

## Gold Chapter 151

### Chapter 151 – Imperial Decree

Yu Hang saw a golden flash out of the corner of his eyes. He looked closely and realized that it was the little yellow kitten that his youngest sister raised. When did this fellow come along? Would it trample on the melon seedlings while running around so recklessly? But, after a careful look, he saw that the little kitten very cleverly chose to run on the ridges on the fields and didn't touch any of the vines and seedlings at all.

Ladle after ladle of water with a faint hint mystic-stone water was watered into the melon fields. The watermelon seedlings stretched its leaves in the breeze, as if it was trying its best to grow. The tiny melons seemed to have quietly grew a little when no one was looking...

They finished watering the three plots of melons fields when it was almost noon. The siblings carried the empty buckets and walked back to their house.

When they reached the foot of the West Mountains, they noticed that the normally deserted Zhao Residence was surrounded by many villagers. Uncle Zhao's family lived far away from the village, so they rarely interacted with the villagers. His house had always been very peaceful and quiet, but today...

Did something happen? Xiaocao and her older brother looked at each other and quickly ran to the Zhao Residence. When they arrived at the stone wall of the Zhao Residence, they could hear the surrounding villagers discussing excitedly:

"Wow! Did you see? That's an imperial decree!! It's the imperial decree mentioned in the opera!! Unfortunately, it's too far away to see what the imperial decree really looks like!!"

"I never expected that Old Zhao was a great general of the former dynasty! Do you know about the official who often comes to his house these days? That's his disciple! He's a high-ranking official of the imperial court!!"

"Didn't you hear what the imperial decree said? The emperor cherishes and values talent, so he wants Old Zhao to go back to be an official. What was the title conferred on him again? I can't remember."

“Zhenguo General [1]!! He’s bestowed the title of a great general!! Tsk tsk, Hunter Zhao’s family is going to be amazing in the future!”

“Isn’t that right! The Zhao Family is going to enjoy a happy life in the capital now!!”

“The person who announced the imperial decree doesn’t have a beard. Is he the taijian mentioned in the opera?”

“Shhh... Are you looking for death?! Those eunuchs hate being called ‘taijian [2]’ the most. If he heard you, you’re will be beheaded!”

...

Yu Xiaocao felt completely relieved after she heard that. Things were finally working out for Grandpa Zhao! Before, when she visited the Zhao Family, she often inadvertently saw Grandpa Zhao staring into the distance with a lost expression.

One with civil and military talents shall serve the imperial family. It seemed like Grandpa Zhao was unwilling to live such a dull life despite living in seclusion for thirty years! Fortunately, the current emperor was wise sovereign who appointed people based on their merits. In the future, Grandpa Zhao and his family should be able to shine and thrive in their own positions...

“Hey! That little girl? Stand right there!!” Just as Yu Xiaocao wanted to turn around and leave, a loud voice stopped her from behind.

Yu Xiaocao looked around and realized that she was the only little girl around. ‘Are they calling me? Who is it?’

“Yes! You!!” The sound of footsteps came from behind and quickly arrived in front of her. A healthy and hearty looking old man, who had a white beard and a fair and chubby face, looked at her warmly with a smile.

“Fifth... Fifth Lord?” Yu Xiaocao recognized him. He was dressed in clothing made of coarse cloth. Seeing his simple attire, she asked curiously, “Why are you here?”

“Because I want to!” With his hands clasped behind his back, the emperor emeritus looked around and saw verdant greenery everywhere. Even the air seemed fresher. He smiled and said, “This is a good place to live out one’s life in retirement!”

With imaginary black lines on her head, Yu Xiaocao thought, ‘You must be too idle. You’re choosing to wear patched clothing made of coarse cloth instead of silks and brocades. You’re not living like a member of the imperial family, but instead you’re wandering around in a barren and poor area. How in the world did you determine that this remote village was a good place to enjoy one’s life in retirement?’

“You... didn’t come with the imperial envoy who came to announce the imperial decree, right?” Seeing that he came over from the Zhao Residence, Yu Xiaocao suddenly had this thought and asked.

The emperor emeritus laughed and seemed to be in a good mood, “I heard... I heard that Head Steward Zhang needs to go to Dongshan Village to announce the imperial decree. Considering that we were going the same way and it was a good idea to look after one another on the way, we just came together!”

“Going the same way? What did you come to Dongshan Village for?” Yu Xiaocao was holding the little golden kitten and gently stroking its fur.

With an even bigger smile on his face, the emperor emeritus narrowed his eyes and looked at her, making her feel uncomfortable. Then he said, “Of course, I came to find you ah!”

“Find me?” Why was he looking for her? Was it because he thought that it was a waste of money to spend three hundred taels to buy her braised food recipe and wanted to get a refund? But then again, this Fifth Lord wasn’t a businessman, nor did he plan on selling anything. So, spending three hundred taels to satisfy his cravings was indeed somewhat wasteful!

The emperor emeritus pretended to be mysterious as he smiled at her. He waved his hands at her and said, “Come, let’s talk as we go!” After saying that, he walked towards the direction of Xiaocao’s house.

Well! It seemed like he really made preparations before coming. He even knew her address! However, she didn't have that much cash at home. She had asked Third Young Master Zhou to help her invest all the money that she earned from selling the recipe, as well as subsequent earnings, into the stores at the harbor.

The emperor emeritus walked slowly in the front, while Xiaocao followed him step by step, like a little minion. Yu Hang and the emperor emeritus's attendants were behind them.

As soon as Yu Hai went out, he saw a group of people headed this way. He looked carefully and realized that his younger daughter was amongst the crowd.

"Xiaocao... what is this? Oh! Isn't this Fifth Lord? Why has the elder come to visit?" Yu Hai had also recognized the old man who walked in front and hastily went forward to greet him.

The emperor emeritus pulled a long face and said with an irritated tone, "Is this lord that old? Little Yu ah, if an honest person doesn't know how to speak, he will offend a lot of people! This lord is very angry!! What do you think you should do!!"

Yu Hai knew that the person in front of him had an extraordinary background. If he accidentally offended him, who knew what he would do to powerless commoners like them! Even if that person just wriggled his pinky, the results probably wasn't something that he could withstand! Thus, for a moment, Yu Hai just stood there helplessly and didn't know what he should say!

"Fifth Lord don't bully my father, who's an honest man!! Tell me, what do you want to eat? As long as we can afford the ingredients, I'll definitely make it for you. But, first of all, I only know how to cook homemade dishes so don't ask me to make stuff like 'Fo Tiao Qiang [3]' and 'Bao Shen Chi Du [4]'. I'm just an ignorant little peasant girl, so I don't know how to make them!" Yu Xiaocao felt that she still had some ability to handle a glutton.

Sure enough, her rude words didn't provoke the distinguished guest from the capital, Fifth Lord. Instead, he guffawed and said, "I really like this little girl, Xiaocao!! Then I, Fifth Lord, won't be courteous anymore—I want to eat pig head meat! I also want 'spicy pig intestines', 'shredded pig tripe in chili oil', 'duck blood soup with vermicelli'..."

The emperor emeritus didn't have any reservations and ordered many dishes, which all fitted into the homemade food category that Xiaocao mentioned. But the last dish, duck blood soup with vermicelli, was somewhat difficult for Xiaocao to make...

"Fifth Lord, it's easy to get duck blood, but where am I going to get vermicelli? Is it alright to change it to 'duck blood and tofu stew'?" At this time, Yu Xiaocao had already confirmed Fifth Lord's identity.

He was in his fifties and had a lofty and hale figure. At first glance, it was obvious that he had served in the military before. Moreover, he could wear bright yellow, which symbolized the imperial family. Most importantly, he knew the dish, duck blood soup with vermicelli! Fifth Lord was the founding emperor of the Great Ming Dynasty and the current Emperor Emeritus! Ay! The Great Ming Dynasty was seriously too small; two transmigrators had actually met just like this.

But, she wasn't sure whether the emperor emeritus knew about her origin. Would she be able to fool him? Yu Xiaocao feigned a distressed expression and muttered, "Fifth Lord, all the other dishes are easy to make. But this 'duck blood soup with vermicelli'... what is a vermicelli? Where can I buy it?"

"Don't act dumb and try to gloss over it! You, this little lass, are still too young to scheme against me! Even if others don't know what a vermicelli is, can you not know? I don't care. I'm definitely going to eat the 'duck blood soup with vermicelli'!!" The emperor emeritus strode into the Yu Family's courtyard in an imposing manner, and then sat candidly on the recliner in front of the house

It seemed like she couldn't avoid it. Seeing that the emperor emeritus didn't intend to perform the scene of 'fellows from the same hometown meeting each other', Yu Xiaocao naturally wouldn't mention it either. She furrowed her little face and said, "Fifth Lord! I only know that vermicelli is made with sweet potato flour, but I have never made it before. I don't know how to make it ah..."

The emperor emeritus swayed leisurely in the recliner with his eyes narrowed, yet he didn't overlook nor spare her as he said, "Stop pretending! You know how to make roasted chicken and osmanthus duck, but you don't know how to make vermicelli? Who are you kidding? If you keep wasting time, I'm going to punish your father with the crime of disrespect and send him to prison. Humph!"

