the west?

Madam Mao rolled her eyes at her and said, "What? You're allowed to come help, but I'm not? We're all neighbors, so why can't I come over to help?"

Madam Fang knew her speaking style, so she continued to speak in a gentle manner, "I didn't mean it that way. You have a lot of things to take care of at home, so Muyun wouldn't mind even if you don't come over."

"Alright, alright! Hurry up and work!" Madam Mao readily picked up a bamboo basket and followed the Zhou sisters to the backyard.

Seeing the satisfying-looking vegetables, Madam Mao couldn't help but exclaim, "Xiaocao, your family really knows how to grow vegetables. Just look at those greens, how gratifying! Our family planted our fields around the same time as yours, and also used straw thatches to keep the crops warm, but it still doesn't look as good as your family's! Last time it was cold during late spring, we didn't manage to cover the fields with straw thatches, so a lot of the crops quickly froze to death. Many of the vegetables still haven't gotten better yet."

"I know, right?! Our family's vegetables also don't look as good as Muyun's family's! Muyun has always been good at tending the fields even before she got married!" Madam Fang agreed with her as she continued to pluck cucumbers from their vines. The fresh and juicy cucumbers exuded an attractive scent that made them seem refreshing with just a look.

Yu Xiaocao smiled faintly, squatted down, and then placed the eggplants she plucked into the basket. The air was good at the foot of the mountain, and the eggplants were clean and fresh. There was no need to wash them with water at all.

Zhou Shanhu picked a tomato that had ripened early, and wondered, "What is this? A persimmon? But don't persimmons grow on trees?"

Yu Xiaocao explained to her in a soft voice, "It looks like a persimmon, but it's not. It's called 'tomato' and was exported here from a foreign land. It's also called wolf peach. Try it. It's sweet and sour, and rather tasty!"

She originally thought that tomatoes had not been introduced into China at this time, and had just nonchalantly mentioned it to Third Young Master Zhou. But she hadn't expected that Third Young Master would actually get the seeds for her. As a result of planting them a little too late, only a few ripe tomatoes could be found from time to time.

"Wolf peach? So this is what a wolf peach looks like!" Zhou Shanhu's father and older brother were street vendors, so they were naturally more knowledgeable than the ordinary folks.

Upon hearing this, Zhou Linglong snatched the tomato from her younger sister's hands and said to Xiaocao, "My father said that wolf peach is poisonous, and rich families only admire it as an ornament. Why is your family growing this?"

Yu Xiaocao found another ripe tomato, wiped it with her sleeves, and then disregarded the Zhou's sisters' hindrance and took a big bite. The sweet juice immediately filled her mouth. Tomatoes watered by the mystic-stone water tasted even better than the ones she ate in her past life. They could be just be eaten as fruits.

"It's fine!" When faced with the Zhou sisters' terrified gazes, Xiaocao smiled and revealed her spotlessly white and neat teeth. She said, "Zhenxiu Restaurant's Third Young Master Zhou said that ripe tomatoes aren't poisonous. Moreover, Zhenxiu Restaurant also uses tomatoes in their dishes!"

She used Third Young Master Zhou to increase the credibility of her words. She didn't know whether the people of this time period had discovered the edibility of tomatoes or not. However, it would definitely be confirmed in the future.

"Is it really edible?" After hearing Xiaocao's words, Zhou Shanhu had already believed her for the most part. Seeing that Xiaocao was still fine after eating an entire wolf peach, the Zhou sisters finally believed that wolf peaches were edible.

After eating the sweet tomato, Yu Xiaocao was full of strength and continued to bend down to pick eggplants. When she lifted her head, she saw that the Zhou sisters' were still studying the tomato. So she said, "Tomatoes are really delicious. You guys will know after tasting it."

"No need. We're just wondering why there would be a rumor that such a beautiful tomato is poisonous. It's really strange! You guys still need to sell these tomatoes!" Zhou Shanhu had a slightly more lively personality, but she wasn't a greedy person.

Yu Xiaocao straightened her waist and walked around the tomato field. She found several tomatoes that had ripened early and stuffed one into each of their hands, and then gave one to Madam Fang and Madam Mao respectively. She said, "There's only a few, so we can't really sell them anyways! Come on, try it! Let me know what price we should sell them for."

