

Gold Chapter 141

Chapter 141

Who would have thought that Old Zhao, who had moved to Dongshan Village over thirty years ago, was actually a brilliant and famous general from the previous dynasty, Zhao Zimo [1]. General Zhao was a brave and outstanding strategist and even defeated 80,000 troops from the emperor emeritus's army at Dingbanpo. The emperor emeritus even sorrowfully sighed, 'If Zhou Yu were to be born, why must Zhuge Liang exist as well?' [2]; he simultaneously admired and despised General Zhao. Admired him for his martial talents, yet hated him for his loyalty to the previous dynasty. Unfortunately, the previous dynasty's emperor didn't cherish him and believed the slander of jealous people. He placed General Zhao Zimo and his arch-enemy, Liu Ming, together in command. During the next fight, in order to eliminate Zhao Zimo, Liu Ming deliberately procrastinated and delayed by preventing reinforcements from arriving on time.

General Zhao had taken his barely thirteen year old son to that blood-soaked battlefield, and they had repeatedly repelled the volunteer army's attacks. Without reinforcements, the battle that day was a fight to the death. The emperor emeritus, who at that time was only the head of the volunteer army, had a heart who liked talented people, so he sent people over and over again to persuade General Zhao to defect. However, all of his attempts had been rebuffed.

General Zhao struggled bitterly for a whole eight days, but the enemy's strength was on an entirely different level. In the end, General Zhao was not a match for them. On that fight, almost all of General Zhao's army had been completely defeated. Fang Zizhen had become seriously injured while trying to cover for his teacher's and younger martial brother's retreat, and they didn't know if he had survived. In addition, almost all of Zhao Zimo's loyal assistants had become casualties, and he himself had sustained serious injuries that left him unconscious. One of his remaining loyal servants had managed to drag him out of a pile of deceased soldiers and carry him to safety. General Zhao had just narrowly escaped death from that fateful battle.

As for Liu Ming, he actually framed General Zhao for treason and accused him of betraying the country. The previous dynasty's emperor was muddle headed and sent down a death sentence decree. Zhao Zimo, who had just managed to stabilize his own injuries, was helpless against this accusation. All he could do was take his only son with him on an arduous journey, evading the forces of the dynasty he had wholeheartedly tried to protect. Luckily, before long, the previous dynasty had been overthrown by the volunteer army. Only then was Zhao Zimo able to take his remaining loyal servants and his son to live in seclusion next to the West Mountains. That was where he and his family had stayed up until now.

For several generations, the Zhao Family only had a single heir for the next generation. General Zhao Zimo had been married for several years without any children, so he had raised Fang Zizhen like his own son. Although on paper the two were master and disciple, in private they were truly like father and son.

After the dust settled, General Zhao returned many times to that battlefield to find his disciple's whereabouts, but had no news for a long period of time. When Fang Zichen covered the Zhaos' retreat, he had been heavily injured and there were a lot of soldiers after them. Thus, it was likely that he had met his end.

At the end of every autumn, the villagers from Dongshan Village, if they had a mind to, could find Old Zhao at the foot of the West Mountain using a candle to burn some rough straw paper [3]. No one knew who he was paying respects to... At first, when Zhao Han heard that this large man with a giant beard covering his face was the disciple that his grandfather always remembered, he felt extremely happy and excited in his heart. However, he recalled that his family was in an awkward situation. Even though he was young, his grandfather had never concealed anything from him.

To be perfectly clear, the Zhao Family was technically considered surviving supporters of the previous dynasty. Zhao Han's grandfather had actually injured the current emperor emeritus in battle before. If their identities became exposed, then it was possible that they would all be destroyed. Consequently, Zhao Han did his best to hide his inner turmoil as he prepared to continue to sound out this man who called himself his martial uncle.

"General! The prefectural magistrate is about to start opening the wine and begin the welcome dinner for you!" An energetic and experienced young man saluted to Fang Zizhen with his hands cupped into a fist.

General? Zhao Han frowned and somewhat retreated a step. The only people who could be called a general in these days were all officials of the Great Ming Dynasty. If the man in front of him was his martial uncle, how could he possibly become a general for the Great Ming Dynasty? At that time, Martial Uncle Fang had slaughtered many in the volunteer army!

Although the brawny man in front of him looked rough, he had a sensitive animal instinct. He could somehow tell that Zhao Han was hesitating and waved his hand at the other youth, "I just found a former acquaintance, so I will be unable to attend the reception. Please tell the prefectural magistrate that I will prepare a banquet for him some other day as an apology!"

After he dispatched the youth, Fang Zizhen spoke to Zhao Han, "Talking in this area is inconvenient. Where are you staying? I'll accompany you there!"

"No need!" Zhao Han looked at the man cautiously and continued, "Sir, you have recognized the wrong person! I really don't know a person named Fang Zizhen..."

"How could I possibly recognize the wrong person? Your face is about eighty percent similar to my master's when he was young!! That being said, you also admitted that your surname is Zhao. I absolutely can't be wrong!!" Fang Zizhen eagerly rebuffed.

Zhao Han replied guardedly, "Some things look the same, some people resemble others! This doesn't really mean anything, right? 'Zhao' is a very common surname, so there are many people with this name. We are only some ordinary hunters, so how could you, esteemed sir, recognize us?"

Fang Zizhen noticed that ever since his subordinate came over, the youth in front of him, who had previously seemed emotional, had started to plead that he didn't know him. He said, somewhat downcast, "Dearest Nephew, do you blame me for taking an official position in the Great Ming Dynasty? It's a long story, let's go find a place to slowly discuss what happened."

"This commoner has nothing to discuss with you, sir! It's getting late, this commoner will leave!" Zhao Han respectfully bowed and then called out to Xiaocao and her father to tell them to leave the night market.

Fang Zizhen didn't attempt to stop him. Instead, he sadly followed from behind like a golden retriever who had been reprimanded by its master. It wasn't easy to find news about his respected teacher, so he absolutely couldn't let this go! He had already decided that when he found his esteemed master, if his master blamed him and even refused to recognize him, he would retire from his position and wait upon his master for the rest of his life.

Zhao Han had noticed the large man following them shamelessly. However, no matter what he said, the older guy wouldn't listen and persisted on tailing them. He felt quite helpless inside but he didn't want the man to know where they were dwelling. So he walked around the city in circles.

After Zhao Bufan finished his own errands, he waited at the inn for a long time. When he didn't see his son and Yu Family's father and daughter come back, he went out to look for them out of worry. Coincidentally, he bumped into Zhao Han and the others walking around in circles.

"It's so late right now and the shops have already closed. Why are you bringing Brother Yu and Xiaocao around right now? If you want to walk around a bit, don't you still have all of tomorrow to do so?" Zhao Bufan discovered that his son wasn't going in the direction of the inn, which was why he was asking his son with some reproach.

"Xiao...Xiaofan?" He heard a voice that quavered from behind Zhao Han.

Zhao Han only felt a gust of wind go by him. The large and burly man bolted toward his father at an astonishing speed and gave his father a giant bear hug!

Zhao Bufan cautiously stood still when the figure that resembled a large black bear dashed over. However, when heard the voice that seemed both familiar yet strange, he set down his fists and endured that incredibly tight hug from the giant.

"Martial Brother Zizhen? You really are Martial Brother Zizhen!!" Zhao Bufan couldn't help but cry out in joyful astonishment.

When Fang Zizhen had sacrificed himself during that battle, the fourteen year old Zhao Bufan, who already had gained experienced on the battlefield, was right next to him. He saw firsthand how his martial brother, who was covered entirely in blood from head to toe, shielded his father and him from a group of almost twenty soldiers from the volunteer army. The sound of his martial brother's hoarse voice shouting, "Run away——" had been deeply embedded in his heart. Even now, he could remember it as clear as day. If it wasn't for his martial brother and their loyal servant Uncle Huang, he and his father would have long become two bodies in a grave!

Zhao Bufan's fierce eyes held back tears as he tried his hardest to suppress his spiraling emotions. He slowly said, "Older Martial Brother, you're still alive——that's really too good!!"

"Xiaofan! Martial brother has finally found you!! Is Master still doing well? How have you and your family been living these years? I've looked for you all for over thirty years and never gave up! Fortunately, fortunately, you are all okay!!" Fang Zizhen hastily wiped tears of joy from his face. His mouth was spread open in a large grin, showing a set of spotlessly white teeth.

Zhao Bufan laughed, "Martial Brother Zizhen, if Father could see you now, he would already be scolding you for not concealing your emotions. Everything is showing right on your face."

"Heh heh! I haven't heard Master yell at me for over thirty years and I quite miss it! I only forgot my manners in front of you, that's all. At court, everyone knows that I, Fang Zizhen, is a 'stone-faced general'. In front of others, I never expose my feelings!"

Fang Zizhen had a simple and honest laugh that didn't have even a hint of the 'stone-faced general' persona. His subordinates behind him gaped at the sight. Is this still their general ah? It wouldn't be an imposter, right?

"General? Martial Brother has a position at court?" Zhao Bufan, unlike his son, was not full of suspicion. He had a good understanding of his martial brother's personality. His martial brother absolutely would not allow them to receive any harm. Even if it had been thirty years since they last met, he was still confident in his assessment—his martial brother would not have changed!

Fang Zizhen's expression looked somewhat unnatural, "That day, after Master and you left, I was taken prisoner shortly thereafter. At the time, the head of the volunteer army was the current emperor emeritus. Once he found out I was Master's disciple, he didn't punish me heavily as a prisoner and even treated my injuries. Not long after, the previous dynasty had been overthrown, and the emperor emeritus took the supreme throne."

Fang Zizhen then paused for a second before he continued, "At first, I wasn't planning on taking a position. However, the emperor emeritus said that only with a high position could I possibly have enough manpower to find the person I wanted to find. At the start of the new dynasty, I followed the emperor emeritus everywhere to suppress the rebellions and battle the enemies surrounding us. During those times, I looked for Master and you everywhere I went. Unfortunately, by the time the country was at peace, there was still no news about you guys. I resigned from all of my positions except the general position in order to have more time to find you guys all these years! The heavens do not let down those who persevere, I've finally found you at Jinwei Prefectural City!!"

As they talked, the whole group arrived at the inn they were staying at. Fang Zizhen saw that the place was simple and crude. He frowned slightly, "Younger Martial Brother, I have a small residence at the prefectural city, you should spend the night at my place. I have a lot of things that I need to talk to you about!"

Zhao Bufan knew that he felt that the conditions at the inn weren't good and smiled, "Let's not bother you, we need to leave early in the morning the day after tomorrow..."

"Xiaofan, we haven't seen each other for thirty years, so it's not surprising you feel a little weird with me! However, at the time, Master was always campaigning all the time, so I basically raised you! How can you treat your martial brother like an outsider now?" Who would have thought that such a big, hulking man with a burly beard and sideburns could have such a sensitive heart.

Zhao Bufan didn't know whether he should laugh or cry at this point, "Older Martial Brother, I'm not treating you like an outsider. I just feel like moving all of our stuff around in the middle of the night is quite a chore! After we finish our errands tomorrow, you can come with us and then leave with us the following day at the break of dawn. Come to Dongshan Village!"

"Dongshan Village? Master and you were at Dongshan Village for all of these years?" Fang Zizhen was very interested in how his master and martial brother had lived for all of those years.

Zhao Bufan nodded, "That's right! We live on the west side of Dongshan Village at the foot of the mountain. The villagers are simple and honest. They live off the fruits of the sea and mountainous forests. With our skills, even in years of disaster, we won't ever go hungry...that being said, at the time, the previous dynasty had a death sentence on us. If we were ever found, the West Mountain is also a very good hiding place!"

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"The previous dynasty's emperor was a stupid dog! Master was loyal and devoted to him yet he ended up getting chased by that man's soldiers! Serves him right for getting killed by his trusted aides, that is true karmic retribution within one's lifetime!!" Fang Zizhen seethed angrily. If the previous dynasty's emperor hadn't believed the slander, then his master would not have had to endure so much hardship, and he wouldn't have been out of contact with him for so long.

Zhao Bufan smiled, "These are all old events, it's best not to mention it! Older Martial Brother, it's getting late. You should go and rest first, we can meet up again tomorrow."

"It's been so long since I've talked to you and I have so many things to discuss! I won't leave tonight. Li Li, go check if there are any rooms open and reserve one for me. Tonight I want to talk to my younger martial brother by the candlelight!" Fang Zizhen felt as if he was in a dream and was afraid that if he left, he would wake up.

At this moment, Yu Xiaocao and her father had already returned to their own room and were talking quietly.

"Father, I never would have thought that Brother Han was the descendant of a general!" Yu Xiaocao had extracted the most important piece from Fang Zizhen's words: Grandpa Zhao was a high-ranking general and was given a death sentence by the previous dynasty's emperor after getting slandered.

Yu Hai slowly nodded his head, "I had found out a while ago that Older Brother Zhao's family's marital skills were exceptional. Now that I know he's from a general's family, it all makes sense now!"

"Father, Grandpa Zhao's adopted son is a general of the current dynasty. Do you think Grandpa Zhao and Uncle Zhao will become generals now?" Yu Xiaocao's eyes lit up. Brother Han was about to become a son of a general, so cool! Yu Hai, on the other hand, was not so optimistic, "However, Uncle Zhao was a general of the previous dynasty, and he even faced off against the emperor emeritus before. No matter how magnanimous the emperor emeritus is, it's impossible that he would give him a position. That being said, our current emperor is not like the emperor emeritus, who rewarded those with military talents only."

Yu Xiaocao also thought that her conjecture was little past the realms of possibility and laughed, "That's true! Earlier I was thinking that if Brother Han and his family were awarded a position at court, then they would definitely have to leave Dongshan Village. In the future, I wouldn't have the chance to go hunting with him in the mountains. I even felt a little sad. But now it's okay, I don't have to worry anymore!"

Yu Hai suddenly thought of something and guffawed, "You want to go up into the mountains to go hunting! I've been told it's forbidden for me, let alone you, right? With your mother watching us, the two of us shouldn't even think about running into the mountains!"