Xiaocao felt really helpless when facing the emperor emeritus, who was like an unreasonable old urchin. After looking at her startled father and confused mother, she summoned her courage and said, "Fifth Lord! Please don't frighten honest people like us. My parents are timid and get easily scared!"

After a pause, she said, "I reckon you won't be able to eat the vermicelli today! The process of making vermicelli is too complicated, so it's impossible to make right now. Also, pig head meat, intestines, and tripe were all taken to the docks to be sold. If you want to eat them, you'll have to wait until the evening!"

"Alright! I, Fifth Lord, am not an unreasonable person either. Let's just have a casual lunch, and I will wait to eat the big feast in the evening!" The emperor emeritus crossed his legs comfortably on the recliner, and then suddenly said, "Why didn't you make a rocking chair? It's so comfortable to rock in a rocking chair while basking in the warm sun."

A big feast tonight? The emperor emeritus wasn't going back to town tonight? How could Dongshan Village possibly accommodate 'this great Buddha'? Yu Xiaocao looked towards the lead imperial guard, who was beside the emperor emeritus, 'Shouldn't you guys dissuade him?'

The lead imperial guard pretended not to see Xiaocao's gaze and stood close behind the emperor emeritus with an icy expression on his face. In fact, he was actually having a mental breakdown inside: If he could choose, he would rather have his master obediently stay in the capital. That was the safest place within the entire Great Ming Dynasty.

But his master liked to run around. There were still supporters of the former dynasty remaining, so it was really dangerous outside ah! Yet he wanted to spend a night at this little mountain village? His master must think that he was still idle and wanted to give him some problems to solve! Unfortunately, Head Steward Liu had stayed in the capital. If he was here, he might be able to persuade him. As for them, the imperial guards, they could only stand to the side!

Yu Xiaocao hid in the kitchen with a miserable expression. Madam Liu pulled on her hand and asked about the identities of the people in the yard in a low voice. Xiaocao was afraid of scaring her parents and didn't dare to reveal Fifth Lord's true identity. She just said that he was an esteemed guest from the capital, who even the county magistrate had to be polite to.

## Chapter 152 – Old Memories

From Madam Liu's perspective, the county magistrate was the highest-ranked official in Tanggu Town. If the magistrate had to treat this man so politely, then he was definitely very high up the ladder. She needed to be more careful around him.

There was a finite amount of resources at home. For the most part, they only had vegetables that were growing in the field. They only had one type of meat at home and that was the portion of streaky pork that they had bought yesterday.

Yu Xiaocao sliced off a portion of the streaky pork and chopped it up finely until it was finely minced. She then sliced some eggplants into discs and dipped them in egg and flour before she fried them into eggplant fritters. She had a hunch that the emperor emeritus liked strongly flavored food, so he would likely enjoy these fragrant and flaky eggplant fritters.

As for the leftover pork, she used it to make the fatty but not greasy, full of delectable flavor, twice-cooked pork. She took string beans that had just been picked from the garden and dry-fried them with a bit of lard to make delicious 'dry-fried string beans'. To the tomatoes, she added several chicken eggs to make a plate of 'stir-fried tomatoes and eggs'. Thus, she managed to put together four hot dishes for the meal.

For the two cold appetizers, she used cucumbers and peanuts that had been cooked in boiling water. However, with only two cold plates on the table, she thought that it wasn't very presentable.

After thinking a bit, Xiaocao took out five of the five spice duck eggs from the marinating jar and boiled them until they were cooked. Then, she sliced them and placed them onto a plate. The marinated duck eggs were full flavor and quite tasty. The egg yolks were bright yellow in color and small drops of glistening yolk oil oozed out. When eaten, they had a mildly salty taste that was very fragrant.

Xiaocao calculated the time quickly and decided that the century eggs should be about done by now. She picked out one of the eggs that had been coated in the mud mixture and lightly pinched off the top of its mud shell. The eggshell, which had been gently cracked open, peeled off, revealing a glossy dark exterior. On the surface, there were white colored, delicate designs, which showed the egg's signature 'pine flower' appearance. She lightly sniffed the egg and a special and exotic smell hit her nose.

Xiaocao asked Xiaolian, who had just returned home, to ride their donkey to the neighboring village and buy some soft tofu. Century eggs with tofu was a simple dish that tasted delicious. This dish had a soft texture, delicate flavor, and melted in the mouth. Because they were entertaining high-ranked guests, she especially prepared a more high-brow dish.

She first cut the soft tofu into small rectangular blocks and had Madam Liu to hollow out the blocks. Then, she finely minced the century eggs and mixed in aromatic vinegar, sesame oil, and other seasonings. Next, she stuffed the century egg mixture into the hollowed-out tofu pieces and sprinkled some finely chopped green and red chili pepper on top. The finished dish not only looked appetizing but also had a savory taste and smell!

“Daughter! Your godfather is home!! What did you make that smells so delicious, I can smell it from far away...” Needless to say, in the past month, General Fang Zizhen often returned from the docks to bum a meal off of the Yu Family. His loud and clear voice could frequently be heard well before he stepped into the family’s courtyard.

This time, the resonant sound of his voice sounded like it had suddenly been cut off and screeched to a stop. At this moment, Fang Zizhen’s eyes were opened wider than a bronze gong and were full of disbelief. He forcefully rubbed at his eyes but the great and honorable person in front of him was still in the courtyard!

“This lowly official kowtows in greeting...” Fang Zizhen went three steps forward and knelt in front of the emperor emeritus. It was as if a gold mountain had met a jade pillar. Just as he was about to complete his greeting to the emperor emeritus, he was interrupted!

The emperor emeritus used a hand to wave at him in dismissal, “Mingzhe ah! We’re not at the capital, so no need to be so serious. Come! Sit here and spend some time with Fifth Lord!!” Mingzhe was Fang Zizhen’s courtesy name.

“Emp...Fifth Lord, why are you at Dongshan Village? Did you hear that my master lives here? That can’t be right ah! If that was true, then you should be at my master’s home, so why are you at Brother Yu’s residence?” Fang Zizhen cautiously sat down on the small wooden stool next to the emperor emeritus and placed his hands on his knees. He resembled an elementary school student who was receiving lessons from his teacher.

Yu Hai was in the middle of the vegetable field in the courtyard, turning over the soil. When he saw a lofty third-rank official kowtowing to Fifth Lord, he knew that this Fifth Lord had an uncanny background. He was trying to guess just how exalted Fifth Lord was as he worked.

However, since Fifth Lord apparently didn’t have any ill will towards the Yu Family at the moment, that was considered a huge blessing!

“Eh? Godfather? Weren’t you at Grandpa Zhao’s place helping them take care of the matters relating to the imperial edict? How do you have time to come over here?” Yu Xiaocao came out of the kitchen to take a peek outside and smiled brightly at the men in the courtyard.



Her luminous and pale little face had somehow gotten coated with some flour unbeknownst to her. Instead of looking sloppy, it actually made her look even more adorable and charming. In front of his sweet and cute adopted daughter, the expression on Fang Zizhen's face became so soft that it looked like one could squeeze some water out of him.

His smile became gentle and his voice also softened, "Good girl! The eunuch who bequeathed the imperial decree is going to eat a meal over there, so I came over to pick some fresh vegetables for them."

"What? The eunuch issuing the imperial decree is staying with the Zhao Family to have a meal? Who gave him the right?" The emperor emeritus erased the amiable smile on his face and the sound of his voice seemed a bit more dignified and imposing.

Fang Zizhen smiled carefully and said, "Fifth...Fifth Lord, it's noon and there's not any place to eat in the vicinity of Dongshan Village. Should the eunuch return back on an empty stomach? Don't blame Eunuch Zhang..."

The emperor emeritus frowned fiercely and replied, "Dongshan Village is only about a two hours horse ride from town. It's not like Zhang Quan doesn't know the customs and rules. Is he not afraid of being accused of the crime of trying to get too close to officials?"

"Uh...Fifth Lord, it shouldn't be this serious right? There's no one else in Dongshan Village, so there likely wouldn't be anyone gossiping about this!" Fang Zizhen felt beads of sweat form on his forehead.

"Are you me that as long as other people don't see it's okay for him to privately become friends with court officials?" The emperor emeritus scowled deeply and commanded the imperial guard next to him, "Little Zhuang, go get Zhang Quan for me. Tell him that I'm having a meal here and I need someone to serve me!"

"Understood!" The imperial bodyguard, Zhuang Mo, received the command and swiftly left. The courtyard quickly became tranquil again, but the atmosphere was somewhat awkward now. Yu Hai had long gone out of the courtyard and started working on the ground in front of the gate. He was afraid that he might hear something that he shouldn't!

“Time to eat!!” Yu Xiaocao’s bright and clear voice shattered the dead silence in the courtyard. Fang Zizhen suddenly felt that there was nothing more pleasing to his ears than his adopted daughter shouting ‘time to eat!’ at the top of her lungs.