After declining several times, they decided not to be so courteous anymore when they heard what she said. Zhou Shanhu eagerly stuffed the tomato into her mouth and took a big bite. The red juice flowed down the corner of her mouth, so she hastily licked it back and said, "So sweet! It's really tasty!! It's even better than a lot of the fruits that I have eaten! Xiaocao, I think you can just sell these tomatoes as fruits!"

Zhou Linglong acted in much more reserved manner. She copied how Xiaocao ate it earlier by taking a small bite first, and then she softly sucked it. The tomato juice inside was sweet and sour, and it tasted very good. She nodded her head in agreement with her younger sister's words. Madam Mao and Madam Fang were also full of praises.

"Xiaocao, it seems like someone is knocking on your family's gates!" Zhou Shanhu had finished eating her tomato and was now enviously staring at her older sister, as if she was 'Zhu Bajie [1] eating a ginseng fruit'. She had good ears, and heard a knocking sound coming from the front gates.

After experiencing Madam Zhang and her daughter-in-law's disturbance last time, the Yu Family would lock all the doors when there was no one in the front yard.

Yu Xiaocao quickly ran to the front yard, while still holding onto two tomatoes. As soon as she got out of the backyard, she saw her older brother holding onto the door and walking out carefully. He was obviously trying to walk outside.

"Older Brother! Stop causing trouble!! It takes a hundred days to fully recover from serious injuries. The doctor said you will need to rest for at least three months before you can get out of bed. Quickly lie down on the recliner. I'll open the door!!" Yu Xiaocao stuffed the tomatoes into her older brother's hands and helped him lie down on the recliner.

Yu Hang sighed helplessly, "I feel that my ribs are almost healed. I don't feel much pain as long as I don't make vigorous movements... ow!"

"It hurts, right? Pain means that the bones haven't recovered yet! Be obedient and rest!!" Yu Xiaocao lightly pushed his chest. She glared at him when she saw him reveal a painful expression.

Yu Hang looked at the back view of Xiaocao, who went to open the door, and muttered, "Little steward! Can't believe you would actually do that..."

Chapter 130 - Visitors

"Eldest Maternal Uncle, Second Maternal Uncle, Eldest Maternal Aunt! Third Uncle? Why are you guys here?" Yu Xiaocao unlocked the latch, opened the door, and saw several people standing in front of the door. She couldn't help but cry out in surprise.

Xiaocao's third uncle, Yu Jiang, looked inside the courtyard and smiled, "I heard from Second Brother that you're alone at home picking vegetables today. There must be a lot of work, right? Your eldest granduncle told me to come over to help you."

"I can manage. Auntie Zhou and two older sisters came over to help. There's also Auntie Qian!" Xiaocao quickly guided them into the yard.

Eldest Maternal Uncle Liu Pei's hair was dripping wet from either the morning dew, or the sweat from hastily running over. With a smile on his simple and honest face, he loudly asked, "Xiaocao, did your father go to the fields? Let's quickly go over to help them then!"

Seeing that they didn't need his help at home, Yu Jiang turned to Xiaocao's two maternal uncles and said, "Do the two older brothers know the way to the fields? I came over to help too. Since there's not much to help out with at home, I'll go help turn up the soil! Come, I'll take you guys over!"

Xiaocao finally understood the reason for her uncles' visit. She was moved by their intention and said, "Eldest Uncle, Second Uncle, you guys have much more land to work on at home. Everyone is busy with spring plowing right now. If you guys came over here, would Grandfather and the rest of the family be able to handle all the work?"

Eldest Maternal Aunt caressed Xiaocao's fair, delicate face and wiped off the dirt on her chin. She smiled and said, "Your maternal grandfather is worried about your family's spring plowing work. He said that your father's leg isn't very nimble and Xiaosha is injured. So, since your family has less land, we should help plow and sow your family's fields first!"

Yu Jiang also smiled and said, "Our family also thought that way. Many hands make light work! With us here to help, it would take less than half a day to plow your family's three plots of land."

"Oh! Why is it so lively today?" Qian Xiaoduo drove the carriage and trotted over. From afar, he had seen a number of people standing in front of the Yu Family's old residence. He was afraid that something had happened, so he accelerated the speed of the horse carriage and rushed over quickly.

"Older Brother Xiaoduo, you came pretty early today. We haven't even finished gathering the vegetables. You can sit in the yard, take a sip of water, and rest for a bit." Yu Xiaocao had noticed that he usually came with the Yao Family's Xiaosi, so she looked behind him. Sure enough, the Yao Family's horse carriage was coming over."