Yu Xiaocao complained half jokingly and half seriously, "Ah, why is Mother so afraid? It's like being afraid of a rope for ten years after being bitten by a snake! The areas around the West Mountains don't have any vicious creatures, why is she being so strict with you and me?"

Yu Hai sighed heavily, "Your mother was truly frightened to death after my accident! In any case, we don't rely on hunting anymore to make money! Cao'er, fortunately we have you. Otherwise, I don't know how our family would have survived until spring without all of us dying of hunger!"

Xiaocao laid down and snuggled into the blankets. She rubbed her tired eyes and mumbled, "Father, we're all one family, why are you saying such polite words? In the future, our family will continue to get better and better..."

The silvery moonlight shone through the windows and illuminated Xiaocao's fair and peaceful face. Her long eyelashes left a shadow on her cheeks. Yu Hai quietly looked at his daughter's face, which seemed to become more delicate with each passing day. He could still remember when she was first born; she

was as skinny as a monkey then and cried pitifully without a lot of energy. His heart simultaneously felt sorrowful yet joyful that his youngest daughter had overcome the bitter part of life to enjoy the sweet part... The two of them slept until Zhao Han's knock on the door woke them up. Yu Xiaocao rubbed her eyes and managed to dress herself while still half-asleep. Zhao Han said with a bit of embarrassment, "Did I startle you two awake? I'm really sorry about that!"

"Brother Han, why are we waking up so early?" Yu Xiaocao used a hand to cover her mouth as she yawned greatly.

Zhao Han twitched his lips and replied, "It's my martial uncle's fault! Last night he talked with my father until the middle of the night. This morning, he knocked on the door to come in before the sun got up. If I had known earlier, I would have had my martial uncle and my father sleep in one room, then I could have slept in my martial uncle's room!"

"Your martial uncle and your father haven't seen each other for more than thirty years, so it's natural that they have a lot of things to say to each other! How about we deliver the geese today, so we don't disturb Uncle Zhao and your martial uncle while they're reminiscing?" Yu Xiaocao carefully dipped the toothbrush she had bought yesterday into some salt and attentively brushed her teeth.

After she transmigrated over, she found out that her family used willow twigs to brush their teeth. She had believed that toothbrushes hadn't been invented in this time period. If you weren't careful when you used a willow twig while brushing your teeth, you could end up jabbing yourself in the gums, causing bleeding. She was very unused to this technique.

Yesterday night, when they were strolling around the night market, she found a place selling toothbrushes made with the bristles from a pig. After scalding the bristles with some hot water, it was actually pretty easy to use as a toothbrush. She also bought some teeth cleaning salt from the same booth, and she was told that the people living the prefectural city all used this type of salt to brush their teeth.

Yu Hai had also been browbeaten by his daughter to brush his teeth. He rinsed his mouth as he said, "Older Brother Zhao doesn't have the time today. However, I don't have much to do. The nobility in the prefectural city have a lot of customs. You both are also half-grown children, so be careful not to cause any trouble."

Yu Xiaocao giggled, "Father, you're really underestimating us! We're just delivering a pair of wild geese, what kind of trouble can we get into? That being said, right now we have a powerful supporter behind

us! Brother Han's martial uncle is titled as the Zhaoyong General [1] and is a third-rank official at court! For the sake of his face, the prefectural magistrate won't try to make things difficult for us!"

"Stop taking advantage of other people's power! You, ah, your courage has always been larger than the sky. The prefectural city has deeper waters than you can swim, so don't cause any trouble!" Yu Hai pulled on his daughter's pigtails and seriously warned her.

Yu Xiaocao stuck out her tongue at her father and wrinkled her nose, "I know, your daughter knows the severity of the issue! Stop pulling on my pigtails, it took me a while to braid them up!"

Normally at home, Yu Xiaocao would only braid her hair into simple pigtails and leave it that way. She never tried to wind it into more complicated styles. Earlier, she only managed to add some hair ornaments at the top of her braided pigtails after spending more than half the morning staring into her reflection in the washing water.

Yu Hai teased, "You don't even know how to style hair, are you still considered a girl? Are you sure that your soul didn't go into the wrong body and that our family was supposed to have another silly boy instead?"

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him. 'Am I really your biological daughter, you silly man?'

Fang Zizhen's assistant went to the prefectural city's most famous breakfast stand in the morning and took back some takeout for them. Xiaocao and her father also benefited from this. They both got to eat Jinwei Prefectural City's most famous soup dumplings and Erduoyan fried rice cakes. Xiaocao felt extremely satisfied afterwards. This trip was worth it in her mind as she had gotten try a lot of snacks that were hard to find in Tanggu Town!

When he found out that Zhao Han needed to go to the prefectural magistrate's residence to deliver the wild geese, Fang Zizhen instructed his subordinate, Li Li, to go with them.

With someone with them, it was easier to finish the errand. The prefectural magistrate had recognized Li Li as an attendant of the Zhaoyong General, so he personally received them. When he saw the two sleek and plump, large geese, he was extremely pleased. In addition, the two people in front of him were recommended by the Zhaoyong General himself, so he naturally wouldn't treat them unfairly. He ended up buying the two geese for around a hundred taels total!

Zhao Han went according to the deal he had struck at the time with Xiaocao and gave her half of the money he received. Xiaocao didn't need these fifty taels at this time and graciously said, "Brother Han, you were the one who contacted the buyer and found the geese. I only helped you with some minor tasks, so how could I possibly take your money?"

Zhao Han adamantly refused to take back the money and added, "If it wasn't for your secret bait, I would not have been able to trap these two geese so easily. Let me tell you, capturing a live goose is many times more difficult than killing one. Although my archery skills are quite good, I can't guarantee that I would be able to take down a goose completely intact! That being said, you were the one who helped raise the geese at home. After being there for so many days, I doubt anyone besides you could take such good care of these geese. You deserve this money! If you don't take it, then I'll take it as you looking down on your Brother Han!"

After he said that, Yu Xiaocao really couldn't refuse anymore. She had no choice but to take the money and said, "Alright, then I'll take the money!"

A simple stroll to the prefectural magistrate's home meant that she made all the money she needed to go shopping in the city! Yu Xiaocao shopped around like a fiend for the rest of the day. At noon, she ate at a pretty good tavern for lunch and tried several dishes that were specialties of Jinwei City. After one day in the city, she managed to buy a lot of things. If she wasn't afraid that she wouldn't be able to haul more stuff home, Xiaocao likely would have spent all fifty taels in one day!

The next day, early in the morning, the group of people proceeded to go back home. They had arrived in the city with four but they were going home with three additional people——Fang Zizhen and his two subordinates.

On the whole way there, Fang Zizhen was antsy, wishing that they could immediately appear in Dongshan Village. His equestrian skills were quite good, and he was riding a horse that was one of the finest steeds available. When he saw Xiaocao and the others not in a hurry, he couldn't help but propose, "Xiaofan! How about...the two of us head off first. With Li Li and the other assistant staying with them, we don't need to worry about Xiaohan's and the others' safety."

Zhao Bufan laughed brightly, "Okay! Older Martial Brother Zizhen, let's see who's better at riding! On behalf of my father, I'll check to see if you've been slacking on your horsemanship all these years, alright?"

Fang Zizhen felt like he was back in the past, with a ten year old Little Bufan. The youth loved to compete horsemanship skills with him and would even snivel when he lost!

"Haha...okay! Xiaofan, your martial brother is not going to go easy on you ah! If you lose, you're not allowed to cry!!" Fang Zizhen laughed in a teasing manner.

Zhao Bufan felt his old face flush red and caught sight of his son sniggering at him. He spoke to his martial brother, "No need to bring back old events of the past! People often say: a soldier can change a lot in three days, enough to change your perspective! Almost thirty years have passed and your younger martial brother has never slacked on his archery and horsemanship skills!"

"With Master around, even if you wanted to slack you wouldn't be able to!! A strict teacher will have brilliant students, I firmly believe, Xiaofan, that you will be able to astonish me with your skills. Let's go!" Fang Zizhen made sure to leave him some face and didn't bring up all of his awkward childhood incidents of the past.

The two of them bolted off, leaving dust in their trail. Yu Xiaocao watched their strong and healthy figures rapidly disappearing in the distance and felt extremely envious. Galloping swiftly on horseback looked extremely carefree, and she also wanted to experience it for herself. However, with her tiny body and poor riding skills, it was likely that she would never be able to try.

Zhao Han had a gentle smile on his face as he looked at her, as if he could tell what she was harboring in her heart. He proposed, "How about this, I could bring you along on a gallop?"

Yu Xiaocao was just about to accept the offer when her father pitilessly stopped her, "Not okay! Men and women should not have physical contact! Cao'er, if you want to ride a horse, Father can take you along!"

Yu Xiaocao pouted and shook her head sulkily. Her father's equestrianism was not much better than her own. He couldn't go faster than Little Gray!

"Little Gray, go faster! Father, if you can keep up with me, then you can bring up riding with you again!" Xiaocao gently squeezed the little donkey's abdomen with her legs, and Little Gray immediately stretched out its legs and started to run.

Xiaocao could hear the wind rushing by her ears as the trees on the sides of the road whipped by. Her clothing, with its wide sleeves and fluttering pant legs, fluttered in the wind...a peel of silvery laughter came out of her and colored the surroundings.

"Eh? This little donkey's speed is actually not bad." Li Li exclaimed in admiration as his eyes opened wide in astonishment. An ordinary donkey would not be able to run so fast. But no matter how hard he looked, this drably gray donkey didn't have any distinguishing features ah!

Chapter 143 - Visiting

When the group of people arrived at Dongshan Village, the fiery sun was gradually approaching the West Mountain, which wreathed the top of the mountain in a glittering, golden halo. The vast majority of villagers had just finished eating dinner, and many elderly men and women were congregated under the old elm tree at the mouth of the village. Some were playing chess while others were chatting genially.

Among them was a fat and plump woman, who was garrulously talking to other people while drops of spittle emitted from her mouth. This person was Xiaocao's eldest paternal aunt, Li Guihua. She had a bunch of roasted melon seeds in her pocket, and her lips flapped swiftly as the husks from the melon seeds flew away. Her beady eyes, which resembled a thief's, furiously roved around. No one knew who she was planning to slander next.

Next to her was Madam Xiong, who used an elbow to poke at her. She pouted towards the entrance of the village and said, "Guihua, look over there! Isn't that your younger brother-in-law and his precious little daughter? I heard that the day before yesterday they went with Hunter Zhao and his son to the prefectural city! Tsk tsk, I've been living for a long time and I've never been to the prefectural city. Your younger brother-in-law takes that silly girl Xiaocao as a treasure, ah, and takes her around everywhere!"

"Psh, what kind of treasure are you talking about?! In the end, isn't she just something you'll lose money on?" Ever since Li Guihua went on her latest, fruitless trip to the old Yu residence and was rewarded with nightmares for several nights, she never had the guts to go there again to cause trouble. She even spread rumors that the old residence had demons haunting it and that Yu Hai's family was so and so...however, most of the villagers knew her personality, and very few of them took her blabberings seriously.

Madam Xiong's eyes flickered, and she laughed until the fleshy parts of her body trembled. She then said, "Do you think your younger brother-in-law is trying to marry one of his children to the Zhao Family because he thinks their circumstances are good? Tsk tsk, even if he wants to, he shouldn't pick that chit Xiaocao ah. She's a sickly one and no one knows when she'll have her next spell!"

“Who knows! Second Brother-in-law is a sworn brother with Hunter Zhao. Maybe they had something to do in the prefectural city and Xiaocao begged them to go along. Second Brother-in-law definitely wouldn't be able to refuse her, especially since he loves to spoil her! As for thinking about marriage, whether or not they could get an agreement is not certain!” Madam Li continued to crack the melon seeds in her mouth noisily and was oblivious to the fact that there were many elders around her. She didn't have any manners and was preoccupied with eating her snacks selfishly.

Madam Xiong curled her lip and sniggered nastily, “Your younger brother-in-law is playing a good game. That Zhao Family has to be one of the richest families in our village. Last time your younger brother-in-law managed to kill a bear in the mountains. I heard, ah, that they sold it for three hundred taels. Your younger brother-in-law had such a serious injury, and he has a very good relationship with Hunter Zhao. He must have gotten a big portion of the money!”

When Madam Li heard that the bear was sold for that much money and that her second brother-in-law probably got a slice of that pie, her expression immediately changed. She repeatedly said, “I'll say ah! Second Brother-in-law split from the family with a lame leg and there's no one in his family who can do proper work. Yet they're becoming more and more prosperous with every passing day! Now I know that he collected quite a lot of money behind Mother and Father's back! No wonder he could fix the house, re-fence the courtyards, and even buy so much cloth to make new clothes...That's not okay, I need to tell Mother! When Hunter Zhao sold the bear, we hadn't split the family then! They need to compensate a bit ah!”

Madam Li stuffed all of the melon seeds that she had into Madam Xiong's hands and impatiently headed home. However, she had just mentioned the money from the bear when Madam Zhang's face twisted and the older woman started hollering at her. In addition, she even got a lot of work assigned to her. There was absolutely no way she could find the time to sneak out to laze about for the next several days!

At this moment, at the entrance of the village, the villagers all saw Hunter Zhao and Yu Hai with a few large men wearing silks and satins that had a soldierly air about them. The villagers whispered quietly among themselves. All of the items that Yu Xiaocao bought were hanging on Zhao Han's and Fang Zizhen's assistant's horses. On one hand, it was because the donkey was too small and couldn't carry all of it. On the other hand, she was afraid that people would become envious of her due to all of the stuff she bought.

Fang Zizhen was in a rush to see his respected teacher, who he hadn't seen for over thirty years. He directly followed behind Zhao Bufan to go to the Zhao Residence. Zhao Han was behind, bringing along Li Li and the other subordinate, and went to Xiaocao's home to deliver her things.

When Madam Liu found out that the Zhao Family was welcoming guests, she warmly picked a little bit of each type of vegetable growing in the fields and gave them to Zhao Han to bring back home. Although Zhao Han's family also had some areas to plant vegetables in, no one in his family knew how to farm, so they never had a great yield from their garden. Furthermore, none of their vegetables were as vivid and lush as the Yu Family's produce.