The frown on the emperor emeritus’s face momentarily disappeared, and he sniffed, “Chicken stewed with mushrooms! This dish is quite good, I like it!”

“Fifth Lord, do you want to eat in the room or in the courtyard?” Yu Xiaocao inquired.

The emperor emeritus glanced at the Yu Family’s tottering, mudbrick house and curled his lip, “The rooms are a bit stuffy and the courtyard is so bright and spacious. Let’s eat in the courtyard then!”

When Yu Hang heard the old man voice his opinion, he quickly moved the family’s new dining table out into the courtyard and took out all of the stools in the house. He looked at the large men next to Fifth Lord, hesitated for a moment, and then asked Xiaocao quietly, “It looks like we don’t have enough wooden stools for everyone. Should I go to Auntie Zhou’s and borrow some from her?”

Although the emperor emeritus was no longer young, his hearing was still as keen as before. He laughed, “You don’t need to go through that much trouble! These men won’t be eating with us at the same table. Mingzhe, earlier the little girl called you her godfather. You’re quite fortunate. Previously I had wanted to adopt this lass as an honorary granddaughter but I had been summarily rejected by her!”

Fang Zizhen grinned widely and laughed a couple of times before he suddenly recalled something. The smile vanished on his face as he said, “Fifth Lord, don’t blame her! Xiaocao is still young and is sometimes childish. Please excuse her ignorance!”

“This servant, Zhang Quan, greets...” A shrill and resounding voice echoed in the air. As a eunuch who was ranked highly enough to issue an imperial decree, Zhang Quan still knelt obediently on the ground as his body lightly trembled.

“Alright!!” The emperor emeritus shouted violently and stopped the eunuch from finishing his sentence. “Why do you look so confused? Why aren’t you coming over now to serve? Are you blind and losing energy?! Liu Fusheng must have been blind to take such an idiot like you as his adopted son!”

Zhang Quan had already discreetly asked the imperial bodyguard, who had given him the message, about the emperor emeritus's mood. At the time, his whole body had suddenly been drenched in cold sweat. A court eunuch becoming friends with a court official was a serious crime that could lead to beheading! He could only blame himself. Previously, the emperor had repeatedly warned him to treat General Zhao with respect. He had gotten too proud and almost unexpectedly committed an overwhelming offense ah! Fortunately, the emperor emeritus had called him over. The emperor emeritus was truly like his second father and benefactor who had saved his life!

"Come, come! Don't all just stand there ah!! Mingzhe, Little Yu, and you, little girl, come over and eat with Fifth Lord!!" The emperor emeritus glared at Zhang Quan and then ignored his presence. His eyes had been attracted to the table full of delicious smelling food that was all familiar to him.

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In his previous life, Zhu Huaiyong had also been a brilliant and outstanding military official of his country. He didn't have any other interests, other than eating good food. After he transmigrated over to this world, he had been on the battleground for several years in a row. Being able to eat enough to fill his belly was already considered quite good, so how could he be picky about the food?

After he ascended the throne, he found that the imperial palace's chefs were all decent. Perhaps he still missed his previous life but he always felt like the food here didn't taste quite right. However, he and the current emperor were both men who didn't know how to cook. Thus, he was even more attached to finding the taste of his previous life in this world.

Decades passed and the memory of those familiar foods of his previous life had slowly faded. He had originally believed that he would never be able to have a taste of his homeland again in this lifetime. However, he didn't expect that in this impoverished, tiny courtyard, he would finally be able to satisfy his long-standing desire.

"These are all just some home cooked dishes, so please don't dislike them because of that, Fifth Lord. Please eat your fill!" Yu Xiaocao took ahold of a plate of century eggs with tofu and lightly placed the dish in front of the emperor emeritus.

Zhu Huaiyong's eyes lit up even more brightly and he smiled slyly like an old fox, "Little girl, you even know how to make century eggs and you claim that you can't make bean vermicelli? Don't try to trick me, Fifth Lord's eyes are still sharp!"

“Centuryeggs? Daughter, our family’s century eggs are ready to eat?” Fang Zizhen had been quite busy on the docks and had almost forgotten about these eggs. He stared at the plate of delicate and delicious century eggs with tofu that was in front of the emperor emeritus. He almost couldn’t control his desire to try some now.

Xiaocao had finished serving all of the food to the table and was about to go to the kitchen to serve food to the imperial bodyguards when the emperor emeritus stopped her, “Little girl, you’ve been busy for a while. Come, sit next to Fifth Lord and eat some. They all have working limbs, if they’re hungry, they’ll be able to find food to eat!”

The emperor emeritus had already ordered that only Fang Zizhen, Yu Hai, and Yu Xiaocao had the honor of accompanying him for the meal. Zhang Quan stood on the side and held a new pair of chopsticks. He picked up an eggplant fritter and was about to taste it.

“Stop! You don’t need to test the food for poison here, go into the kitchen where Commander Zhuang and the others are and eat the meal there!” The emperor emeritus trusted the Yu Family and having someone taste the food before he tried was not essential. He refused to permit another person at the table to eat his precious food!

Zhang Quan perceptibly made a noise in assent. In his heart, the Yu Family had risen ranks. There probably weren’t many people who could make the emperor emeritus trust them so much, right?

“Century eggs with tofu! It’s been decades since I’ve last had these! I’ve almost forgotten what they taste like ah!” The emperor emeritus carefully picked a piece of tofu stuffed with century eggs and opened his mouth wide. He shoved the whole piece into his mouth. The tender tofu with the savory flavor of the century egg spread through his mouth. Being able to taste food that he hadn’t had for years almost made Zhu Huaiyong let out a couple tears in joy.

Fang Zizhen watched the emperor emeritus earnestly. When he saw the obvious pleasure on the older man’s face and some faint signs of moisture in his eyes, anxiety rose in his heart—was there really something so delicious that would make the emperor emeritus cry?

Chapter 153 – Old Urchin

“Eh? How come all of you are just watching me eat? If you all don’t start eating, I’m going to finish off this table ah!” The emperor emeritus took another piece of century egg with tofu and stuffed it into his mouth as he delicately enjoyed it.

This was the first time in his life that Fang Zizhen was sitting at the same table for a meal with the emperor emeritus. Sure enough, the emperor emeritus was an amiable and approachable person. In history, how many emperors had sat at the same table as their officials? Although he was a bit nervous, he couldn't resist the tempting lure of the delicacies and carefully picked up a cube of century egg in tofu to eat.

A special flavor combined with the exquisite light taste of the tofu slowly bloomed inside his mouth. It provoked his taste buds. He had eaten the food that Xiaocao made for over a month now but she surprised him with something new every time. Even if it was the exact same ingredient, she had the ability to make it into something completely different. He suspected that even the famous chef at Zhenxiu Restaurant would not be able to recreate the same flavors that she cooked. (Xiaocao sniggered: thanks to the mystic-stone water!)

Fang Zizhen immediately fell in love with the slippery texture and fresh, savory taste of the century eggs. Once he had finished reflecting on the taste in his mouth, he wanted to grab a second bite and discovered that the plate was completely empty. The emperor emeritus, on the other hand, had a longing expression on his face, as if he wished he could eat more.

"Daughter, the portion size of this century egg with tofu is really too small right? I only ate one piece and the plate is empty. This doesn't satisfy my craving. Didn't you make twenty to thirty century eggs? Slice a few more for us! Today Fifth Lord is here, so don't be petty!" The expression on his face and words coming out of his mouth made it seem like Fang Zizhen was advocating for the emperor emeritus, but, in actuality, he just wanted to eat more himself.

Yu Xiaocao glanced at the emperor emeritus and secretly sneered within her heart, 'I've never seen someone at your age eating this much alone. A whole plate of century eggs with tofu had been gobbled up by you, old man. As for godfather, you're lucky that you got to try a piece ah. My biological father hasn't even picked up his chopsticks!!'

Despite her less than flattering thoughts, she still had a sweet smile on her face, "Fifth Lord, there should be tomatoes in the capital, right? Try some of the stir-fried tomatoes with eggs that I made. How does it taste?"

The emperor emeritus obligingly went with her request and picked up a portion of eggs as he said, "Tomato seeds were only recommended for growing last year. Not a lot of people are growing them in the capital, but you have already done so? You have a pretty good way of doing things ah! Good, Fifth Lord will taste how it is!"

Just as he finished talking, he placed the eggs into his mouth and chewed. His long beard moved up and down with his mouth movements. Xiaocao couldn't help but face him and stare at the long whiskers for a bit.

"Not bad, not bad! The colors are bright and appetizing, the taste is fresh and sweet, it's better than the food made by palace's imperial chefs! Little girl, are you sure you weren't a chef in your previous life?"

This seemingly simple statement made by the emperor emeritus made Xiaocao extremely nervous. She glanced over at her somewhat reserved father and laughed hollowly, "Perhaps ah! Who can remember their previous life after drinking Granny Meng's soup? However, everyone tells me that I have a talent for cooking. Maybe I was truly a famous chef in my past life! Probably also one who specialized in the dishes that commoners eat!"