Qian Xiaoduo laughed bitterly and said, "Miss Yu, our young boss treats you as his younger sister. So how can this lowly one let you call me 'older brother'? Please just call me Xiaoduo!"

“You are you and he is he! Our relationships don't interfere with one another!” Yu Xiaocao smiled sincerely.

Liu Pei looked at the sky, and then told his wife, “You don't have to go to the fields. Stay here to help gather the vegetables and with the cooking. Xiaocao, we'll go to the fields first.”

“Eldest Uncle, Second Uncle, you guys have rushed over from so far away. Have a drink of water and rest for a bit!” Her maternal grandmother's family lived in Xishan Village. When coming over, they needed to travel across a big mountain. Seeing that her uncles' trouser legs were wet from the morning dew, she knew that they had set out before dawn.

“No need! We'll go plow the fields first!” Second Maternal Uncle Liu Han had a more quiet temperament and didn't talk much.

Seeing that she couldn't get them to stay, Xiaocao got water bags from the kitchen and filled them with diluted mystic-stone water. Then, she had her uncles take the water bags with them. Not only would drinking the mystic-stone water quench their thirst, but it could also eliminate fatigue.

Under Yu Jiang's lead, her maternal uncles set out to the fields. Xiaosi's carriage has also arrived at the entrance and began unloading the bamboo baskets. The bamboo baskets used to pack the vegetables were all made by Yu Hai. They needed a large quantity of baskets every day, so when he was free at night, he would chop some bamboo and weave baskets.

“Miss Xiaocao! Starting today, we need double the amount of vegetables. Our old master's friend had a meal at our estate and said that our vegetables tasted better than the ones that they bought! The two families live close by, so they wanted me to help them buy some vegetables.”

The vegetables that the Yao Estate bought were mostly for the master and stewards to eat. They didn't need a lot every day, so half a carriage was enough. Thus, he was still able to transport the vegetables even after doubling the amount needed.

Qian Xiaoduo drank all the water that Xiaocao gave him in one breath. After finishing, he wiped his mouth with his sleeve and smiled, “Mountain spring water is surely different. There a sweet taste to it. My whole body is full of strength after drinking it. Xiaosi, drink quickly and start working!”

Every time Qian Xiaoduo came, he would drink a bowl of the Yu Family's water. Although it was just plain water, it was more refreshing than the best tea.

Xiaosi also swiftly finished drinking his bowl of water. He waved his arm and laughed, "Go! Let's go gather vegetables!" These two would help with some work every time they came, as if it was their own home.

With the addition of three labor forces, the vegetable picking speed was naturally much faster. A few moments later, the empty baskets were filled with fresh and juicy greens.

Xiaocao washed a few cucumbers and gave one to each person, "They're homegrown, so don't act so courteous. Try and see how it tastes!"

Madam Fang refused and shook her head repeatedly, "Your family's vegetables aren't sold at a cheap price. These cucumbers probably weigh a few catties, which can be sold for several hundred copper coins. Don't waste them. Quickly put them in the basket!"

The little glutton Zhou Shanhu had already opened her mouth wide, and just hadn't put the cucumber into her own mouth yet. She pouted her lips when she heard her mother's words, but she conscientiously put the cucumber into the bamboo basket.

Xiaocao quickly stuffed the cucumber back into her hands and said, "You guys have been helping for nearly two hours. What's the big deal with eating a cucumber? Do you think that our family are misers?"

"This child!" Eldest Aunt Madam Han glared at her, and then smiled at the people who had helped out, "Although the child's words sound rude, she is honest and sincere. So just eat! Just eat!"

Seeing that they were still hesitating to eat, Yu Xiaocao broke the cucumbers one by one and showed it to them. She smiled and said, "They're broken, so they can't be sold!"

"This kid!" Madam Fang didn't know whether she should laugh or cry. She picked up the broken cucumber and took a bite. The crisp and juicy mouthfeel, and the light and sweet taste, immediately conquered her taste buds.

“Wow! Xiaocao, even your family's cucumbers taste better than others!” Zhou Shanhu exclaimed as she ate.

Of course! Cucumbers watered with the mystic-stone water were not only big but also delicious. Xiaocao naturally couldn't directly tell them these things, so she just smiled and said, “You just think it's delicious because it's the first time you're eating cucumbers in half a year. Later, when your family's cucumbers are ripened and you eat too much of them, you won't think it's tasty anymore.”