Ever since Yu Hai's branch split from the main family, they became even closer to the Zhao Family. Every few days or so, Zhao Han would deliver some game to them and even help them harvest vegetables. He also never slacked off when he helped them. Thus, from time to time, the Yu Family would also send some of their vegetables over.

After the members of the Zhao Family ate the Yu Family's vegetables, they disliked their own green vegetables even more. Even the old man, Zhao Zimo, complimented the Yu Family's vegetables many times. The vegetables they grew were lush and extremely tasty. It was easy to eat a couple extra bowls of rice when you had their vegetables to eat! He felt like his own body was getting stronger and stronger with every passing day. Even his old internal injuries, left by his previous military campaigns, seemed to have gotten better by a lot!

Zhao Han took the vegetables without any quibbles and even gave the bright red tomatoes to Li Li and the other guy. Li Li had gone with the general to visit other residences in the capital and had seen tomatoes before. However, all of those people kept the tomatoes in pots and used them as decorative plants only.

Li Li only found out that tomatoes could be eaten like a fruit after he had a taste of the sweet and sour tomato! That night, he also got to eat tomatoes used like a vegetable in cooked dishes. He suddenly realized then——tomatoes actually weren't considered a fruit but a vegetable! [1]

After they saw Zhao Han and the other two people off, Madam Liu started to put away the things Xiaocao bought while inquiring Yu Hai and her daughter about what they ate in the prefectural city, their living conditions, etc. As for Xiaocao's extravagant spending, Madam Liu had already gotten used to it. Luckily, Xiaocao was also very good at making money, so Madam Liu didn't bother saying anything anymore.

Xiaocao had bought Madam Liu a bolt of simple yet elegant cotton cloth. Madam Liu liked it so much that she almost couldn't bear to use it. However, Xiaolian and Xiaocao pestered her to try it, so she wrapped it around her body to take a look. Surely enough, the cloth suited her completely as it really showed off her gentle and sweet-tempered nature. Even Yu Hai repeatedly praised Xiaocao for having a good eye!

Xiaocao then took out the jewelry she had carried under her clothes. She first took out the pair of lilac earrings for Xiaolian and helped her put them on. The delicately fine earrings made Xiaolian's glowing and rosy cheeks seem even more pretty.

Madam Liu smiled on the side, "Xiaocao, this set of earrings you chose are not bad. All girls should have a few things of jewelry. In the past, our family had difficulties, but in the future, we should prepare a few more sets for you two sisters!"

Which young maiden didn't like shiny and glittery jewelry? Xiaolian absolutely loved that pair of earrings and hairpin studded with pearls. She wore the hairpin in her hair and couldn't bear to take it off. Yu Hai and his wife gently laughed as they watched their daughter admire herself. They thought it was simultaneously a bit funny as well as a bit heart wrenching.

"Mother, I bought this for you. Quickly try it on and see if it suits you!" Xiaocao took out the silver bracelet and hairpin out. She presented them as if they were the finest treasures in the world.

Madam Liu let her daughter place the bracelet over her hands as she commented, "What's the point in spending this money? Mother usually has a lot of work to do, so wearing a bracelet would only get in the way, right?" Although she said those words, she still felt warm inside her heart. Daughters were truly intimate with their mothers.

When she saw the silver hairpin shaped like a magnolia, her eyes suddenly became wet and hot, and her mouth trembled. When she got married, her two older brothers had also recently married too, so the family was not well off then. The magnolia silver hairpin in her dowry was also her mother's dowry. Usually, her mother couldn't bear to wear it. Although her mother had it for more than a couple of decades, it still looked new.

However, when Xiaocao was five, she had been very ill. Madam Zhang used the excuse that the family didn't have much money at home after paying for her third son's schooling fees and refused to give them money to have Xiaocao see the doctor. Helpless, she could only use that silver hairpin from her dowry to pay for her daughter's doctor visit and medicine. Every time she thought of that silver hairpin,

she felt a bit wistful but never regretful. A silver hairpin was only an object, no matter how expensive it was, it could never be as precious as her daughter's life!

Now a new magnolia silver hairpin had appeared in front of her. In fact, it was her sensible daughter who bought it for her. The hole in her heart had apparently been crammed full. With a daughter like this, what more could she ask for? She once again rejoiced that she had used her hairpin to save her daughter's life!

Xiaocao saw her mother hold back tears in her eyes as she looked at the hairpin in her hands. Her mother was lost in her thoughts, so she quietly interrupted her, "Mother! I missed you these past few days while I was in the prefectural city! Was everything okay at home? Did anyone from over there come over and make things difficult for you?"

Madam Liu carefully stored the silver hairpin and lightly blinked away the tears in her eyes. She smiled sweetly and said, "You have such a sweet little mouth, as if you have honey smeared all over it! Everything at home was fine...that's right, Third Young Master Zhou sent Xiaoduo over today with the watermelon seeds. How should we plant them? We can't delay farming season!!"

"We won't! Watermelons like warm weather, so if we wait a few days it won't cause any trouble! We should start up the kang bed in the west room. Watermelon seeds need to be soaked to promote germination. It's still a bit cold in the mornings and evenings here, so we need the kang to be going to keep the temperature warm." Yu Xiaocao had a good idea on how to grow watermelon. In her previous life, before her parents passed away, they had also grown two mu full of watermelon. At the time, she was in middle school, so she was already doing a lot of work around the family farm.

The whole family sat on the kang bed and was putting all of the things they bought away. Madam Liu came off the bed to make dinner. The Yu Family had already gotten used to eating three meals a day, so their last meal of the day was usually a bit later than the other villagers'. Yu Hai and his daughter had gnawed on some dried rations during noon. Madam Liu felt bad for them, so she especially made a couple more dishes for dinner.

Right after they finished their meal, they heard someone knocking on their gate. Xiaolian bolted out to open the door and welcomed in Madam Mao, who was holding a basket full of duck eggs.

Madam Mao entered the main room with her face wreathed with smiles. She sat cross-legged on the kang bed and pushed the basket full of duck eggs towards Madam Liu and said, "I'm here to thank your daughter Xiaocao! Today, Zhenxiu Restaurant's Little Brother Qian came by and reserved fifty ducks

from us for tomorrow. If it wasn't for their relationship with your family, then they would not have bought so many ducks from us and also not need us to slaughter and clean them. You guys wouldn't know this, but before, whenever someone ordered a duck from us, we always needed to slaughter and clean them. Duck feathers are very hard to pluck, so how long would it take us to pluck fifty ducks?"

Madam Liu was an honest person, so she spoke truthfully, "We cannot claim credit for this! Today Xiaoduo was helping us in the back courtyard and saw your son, Wuzi, herding the ducks through our bamboo fence. He said that your family did a good job raising the ducks and wanted to know who you were. I merely said a few words about your family, that's all. I absolutely can't take this gift from you."

"If it wasn't for your daughter Xiaocao's talents, how could Zhenxiu Restaurant need so many ducks? If it wasn't for Little Brother Qian coming by to buy produce from you, how could they find out that my family raised ducks? In the end, we are the ones taking advantage of you! It's only a few duck eggs, that's all. No need to be so courteous!" Madam Mao pulled on Madam Liu's hand a couple of times and was extremely warm to her.

Chapter 144 - Giving Advice

Originally, Madam Mao had heard from a relative, who worked at Zhenxiu Restaurant, that the recipe for the blazingly popular roasted chicken in town was created by a little girl from Dongshan Village, whose surname was Yu. She didn't quite believe the story at the time. How could an eight to nine year old girl, who had been sick and weak for many years, know how to cook food?

However, when the Yu Family recommended the Zhou Family's chickens to Zhenxiu Restaurant, their chickens, which had previously sold poorly, not only completely sold out but they also caught a bunch of chicks in the spring. They said that they wanted to expand their chicken raising activities!

If her family's ducks still couldn't be sold, due to the poor circumstances of the year, they would likely become a deficit for her family. Madam Mao decided to take her chances, despite only half-believing the stories, and come over to ask for help. She didn't expect that the Yu Family's youngest daughter truly had a gift for cooking. Within a few days, the little girl created 'osmanthus duck', which was a novel dish that sold very well.

It was said that this osmanthus duck not only had a tantalizing flavor but it could also nourish the body in many ways. It was rumored that if you ate it consistently it could alleviate fevers, expel toxins, nourish Yin, repair the lungs, moisturize dry areas, and beautify the skin!

Madam Mao knew that her husband didn't have a natural gift at doing business like the Zhou Family's brothers. Other than raising ducks, he wasn't good at much else. Her eldest son had tuition fees and all of the other expenditures at home depended on them selling ducks to pay for them. In the past, she

could only sell one duck for every two chickens in town. With that, they could barely make ends meet. This was also the reason why she had to haggle over every ounce or copper.

Now it was different. With this new dish and her relationship with the Yu Family, even if her family raised even more ducks, they wouldn't have to worry about selling them! Madam Mao felt immensely grateful within her heart towards the Yu Family for their benevolence and care. This basket of duck eggs was her way of sincerely thanking them.

After she saw off Madam Mao, Madam Liu fretted about the basket of duck eggs. Duck eggs did not taste as good as chicken eggs. No matter how you prepared them, they would always have a slight fishy taste. Apparently, they could only just use some coarse salt to preserve them. When the peak farming season came along, they could add another dish to their table then!

“Mother, give these duck eggs to me, and I'll prepare them!” On the other hand, Yu Xiaocao wasn't the tiniest bit worried over the eggs. In her past life, century eggs and lean meat congee and century eggs stir fried tofu were both her favorite foods to eat. The best salted and preserved duck eggs also had rosy red yolks, delectable golden yolk oil, and a delicate flavor... 'ah, can't think about it anymore, going to start drooling soon.'

Xiaocao always did what she promised! The next day, she took some Sichuan peppercorns, Chinese cinnamon, fennel, fresh ginger, fine salt and added it to some cold water and let it all boil for around twenty minutes. Afterwards, she poured the mixture into an earthenware jar and placed the duck eggs, which were washed clean, into the mixture and sealed the jar shut.

When Madam Liu saw her doing this, she said that she was only making regular salted duck eggs. Using spices like this would be a waste, so she shouldn't do it. Traditionally, when preserving duck eggs, people usually used some red soil and mixed it with water until it became viscous and gooey. Some coarse salt was then added and the whole mixture was used to coat the eggs and marinate them.

Xiaocao laughed, “Mother, I'm making five spice seasoned salted duck eggs. This type of duck egg has a rich fragrance and a savory flavor. I guarantee it will be better than all of the other salted duck eggs you've tried, just wait and see!”

“Don't we have a whole basket of duck eggs? Why did you only marinate half of the basket?” Madam Liu asked as she helped her daughter.

Xiaocao thought for a bit and replied with a different question, "Mother, are we able to get some quicklime around here? And huangdan powder..."

"Huangdan powder? Isn't that used by Taoist priests to concoct pills for immortality? Don't tell me that you plan on using the rest of the duck eggs to make immortality pills? That doesn't seem right, I've never heard of immortality pills needing duck eggs..." Madam Liu was quite puzzled by her question.

When she heard Madam Liu's words, Xiaocao felt relieved. It looked like quicklime and huangdan powder were all obtainable.

Surely enough, Madam Liu continued, "Quicklime is not hard to get ahold of! A lot of townspeople in town use lime to paint their walls when they build a new house. Your youngest maternal uncle knows how to lay bricks, so we can send a letter to him to get you some. As for huangdan powder, you should probably be able to buy some at a pharmacy."

Quicklime was used to build houses ah! Wasn't Third Young Master Zhou at the docks overseeing the factory construction? Finding him would be perfect! The docks also seemed to have a small pharmacy too, but she wasn't sure if they had any huangdan powder for sale. Yu Xiaocao was burning with anxiety and started to prepare to go to the docks.

After she finished breakfast, Xiaocao drove the donkey cart along with Xiaolian onto the road to the docks. Just as they left the village entrance, they saw the fat figure of Yu Heizi appear.

Previously, Yu Heizi was considered a hooligan in Dongshan Village who caused trouble all day long. Using his large and fat figure to his advantage, he bullied all of the other children in the village. After being scared witless by the little divine stone, he unexpectedly did a 180 and dropped all of his bad habits.

"Brother Heizi, are you going to the docks? Come up, we have room for you!" Yu Xiaocao didn't have any ill will towards the reformed Yu Heizi. After all, they were family. She couldn't pretend not to see him just because she disliked his mother!

Yu Heizi avoided Xiaocao's eyes and chuckled sheepishly, "Ahhhh, I'm going to the docks to see if there's any work for me to do...it's okay, I should lose some of this fat on my body, so walking there is better!"

Yu Xiaocao giggled, "Losing weight doesn't happen all at once. Our donkey cart moves fast, and the earlier you get there, the more opportunities you'll have! Stop dawdling, quickly come up ah!"

Yu Heizi didn't try to decline her offer again and clumsily climbed onto the donkey cart. Little Gray was still quite calm and didn't decrease its speed despite having a fat Heizi added to its load. Heizi praised the donkey sincerely, "Xiaocao, your donkey was raised very well! When you first bought it, it was so skinny that it looked like a bag of bones. It was also so sick that it was at death's door. Everyone said that you guys were wasting money. I didn't expect this donkey to be so sturdy and healthy after being raised by you."

"Little Gray actually wasn't that sick, it's just that there isn't a good vet in town. You also know that I learned some medicine from Doctor You for a few days. I can definitely treat animals without a problem!" Xiaocao replied mildly.

Xiaolian glanced at Heizi's figure briefly and asked curiously, "Brother Heizi, what made you want to go to the docks to find work? Did Grandmother tell you to go?"

Heizi scratched his face out of embarrassment and said, "No! I'm already fourteen years old this spring. My mother said...in two more years I could probably talk about marriage. Heh heh...we're not able to make much at home from fishing and my mother said that all of the money at home is for Younger Uncle's studies. In the future, Grandmother likely won't give me much for a betrothal gift. So, I thought about it for a bit, and decided that since I'm perfectly healthy, I can go out and earn my own money!"

"You have spirit! Brother Heizi, I believe in you!" Yu Xiaocao nodded her head in admiration. In this time period, it was very common for people to find matches for fifteen to sixteen year olds. To Madam Zhang, other than her youngest son, who she treasured, everyone else was as important as grass. She really could see that old woman not giving any money for Heizi's betrothal gift!