"This child doesn't know how to be humble! Are there any famous chefs who are female?" Yu Hai glared at her in warning. Someone who was able to eat the food the imperial chefs made was absolutely not low in rank. His little daughter frequently liked to blabber thoughtlessly, but she absolutely should not offend Fifth Lord.

The emperor emeritus was in an exceedingly good mood and grabbed a chopstick full of chicken stewed with mushrooms. He ate it heartily and smiled, "I don't know if there were any famous female chefs in history but I believe that our Great Ming Dynasty can have a famous female chef show up!" As he talked, he even looked at Xiaocao for a bit.

Yu Xiaocao calmly ate the rice in her bowl. Since she transmigrated over here, she hadn't been able to eat plain white rice. When she heard what he said, she finally became more modest, "Fifth Lord, you're overestimating my abilities. I only know how to make a few homestyle dishes. You've probably gotten tired of eating fancy dishes with lots of meat and seafood. Now that you get to taste some homestyle cooking, you think it's fresh and unique, that's all. If you had to eat this style of food every day, then you wouldn't think it's tasty anymore!"

Fang Zizhen was gobbling up his food with head plastered to his bowl when he coolly interjected, "I think my daughter's skills are just plain good. I've eaten the food you made for over a month and haven't gotten tired of it! My family's daughter could make even vegetables boiled in plain water taste good! Daughter, go slice up a few more century eggs ah!"

Yu Xiaocao looked at her godfather, who had fattened up a few inches around his waistline, somewhat helplessly. Luckily, Grandpa Zhao would force him to practice martial arts every day. Otherwise, she was afraid that he would have become a rotund fatty at this point! At the rate that he was gaining weight, she wasn't sure whether her godmother would still recognize him the next time he went back to the capital!

She grinned as she looked at Fang Zizhen and then spoke to the emperor emeritus, "I also made some century eggs out of chicken eggs and they should be ready to eat. I'll slice up a few to let everyone try some. The uncle bodyguards over there..."

"Don't bother with them, they're fine eating anything. As long as they can eat until they're full!" The emperor emeritus knew that Xiaocao didn't make a lot of century eggs in her first batch, so he obviously couldn't bear to let that bunch of brats eat his food, right? He was still planning on bringing some back to the capital with him!

The imperial bodyguards were sitting at the table in the kitchen. On the table, other than the century eggs and tofu which had been switched for tofu mixed with shallots, the rest of the dishes were the same as the ones for the table outside. The imperial bodyguards had been on the road for the whole morning and had long felt their stomachs sticking to their backbones out of hunger. In front of a table full of tasty dishes, they gorged themselves without any inhibition. They usually had a good relationship with one another but, today, for the sake of a piece of twice-cooked pork, they almost started fighting.

When Xiaocao entered the kitchen, the imperial bodyguards had already completely finished the table full of food in record time. Every plate on the table was completely empty, even the sauce from the vegetables had been poured onto their rice and eaten. The commander of the guards felt his face flush with embarrassment when he saw Xiaocao enter the kitchen. He silently cursed the soldiers underneath his command for acting like a bunch of starving refugees. Weren't they going to be laughed at by this little girl?

"Uncle bodyguards, did you guys eat to your fill? If that wasn't enough, I can cook a few small dishes for you all?" Xiaocao exclaimed in astonishment when she saw how much food the four men ate. They had unexpectedly eaten enough for eight people and cleared all of the plates. Perhaps those who practiced martial arts used more energy, so their capacity for food was larger?

The four imperial bodyguards along with a court eunuch all became excited at the thought of eating more food. However, after rubbing their rotund, stuffed stomachs, they could only shake their heads in regret and tell her that they were full. The commander of the group couldn't look Xiaocao in the eye when he saw how shameless his soldiers were!

Xiaocao retrieved a few mud-coated eggs from the corner, tapped off the mud shells, and peeled the century eggs. In her previous lifetime, at her hometown, century eggs made out of chicken eggs were also called 'biandan'. These few biandan were all ready to be eaten. The egg white part of the eggs looked like jelly and were sparkling and translucent. The yolk part of the eggs resembled a ball of sugar. When cut open, liquid drops of oil flowed out and made the eggs look extremely appetizing.

The courtyard wasn't very large, so the imperial bodyguards had naturally heard what the emperor emeritus had said previously. Were these the century eggs that the emperor emeritus had mentioned? What did they taste like? Everyone could tell that these were extremely delicious. Otherwise, why else would the emperor emeritus, who had tried every delicacy under the heavens, protect these eggs from them? The more restricted something was, the more the heart thirsted for it. Unfortunately, this was not a desire they could satisfy right now.

The imperial bodyguards stared at Xiaocao intently as she peeled and sliced the eggs. Their gaze made her feel a lot of pressure and she felt like her back was burning under their relentless stares. She accelerated her movements and also chopped up some garlic cloves and green peppers. Vinegar and sesame oil were added to season the dish and then everything was sprinkled on top of the century eggs. She quickly carried the dish out. If she didn't leave soon, then she absolutely would have collapsed from being stared at by this pack of 'hungry wolves'!

This cold plate of seasoned biandan naturally received unanimous, generous praise from everyone who tried it. Fortunately, the emperor emeritus had pretty much eaten his fill, so this allowed Fang Zizhen and Yu Hai the opportunity to try some. After Yu Hai tasted a slice, he lightly nodded his head, "This is a dish that probably goes well with alcohol..."

"That's right! Such a delicious dish, how come we don't have any alcohol with it? Commander Zhuang, where did I hide that bottle of Zhenniàng when I left? Quickly take it out!" The emperor emeritus yelled at the commander in exhilaration.

The stony cold expression on the commander's face didn't change a whit as he calmly replied in an even tone of voice, "Before we left, the emperor had inspected our luggage while you were unaware. That bottle of imperial Zhenniàng had been confiscated by him!"

When the emperor emeritus was young, he loved to drink alcohol. After ascending the throne, he felt that he had a lot of responsibility, so he very rarely drank until he was dead drunk. Once he abdicated, he immediately invited a bunch of old officials over and drank alcohol with them every day. The old



internal injuries left behind from the war as well as his advancing age caused his stomach to bleed after drinking too much. He vomited blood everywhere and scared the group of old officials until they were pale from fright. Fortunately, it wasn't his time to go and after being treated by all of the imperial doctors in the palace, he was able to keep his life.

Since then, the emperor strictly prohibited him from drinking alcohol. He not only sent people over to watch over him but also set down rules for 'guilt by association'. Whoever accompanied the emperor emeritus in drinking alcohol or witnessed him drinking without reporting would also be sentenced to go down a rank. If they weren't an official, then they would have to be imprisoned for three months. The pitiful emperor emeritus with his alcohol-loving heart was no longer able to find any alcohol to drink. When he did get his hands on some, he couldn't find anyone to accompany him. It was truly a calamitous situation for him!

The smile on the old man's face disappeared, and he snorted furiously a couple of times, "Don't drink then I won't drink! Without alcohol to accompany the meal, it doesn't feel right. Oh right, little girl! Have you any fermented grape wine or fruit wine of any sort?"

Yu Xiaocao could sense the commander's anxiety and looked at him reassuringly to placate the man. She smiled, "You also know that we had separated from the main family at the end of last year. Other than receiving this run-down old house, we didn't even get any furniture to go with it. How would we have any tools to ferment wine? That being said, even if I had the tools, how could I have made any without any of the ingredients? In the dead of winter, where would I find any grapes and fruit then to ferment wine for you?"

The emperor emeritus pursed his lips and replied irritably, "Little Yu ah! I really don't like that stepmother of yours!! The rest I won't mention, but she had taken Zhao Bufan's three hundred taels from selling that bear yet she didn't even give one tael to your family. Also, that younger brother of yours. From my standpoint, he's not suited to be a scholar! And he's living in town like a young lord, eating good food. All of it is funded by her. She's so biased that she doesn't know what's right and proper anymore!! I really feel annoyed about this, very annoyed!! How about I call her over and scare her a bit?"

A waterfall of cold sweat poured down Yu Hai's body. Why was this Fifth Lord meddling with his family's matters? In regards to Madam Zhang, he didn't feel any hate or rancor towards her, only a bit of resentment. After all, Madam Zhang had raised him and his older sister after his mother had passed away. He already understood Madam Zhang's personality; she was the perfect example of a tyrant at home but a coward outside. She was only a little brazen, that's all. Now that she was older, he was afraid that she wouldn't be able to tolerate being frightened.

Yu Hai hurriedly stood up and bowed, “Thank you Fifth Lord for your benevolence towards us! As the proverb says, ‘the son cannot criticize his parents’ actions’. After all, she’s the wife that my father had legally married, and she also raised me and my older sister. Thus...”

Chapter 154 – Vermicelli

“You, as a person...all other qualities are good, but you are foolishly filial! If you never set your boundaries, then be prepared to be taken advantage of!! Should you continue to go down this path, then I’m afraid that your wife and children will need to suffer more ah!” The emperor emeritus shook his head out of disappointment. To him, Yu Hai was like a piece of iron that refused to strengthen into steel.

