

Fields of Gold Chapter 15

Manager Jiang took the silver ingots from them with a smile and left. A few moments later, he came back out. One hand held a plain purse made of rough burlap and the other had a couple strings of copper coins. "This bag holds about 4 and 1/2 taels worth of silver bits. I changed the rest into these strings of copper cash." The restaurant manager even warned them. "Be careful with how you store this money! You don't want any thieves to get their eyes onto this!"

"Thank you, Manager Jiang!" Yu Xiaocao as she carefully placed the pouch full of silver into her clothing. She then divided the strings of copper coins evenly between her and her older brother in preparation for their upcoming shopping trip. Before the two siblings left, the young girl went into the restaurant's back kitchen to retrieve their old and damaged ceramic pot. At the same moment, a shipment of oysters had come in. The sight of the pails and pails of fresh seafood flowing into the kitchen astonished her. "Wow!" She exclaimed in awe. "Zhenxiu Restaurant must be doing really well! Are you really able to sell all of these oysters out in one day?"

Head Chef Wang laughed ruefully. "Unfortunately, oysters aren't exactly a rare delicacy for a coastal town like us. How is it possible for us to sell this many oysters in one day? It must be Third Young Master buying more than we need again! These darned creatures are hard to keep alive outside of the sea, and it's hot right now so we can't let them sit for too long. I guess I'll have to find someone to turn most of them into dried goods..."

Zhou Zixu had also followed the two children into the kitchen. After seeing the bunch of oysters all piled in the room, he knew he had bought too many. Feeling awkward, he rubbed his nose sheepishly.

"Uh..." said Yu Xiaocao. "I'll help you guys out since Third Young Master Zhou was so generous! Is there any sugar and cooking wine in

here?" The little girl rolled up her sleeves as if she was about to do some hard work.

Zhou Zixu glanced at her slender and weak looking arms before he quickly replied, "Of course we do. What kind of restaurant would we be if we didn't have such basic ingredients? What are you planning to do with these oysters?"

Yu Xiaocao beamed a smile at him but decided to keep him in suspense. "You'll know once I'm done! Take it as my present to you, young master!"

The two older men exchanged a perplexed look. Just what was the little girl up to? They still had some spare time before the county magistrate's banquet, so they had enough time to satisfy their curiosity.

In her previous life, her younger brother loved to eat food flavored with oyster sauce. However, the oyster sauce sold at the supermarket all had a bunch of additives in them. In an effort to avoid harming his health, she found a recipe online and started to make her own oyster sauce at home.

After experimenting and tinkering with the recipe for long time, she finally developed a recipe that was not only delicious but also more healthy. Her brother loved the homemade sauce and thought that it tasted more original and savory than the versions from the store. The only flaw was that it spoiled more quickly than the manufactured sauces. But it was to be expected. After all, she never added any preservatives to it!

With a demeanor full of confidence, Yu Xiaocao directed the kitchen staff to start shucking all of the oysters and to leave the meat in a separate wooden cask. She surveyed the kitchen and grabbed the

largest pot she could find. She swiftly calculated the ratio, then poured an appropriate amount of water into the pot to boil.

Once the water started to boil, Yu Xiaocao poured in all of the oyster meat and started to stir the pot vigorously with a ladle. The cask that held the oysters had some essence left at the bottom. This leftover liquid actually held a lot of the oysters' savory flavor, so she added all of it into the hot pot without a second thought. It would be a pity to waste something that could enhance the taste and increase the output of the sauce.

"Hey you! Come help me stir this pot." Yu Xiaocao's fragile body was still too weak to work for too long.

"Let me do it instead!" Head Chef Wang exclaimed as he squeezed his fat butt into the crowd and pushed the earmarked kitchen staff aside. "Should I continue stirring in one direction?"

Head Chef Wang had worked as a chef for over ten years and was passionate about uncovering new methods and recipes. Although it was a little shameful to steal skills from other people, this particular person didn't seem to be guarding her methods. How could he let such a prime opportunity pass him?

Yu Xiaocao nodded absentmindedly as she silently calculated out the remaining time. The oysters needed to simmer for another twenty to thirty minutes to maximize flavor extraction. After that, the meat needed to be separated out to allow the rest of the sauce to develop. However, the leftover oyster meat could still be cooked in other dishes or set out in the sun to dry for later. Not one bit needed to be wasted!