Heizi smiled foolishly at her, "Actually, it was you, Xiaocao, who encouraged me! You're younger than me by five to six years but you know how to sell braised food at the docks to earn money. I'm almost at the age where I can marry a wife, so it's not good if I only stay at home waiting for other people to get food and drink for me! If I continued to idle about at home, then I might have trouble marrying a wife in the future..."

Xiaolian gently made fun of him, "Hee hee hee... Brother Heizi, I didn't know you wanted to marry a wife! Do you have anyone in mind?" Her teasing laugh sounded like little silver bells chiming in the air.

A bright red flush appeared on Heizi's swarthy face, and he stammered, "That is...I heard the elders at the village entrance mention that the bum in the neighboring village does nothing all day and is unable to marry a wife even at the age of forty, so that's why...why...don't spread rumors about me!"

Xiaocao helped him out of this awkward hole, "Brother Heizi is right! As long as you are hardworking, do you have to worry about marrying a wife? Older Brother Heizi, what are you plans?"

"No...nothing in particular! Just want to go to the docks and see if they need any dock workers. I heard, during busy times, a dock worker can earn around fifty to sixty copper coins a day!" A yearning expression flickered across Heizi's face.

Yu Xiaocao looked over the rolls of fat on his body with a bit of concern, "Working as a docker requires a lot of strength and endurance! Do you think you can move something that weighs around fifty kilograms?"

Heizi fell silent for a bit before he replied, "Even if I can't at first, I still have to try. I can tell them to pay me a bit less...once I toughen up, then it'll be fine!"

The three of them chattered during the whole journey, and, before long, they reached the docks. At this moment, there weren't a lot of ships in the area, so Foreman Sun and his workers were all idling about.

When he saw the pair of pretty sisters, Foreman Sun walked over and greeted them, "Xiaocao, it's been a while since I last saw you at the docks, how come you have time today?"

"Uncle Sun, I was at the docks yesterday! You're mistaking me for someone else, I'm Xiaolian. Xiaocao is next to me!" Xiaolian grinned happily as she walked over to Grandpa Liu's noodle stall and set up next to it. She ignited a small clay stove and put the braised food on top to heat it up.

Foreman Sun looked at Xiaolian and then looked at Xiaocao. He laughed somewhat awkwardly as he rubbed the back of his head, "You two sisters really look too alike. It's not easy to distinguish between you two quickly. Old Liu, give me a bowl of mixed grain noodles. Xiaolian, give me a portion of pig head meat, I want the more fatty bits!"

Xiaocao was perplexed by his order and asked, "Uncle Sun, how come you're eating mixed grain noodles? Are you tired of eating wheat noodles?"

Foreman Sun grimaced bitterly and shook his head, "Xiaocao ah, don't make fun of your Uncle Sun. I almost can't afford to eat this bowl of mixed grain noodles, let alone wheat flour noodles!"

"What happened? Business is not going well?" Xiaocao asked somewhat pensively as she glanced at a large ship that was docked. There was a whole group of dock workers energetically working in full swing on the boat.

Foreman Sun slapped the table fiercely and loudly exclaimed, "That bastard Liuzi is really not someone who's easy to deal with! He pretty much monopolized all of the work on the docks! All of the strong and vigorous men also went to him. He's not leaving me any way to make a living anymore ah!"

"That can't be true, right? Brother Liuzi doesn't seem like someone who would monopolize everything, right?" Xiaocao frowned and looked at the tall and brawny figure near the shore.

Foreman Sun laughed bitterly for a moment and then said, "It's my fault too! In the past, I threw my weight around and made things difficult for Liuzi. There was a time, when business was good, that I became complacent from my success. I promoted someone to an assistant and didn't bother managing things much myself. Who knew that I was blind and that assistant changed everyone's daily pay to monthly pay. After a month passed, he embezzled everyone's salary and fled! Liuzi seized the opportunity then to entice everyone over to him. In addition, he also has someone helping from above, so it'll be very difficult for me to make a comeback. Ay...now, being able to eat my fill is considered quite good for me ah!"

Yu Xiaocao noticed someone in the distance, not too far from the docks, measuring something on the land. She soothed him, "Uncle Sun, it'll only be hard for a short period of time. Once the docks finish construction and we have a large harbor, there will naturally be a need for a lot more workers. When that time comes, you'll have another opportunity! However, I feel like competing bitterly with someone is not as profitable as working together..."

"Hmm? Why is it more profitable to work together? Let me hear your thoughts, ok?" From behind her, a loud and clear voice suddenly interjected.

Yu Xiaocao swiveled her head around and looked. She didn't know when Brother Six had arrived behind her. He had a tall and heavily muscled body with skin that was colored a healthy bronze. The scar on his face didn't diminish his manly looks one bit. He truly was the epitome of a manly man bursting with hormones!

Chapter 145

Yu Xiaocao grinned at him, "I think that you two can establish a port management office and rent one of the shops as your office front. You guys can engage in cargo transport, freight storage, assisted purchasing services, and coordinating transportation for people. Once construction on the harbor is finished, Brother Six will have more and more people working under him and will have a lot more projects. He'll naturally need to delegate some issues to a manager. Uncle Sun is already very familiar with the docks and freight transport. It's better to use someone who knows the work than someone who is brand new. Thus, Brother Six can give Uncle Sun some matters to manage...this way, isn't it better than competing against each other bitterly?"

Brother Six rubbed his chin as his eyes started to shine. It was apparent that he had been deeply moved by her description of a possible, grand future. Although her ideas were not fully fleshed out, it gave him a good direction to go to and opened up his heart to the large amount of opportunities available. Brother Six wasn't someone who didn't have talents. As long as you gave him a chance, he would definitely be able to soar high!

Many years later, everyone who had some sense in the heads knew of the harbor's mogul, Brother Six. Even some officials and nobles had no choice but to treat him courteously. This was because if you offended Brother Six there were consequences. A light offence would cause your cargo to be delayed from loading or unloading. A heavy offense, on the other hand, could lead to your whole stash of goods stuck in one spot. At the port, Brother Six became a legend among all of the workers there—and all of this was started from the casual remarks of a little girl!

At this moment, however, Brother Six was simply a small foreman. He lightly patted Foreman Sun's shoulder and sincerely said, "Brother Sun, I respect you as a man. Do you want to work with me? With the two of us united, we absolutely can do great things together!!"

Foreman Sun replied emotionally, "Liuzi! Your Brother Sun is not as daring nor does he have as much vision as you. But I do know the loading and unloading business on the docks like the back of my own hand. If you're willing to trust me, I absolutely won't let you down!!"

When Yu Xiaocao saw that the two men had dissolved their misunderstandings, she immediately let out a sigh in relief. When she first started selling her braised food, Foreman Sun helped a lot by bringing her business, and he also gave her maternal uncle and cousin steady work at the docks. As for Brother Six,

he once protected her from a bunch of villains and could be considered half of a benefactor who saved her life. To be honest, she felt grateful to both of them, so she didn't want to see them quarrel anymore.

"Xiaocao..." Yu Heizi noticed that Brother Six, the large man at the docks, had treated his little sister favorably. If she spoke up for him, would it still be difficult to find work at the docks? He stealthily pulled on the corner of her jacket and quietly called out her name.

Only then did Xiaocao remember Yu Heizi's situation. She sheepishly spoke to Brother Six, "Brother Six, this is my older paternal cousin, Yu Ge, he wants to find some work at the docks and doesn't mind being paid a little less. Do you...have any work that's suitable for him to do?"

Brother Six looked at Heizi, who had body full of fat and a concerning lack of muscle. He slightly frowned and the look in his severe eyes could make less courageous people tremble in fright. He said, "You are...Yu Ge, is that correct?"

"Yes, yes! Brother Six, you can just call me Heizi..." Yu Heizi felt his heart race after being stared down by the larger man but he still kept a smile on his face.

Brother Six nodded his head and bluntly said, "Heizi, to be honest, I don't have a good feeling about you! However, since Little Sister Xiaocao asked, I will give you a chance! Do you see that ship over there? There are some luggage for the women of that family that need to be moved onto a cart. Go work with the boy from the Liu Family. If you work hard, then come again tomorrow. If you can't do it..."

"It's okay! It's absolutely okay!" Women's luggage couldn't weigh that much. Compared to cargo that weighed at least fifty kilograms, this was considered relatively easy work. Yu Heizi knew that Brother Six was treating him well as a favor for Younger Sister Xiaocao, so he firmly nodded his head and agreed. If he wasn't able to do this kind of work, would he still be considered a man?

Brother Six beckoned at a tall, somewhat frail looking figure not far from them, and the youth quickly trotted over. Yu Xiaocao stared for a bit. Wasn't this Second Maternal Uncle's son, Older Brother Zhiwei?

"Older Brother, are you guys not busy with farmwork now? My father said that he wanted to go over in the next couple of days to help!" Yu Xiaocao softly remarked as she raised her head and smiled brilliantly at him.

Liu Zhiwei wiped the sweat off his forehead and giggled, "My eldest uncle and father are still at home! With my sisters also helping, they don't need me to work there. Third Uncle heard that the docks are getting constructed into a harbor and needed bricklayers, so he came by to find more information. I came along to see if I could get a temporary job. Brother Six takes really good care of me and always gives me the easiest job. Even though I'm quite young, I have plenty of strength in this body!"

The top of Xiaocao's head only came up to Liu Zhiwei's armpits but the words coming out of her mouth sounded like she was his older sister, "Older Brother, you're still growing right now. Take it easy and don't harm your body."

"Don't worry, I won't get hurt!" Liu Zhiwei chuckled for a bit before he directed his attention to Brother Six, "Brother Six, did you call me for something?"

"You're in charge of the unloading for the passenger ship docked on the second wharf. Show this new guy the ropes too. Any questions?" Brother Six swiftly and decisively assigned him the task.

"Not a problem, I promise I'll complete this assignment!!" When Liu Zhiwei found out that he was in charge of the whole ship, he immediately knew that he had been entrusted with more responsibility and felt his heart swell with a desire to do well. It was only a passenger ship, how much luggage could be on it? Even if he didn't have someone helping him, he could finish this job completely by himself!

Brother Six stately solemnly, "Zhiwei, this is Heizi's first day, so he doesn't know much. You need to patiently teach him. We absolutely cannot tolerate people who like to fish in troubled waters..."

Heizi? Liu Zhiwei turned to face the swarthy and plump figure and looked at him. 'This is the fat blockhead who always bullied his younger cousins in the Yu Family! Here to find work? How could his mother and grandmother be willing to let him to do hard work? Is he trying to use his connection with his younger cousin to goof off and slack around? Not okay! I, Liu Zhiwei, will absolutely not allow him to do that!'

"Heizi, let's go! The earlier we start, the earlier we finish! Unloading a passenger ship is not only easy but also very profitable. If it weren't for Younger Cousin over there, how could us two brothers get such work? We need to work smartly and energetically! If we do well, the masters might even give us tips!" Liu Zhiwei heavily thumped on Yu Heizi's shoulders.

Under Liu Zhiwei's meticulous orders and slight desire to be hard on him, Yu Heizi worked without stopping. Heizi, who had never done hard physical labor before, started out full of energy and enthusiasm, but after moving a few pieces of luggage, he felt like there was a five hundred kilogram weight on his shoulders. Countless drops of sweat scattered onto the ground with every step he took. However, Yu Heizi didn't give up and stubbornly carried on with one thought— I need to endure through this, make a lot of money to marry a wife...

After they finished unloading all of the luggage on the passenger ship, Liu Zhiwei only had a few trickles of sweat flowing down his body. On the other hand, Yu Heizi was gasping for air like an old ox who was seriously ill. Sweat poured down his body like torrential rain, and his two legs trembled viciously. Despite all that, he didn't voice a single word of complaint.

Brother Six came over and patted his shoulder, "Good work there! The first time is always like this, once you get used to it, you'll be fine!! Rest a bit and eat something to save some energy. There will be more coming this afternoon! Did you bring any money? If you didn't, you can go to the payroll and get some money paid in advance..."

"No need, Brother Six! I already ate this morning before I came over, so...not hungry yet!" Yu Heizi wiped the sweat off his face with a hand and left behind a few obvious lines of dirt.

Brother Six nodded his head, "Then go find a place and make sure you get some good rest!"

When he was working, Yu Heizi had taken off his jacket and only wore a single unlined shirt. He lightly lifted the cloth from his shoulders and saw that the skin in the area had already been rubbed a bright red. He grimaced as he gently kneaded the area.

Liu Zhiwei had a whole new level of respect for him after this morning and came over. He commented, "Your wounds here are considered quite light! When I first started working here, I didn't know Brother Six yet, so I did the same type of work that the adult men do. I also got half as much as they did for pay. After working for a day, the top layer of skin on my shoulders had been rubbed off. It hurt like hell at night and I couldn't fall asleep then."

Yu Heizi rubbed his shoulders as he grinned, "Thank you very much for taking care of me, Brother Zhiwei. I'm not as strong as you, so all of the larger pieces of luggage were all carried off by you. In a moment, when we get our wages, you should get a larger portion!"

"You also worked very hard too!" Liu Zhiwei looked at Heizi, flabbergasted. Previously, Heizi had always been someone who would slack off and bully others, why did it feel like he'd suddenly become a whole new person?

"I'm going to go see our little sisters over there. Right now there's a lot of people eating, so they are probably very busy right now!" When Xiaolian used to come over by herself, Liu Zhiwei would help her during the meal break. Today was also not an exception.

The braised food for one copper coin a portion was becoming more and more popular at the docks. The amount of food made from one pig head and the ten or so portions of pickled fish was unable to satisfy the fiery demand. Now, their customers not only were the dock workers but also the people living nearby in the area. There were even people who traveled from far away to buy a few portions of the braised food to take home for entertaining guests.

Thus, every time the dock workers had a break, the braised food pretty much sold out within minutes. A lot of the workers, who were looking forward to eating a portion, had to leave empty-handed. In order to meet the people's demand, Yu Xiaocao had no choice but to increase the amount they made. She first asked the dock workers for help. If their village had anyone slaughtering a pig, she asked them to help her buy the pig head and offal. In return, she would give them two portions of braised food for free. Very quickly, she had a few more fixed suppliers for her raw ingredients.