Fang Zizhen had long understood the complex relationships within the Yu Family and looked at Yu Hai. He slightly frowned, “If my goddaughter gets mistreated, don’t blame me for not warning you! When that moment comes, I will take my daughter to the capital to live comfortably and make sure that you will never be able to see her again!!”

When Yu Hai heard this, the look on his face immediately changed. In regards to this fellow, who was constantly trying to steal his daughter, he already felt unhappy. For the past month or so, he felt like he was the stepfather in this relationship and Fang Zizhen was the true father. Whenever Fang Zizhen was around, he felt like he had to take a step back.

However, General Fang truly treated his daughter well. Clothes, jewelry, and other expensive articles for daily use were all moved into his daughter’s room as if they didn’t cost any money. His daughter’s east room had almost been stuffed to the brim. If it were not for Xiaocao making a fuss, Fang Zizhen would have given her even more.

Without someone to compare to, then there would be nothing showing his deficiencies. Now that there was a comparison, he, as the biological father, not only couldn’t give his daughter everything she needed but she also had to constantly deal with the avaricious and greedy Madam Li and Madam Zhang too!

Argh, as a father, he truly wasn’t a qualified and good one ah! However, with the pressure of filial piety above him, he didn’t want to cause any trouble for his children. If he had a bad reputation for being disobedient to his parents, that would mean his children would be subject to the gossip of others as well as create a bad reputation for his youngest son, who was studying in town...this was truly like being between a rock and a hard place!

Xiaocao stepped next to her worried father's side and secretly pulled at his callused and large hand. She comforted him, "Father, don't worry! I won't abandon our family and live in luxury by myself in the capital. If I want to go, then our whole family needs to go together! Father, trust me, I will definitely lead our family to live happy and prosperous lives together! We'll make those other people be envious!"

The rims of Yu Hai's eyes suddenly became red. Ah! He was so useless that he needed his barely nine year old daughter to comfort him. He lightly grasped his daughter's small and chubby hand. Ever since they separated from the main family, not only did his youngest daughter gain some weight but also the rest of the family members. Compared to their original stick skinny figures, they looked a lot healthier now!

"Ah! Such a good daughter ah!! Daughters are still more considerate and loving, no wonder everyone says that daughters are their parents' warm, little winter jackets!" Fang Zizhen's heart felt sour as he watched the father and daughter pair interact with each other. Why did the heavens not have eyes? Such a good daughter should have been born in his family. If he had such a sweet daughter, he would absolutely pamper her, give her the very best, and absolutely not allow anyone to bully her!

After they finished eating lunch, the emperor emeritus left with his group of guards and the court eunuch to visit the Zhao Family. Before he left, he said, "Tonight, I'm coming over to eat braised pig head meat and duck blood vermicelli soup!" That old fellow, Zhao Zimo, had fought with him several years in the past. Had the previous dynasty not had that imbecile on the throne, it wouldn't have been easy for him to seize the throne! Zhao Zimo's strategies and tactics were godly and he had long itched to exchange ideas with him!

Yu Xiaocao felt very helpless! Making bean vermicelli by hand was very complicated and difficult!! This emperor emeritus was seriously too much; he never let a person relax for even a second!

Because there had been outside visitors earlier, Madam Liu had stayed inside. She had just finished her meal when she came out and noticed the worried expression on her daughter's face. She asked out of worry, "The vermicelli that Fifth Lord kept mentioning, is it difficult to get the ingredients for it?"

"We already have all of the ingredients at home, but the process to make it is quite complicated!" Yu Xiaocao acted spoiled and held onto Madam Liu's arm as she softly inhaled her mother's warm smell.

Madam Liu stroked her daughter's lustrous and black hair. Her younger daughter's body was becoming healthier every day, and she hadn't even gotten a cold since they split from the family. Her previously dry, messy, and yellowing hair had also become glossy and dark after receiving more nutrition. As for

her face, it used to be wan and sallow but now there was plump flesh to be pinched. Madam Liu felt deep satisfaction within her heart! If she had known earlier that her children would all become like this, she would have fought harder for them despite the risk of being labeled 'unfilial'.

She rubbed at her younger daughter's rosy and tender face and softly said, "It doesn't matter, Mother will help you!"

"And there's also us!" Yu Hang and Xiaolian, who had just finished cleaning and putting away the plates and chopsticks, came in and grinned at the rare sight of their younger sister acting spoiled. It was only in times like this that their younger sister actually seemed like a nine year old child.

Many hands make light work! With her whole family there, Yu Xiaocao felt energy surge her body. She waved a fist in the air in excitement and loudly exclaimed, "Okay!! Let's work together then!!"

"Xiaolian, scrub the large pot on the stove until it's completely clean, then boil a whole potful of water in it!"

"Older Brother, go to the cellar and bring up a bag of sweet potato powder!"

"Mother, help me wash the large basin clean...then prepare a bolt of gauze for me!"

"Father, can you drill some evenly-spaced holes in the bottom of this wooden basin?"

Yu Xiaocao ordered everyone around in succession. Although they were all busy, everyone felt happiness bloom within their hearts. Having the whole family work together towards one goal, it really felt amazing!

Xiaocao instructed her brother to pour the sweet potato powder into the large basin and added water until it became viscous and sticky. After that, she used the gauze cloth to filter out any impurities. By the time she finished with that, the water on the stove had started boiling.

They poured the hot water into another pot and dumped the filtered sweet potato powder into it. A rolling pin that was as thick as a person's wrist was used to agitate the contents. Naturally, this job fell to

Yu Hai, who had already finished drilling holes into the small wooden basin. As he stirred, more filtered sweet potato powder was added.

The pot was then put on the stove at a low heat, and they had to use a lot of force to knead the sweet potato mixture. Kneading was exhausting work and required a lot of strength and endurance. Yu Hai naturally wouldn't let his wife and children do this type of work, so he followed his younger daughter's instructions and kneaded with a lot of effort.

After the kneading was done, Xiaocao had her mother stand next to the stove. Then, she grabbed the wooden basin with its newly drilled holes and poured the kneaded sweet potato powder into it. Madam Liu stood on a stool and pounded the wooden basin with a lot of force. The sweet potato mixture slowly went through the holes. Due to gravity, the strands of sweet potato dough became long and slender. When they fell into the boiling water, they immediately became cooked.

Xiaolian then took a long wooden dowel and stirred the pot full of vermicelli incessantly. At exactly the right time, Xiaocao used a sieve in her hand to fish out the cooked vermicelli. The scalding hot vermicelli was then put into a large vat full of cold water. The quality of the cold water directly influenced the taste of the vermicelli. Thus, the vat was not only filled with spring water from the mountains but also had a few drops of mystic-stone water mixed in.

Once the vermicelli cooled down, Yu Hang carefully fished it all up. At this time, the vermicelli was still a bit sticky and required Yu Hang to separate each strand by hand. This work was quite laborious and tiring.

Because pounding the sweet potato dough through the holes also required a lot of endurance, before long, Madam Liu's arms became very sore and she couldn't bring them up again. Yu Hai felt bad for his wife and hastily took over the task for her.

Madam Liu couldn't stay idle, so she went to take the cooled vermicelli and hang them from bamboo poles and lay them flat on wooden planks to dry. They couldn't let the vermicelli dry in the sun as that would ruin the final product. In addition, while they were drying in the air, they also needed to sprinkle water on top to prevent them from sticking to each other. Thus, not only did they have to sprinkle water on top but also continuously separate the strands by hand.

After repeating this process over several times, they could finally take the wooden planks away and set up the bamboo poles. The vermicelli could then hang from the poles and air dry. During the drying process, it required someone to flip the vermicelli over until they were completely dry.

With the whole family working on this, they were busy for a whole afternoon to make twenty or so catties of sweet potato vermicelli.

The reason why Xiaocao knew how to vermicelli was because in her previous life, there was a woman who married into her village who was from a family that knew how to make sweet potato vermicelli. For a time, the woman had made handmade vermicelli to sell in town. Xiaocao, as Lin Xiaowan in her previous life, had helped that woman make them, and thus that was how she became so familiar with the whole process.

Although this was the first time she had independently completed the process, the vermicelli all turned out okay. However, the finished product wasn't uniform in thickness. Making vermicelli was a process that required skill and practice. The more she made them, the better they would turn out!

Nevertheless, the work required to make vermicelli was quite tiring and exhausting. Especially Yu Hai's task—he had to hold up a rather heavy wooden basin and constantly pound it to let the sweet potato mixture come out. After all that work, his arms didn't feel like his own anymore. They were so sore that he couldn't raise them up again. Xiaocao used the multi-colored stone to massage his arms for a long time, and only then did they recover a bit.

As the night slowly crept over the sky, the emperor emeritus finally came back with Zhao Zimo's entire family. He walked in, immensely pleased. From the look of the expression on his face, it was obvious that his discussion that afternoon had been very fruitful. Many strategies and tactics of war had been lost throughout the years as they were transferred through generations. With the Zhao Family's arts explained to him, a lot of things he used to have trouble understanding suddenly became clear to him.