After the allotted time finished, Yu Xiaocao strained the leftover meat and other solids from the finished oyster essence. She poured some oil into a clean pot to coat the inside to prevent substances from sticking

to it. The oyster essence was then added to the vessel along with some fresh water. The contents were set on the fire to stew again.

During this second process, Yu Xiaocao added some sugar, cooking wine, and some other seasonings while the sauce simmered on low heat. Time passed as she let the ingredients cook and meld together. It was almost lunchtime before she finally declared that it was ready!

The finished oyster sauce was dark in color and had a glossy sheen. The whole kitchen was filled with its savory fragrance. Head Chef Wang impatiently sampled a taste of the sauce and his eyes opened wide in shock. "This is incredible! How could something have such a dense yet savory taste? It is so full of flavor but it doesn't seem overwhelming!"

Yu Xiaocao also took a taste before smiling. "It still lacks a couple of key ingredients that would make it more delicious. Still, this sauce is still pretty good, it retains the original flavor from the oysters."

Zhou Zixu and Manager Jiang followed in trying the sauce out. "What kind of sauce is this? Can it be added to cooked meats and vegetables?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded in assent. "This is called 'oyster sauce'. Oyster sauce is also known as the 'essence of the sea'. Using it while cooking can increase the overall savoriness and tastiness of a dish."

She looked around the kitchen and then pointed at a bunch of green leafed vegetables. "Let me make some simmered green vegetables [1] with this. This is one of my specialties!"

Head Chef Wang enthusiastically started washing the vegetables himself. In the meantime, Yu Xiaocao set another pot full of water on

the fire and let it come to a boil. After quickly blanching the cleaned greens in the water, she set the cooked vegetables onto a serving plate and drizzled some oyster sauce and sesame oil on top. The dish was finished! She glanced up at everyone in the kitchen and hinted at them to take a taste.

"Is this already finished?" asked someone incredulously. The rest of the people in the room looked at her in dismay. Wasn't this just boiled green vegetables?

On the other hand, Head Chef Wang had a thoughtful expression on his face. From his culinary experience, he knew that the more simple a dish was, the more it tested a chef's capabilities. He grabbed a pair of chopsticks and used them to bring a single stem to his mouth. The taste of the savory oyster sauce and fresh flavor of the vegetable melded perfectly together. It was something that he had never tasted before but it was divine to his senses.

The blissful expression on Head Chef Wang's face elicited Zhou Zixu's curiosity. How could someone like the head chef, who had likely eaten many delicious dishes, be so infatuated with something like this? It was just some steamed vegetables with some sauce on top...

After contemplating for another second, the young master finally decided to try it himself. He also picked up one stalk and carefully placed it into his mouth. As someone who grew up in a rich family, he naturally loved to eat meat more than plain vegetables. His mother had gone through a lot of effort throughout the years to get him to eat some vegetables at his meals.

The chef of his family had a practiced hand in cooking vegetables. In fact, many of the nobles and aristocrats had asked one time or another for his family to sell this chef to them. All of the offers had been gracefully declined.

However, all of those exquisite dishes made by high class cooks could not even be compared to this simple dish made by this little girl. The secret ingredient was obvious in this case!

Zhou Zixu and Head Chef Wang looked at each other. Their thoughts and hearts were linked as one in what their next step to be. The light of greed started to shine in their eyes.

"Young miss from the Yu Family, do you... do you plan on selling your method?" Third Young Master Zhou and Head Chef Wang asked at same time.

"Are you two asking about the recipe for the oyster sauce? What do you mean by 'selling it'? I didn't hide anything when I made it earlier. If there are any parts that are confusing, feel free to ask me!" Yu Xiaocao had never intended to sell her recipe for money. It was more important for her to build some good karma and connections.

Zhou Zixu not only was the true owner of the best restaurant in Tanggu Town but was also the young master of one of the four great merchant families of the country, the Zhou Family! In the future, it was likely she would need a couple of favors from him. It was better to leave a good impression now than to be greedy! The more friends she had, the more options she had in the future!

[1] Green vegetable with oyster sauce

Chapter end