They also sold more varieties of food than before. Other than the braised meat dishes, they also had braised kelp, braised dried tofu and other vegetarian dishes. Although it was said to be vegetarian, the vegetables and tofu were all braised using the sauce that was stewed with pig head meat. Thus, the vegetable based dishes had absorbed a lot of animal fat and flavor, so anyone eating them could taste the flavor of braised pig meat. The portion of the vegetarian dishes were also larger than the meat dishes. Thus, these dishes were quite popular too.

With more variety of braised food to sell, they could no longer rely on portioning out food in advance at home. Consequently, Yu Xiaocao bought a copper pot and small clay stove to heat the braised food at the docks while selling it. Braised food that had been heated up had an even more dense flavor, and the smell traveled into every nook and cranny of the docks with the sea breeze. Even the women coming off of the passenger ships couldn't help but ask about it.

Having to portion out the food while selling, along with the larger customer base, made it difficult for only one person to handle all of the work alone. Luckily, the vast majority of customers were dock workers and were all well acquainted with the two sisters. All of them would conscientiously line up to buy braised food.

At this point, there was a very long queue in front of Yu Family's clay brazier. Most of the people in line knew each other, so they waited as they conversed genially. None of them seemed to be in a rush.

"Ehh? What are those people all standing in line for? Are they looking for work?" A loud and clear voice suddenly asked, clearly flabbergasted at the sight.

"My Lord! That is the dock's most famous 'one copper coin per portion of braised food'. Although it's food that's a bit crude, the flavor is quite good!" The overseer at the docks glanced at the crowd that wasn't too far from them and humbly replied with a smile on his face.

The person next to him was someone who was personally appointed by the emperor himself to oversee the construction of the harbor. Even the prefectural magistrate had to treat him politely, let alone himself, who was just a small supervisor. If he wanted to continue this line of work in the future, he absolutely needed to serve this lord very well ah!

Chapter 146

The imperial envoy wasn't very interested in this and replied faintly, "What kind of delicious food can one buy for one copper coin? This rumor sounds a bit exaggerated."

The overseer had eaten the Yu Family's braised food before. Although he thought it was quite delicious, he didn't have the guts to foolishly rebuke the imperial envoy. He smiled flatteringly, "The lord is right! In addition, that food is made of pig head meat, pig offal, pig blood and other ingredients that other people wouldn't touch. With your lordly status, you absolutely would disdain eating this!"

"You can't say something like that!" The imperial envoy rubbed at the short beard under his chin, and his eyes became misty. He apparently was reminiscing about his past.

Silence prevailed for a long time before he finally continued, "In those days, I was with my master defending the borders from our enemies. We had been besieged by them for more than ten days. We not only ate tree bark and grass but also dirt! I remember once, when the situation got really bad and people were at their limits, I infiltrated the enemy's camp with my younger martial brother and stole the pig head that they had used as a sacrifice to the gods. We roasted it at campfire on the mountains. For the soldiers who hadn't eaten anything good for the past several days, eating a small piece of pig head meat was even more delicious than eating any exotic delicacy nowadays..."

The supervisor hurriedly interjected, "General, you are wise and brilliant. Since you were able to survive such a terrible time, you absolutely will have a lot of fortune and blessings coming your way now!"

The imperial envoy burst out into straightforward laughter, "Whether or not I have future blessings coming my way, I don't really care! I'm extremely happy today, do you know why? I finally found my master and younger martial brother, who I had lost touch with for over thirty years!"

"Congratulations, my lord, congratulations, my lord! This is absolutely a fortunate event!!" The overseer seized the opportunity to flatter the man.

The lord imperial envoy faced the docks that was flanked on each side with simple and crude looking buildings. He commented, "Did you already finish discussing the compensation that will be given to those whose shacks will be demolished? The emperor himself has said that the construction of the port is an important matter that will benefit both the country and his people. We absolutely cannot do anything that will make the commoners complain and resent this!"

"The emperor is a wise ruler who loves the commoners as his own children. This lowly one admires him adoringly..." The supervisor hastily expressed his feelings of loyalty.

The imperial envoy ignored his attempts at flattery and continued, "Save your breath on these empty phrases! Less talk and more action! The harbor pathway needs to be widened by at least double its current width and the shacks on both sides need to be torn down! I already have the money for compensating the people with me, so you need to discuss this carefully with the commoners..."

"Yes, yes! This lowly one will absolutely do this in such a way that you will be satisfied!" The supervisor nodded his head furiously, as if he was trying to pound garlic paste with his chin.

The imperial envoy waved his hand and strolled forward as he said, "It's not enough to make me satisfied, you need to make sure the commoners are pleased too! Naturally, those who wish to gouge us should not be given full rein! Li Li, you should provide your assistance to..."

"This lowly one's surname is Liang!" The overseer bowed and nodded his head with a bright smile on his face.

"Okay! You should assist Supervisor Liang with this matter!" The lord imperial envoy inspected the situation around the docks as he slowly walked towards the coast.

The number of people queuing up at the braised food sellers slowly decreased. Seemingly unwaringly, the imperial envoy and his subordinate arrived at Old Liu's noodle stand.

Old Liu and his wife trembled in fear when they saw the man wearing an official's robe. They were so frightened that they couldn't talk.

"Old couple, don't be scared! I noticed that your business is quite good so I wanted to buy a bowl of noodles to try..." In front of the obviously scared old couple, the lord imperial envoy did his best to relax his rough and frightening looking face into a genial smile. Unfortunately, the opposite effect occurred. His attempt at squeezing out a smile made him look even more fierce and threatening.

"Eh? Aren't you...aren't you Brother Han's martial uncle?!" When Xiaocao saw that there were only four to five people left in line, she felt like she could finally take a breather. A familiar voice had hit her ears, so she twisted around to look. Ah! This large and brawny man who was wearing an official's robes with a qilin embroidered on it was Fang Zizhen, who they had met by chance at the prefectural city. Why was he at the docks? And also wearing an official's robes at that?

The lord imperial envoy, Fang Zizhen, looked calmly over. Eh? Wasn't this the younger daughter of the sworn brother of his martial brother? The little girl who was named Xiaocao? He looked a bit closer at her, aiyò! Maybe his eyes were blurry, but there were surprisingly two Yu Xiaocao's in front of him...

"My lord, you're not seeing things! They are actually twins!" Unbeknownst to him, Fang Zizhen had actually said his thoughts out loud.

Fang Zizhen looked at the copper pot in front of the two sisters. The contents of the pot bubbled furiously and a strong, fragrant smell continuously flowed into the air. He chuckled, "Ah Xiaocao! Apparently the famous one copper coin per portion of braised food at the docks is the product of your family's skills ah!"

There wasn't a lot of braised food left in the pot. Xiaocao smiled sincerely at him, "Yup! General Fang, do you want to try some?"

Originally, Fang Zizhen was not hungry, but after smelling the tantalizing aroma of the food, he couldn't help but smack his lips a bit, "Okay ah! Then I'll try some..."

Fang Zizhen's other subordinate, Wu Yun, quietly reminded him, "Lord, this food is made of pig intestines and offal. We don't know if they've been cleaned properly, so you can't possibly eat this!"

Before Wu Yun could finish his thought, his lord glared at him. Fang Zizhen coldly snorted and said, "Looks like you've been living the easy life for too long and forgot what it's like to be poor! I heard that the north-west border is quite lively, how about this general recommend you go there to toughen up a bit?"

Wu Yun had been promoted by Fang Zizhen from the ranks and had experienced only a few battles before the country had become peaceful. Thus, he was not as familiar with the hardships and sacrifices of war as his lord. When he saw that his master's expression had turned cold, he didn't have the guts to continue. He was afraid that if he said any more, he would be fated to go to the border the next day!

"Old man! Give me a bowl of braised noodle soup! Xiaocao, please cut Uncle Fang a plate of pig head meat!" Fang Zizhen lifted his official's robes up and sat on a stool that was missing a leg.

Old Liu's mouth trembled. He wanted to say something but was too afraid to do so. He looked at Yu Xiaocao as a plea for help.

Xiaocao happily replied, "General Fang! The conditions at the docks are a bit crude, so Grandpa Liu doesn't prepare braised noodle soup here. How about you have him roll out some noodles for green vegetables and egg noodle soup?"

"Green vegetables and egg noodle soup? No good, no good! Yesterday I ate some tomato and egg noodle soup at my master's house, and it was quite delicious!" Fang Zizhen smacked his lips as he reminisced. He had lived for more than forty years and this was the first time he had heard of using 'wolf peaches' as a dish. It was really quite delicious!

He was mostly just mentioning it and didn't have much hope. Fortunately, Yu Xiaocao, whose family grew tomatoes, had conveniently picked a few ripe tomatoes as she was leaving to sell the food. She was originally planning on eating them when she felt thirsty. With tomatoes and eggs on hand, there was no need to worry whether they could make tomato and egg noodle soup, right?

Old Yu had finally managed to squeeze out a "sorry" when Yu Xiaocao caught his eye with a bright smile on her face. She spoke to Fang Zizhen, "General Fang, if you feel it's okay, I can help you make this tomato and egg noodle soup for you! I'll first piece together a plate of braised food for you to eat. Within fifteen minutes, the noodles should also be ready."

A look of surprise appeared on Fang Zizhen's face as he said, "Are there really tomatoes around? Ah! I remember, the tomatoes we had yesterday at my master's house were sent from your family! Haha, then I really got lucky with food today! I heard that, when eaten raw, tomatoes have a sweet and sour taste that's quite good. Give me one so I can try right now!"

Xiaocao looked at the already washed tomatoes in her basket and chose the largest and reddest looking one. She placed into General Fang's hands and used the other two to chop into small cubes.

Old Liu finally realized that the high-ranking official in front of him wasn't that intimidating. Under Xiaocao's directions, he quickly rolled out a bunch of noodles.

Xiaocao first put some lard into the pot with some chopped onions to let the flavors blossom. After that, she placed the chopped tomatoes into the hot oil and quickly stir fried them until a thick soup appeared. Then, she poured the chicken eggs that she had already beaten into the pot. Once the eggs started to solidify, she lightly mixed the contents. Next, she added an appropriate amount of water and let it come to a boil before she placed the noodles inside. Once it boiled again, she added some salt and green vegetables, mixed it all up, and it was ready to be served!

The tomato and egg noodle soup was brightly colored and had a rich scent. It attracted the looks of many people around them. Which worker on the docks had ever seen a tomato before? One after another, they all asked Old Yu the name of the dish as well as the price.

Old Yu looked at Yu Xiaocao and hesitated before he replied, "The tomatoes came from Xiaocao. I've lived for a long time but I've never seen this type of food before. It's probably...not cheap, right?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded and agreed, "Tomatoes are indeed not cheap. For good ones, they're around dozens of copper coins for a catty! This bowl of tomato and egg noodle soup probably cost around thirty to forty copper coins for the ingredients and work alone. If any uncles around here want to try, you can reserve some in advance with Grandpa Liu."

Over there, Fang Zizhen had already impatiently started to eat. The scorching hot temperature caused him to sharply breathe in cold air but he still couldn't bear to split out the boiling hot noodles from his mouth.

After a mouthful of noodles went down, he closed his eyes contently and repeatedly complimented her, "Xiaocao ah, you really are talented! This bowl of tomato and egg noodle soup is even more delicious than the one I had yesterday at my master's house! Your Uncle Fang is a rough person, so I don't know how to use pretty words to describe this—however, it really is very delicious."

As he talked, he used his chopsticks to pick up another portion of noodles and carefully blew air on them before he ate them in large mouthfuls. Other people around them couldn't help but swallow some saliva down as the way he ate demonstrated just how delicious these noodles were.

Wu Yun took the opportunity to take the remaining few strands of noodles in the pot and place it in a bowl with half of the soup broth in it. He drank the contents in large gulps. The lord got to eat the noodles but at least he was able to drink some soup. Once the noodle soup hit his tongue, the slightly sour and savory flavor of broth spread throughout his mouth. It tasted so good that he almost wanted to cry.

After he ate more than half of the bowl of noodles, Fang Zizhen finally had a desire to try the braised food platter that Xiaocao had sliced for him. Whether it was the soft and full of flavor pig head meat, or crispy pig ears, or the intestines that made people's mouths fill with delectable oil, they were all considered to be top-notch delicacies. Even the kelp and dried tofu had their own distinctive and delicious flavor.

Fang Zizhen had been an official for many years and had traveled extensively. Thus, he had tried many so-called delicacies before. However, none of those delicacies apparently had the flavor of these deceptively simple braised ingredients that suited him more.

Although he previously wasn't very hungry, Fang Zizhen managed to polish off a huge bowl of noodle soup along with the entire platter of braised food. He rubbed at his stuffed belly and didn't stint on his praise, "Ah! Your skills are quite good!! I would have never expected that you, Xiaocao, at such a young age, would be able to cook so well. This braised food is even more delicious than the ones served at Zhenxiu Restaurant in town. The flavor can compete with their roasted chicken and salted duck!"

Xiaolian giggled, "Lord, you must not know that the braised food at Zhenxiu Restaurant...was made from a recipe that our family sold to them!"

She also wanted to mention that the roasted chicken and osmanthus duck were also recipes that Xiaocao developed but she had been stopped by her younger sister yanking on the hem of her jacket. After she got the hint, she only mentioned the braised food.

"No wonder! Apparently your family's braised food is the most authentic one ah!" Fang Zizhen was in an extremely good mood!

Chapter 147

At this time, the supervisor jogged over, wiped the sweat on his forehead, and smiled flatteringly, "Lord Imperial Envoy, according to the scale of the expansion of the harbor and the estimated construction period, we will need a large number of masons and construction workers. What do..."

"You have to ask me about such a trifling matter? Then what do I need you supervisors for?" Fang Zizhen had a straightforward temperament, and always spoke bluntly to vile people who only knew how to curry favors and don't do any practical work.

But the supervisor wasn't someone completely without merit either. He was just uncertain about the temperament of the imperial envoy who was sent over, so he didn't dare act recklessly! Since he was willing to delegate power to him, what worries would he still have?