Although it had been a long time since they had last been on the battlefield, the emperor emeritus and Zhao Zimo were soldiers to their bones. While the two were discussing strategies with each other, they had some people retrieve some sand from the beaches to make a sandbox. Using the sandbox, the two dueling each other for an entire afternoon and didn't permit others to bother them. Both won and lost, and both gained a new understanding and enlightenment of the art of war. The two old men enjoyed themselves immensely.

Once they finished, the emperor emeritus especially invited Zhao Zimo and his family to Yu Xiaocao's home to try some delicacies. He even mysteriously hinted to Zhao Zimo, "Today, that little girl Xiaocao has created a whole new dish. I guarantee that you've never eaten it before. If you don't go, you'll never be able to eat it again when you return to the capital!"

It was easy for him to flap his lips and say that, as just a single sentence of his had caused the whole Yu Family to be busy for an entire afternoon. He had already started boasting, but wasn't even a bit afraid that Xiaocao wouldn't be able to figure it out!

Zhao Han sneered on the side and inwardly thought, 'With my family's good relationship with Xiaocao's family, how could I possibly not be able to eat it? Every time she makes something delicious, she always sends some to us.'

However, then he thought, 'Today, Grandfather received a position from court. Within a few days, he'll need to go to the capital and claim his post. Father has also been given a general of the fourth rank position, and it's rumored that the tribes in the northwest have not been very peaceful lately. Grandfather is getting old, so if Father wants to continue the Zhao's family traditions, then he absolutely cannot avoid going to the battlefield!' *freewebnovel.com*

At his age, his father had already fought on the battlefield with his grandfather. Zhao Han was certain that he would also be going to the border to gain experience. Every man had a dream that he wanted to pursue in his heart. As someone who had learned martial arts at a young age, he was no exception. One of his longtime dreams was to go on the battlefield to kill the enemies of his country, so he should be happy right now.

However, when the thought of not being able to try Xiaocao's foods for a long time in the future, as well as not being able to see her hit him...Zhao Han immediately became gloomy.

"Haha! Zhao Family youngster, how come you suddenly look so sad? Don't worry! Today, you'll all enjoy the reflected glory from me, Fifth Lord. All of us can be the first ones to try a new delicacy. Come, come! I can't wait anymore!!" The emperor emeritus took the lead and swiftly walked down the mountain road. He wasn't even afraid that he might twist his ankle!

#### Chapter 155 – Leaving Reluctantly

In the afternoon, Xiaocao had gone over to Madam Mao's to buy two ducks. She let the duck blood flow into a small basin and used the duck offal to braise along with the pig intestines.

At this moment, the braised food had just finished cooking and the whole courtyard was enveloped in its tantalizing smell. As the emperor emeritus entered the residence, he forcefully breathed in the air and an intoxicated expression appeared on his face. He muttered to himself, "This is the exact smell! The only braised pig head meat that tastes authentic is the one that this little girl makes!"

When he saw the vermicelli drying in the courtyard, he guffawed heartily, “I knew that the little lass would be able to make it happen! Isn’t that right?! Girl, little girl! Add a ‘pork stewed with vermicelli’ to the table!!”

Yu Xiaocao came out of the kitchen to see the fuss and greeted both the Zhao Family members and the emperor emeritus. She then rolled her eyes at the person who had added another request, “Fifth Lord, if you can conjure up some pork right now, then I will make you some pork stewed with vermicelli!”

“Look at you, you’re claiming you’re poor in front of this lord!! Last time I gave you quite a bit of money for that recipe, don’t tell me you can’t afford to eat pork then? Hey! You’re becoming more and more gutsy nowadays, little girl, ah. You even dare to roll your eyes at this lord, eh?” Although the emperor emeritus wasn’t young anymore, his eyes and ears were still quite sharp. He naturally didn’t miss Xiaocao rolling her eyes at him.

By now, Yu Xiaocao already had a good idea of what the emperor emeritus’s personality was like. If he truly wanted to punish her for her transgressions, then she already would have been punished a billion times by now. She daringly made a funny face at the emperor emeritus and grinned provokingly, “How so? You’re old, so you must have been seeing things—the duck blood and vermicelli soup will soon be done. Fifth Lord, please sit down for now.”

Fang Zizhen was stunned silly by his adopted daughter’s reckless conduct. She was being impudent to the highest authority in the land, the emperor emeritus, who was known for being brutal and callous when needed. In order to preserve his adopted daughter’s life, he hurriedly pleaded for leniency, “Fifth Lord, this little girl doesn’t know the consequences of her actions. She’s still a child, please don’t lower yourself to her level.”

The emperor emeritus imitated Xiaocao’s conduct and rolled his eyes at Fang Zizhen, “Do you really need to butt in? For the sake of the duck blood and vermicelli soup, I’ll forgive you this time—cut a portion of the braised pig head meat and pig ears for now, and mix in some garlic paste too!!”

Yu Xiaocao was so busy in the kitchen that she couldn’t do much else, so Xiaolian took out the braised pig head, pig ear strips with chili oil, pig intestines with scallions, spicy and numbing pig tripe, stir-fried pig liver, and five-spiced spicy duck to the guests. Every dish was piled high and there was even enough for the imperial guards to eat too. As for the court eunuch who brought the imperial decree, Zhang Quan, he had been ordered back to the capital by the emperor emeritus after lunch.



Originally, the amount of food that was prepared was quite abundant. However, both the emperor emeritus and Fang Zizhen had ultra-sized stomachs. In addition, there were four people from the Zhao Family there too, so it was a bit lacking. The two burners on the kitchen stove were both on high heat. One of them was stewing some duck soup and the other one was being used by Yu Xiaocao, who was brandishing a spatula, to saute a few vegetable dishes.

“Come in, come in, come in! Don’t be polite! Try some of the fruits of the little lass Xiaocao’s labor!!” The emperor emeritus had taken charge of this meal as he sat on a simple and crude wooden stool. His eyes stared at the table full of food. and he started wielding his chopsticks without regard for the others.

The Yu Family’s new dining table wasn’t very big, so it was a bit crowded from seating six large, brawny men. With the imposing emperor emeritus at the table, the rest of the people couldn’t fully express themselves. Luckily, the emperor emeritus didn’t have many airs and the way he ate increased other people’s appetites. When he was pleased from eating the food, he would even grab a chopstick bite of the dish for General Zhao Zimo to share. General Zhao felt quite overwhelmed by his favor.

With his mouth full of delectable pig head meat, crispy pig ears, and fatty intestines, the emperor emeritus felt like he had finally tasted the flavor he had been craving for. He really wanted to settle down at Dongshan Village as a longtime resident!

When he had eaten almost to his fill, the emperor emeritus looked at the vermicelli drying in the courtyard. He remarked with emotion in his voice, “I really miss the taste of pork stewed with vermicelli ah! It’s been on my mind for decades, and I’m not sure if I’ll ever be able to taste it again in this lifetime...”

General Zhao Zimo looked at the former chief of the volunteer army, who had once been vigorous and full of energy. Now, the man’s hair had turned completely white and there were a lot of wrinkles on his face. His back also wasn’t as straight and brawny as before. A sorrowful feeling settled in his heart and the thought of a ‘hero who is past his prime’ flickered through his mind. He quietly asked, “Is it difficult to make pork stewed with vermicelli? I know what pork is, but I’ve never heard of vermicelli. This official is ignorant and inexperienced, so this is the first time I’ve heard of that.”

“Look!” The emperor emeritus faced the bamboo poles that held the drying strips and pouted, “That is vermicelli. I didn’t expect that by just mentioning it, the little girl really figured out how to make them. Although I can tell that the thickness of the noodles are not very even, the taste should still be the same! Now that everything else is prepared, we only lack the pork ah! If we had some fatty streaky pork, that would be even better! Ah! Dongshan Village is still a bit too desolate, it doesn’t even have a place to buy meat from!”

Fang Zizhen was also quite interested in the 'pork stewed with vermicelli' that the emperor emeritus kept mentioning. He suddenly had an idea and smiled, "Fifth Lord, although there isn't a place to buy meat from in Dongshan Village, there are still people who raise pigs here ah! If you really want to eat some, we could buy a big, fat pig and then slaughter it..."

"Mingzhe!!" Zhao Zimo wasn't quite sure what to do with his occasionally unreliable apprentice. He really didn't know how this confused man managed to survive decades during the chaos of the start of the dynasty. The man didn't know how to keep his mouth shut and use his brain.

Fang Zizhen lowered his head sadly like a child who had said something wrong. He stealthily glanced at his master and then quickly looked down again.

Zhao Zimo glared at him fiercely. What kind of rotten idea did this dumb schmuck come up with? The current emperor promoted being frugal and economical and had a great reputation among the commoners. If they especially slaughtered a pig right now and the word came out, that would damage the imperial family's reputation! This stupid rascal, did he want to become a conniving favored official ah?