Qian Xiaoduo gnawed on the cucumber in big mouthfuls and grinned, “This cucumber is really good! Miss Xiaocao, what kind of fertilizers do your family use on the fields? The crops grow so well and fast. Yesterday, the cucumbers weren't even ready to be harvested, but we gathered two baskets today!”

“Eh... the weather has warmed up now, so it's natural that the vegetables grew slightly faster.” Xiaocao made a random excuse. Fortunately, Qian Xiaoduo's family weren't farmers and he had just casually asked without the intention to dig deeper into the topic.

After the vegetables were weighed and the money was paid, Qian Xiaoduo and Xiaosi hurried back. Zhenxiu Restaurant was still waiting for the vegetables since they needed to use them to serve customers.

Madam Mao and Madam Fang had already left while they were weighing the vegetables. Her eldest maternal aunt, Madam Han, was stunned as she looked at the fifty taels in Yu Xiaocao's hands and spoke incessantly, “I didn't expect vegetables in this season to be so expensive! A catty of cucumbers cost thirty copper coins? Isn't that almost the same price as pork?”

Yu Xiaocao smiled at her, gave her a red tomato, and said, “At this time, crops like cucumbers and string beans haven't ripened yet! The rich people in town want to eat fresh greens and they don't lack the money to buy them! A plate of smashed cucumber salad at Zhenxiu Restaurant costs one tael! This price is considered rather trivial for them!”

A plate of smashed cucumber salad could be made with just one of Xiaocao's family's cucumbers, so Zhenxiu Restaurant's expense was no more than a few dozen copper coins. A plate of cucumber could earn them hundredfold in return. Tsk tsk, who else would be able to do this!

Madam Han noticed that it was still quite early and wanted to go help out in the fields. Xiaocao hastily stopped her and said, “Our family doesn't have much land, so my parents and uncles are enough for the job. Eldest Aunt should sit down for a rest and eat a tomato. Help me clean the ducks later.”

“Tomato? I thought it was a persimmon! I was just wondering where you got this persimmon from during this time of the year.” Madam Han curiously examined the red tomato in her hands.

“This is a tomato. We eat it less at this little place of ours. It is said that people in the capital and some of the bigger cities in the south eat it more often. Tomatoes can be prepared as a cold dish with just some sugar. It can also be stir-fried with eggs, stew soup...” Yu Xiaocao motioned her eldest maternal aunt to try it.

Madam Han noticed that not many tomatoes were harvested, only four or five. So she smiled and said, “I'm not eating it. Let's cook it later so everyone can eat it together!”

Xiaocao wanted to say something else, but Madam Han had already stood up and walked to the entrance of the kitchen. She picked up the ducks, which had their legs tied up, and was about to walk to the well.

“Wait a moment, Eldest Maternal Aunt! I'll go get a large basin to hold the duck blood!” Speaking of duck blood, Xiaocao couldn't help but think of delicious food such as 'duck blood stewed with tofu' and 'duck blood soup with vermicelli'.

Madam Han thought about it and smiled, “It turns out that not only chicken blood, but you can also make delicious food with duck blood ah! So duck giblets can also be eaten then!”

Xiaocao nodded her head and said, “Later, I'll braise the duck gizzard, duck liver, and duck intestines. We will have another dish for lunch! It's too bad we don't have vermicelli for the duck blood. Let's just make duck blood stewed with tofu then!”

Madam Han skillfully slit the duck's neck and dripped the blood into the basin. She asked, “Vermicelli? What's that? Is it tasty?”

“Eldest Aunt hasn't heard of vermicelli before?” Could it be that vermicelli didn't exist during this era? When did vermicelli appear in history? Xiaocao, who hadn't graduated from middle school, couldn't help but be somewhat confused.

Madam Han shook her head, threw the dead duck on the ground, and picked up the other duck. She asked, "I've never heard of vermicelli. Is it delicious when stewed with duck blood?"

"Vermicelli can be made with sweet potato flour or mung bean flour. It has a smooth, slippery texture and is very chewy!" Xiaocao's eyes lit up as a new money-making method brewed within her mind.

After boiling the water and scalding the ducks, there was also the great task of plucking the duck feathers. Xiaocao was responsible for cleaning the duck giblets, as well as braising the offals.

She prepared to make salted ducks with the two ducks. But, due to time constraints, the curing period for one of the ducks had to be slightly shortened. With her culinary skills, it shouldn't affect the taste too much.