When Yu Xiaocao heard that they needed masons for the harbor construction, she immediately thought of her youngest maternal uncle. Her youngest maternal uncle didn't have any other abilities, but he was even more skilled as a mason than a carpenter. Since Brother Han's martial uncle was in charge of this matter, it would be a waste to not use this connection!

"General Fang..."

"What General Fang! You make it seem like we're strangers!! With your family's relationship with my martial younger brother, you can just call me Uncle Fang!" Fang Zizhen was quite cordial towards this bright and clever young girl.

Yu Xiaocao also didn't act courteous with him anymore and smiled even sweeter, "Uncle Fang! Xiaocao has a small matter, which I would like to ask you for a little help with..."

"How small is this small matter?" Fang Zizhen teased her.

Yu Xiaocao glanced at the supervisor and deliberately whispered into his ears. In fact, she spoke in a voice that could be heard by the people around them, "Uncle Fang, the construction of the new harbor must require a lot of workers, right? Are these people sent from above, or are they recruited onsite?"

Fang Zizhen also deliberately lowered his voice and spoke in a secretive manner, "The Ministry of Works sent several people over, but except for this, everyone else will be recruited onsite. Why? You have family who wants to work at the docks?"

The supervisor had a lot of doubts within his heart regarding the relationship between the imperial envoy and the fisherman's daughter who sold braised food at the docks. But he could tell that the imperial envoy treated the little girl like she was a child of his family. The smooth and slick supervisor naturally knew what to do.

He listened attentively and heard Xiaocao say with slight embarrassment, "Uncle Fang, my youngest maternal uncle is very good with masonry work! There aren't any villagers in the surrounding villages who don't know this! I heard that he had also come to look for work at the docks... Perhaps you can test him?"

Fang Zizhen raised his eyebrow and gave the supervisor a look. Then the supervisor tactfully said, "What's there to test? Would there even be anything wrong with someone that Miss Xiaocao recommended? Do you see that new hut over there? Later, just tell your youngest uncle to go there directly. I will be there registering the new recruits!"

Yu Xiaocao waved at Liu Zhiwei and told him, who had jogged over, "Oldest Cousin, do you know where Youngest Uncle is? Tell him to come over quickly and go register with this sir."

"Registration? For what?" Liu Zhiwei couldn't think straight for a moment as he looked cautiously at the official's robe that General Fang and his subordinates were wearing.

Yu Xiaocao glared at him and said, "Of course it's the registration for the recruitment of masons... Just go, why are you asking so many questions? If you mess up this matter, just see if Youngest Uncle will spare you!"

Liu Zhiwei took another look at the officials present and widened his eyes: 'Oh my god! Little Sister Xiaocao actually has connections with the officials in charge of the construction of the harbor. Tsk-tsk, Little Sister Xiaocao is seriously too bold, to be able to keep a straight face in front of all these officials. If I were in her place, I probably wouldn't even dare to say a word! But, the most surprising thing was the fact that Little Sister Xiaocao actually had some face in front of the officials. What exactly is going on?'

Although Liu Zhiwei had thousands of questions in his heart, he still managed to hold back perplexed feelings and swiftly ran off to find his youngest paternal uncle. He knew very clearly what this job meant to his youngest uncle and his family.

It would definitely take at least three to five years to complete the harbor construction, which meant that his youngest uncle would have a stable income for the next three to five years. He would have a stable job! He had heard that the emperor attached great importance on the construction of the harbor and sent an imperial envoy to supervise the progress of the construction.

There had been a rumor at the docks that workers who participated in the construction of the harbor could have a salary that was no less than the porters on the docks! Many of the dockworkers were interested in job and were preparing to try out at the recruitment site.

Liu Zhiwei pulled out his youngest paternal uncle from the crowd in front of the recruitment hut. Liu Hao was working hard to squeeze his way to the front because the chance of being recruited would increase if he was closer to the front. However, the people enlisting were all burly men who were used to heavy manual labor. He didn't have a strong-built figure, so how would he be able to squeeze through the crowd?

Liu Hao, who was abruptly pulled out by his nephew, said with a displeased face, "Zhiwei, what are you doing? I finally managed to squeeze into the middle but ended up being dragged out by you. All my efforts have been wasted! What exactly is the matter?! Quickly say it!"

"Youngest Uncle stop trying to squeeze into the crowd! Little Sister Xiaocao used her connections for you, so you can just directly go meet the person in charge of recruiting workers!" Liu Zhiwei pulled his youngest uncle further away from the crowd and whispered with excitement.

After being delighted for a moment, Liu Hao pulled a long face again and said, "Don't joke with Youngest Uncle! How would Xiaocao know Supervisor Zhang? Even if she knows him, why would Supervisor Zhang give face to a little girl like her?"

Seeing that he didn't believe him, Liu Zhiwei slightly anxiously said, "Youngest Uncle! How could I possibly joke around with this matter? Either it's real or not, wouldn't you know when you go over? Hurry up, or else the lords might get impatient from waiting and leave!"

Liu Hao was still skeptical as he followed his nephew to Old Liu's noodle stall. When he arrived, he saw a high-ranking official, who was dressed in an official's robe and sitting uninhibitedly on a stool, happily chatting with his niece. Supervisor Zhang, whom he recognized, was accompanying them with a smile.

When had he ever seen Supervisor Zhang being so fawning? Supervisor Zhang was in charge of recruiting workers, so he had always acted arrogantly towards the people who came to apply for work and never had serious regard for them. At this time, that usually snobby and arrogant person was actually listening to his niece with a broad smile. Had he not seen it with his own eyes, he seriously wouldn't have believed it!

"Greetings, my lords! I shall pay my respects to Your Excellencies!" Liu Hao had worked in town before, so he was more knowledgeable than the farmers who only worked hard in the fields. He disregarded the doubts in his heart and bobbed a greeting to the lords first!

Fang Zizhen carefully examined him, and then nodded, "Mhm! Not bad! He's a fine-looking man. I heard that you're skilled in masonry?"

"This commoner doesn't dare accept Your Excellency's praise! This commoner began learning under a mason in town at the age of fourteen, and it has been fifteen years now!" Liu Hao could tell that he was the highest ranking official among the three people and answered respectfully.

Fang Zizhen commended, "Not arrogant nor rash, and answers in an appropriate manner! He is obviously someone who can do practical work! Little Zhang, what do you think?"

"Your Excellency has foresight! This lowly one is full of respect ah!" Supervisor Zhang didn't forget to fawn over him again before he asked a few more questions regarding construction. Liu Hao carefully answered them one by one.

Supervisor Zhang was also quite satisfied and said, "Sure enough, the person recommended by Miss Xiaocao is very good! Alright, you can work under me in the future! Do you know how to write?"

"When this lowly one was young, I was able to attend an academy for several years. Although I hadn't studied a lot, I'm able to recognize some words. As for my writing, it might not look very good!" Liu humbly replied.

Supervisor Zhang seemed rather satisfied with his sense of propriety. He said with a beaming face, "We're not taking the imperial examination, so why would we need to have beautiful handwriting? Come, go to the register at the recruitment hut... Little Liu ah, do you know any masons? You can also introduce them to this job! After all, it's better to use people who are familiar with the work than people who have never done it before..."

Youngest Maternal Uncle's matter was easily settled just like that! Taking General Fang into account, the supervisor probably wouldn't make things difficult for her youngest maternal uncle, right? Yu Xiaocao looked at Liu Hao and Supervisor Zhang's back view and revealed a contented smile.

Fang Zizhen had a smile on his face from the beginning to the end. He really liked this little girl with excellent cooking skills! Fang Zizhen was already almost fifty years old and had gotten married after he settled down. However, he might have ended up with an internal injury after years of war expeditions because he was still childless when he was nearly fifty. His wife had urged him many times to take in several concubines, but he refused.

The emperor had sent imperial physicians to examine his and his wife's pulse on many occasions, but they always made the same conclusion. The problem wasn't with his wife, but him! Although the imperial physician had advised that he should be able to improve with attentive treatment. However, he gradually lost hope after so many years...

Fortunately, his younger martial brother had gotten married early and had a son at a young age. In the future, his little martial nephew would be the same as his own son. He would definitely use all his connections and do his best to foster him! With his martial nephew's talents, his future achievements definitely wouldn't be below his!

He was childless, so it was inevitable that he would pay more attention to children who were more sensible and interesting. For example, his martial nephew and also... this adult-like little girl in front of him!

"Xiaocao ah! Would you like to be Uncle Fang's daughter?" Fang Zizhen had an urge in his heart, and then made a decision.

Wu Yun widened his eyes and felt extremely anxious within his heart. The general was a third-rank official and someone that the emperor trusted and relied on. As long as he opened his mouth to say that he wanted to take in a godson or goddaughter, numerous officials in the capital would line up and send their children over. How could he... How could he just accept a little farmer girl as his goddaughter because of a bowl of noodles and a plate of braised food?

He blinked his eyes and twitched his mouth in an attempt to hint his disagreement. Seeing that it didn't work, he openly expressed, "My Lord! This matter... perhaps it would be better to wait until you return to the capital and discuss this matter with your wife before making a decision?"

Fang Zizhen appeared gallant and imposing, and he made enemies tremble in fear in the battlefield just by hearing his name. But he was somewhat henpecked at home. Though it may seem like he was henpecked, it wasn't necessarily true. He was merely more considerate to his wife and respected his wife a little more than others.

Fang Zizhen slanted his eyes to look at his trusted subordinate and said, "My wife wants a goddaughter even more than me! Xiaocao is smart and clever, and also sensible and obedient. My wife will definitely like her when she sees her!"

If another person had heard that a third-ranked official wanted to take her in as his goddaughter, she would have been elated and agreed a long time ago. But Xiaocao wasn't an ordinary person! She was someone who was able to calmly refuse the emperor emeritus's suggestion to take her as his granddaughter, let alone a mere third-ranked official.

Chapter 148 - Godfather

Yu Xiaocao's smile became a little more sincere. Although she had a decent impression of Brother Han's martial uncle, she still firmly declined, "Uncle Fang, thank you for your affections. However, I still can't accept your kindness..."

'What? It's the blessing of several generations for the general to think highly of a little peasant girl like you! Yet you actually dared to reject him?!' Wu Yun instantly felt indignant for his lord, "Little girl, if you agreed, you will be the young miss of a third-ranked general's family. You won't have to sell braised food and farm anymore ah! You can just live a comfortable and leisurely life! In the future, you can also marry the son of an official... Not just anyone can get this lifestyle. You have to think carefully!"

Yu Xiaocao didn't know whether she should laugh or cry as she looked at him and said, "This uncle, weren't you just obscurely opposing this idea? Why are you suddenly trying to persuade me? You're seriously so fickle!"

With a displeased expression, Wu Yun said, "It's one thing whether my lord accepts you, but it's another thing for you to decline... For what reason are you refusing? My lord is a brilliant master of martial arts, and has great merits in war. The madam is affable and kind, as well as gentle and refined. This is a good opportunity that only occurs once in a lifetime!"

Yu Xiaocao looked at him with a smile and said firmly, "My father is honest and kind. He loves and cherishes me and my siblings. Furthermore, he listens to me and does everything that I want. My mother is gentle and considerate, and she loves me to her bones. I am very glad to be born into this kind of a family, and I also feel very fortunate to have parents and siblings like them."

Though Yu Xiaocao's eyes were brimming with tears, she still had a smile on her little face, which appeared bright and graceful under the sunlight, "When I was young, I often fell ill. My parents were the ones who disregarded themselves and did their best to take care of me in every possible way. They devoted all their energy to me. If I abandoned my parents who loved and pampered me because I wanted to be rich, then am I still someone worthy of your attention, Uncle Fang?"

When Xiaolian heard Fang Zizhen say that he wanted Xiaocao to be his adopted daughter, she held her younger sister's hand tightly, afraid that her younger sister would be snatched away if she loosened her grip. When she heard Wu Yun state the benefits of being the general's goddaughter, she felt hesitant within her heart: She wanted her younger sister to have a good future, but she was also reluctant to part with her younger sister, whom she was accustomed to taking care of and protecting. Hot tears welled up in her eyes when she heard Xiaocao's words of refusal and reason for declining. She felt proud to have such a younger sister! She didn't pamper her in vain!

When Fang Zizhen heard Xiaocao's words, he laughed even more heartily, "What a good child! I wasn't wrong about you!! I just want to take you as my goddaughter, not snatch you away from your family! You can continue living with your family and your parents are still your parents. You will just have some adoptive relatives! Don't overthink it!! Tonight, I will go to your house and talk to your parents about it,

so prepare a good meal. I'll bring the good wine that was awarded to me by the Emperor and have a good drink with your father.”

Xiaolian still had doubts, so she summoned her courage and asked, “Are you telling the truth? You won't take away my parents' daughter?”

“Of course! What kind of person do you guys take me as? I may look like a bandit, but I have never robbed or plundered anyone! Rest assured! Your younger sister will just have a new set of godparents!” Fang Zizhen was very touched by the affections between the sisters and felt even more impressed by how Yu Hai and his wife taught their children.

As long as she didn't have to leave her parents and her whole family could live together happily, Yu Xiaocao didn't oppose the idea of having a godfather. In the future, her family certainly wouldn't be confined to this small village. Thus, it would probably somehow benefit them in the future if she had a powerful and influential godfather, right?

Yu Xiaocao put the last bit of braised food on a plate and gave it to Wu Yun, who had been staring at Uncle Fang's braised food for a long time.

Wu Yun looked at her, swallowed his saliva as he looked at the dish of braised food, and then proudly said, “I won't be bribed just because of a plate of braised food!”

“Who would want to bribe you? What are the benefits of bribing you? I'm just giving Uncle Fang face and expressing my concern and sympathy to his subordinates! It's already noon. Aren't you tired from running around? Uncle Li, quickly eat some food to fill your stomach!” Yu Xiaocao inwardly laughed at his difficult temperament, and waved her hand at Li Li, who was walking over from a distance.

Li Li helped maintain order at the recruitment site. He was so busy that his face was covered in sweat and his stomach was rumbling from hunger. At this time, Old Liu brought over a full bowl of green vegetables noodles. He took it conveniently and poured a small portion of the braised food into his bowl. He didn't care that it was scalding and started slurping up the food.