"Grandfather, we have a piece of pork cooling in the well in our back courtyard! However, it's not fatty, streaky pork and is a more balanced piece of leg meat!" Zhao Han's mother usually didn't leave the house often, so most of the family's goods were purchased by Zhao Han or his father. Thus, Zhao Han usually had a good idea of what ingredients they had at home.

The emperor emeritus slapped his hand down and laughed heartily, "Leg meat is also okay!! As long as it's pork, it's fine. Youngster Han, go get the pork now! Today, I'll finally be able to eat some pork stewed with vermicelli ah! Originally I was planning on staying an extra half day tomorrow in order to not leave with regrets!"

In the other room, the leader of the imperial guards heard the emperor emeritus's remark as he ate his meal. He felt his heart tremble. Before they left, the emperor had given an order he could not disobey on the pain of death. They had to bring the emperor emeritus safely back to the imperial palace within five days. A one-way trip to Dongshan Village already took two days, and they had already spent an entire day in the village today. Originally, the plan was to go back to the prefectural city tomorrow, rest half a day, and then go to the capital the day after.

If they delayed an additional day, then who knew if the emperor emeritus would have another brilliant idea on the way home and delay them further. Should the emperor emeritus be prompted by a sudden impulse to do something else—then his mission to bring him back within five days would be impossible to complete! Hearing what the emperor emeritus just said made him want to cry tears of despair! Fortunately, the Zhao Family had some pork. He had never been so ecstatic and happy over a piece of pork! *freewebnovel.com*

That evening, the emperor emeritus had finally satisfied his long-standing craving for good food. Not only did he get to taste duck blood and vermicelli soup, but he also got to eat some authentic pork stewed with vermicelli. Although he wished he had some wine to accompany him, he was still extremely content.

At night, the emperor emeritus stayed over at the Zhao Family's residence. The Zhao Family trembled with fear as they cautiously made preparations for the night. They were afraid that even the wind blowing over the grass might alarm the emperor emeritus. The imperial bodyguards were even more miserable. Because there weren't enough rooms available, they had to spend the night in the middle of the cold courtyard with blankets wrapped around their bodies to keep warm in the chilly spring night. Luckily, the night passed without any problems, and the Zhao Family and bodyguards were able to sigh in relief the next day.

The next day, before he left, the emperor emeritus especially went to the Yu Family, and bought all of the remaining vermicelli and the braised food they were planning to sell at the docks that morning! Once he got back to the capital, he certainly wouldn't have another chance to eat such authentic tasting braised food!

Aish, should he build a mansion residence on the West Mountain? When he returned, he planned on asking Chief Steward Liu if his budget had enough money for this. If not, maybe he should borrow some money from his numerous sons and grandsons to get this done?

Right at this moment, within the capital, the imperial and royal princes all sneezed a few times by chance! A cold chill ran through their bodies, 'This is a sign of bad luck coming their way ah!!'

The little royal prince, Zhu Junyang, who was far away drifting somewhere on the ocean, also let out a large sneeze. He rubbed his nose a couple of times and looked back towards the motherland. He thought, 'It must be Mother who's thinking of me. I've already been out at sea for almost half a year. It's quite boring and dull being out here in the distant seas. Luckily, this group of ships has already been improved. Not only are they much more sturdy, but they are also a lot faster than before!'

He was convinced, that before long, he would be able to smoothly head back home. If he was lucky, he could even accompany his father and mother to the Dragon Boat Festival! When he was by their side he never thought of it, but when he left, he really couldn't help but worry about them. Zhu Junyang was looking forward to the day he would get back!

After they saw off the esteemed honorable guest, the emperor emeritus, Yu Xiaocao didn't get to rest for a few days before it was time to say farewell to the Zhao Family.

In order to send them off properly, Yu Xiaocao prepared a grand table full of delectable delicacies. She even ordered some roasted chicken and osmanthus duck from Zhenxiu Restaurant and also got a jar of good wine from them.

That day was coincidentally the day that Little Shitou had his day off. The little boy sat at the table and looked at Zhao Han pitifully. He didn't want the older youth to leave, so he spoke with a voice choked with emotion, "Brother Han, can you not leave? I will miss you a lot!"

Before they had split from the main branch, he had lived a life where he starved day in and out. Zhao Han, who knew how to hunt, had become a ray of sunlight for him during those dark times. Brother Han had taken him and Second Sister deep into the forest to set traps, roast game in the valley, and catch fish in the creek to stew into soup...although his life now was much more pleasant and comfortable compared to before, those memories had become some of the best ones he could remember.

When they split from the family, Brother Han had also delivered some game to them from time to time in the beginning. It was his help that enabled them to survive that dangerous period of time. Later on, Second Sister used her talents and skills to send their family into prosperous times. However, within his heart, Brother Han was still a tall and lofty figure. For him, the ensemble of Brother Han and Second Sister had become a heavenly, perfect match.

If only...Brother Han didn't have to leave, wouldn't that be great?!

Zhao Han rubbed the little fellow's head. After studying in town for a few months, the little guy not only fleshed out but also grew quite a bit in height. In addition, he was also dressed in the robes of scholar, so it really made him seem like a promising young youth.

At this moment, Zhao Han's heart was also filled with regrets. Dongshan Village was the place where he was born and grew up in. Although life here was poor and honest, it was a peaceful life. This place held all of the sweet memories of his youth, and this place also held the people who he cared and worried about.

#### Chapter 156 – Sending Them Off

Zhao Han looked towards the direction of Yu Xiaocao for a second. Once he went to the capital, he wasn't sure when he would see her again. He believed he would always remember that thin and weak, yet simultaneously strong figure. Even in the pits of suffering, that little girl always had a sweet smile on her face, and she always managed to bring people hope as well as create many surprises...he didn't know whether he would be able to see her again in the future!

After they finished their meal, the old general, Zhao Zimo, left early to go back. Zhao Bufan and Yu Hai gazed at the moon together as they drank small sips of alcohol. Their eyes were hazy with drunkenness and they chatted incoherently amongst themselves. Auntie Zhao pulled Madam Liu into one of the rooms to discuss some private womanhood matters.

After Zhao Han and Yu Hang finished their conversation, he noticed Xiaocao busily putting away the bowls and chopsticks. At last, he couldn't help himself and advanced a step to say, "Xiaocao, do you have time to talk for a bit?"

Xiaolian noticed the complicated look in Zhao Han's eyes and grinned, "Little sister, go ahead! I'll finish up here myself!"

Yu Xiaocao washed her hands clean, used a cotton towel to wipe them dry, and then headed towards Zhao Han.

"Tomorrow, I'll be leaving here. Can you go on a walk with me?" Zhao Han lowered his head and looked at the delicate little girl in front of him who only reached the height of his chest. His voice was soft and gentle, as if he was afraid he might startle her.

Yu Xiaocao nodded and took the lead, walking towards the gate.

The cool and refreshing evening breeze blew merrily through the trees. The newly grown foliage rustled gently in the wind. At night, the West Mountain seemed to be a giant, black monster, and it towered

over the edge of Dongshan Village. At times, it also seemed like the village's protector, with its head lowered watching a small child...

Two figures could be seen in the gloomy light of the stars, one tall and one short, one sturdy and one weak. They slowly strolled along the rugged dirt road. Zhao Han lowered his head to look silently at the quiet Xiaocao. He ended up being the first to break the silence, "I'm about to go, do you have anything you want to say to me?"

At this moment, Yu Xiaocao's heart was full of sorrow and reluctance. It could be said that Zhao Han was one of the first friends she had since she transmigrated over to this world. It was he who taught her how to set traps and helped her acquire her first bit of wealth. It was he who protected her and her younger brother from the strong bully, Heizi, and became their patron saint. It was he who trusted and pardoned her despite her many odd actions and idiosyncrasies, and who never doubted or questioned her!

Having a friend who supported her unconditionally, it was unlikely she would find another one in the future, right? All sorts of feelings welled up in her heart and out of all of the thousands of words in the world, only one came to mind at this moment, and that was 'precious'.

As Zhao Han gazed at that tiny, pale, little, smiling face, that was raised up towards him and had two bright, large eyes full of regret, he had a sudden, reckless impulse to hug Xiaocao and carry her away.

However, reason prevailed in the end and prevented him from taking that crazy action. Zhao Han said with a bit of hope in his voice, "Xiaocao, come with us to the capital! Over there, you can fully use your talents and start a new career. Haven't you always held Jiang Siniang's Exquisite Garments as an example of women showing their talents?"

Yu Xiaocao's large, limpid eyes seemed to speak stories to him as they looked at him. In them, he could see his eager and earnest reflection within her pupils. However, in the end, Xiaocao slowly shook her head. Then again, what sort of qualifications did he have to ask her to go with him?

Yu Xiaocao had managed to sense Zhao Han's feelings of loss of disappointment. She softly pulled on his sleeve and said, "Brother Han, I know you don't want to be apart from me, Shitou, and the rest of us. We also don't want to see you go. However, in the capital, you and Uncle Zhao, and the rest of your family can become who you are all truly meant to be and achieve your dreams and aspirations. We can only silently support and bless you here."