Wu Yun frowned and yelled in exasperation, “That's my noodles—Alright, Little Chestnut [1], you actually dared to steal your Older Brother Wu's noodles and braised food. How irritating!!”

“Wuda [2], you're too petty! I've been working for half of the day and was extremely busy! You're just sitting here and chatting with the lord, so can't you just let me eat first! Mhm, Mhm! This braised food tastes really good. Is this pork tripe? I like it!” Li Li put some more of the braised food into his bowl and ate with relish.

Wu Yun got irritated, and swiftly grabbed the plate that only had half a plate of braised food remaining. He angrily said, “How many times have I told you?! Stop calling me 'Wuda'!! The little girl gave the braised food to me. Are you a bandit?”

“Don't you call me Little Chestnut? Why can't I call you Wuda? Hey, Wuda, you're getting more and more stingy. I just ate a few pieces of your braised food, so why are you acting like I'm cutting your flesh?!” There wasn't much noodles left in Li Li's bowl. He gulped down everything, including the soup, in a few mouthfuls and burped in satisfaction.

Wu Yun's noodles was just served at this time. He slowly picked up a few strands of noodles and carefully blew on them before he stuffed them into his mouth. He bit off the longer noodle strands and then carefully chewed. After that, he picked up a piece of pig head meat and hesitated for a moment before he placed it into his mouth. When the pig head meat entered his mouth, he paused for a second, and then he chewed a little faster.

Beside him, Li Li's mouth twitched and said, “Watching you eat seriously makes me anxious. You're eating like a little lady!”

“Then should I eat like you, who acts like you're the reincarnation of a hungry ghost, in order to be considered a man? That's called being boorish, okay? This little lord is a cultivated general, so I won't lower myself to be the same level as a rude person like you!” Wu Yun glared at him, and then continued to eat the delicious braised food. Although he didn't say anything, it was obvious that he was very satisfied with the braised food.

Fang Zizhen laughed merrily as he watched his two subordinates bickering. These two fellows had liked to quarrel with each other since they were young soldiers. It had been nearly two decades, but they still liked to argue whenever they got the chance. But he was also aware that if one of them was bullied, then the other would risk his life to help him. It seemed that bickering was just a way for them to improve their friendship.

With a hint of a smile in his gaze, he looked towards Xiaocao and her sister, who were currently packing up their pots and dishes, and asked, “Xiaocao, are you getting ready to go back?”

“I'm going to the small market on that side of the docks to see if there's any huangdan powder. I also need to go to the construction site over there to see if I can find some quicklime!” Yu Xiaocao packed up the small mud stove, and then put all the dishes and whatnot into Old Liu's noodles stall. In this way, they wouldn't have to bring them back and forth, and thus saved them a lot of trouble.

Old Liu and his wife were good-natured people. They had gotten a lot more business since Xiaocao's family started selling braised food beside them. Right now, dockworkers earned a decent daily salary. On a good day, they could earn over a hundred copper coins. On the docks, they could eat until their bellies were round with just a few copper coins. Most of the dockworkers didn't mind spending a couple of coins, and there were fewer and fewer people bringing dried rations to the docks.

The taste of Xiaocao's family's braised food was universally acknowledged to be good. After buying the braised food, they would also conveniently order a bowl of noodles and enjoy their meal while sitting. As a result, it also boosted the business of Old Liu's noodles stall, and Old Liu became one of the most popular food vendors at the docks.

The lady boss of another noodles stall on the docks was full of regret. Had she not driven Xiaocao away from her stall at that time, she would have been the one who sold dozens of bowls of noodles every day! She had also quietly gone to find Xiaolian and asked her to sell braised food next to her stall. However, she had been rejected by Xiaolian with the excuse that she was afraid the dockworkers wouldn't be able to find them and that they would lose their customers! The lady boss's husband had also quarreled with her a few times for this reason!

When Fang Zizhen heard that Xiaocao wanted to buy huangdan powder, he curiously asked, “Why are you buying huangdan powder? Do you need to use huangdan powder as a seasoning when making braised food?”

Yu Xiaocao shook her head and said, “Although huangdan powder can be used to reduce phlegm, relieve convulsion, and treat mouth ulcer, dysentery, and other illnesses, but it can't be used as a seasoning. It's easy to get lead poisoning if one consumes too much huangdan powder!”

“Uh-huh, Uh-huh! Those Taoist priests also use huangdan powder to make pills. The emperor once said that the pills made by Taoist priests are inedible because there's lead in it! Xiaocao's viewpoint coincides perfectly with the emperor's ah!” Fang Zizhen immediately felt that Xiaocao was very smart, to know the same things as the emperor.

The corner of Yu Xiaocao's mouth twitched slightly. It was seriously very stressful to have such a powerful and high-ranking fellow transmigrator ah!

“If it's not a seasoning, then what do you need huangdan powder for? To treat an illness?” Fang Zizhen seemed very relaxed as he chatted leisurely with the little girl.

“To make century eggs.” Yu Xiaocao answered nonchalantly.

Fang Zifeng sat up with great interest and asked, “Songhua eggs [3]? I have heard of chicken eggs, duck eggs, goose eggs... what kind of egg is a songhua egg? Eggs laid by a songhua? Is there a bird called songhua?”

“Uncle Fang, you have such a wild imagination ah! Century eggs are duck eggs made with a special process. There are pine-like patterns on it, so it was named 'songhua eggs'.” Yu Xiaocao finished packing up and patted the dust on her body. She picked up the basket and prepared to try her luck at the small market.

Fang Zizhen also stood up and said to Wu Yun, “Go help Miss Yu find the quicklime. I'll go inspect the small market.”

Wu Yun grumbled in his heart, 'Inspect? What high-sounding words. You just want to follow the little girl and find out what kind of a delicacy century eggs are.'

Wu Yun followed his order and went to look for quicklime. Xiaocao, Xiaolian, and a huge tagalong—General Fang Zizhen—slowly headed towards the small market.

The small market on the wharf was a little market formed spontaneously in an open space. There were low shacks on both sides, which were shops at the market. There were also many stalls selling small goods. Due to a lack of management, the whole market looked dirty and chaotic, and had piles of debris and rubbish on the ground.

Yu Xiaocao shook her head inwardly. There really needed to be some regulations. After the construction of the harbor was completed, there would definitely be proper roads, stores, and a marketplace. There

would be people specially assigned to manage this place. It seemed like the construction of the port was indeed a matter that benefited the country and the people!

Chapter 149

At the small market at the docks, there was only one simple shop selling medicinal herbs. There were very few kinds of herbs in the shop, and the quality of the herbs were not very good. Of course, the price was also quite cheap. Fortunately, huangdan powder wasn't a rare medicinal herb. Yu Xiaocao bought twenty copper coins worth of huangdan powder at the pharmacy that seemed like it would be blown down by a gust of wind. After that, she also bought some soda ash at a nearby general store.

After thinking about it, Yu Xiaocao asked Fang Zizhen, who had been following her and asking all sorts of questions, "Uncle Fang, do you have any black tea? It doesn't have to be really good quality; average quality will do!"

Fang Zizhen creased his brows and thought about it. Then he shook his head and replied, "I'm a rough man, so I don't know anything about tea. Isn't drinking wine more pleasurable than drinking tea?"

Yu Xiaocao hung her head in slight disappointment. She had thought that she could save some money since the price of tea wasn't low after all!

Seeing her look like a frozen eggplant that had withered, Fang Zizhen felt slightly bad and said, "I'll help ask Little Zhang for you later. That fellow seems like someone who likes to pose as a culture lover. If he doesn't have it, he will still be able to find it for you. Xiaocao, do you like to drink black tea? Next time, if the emperor rewards me with tea, I definitely won't reject it!"

Yu Xiaocao was amused by him. She chuckled and said, "The black tea isn't for me to drink. I need to use it to make century eggs. With black tea, the century eggs will taste even better!"

"It's used to make century eggs? Okay, okay! Uncle will definitely get it for you!! Ah-li, go ask Little Zhang if he can get some black tea? The sooner, the better!!" Fang Zizhen seemed even more anxious than Xiaocao. After giving his order, he asked Xiaocao, "How long does it take to make century eggs? Will I be able to eat it tonight?"

Yu Xiaocao looked at him with a radiant smile, slowly shook her head, and said, "Uncle Fang, you should forget about eating century eggs tonight. It takes at least twenty days or so to complete the entire process of making century eggs. If the weather is cold, I'm afraid that it might take even longer!"

Fang Zizhen looked disappointed and sighed softly, "It takes more than twenty days ah! It's alright. I, your uncle, am in charge of supervising the progress of the harbor construction, so I probably won't leave within the next two or three years! There are plenty of opportunities in the future! Did you get all the ingredients? Go, let's go back to Dongshan Village!"

"Uncle Fang, aren't you here to supervise the progress of the construction? What time is it right now? Aren't you leaving too early?" Yu Xiaocao was in a good mood after buying all the ingredients, and joked with Fang Zizhen.

Fang Zizhen chortled and said, "I'm not the supervisor, who needs to sit at the docks every day. Moreover, isn't there Li Li and Wu Yun? The disciples will handle all the work! Those two brats aren't my disciples, but I watched them grow up. They should be able to handle doing some trivial matters for me!"

With Fang Zizhen riding on a tall and big horse and Yu Xiaocao driving the little donkey cart, they traveled slowly and leisurely on the road back to the village. Fang Zizhen was a complete chatterbox, who had one question after another, and thus they weren't lonely on the way back.

When they returned to Dongshan Village, Fang Zizhen didn't rush back to his master's house, but instead, followed Xiaocao and her sister back to the Yu Family's old residence first.

Under the old elm tree, as if she was afraid that others would hear her, Madam Xiong moved closer and whispered into Madam Li's ears, "Guihua, your second brother-in-law is seriously amazing! First, he fawned over the third young master of the Zhou Family and became the sole vegetables supplier for Zhenxiu Restaurant. This time he's currying favor with some government official! Based on the color and pattern of his official's gown, he's probably not some low-ranking official. I wonder who has the higher rank between him and the county magistrate?!"

The county magistrate was the highest-ranking official that Madam Xiong had seen! If the short-sighted her found out that Fang Zizhen's title of Zhaoyong General was several levels higher than the county magistrate's rank, then she probably wouldn't even dare to speak!

Li Guihua smirked and spat a thick phlegm on the ground and said, "I didn't notice in the past, but this second brother-in-law is really a money-grubber. What's that saying again? Separate... separate...something...pay...something..."

"Isn't it 'curry favor with those in power'?" Madam Xiong inwardly ridiculed Li Guihua for being uncultured.

"Yes! That's the phrase!! What abilities does that second brother-in-law of mine have? He's not even worthy of holding other people's shoes! How did he even manage to get in their favor?! Just watch! Do you think that it's really that easy to cling onto an official? He will probably get annoyed one day and chop all their heads off!" Madam Li said sourly.

Madam Xiong suddenly thought of something and said, "Guihua, didn't you say that your family's Heizi is filial and wanted to go to the docks to earn some money for you to spend. Didn't Xiaocao just return from the docks. Why don't you go ask about it?"

"Ask them? What will they know?? Have you not seen my son's figure before? He's full of strength, so there's no way he can't find a job. I heard that the dockworkers earn quite a lot now. They can earn dozens of copper coins every day with a problem!" Madam Li beamed with joy and had a smug expression on her face.

Madam Xiong's mouth twitched and thought, 'Your son's figure? With a body of fat, he pants like a cow after walking a few steps. What would he be able to do?'

While the two spoke ill of others in a seemingly compatible manner, Xiaocao and the others had already arrived home. Yu Hai was stunned by the official's robe on Fang Zizhen and didn't recognize him for a moment. He murmured in his heart, 'Why did they bring an official here?'

Fang Zizhen greeted him first, "Younger Brother Yu, what's wrong? You don't recognize this older brother just after a night? It's me, Bufan's older martial brother!"

Yu Hai looked like he had a sudden realization, "So it's General Fang! Quick, come inside the house to sit!!"

"No need, I want to see how century eggs are made!" Fang Zizhen stood in the courtyard and saw all kinds of vegetables growing vigorously in the yard. The yard was clean and tidy, and all the items were arranged in an orderly way. He inwardly nodded his head.

"Century eggs? Oh, that's a novel food our family's Xiaocao is preparing to make. I wonder what the finished product will be like!" Yu Hai looked at his younger daughter with a hint of a smile in his eyes, and his heart was full of pride.

Yu Hang brought out a stool from inside the house and placed it beside General Fang. He said softly and politely, "General Fang, please sit!"

"Is this your eldest son? Sure enough, he's a fine-looking boy! Younger Brother Yu, I really envy you for having these wonderful children!" Fang Zizhen patted Yu Hang's shoulder, and then lifted his official's robe and sat down. His tone was filled with sorrow.

Yu Hai laughed and said, "General Fang, you're flattering me! With a father like you, the general, your children will surely have good prospects..."

"Father..." Yu Xiaocao blinked at her father. Based on what she heard from Wu Yun and General Fang's conversations, she had learned that General Fang didn't have any children. So she was afraid that her father would poke at his sore spot.

Fang Zizhen was even more satisfied with this clever little girl. He waved his hand and said, "There's nothing that can't be said. I fought in wars when I was young and ended up with an unmentionable disease. I'm afraid that it will be very difficult for me to have any children in this lifetime. Brother Yu, to tell you the truth, I really like your younger daughter. I want to become nominal relatives with you and adopt Xiaocao as my daughter. Would Brother Yu be willing to agree?"

Although the kind Yu Hai didn't really want to share his daughter with someone else, he pitied Fang Zizhen for being childless. Moreover, the other party solemnly declared that he wasn't trying to take his daughter away from him. He hesitated for a long time, but still ended up agreeing. Hence, Yu Xiaocao now had a third-ranked general as her godfather.

After Yu Xiaocao solemnly served him tea and acknowledged him as her godfather, she began her attempt to make century eggs. Fang Zizhen watched with interest beside her.

Yu Xiaocao first mixed salt, white lime, loess, and plant ash into a mud-like matter. Then, she added an appropriate amount of black tea and huangdan powder into the mud-like matter. After that, she

wrapped the fresh duck eggs with the mud-like matter and covered each of them evenly in battered straw and rice husk. After she wrapped each of them securely with an oiled paper, she placed all of them on top of the warm kang bed. As it turned out, for the watermelon breeding, they had also heated up the kang bed in the west room, which was unoccupied. In the warm environment, the production time of the century eggs would be shortened.

There was extra of the mud-like matter leftover, so Xiaocao got several chicken eggs from the kitchen. Century eggs made with chicken eggs were bright and transparent, like a fine yellow jade. It tasted cool and refreshing, and it was fragrant but not greasy. In her past life, Xiaocao really liked eating the ones with a sweet filling, which had an even softer and smoother mouthfeel.

"That's it?" Fang Zizhen, who had also followed Xiaocao and personally made several century eggs, didn't think that it was very difficult.

"That's right! It's just that easy. It should be ready to eat in twenty or so days!" Xiaocao nodded. After she said that, she stood up and went to help prepare lunch in the kitchen. With this great lord here, they definitely couldn't just casually make two dishes.

Fang Zizhen also realized that his visit was too abrupt and felt rather embarrassed. So he stood up and said, "Don't prepare my meal. This morning, I told my master that I will return for lunch! Brother Yu, I will come have a good drink with you in the evening!"

Yu Hai graciously urged him to stay, "General Fang, it's already noon. How can we just let you leave without eating? Everything at home is ready-made, so it all very easy to make..."

Fang Zizhen interjected, "Brother Yu, why are you still calling me 'General Fang'? You're treating me like an outsider. I'm several years older than you, so you can just call me 'Older Brother Fang'!"

Yu Hai rubbed his hands and chuckled, "Fang... Older Brother Fang..."

"Alright! I can't let my master wait, or else I will be punished to stand on a stake! Tonight, I'll come over with Xiaofan. The three of us needs to have a good drink! Daughter, when the construction at the docks are completed, Godfather will take you to visit our residence in the capital. Your godmother will definitely be happy to have a goddaughter like you!"

The capital? If she had a chance, Xiaocao long wanted to visit the capital! In her previous life, she had stayed in a small county town and devoted herself to raising her younger siblings. Had she not visited her younger siblings, who had worked and settled in a big city, it would probably be very difficult for her to walk out of the small county town during that lifetime. Thus, it was even more unlikely for her to have a chance to visit the capital.

In this lifetime, she hoped she would be able to make up for the regrets she had in her previous life. She wanted to visit the capital and have the opportunity to look at the elegant demeanor of the imperial city. Of course, if that fellow transmigrator wasn't in the capital, she would anticipate it even more.

In the evening, Yu Xiaocao took her new godfather's likings into consideration and made 'soy-braised pork' with the perfect ratio of fatty and lean meat. It was fragrant and soft, and just melted within one's mouth. She also used the bighead carp within the vat to make the colorful and pungent 'steamed fish head with chili pepper', which had a tender texture. After picking out the bones, the rest of the fish was battered into paste and used to make 'fish balls soup'. There was also stir-fried lettuce with oyster sauce, scrambled eggs with tomatoes, eggplant with minced garlic..."

Fang Zizhen felt that he had never been so happy before as he ate the food personally cooked by his goddaughter, drank the wine that the emperor awarded to him, and chatted with two like-minded brothers. He looked at his dear daughter who was busy like a bee and felt a sense of satisfaction of 'everything was well with a daughter'.

Chapter 150

Xiaocao had a general and imperial envoy as her a new godfather, but there wasn't much change to her current lifestyle. She had always kept a low profile when doing doings, so no one in Dongshan Village knew that Yu Xiaocao had such a powerful godfather, except for the Yu Family at the old residence and the Zhao Family.

At the beginning, Yu Hai and Madam Liu still acted very cautiously in front of General Fang. Later, under their daughter's influence, they were also able to face him in a calm manner. Now, everyone had already treated the bold and unrestrained General Fang, who often came to eat at their house, as a relative.

In a blink of an eye, a month had already gone by. Under the warming weather and lovely spring days, the vegetation on the West Mountains radiated with vitality. In Xiaocao's family's three plots of farmland, the watermelon vines had extended, and the green leaves appeared as if they had been dyed. There were small, light yellow watermelon flowers on the melon vines. Some of the female flowers already bore tiny, green watermelons.

Yu Xiaocao carried a small wooden bucket and held a ladle in another hand. Yu Hang, who had already recovered, carried a load of water on his not-so-broad shoulders and followed behind his younger sister.

Xiaocao looked back and saw the dense beads of sweat on her older brother's forehead. Her heart somewhat ached for him, "Older Brother, if you're tired, take a break. I reckon we should just borrow Uncle Zhou's wheelbarrow. We just need to make four or five trips and we will have enough to water the watermelon fields. Had Father not driven the donkey cart to the docks, we wouldn't have to go through this trouble!"

"It's not troublesome. Isn't it just carrying a few loads of water? Our buckets are all a small size that was specially made by Father, so how heavy can they be? It's so much easier than when I had to move timber!" Yu Hang smiled at his younger sister, and his handsome face showed a healthy glow because he was carrying water. What a handsome young man!

"Aiyo! Isn't this Xiaosha and Xiaocao?! Are you guys going to water the fields again? Tell Uncle Wang, what exactly are you guys planting in your fields? The flowers look quite beautiful!" Wang Ergou, who had been forced by his wife to come water the fields, asked with a grin.

There was little rain this spring. Fortunately, there was a stream flowing through Dongshan Village, which flowed down from the West Mountains. Even in the dry season, the stream rarely stopped flowing. Thus, it was more convenient for the villagers of Dongshan Village to get water and irrigate their farmland than villagers of other villages.

The siblings were familiar with his personality. If they didn't tell him, he might come back to visit their melon field tonight. Although there wasn't anything to steal right now, she would be distressed if he trampled on the melon seedlings.

With a sweet smile on her face, Xiaocao said, "Uncle Wang, our family is growing watermelons, which is a kind of fruit. It's very valuable! The flowers just started blooming now. Uncle Wang, your family lives closer, so please us keep an eye on them. Don't let those naughty children harm them!"

Wang Ergou's eyes darted around, and then he nodded solemnly, "As fellow villagers, even if you didn't ask me, I would still help you guys look after them. Xiaocao, what does this watermelon thing look like? Is it tasty? Uncle Wang has never heard of it... Aiyo, who's twisting my ear?"

He turned around and saw his family's tigress glaring at him with her hands on her waist. The anger on his face disappeared in a flash and he smiled flatteringly at her, "Wife, why did you pull on my ear? Am I not working right now? I didn't loaf on the job!"

Ergou's wife looked at him from head to toe, and caused him to feel scared inwardly, before she said, "I know what you just pooped as soon as you stick up your butt! Tell me, why are you asking about their watermelons? What's your intention? Wang Ergou, I'm warning you! No matter how good other people's things are, we're not allowed to keep thinking about them! If you repeat your old habits, I'll bring our baby back to my parent's house! I can't let you teach bad things to our baby!!"

Wang Ergou immediately became well-behaved. He nodded his head very obediently and promised, "Wife, look at you! I'm just curious about what a watermelon looks like. What other thoughts would I have? Rest assured! I have changed! I have really changed!!"

Wang Ergou was nearly thirty when he finally got married. They had been married for almost five years, but there still wasn't any good news. Recently, his wife had been vomiting everything she ate and gave him a terrible fright. Doctor You was away with his grandnephew and he didn't trust Xiaocao's medical skills, so he borrowed a cart and took his wife to see a doctor in town.

The old doctor took her pulse and immediately told him that he was going to be a father. He was so happy that he laughed like a fool and showed off whenever he saw someone, "My wife is pregnant! I'm going to be a father!" Ergou's wife was so embarrassed that she pinched the flesh on his waist until it was bruised.

When they returned, Wang Ergou treated his wife like she was a Bodhisattva, and would do his best to get whatever his wife wanted to eat. During the time when Ergou's wife had morning sickness, she almost threw up everything that she eats. She vomited so much that she was about to spit out her guts.

Fortunately, when Yu Xiaocao found out, she sent them a few batches of greens, cucumbers, and tomatoes. At that time, Wang Ergou had even muttered in his heart that the Yu Family was stingy, to gift others with vegetables that every family had. Unexpectedly, after his wife ate a tomato, her morning sickness seemed to have suddenly disappeared and she ate everything with relish.

But, after Ergou's wife finished the vegetables that the Yu Family sent over, she languished again. Ergou's wife was also a diligent person. They also grew cucumbers in their vegetable fields, let alone green leafy vegetables. However, none of them suited her appetite and her morning sickness started again!

Wang Ergou hastily went to the Yu Residence and bought tomatoes, cucumbers, and some greens. The Yu Family's produce had always been two or three times more expensive than other sellers. But, since they were neighbors, the Yu Family not only didn't request him to pay the higher price, but they also sold the vegetables at a cheaper price than normal vendors. So Wang Ergou and his wife were very grateful.

Ergou's wife's pregnancy was becoming more apparent now. After her morning sickness completely stopped, she gained back the weight that she had lost earlier. The competent Ergou's wife could usually handle watering all their family's farmland by herself. However, it was a crucial period for her right now. So how could Wang Ergou be willing to let his wife do heavy labor? Thus, he gritted his teeth and took over the task while patting his chest.

Ergou's wife knew about her husband's usual conduct, so she was worried about him watering the fields. She quietly followed and monitored him, and thus came across him inquiring the Yu siblings! Seeing his eyes darting around ceaselessly, Ergou's wife knew that her husband was getting ideas about those watermelons.

The Yu Family's friendly sentiments of gifting and selling them vegetables was something that Ergou's wife remembered deeply within her heart. How could she permit her husband to have any malicious intent? Recently, the best threat was to say that she would return to her parent's house with their baby. It worked every single time! Sure enough, her husband was vowing and making guarantees to her, and acting very obedient.

Yu Xiaocao watched the interaction between the peculiar couple. It seemed like the two were constantly bickering, but their feelings for each other were deep and strong. Rather than saying that Wang Ergou was afraid of his wife, it was better to say that he cherished her deeply. He liked to quarrel with her at times, but he still acted according to his wife's wishes.

Xiaocao and her older brother waved goodbye to the couple and arrived at their family's melon fields. Looking at the green vines and tiny spots of yellow flowers in the fields, she felt as if she could see a big and round watermelon waving its hands at her.

Yu Hang bent his knees to steadily put the buckets on the ground. Then he put down the carrying pole in his hands and took the ladle in Xiaocao's hands. He was about to go water the fields, but he was stopped by his youngest sister.

Under her older brother's questioning gaze, Yu Xiaocao scooped some water from her own bucket and poured it into the buckets that Yu Hai was carrying. After she poured a ladle of water into both buckets, she told Yu Hang, "Alright, you can go water the fields now!"

Yu Hang felt puzzled as he looked at Xiaocao's bucket and softly asked, "Youngest Sister, is there something special with your bucket of water? Why do you always pour a ladle of it in when we're watering the fields?"

Yu Xiaocao looked around and then she deluded, "Shhh! Don't be so loud!! This is a fertilizer that I specially made that can fertilize the soil! It was also thanks to this fertilizer that our family had such a high yield of sweet potatoes last year!"

"Oh... I see! Youngest Sister, you know so much. You even know how to make fertilizers. If this formula can be made public, then it will definitely benefit a lot of people!" She hadn't expected that Yu Hang had the potential to be a saint. No way! She must destroy this quality immediately!

Xiaocao appeared even more mysterious as she moved closer to him and whispered, "This kind of fertilizer was made with a celestial item that the God of Fortune gave me. When the God of Fortune gave it to me, he specially warned that, as a mere mortal, using the celestial item would definitely consume a certain amount of my vital energy. Thus, it shouldn't be frequently used. Otherwise, it will cause damage to the body!"

As soon as Xiaocao's health was implicated, Yu Hang instantly changed his mind, "Since the use of the celestial item could harm your body, then don't use it anymore! Increasing the yield isn't important! Your health, which had gotten better after much difficulty, is the most important."

"It's alright. I tried it out already! As long as I don't overuse it, it won't do much harm to my body. I will just feel slightly tired!" Yu Xiaocao continued to fabricate her white lies.

After hearing that, Yu Hang finally felt relieved and bent down to water the melon fields. But he continued to say, "In the future, try to use it as little as possible—by the way, what exactly does the celestial item you mentioned look like?"

Yu Xiaocao panicked for a moment and then saw the increasingly dazzling multicolored stone on her wrist. She calmed down and said, "Here! This is a celestial stone!"

Yu Hang looked at it and vaguely remembered that this little multicolored stone seemed to have appeared after his youngest sister got injured and went into a coma. He became slightly more convinced and laughed, "I thought this was a pretty stone that you picked up in the mountains, so it turned out that it was a divine treasure. You must store it properly and don't let a wicked person steal it away!"

"It's no use even if someone steals it! Celestial items will recognize its owner, so it will come back itself even if it got stolen!" Yu Xiaocao raised her eyebrows and had composed smile on her face.

After hearing her words, Yu Hang was finally relieved and sincerely complimented, "What a treasure!"

[Of course! This Divine Stone is an enlightened celestial stone smelted by Goddess Nuwa for a total of forty-nine days, who she had kept by her side for a long period of time. The world's one of a kind treasure!!] The little divine stone transformed into a little golden kitten and appeared on Xiaocao's shoulder out of thin air, with a proud expression.

Suddenly, it seemed to have thought of something, and drooped its head and said, [Ay, I wonder if Goddess Nuwa would be lonely without me by her side. Without me, Goddess Nuwa's monotonous period of seclusion would be so dull...]

Yu Xiaocao caressed its little head and whispered, "Then you need to help me out more. You should strive to recover your spiritual power earlier, break out of the void, and return to Goddess Nuwa's side."

[I want to, too! But your life is so peaceful that there's not much that I need to help you with! How much improvement can I make when I only need to produce some mystic-stone water every day?] There was a slight sense of dissatisfaction within little divine stone's tone. It jumped off of Xiaocao's shoulder and ran around in the watermelon fields.