She paused for a second as she turned her head around to look at the dark shadows of Dongshan Village. A light sigh came out of her before she continued, "I am not the same as you! My godfather had previously tried to persuade me to go to the capital and accompany my godmother. He said he wanted to give me a good life there. However, Dongshan Village is my home, my parents, brothers and sister are all here. I can't give them up and live a luxurious life on my own. If there's a day that I leave Dongshan Village, it will have to be by my own skills and achievements, so I can bring the entire family over. That way, we can all enjoy a comfortable life together. Do you understand what I'm trying to say?"

Zhao Han's mother was a nobly born miss from a wealthy family in the previous dynasty. From childhood, she had been instructed in the three injunctions and four virtues. Thus, Zhao Han had always seen women as weak, delicate, sweet-tempered people who relied on their husbands completely. In front of Xiaocao, who constantly strove for improvement, he suddenly realized that women, too, could be independent and strong. They could also, for the sake of their families, work to support the sky as well...

Under the dim starlight, Yu Xiaocao's confident little face seemed to emit a slight fluorescence. It illuminated the dark mountain forests and also lit a light that couldn't be extinguished within Zhao Han's heart.

"Okay! I respect your decision! Then I hope, in the not-so-far future, that we will meet again in the capital. I still believe, that in the capital, you will be able to develop much more rapidly!" Zhao Han drew back his gaze and buried the disappointment he felt deep within his heart. He didn't know when they would be able to meet again.

Yu Xiaocao revealed a brilliant smile that seemed to be brighter than the full moon. The sound of her voice seemed to echo endlessly within the forest thickets, "We absolutely will! Let's clap our hands together and make an oath: meet again at the capital!"

A sturdy and stiff palm crisply hit against a fair and soft palm, causing a sharp and clear sound to appear. That noise seemed extremely loud within the night and startled a bunch of birds that were resting in nearby shrubbery.

The news that the Zhao Family had become an important general's family and was going to the capital to take post had long traveled throughout Dongshan Village. When they left, Fang Zizhen summoned a squadron of men and horses to take them. There were even six horse carts that came over. In order to show how much he esteemed the Zhao Family, the emperor had granted them a mansion with lands. Other than some precious and personal items, they didn't need to bring much with them. However, this ostentatious display was the subject of many conversations for the Dongshan Villagers for a long time.

On the day the Zhao Family left, the whole village came out to see them off. The village chief, who represented Dongshan Village, stammered as he expressed his thoughts and sincerity. Those who had dealings with the Zhao Family also came up to say a few words and give them a few local specialties in hope that they wouldn't disdain these gifts.

What a joke! The Zhao Family was now a hot commodity in the emperor's eyes and highly ranked to boot. If they could have some relation with a high-ranking official, even if it was merely saying a few words, then in the future they could still brag for a long time. Those who didn't have much contact with the Zhao Family or perhaps had a few problems, could only timidly stand at the side, watching the rest enviously.

As for the Yu Family, who were the ones closest to the Zhao's, they were merely helping them put away their luggage on the carts. The thoughts they wanted to say were already said the previous night.

Madam Li watched with envy as Madam Liu helped the Zhao Family's daughter-in-law to carry a suitcase. She slowly came up to try to exploit an opportunity, "Second Sister-in-law, the suitcase is probably very heavy. Let me help you..."

"No need, there's not much in the suitcase. I'll carry it myself!" Zhao Bufan's wife didn't have a good impression of Madam Li. However, for the sake of Madam Liu's face, she didn't treat the other woman rudely and only politely refused her helping hand.

Madam Li pulled back her hands in embarrassment and continued to try to worm her way into the Zhao Family's good graces, "Zhao Family's daughter-in-law, in the future you can live comfortably in a large house in the capital. You'll probably even have servant girls and senior servants to help around. Tsk tsk, feels like you've fallen into a honey pot. I've long said that you had a face full of good fortune!"

"Thank you for your kind words." The other woman replied neutrally. She then turned and pulled on Madam Liu's hand and repeatedly reminded her that, if she had the opportunity to go to the capital, she needed to remember to visit them too.

Madam Liu held back her tears as she nodded. Although she didn't believe that she would ever have the chance to go to the capital in this lifetime, she still gently promised the other woman. Madam Li watched the two women, who seemed as close as two sisters, with pure envy and jealousy. Her eyes flickered around, as if she was suddenly plotting something.



Under the earnest stares of their fellow villagers, the Zhao Family finally set out on their journey. Their house by the mountains was sturdily built and, before they left, they gave it to Yu Hai and his family, which made many villagers feel envious and jealous.

Fang Zizhen took a squadron of men and horses with him to personally escort the Zhao's. He sat steadily on a high horse and looked into the crowd for that familiar little girl. He suddenly hollered out in a loud voice, "Daughter! How about you take this opportunity to come with godfather to the capital and see your godmother? Your godmother has long wished to meet you in person..."

This one shout made Yu Xiaocao and the rest of the Yu Family immediately become subject to the stares of everyone else around them.

The fact that General Fang Zizhen was here as an imperial envoy and was in charge of supervising the construction of the port was news that had long spread throughout Dongshan Village. For the past month or so, this lord imperial envoy frequently appeared at Dongshan Village. General Fang was General Zhao's disciple, so it wasn't surprising that he came over frequently. However, this high-ranking imperial envoy seemed to go to the Yu Family's Residence even more often, and it caused many in the village to not understand the situation. In fact, he had even tactfully declined several invitations from the village chief to visit his home! So just what did this Yu Family have that made Official Fang treat them with such importance?

Other than the Zhao Family and the few who had a good relationship with the Yu Family, no one else knew that Fang Zizhen had taken Xiaocao as his adopted daughter. In addition, the few outsiders who were aware also weren't chatterboxes and knew how to hold their tongues. Without the Yu Family's permission, they absolutely would not broadcast this information. Thus, the true relationship between Fang Zizhen and the Yu Family was not known at Dongshan Village for a whole month.

The fact that he shouted wasn't important, but it caused all of the villagers to look at the Yu Family with complicated feelings within their hearts. Ever since Yu Hai split from the main family, it seemed like everything was going his way. Not only did his leg, which the doctor had previously recommended amputation for, recover fully, but his life seemed to get better and better with each passing day.

First, they came out with the one copper coin per portion of braised food that was extremely popular at the docks. It was rumored that now their income from selling food was around one hundred copper coins a day. Furthermore, they could now produce vegetables a whole month earlier than other people as well as become the sole provider of Zhenxiu Restaurant. Yet, previously, no one knew that Yu Hai was

an expert in farming and planting. The income just from selling vegetables was also not a small sum. They also heard that the master of Zhenxiu Restaurant also had a good relationship with the Yu Family!

Now, it seemed as if Yu Hai had obtained eight generations worth of fortune from his previous life as his youngest daughter had somehow caught the lord imperial envoy's eyes and was now his adopted daughter. This was such a large fortune ah!

The youngest daughter of the Yu Family had almost lost her life several times in her childhood due to illness, but no one expected that after calamity would come good fortune. Now, her body was healthy, she also had the talent with cooking braised food, and she had been taken as an adopted daughter by an official...the villagers all looked at her with fiery excitement in their eyes. Those who had male descendants around Xiaocao's age all started to make plans in their mind.

Yu Xiaocao endured the pressure of everyone's stares and pouted at her godfather, "Godfather, I won't go with you this time. Please help take good care of godmother in my stead!"

Fang Zizhen had long predicted she would reply this way and grinned craftily at her. He was afraid that, when he left, his goddaughter might get bullied by others, so he did this to give her some support.

#### Chapter 157 – Sandworm

Early in the morning, a large red sun rose from the sea to the sky. The sea breeze gently blew on the waves, which softly beat against the golden beach. At this time, the tide had receded, so the hard-working villagers of the fishing village had brought along their tools to search for seafood by the sea with their friends and family.

In the spring, the sea water felt cool and refreshing as it brushed against the fishermen's bare feet. The selfless sea had nurtured generations after generations of fishermen. At this time, there were countless gifts from the sea on the shore, waiting to be excavated by the fishermen like treasures.

"Xiaocao—Xiaocao—" Zhou Shanhu's clear voice had crossed over the high wall and traveled into the Yu Family's courtyard. The little girl's slender figure quickly appeared at the entrance of the yard. Xiaocao and Xiaolian, who were busily working in the vegetable garden, looked at her at the same time.

Zhou Shanhu was slightly stunned as she looked at the two identical faces. She blinked her big eyes and laughed awkwardly and said, "Xiaolian is also at home ah! That's even better!! I have good news for you guys!"

Xiaolian pursed her lips and asked, "What's the good news that made you so happy? Did your mother also arrange a good marriage for you?"

Zhou Shanhu's older sister Zhou Linglong had just gotten engaged last month. Her fiancé was the son of a general store owner. This general store owner also started out as a street peddler like Linglong's father. He was a clever man, so he had quickly saved up a fortune and rented a shop in town to sell general goods.

The general store owner had a good relationship with Zhou Linglong's father, so the two families had a close relationship. Right now, most of the goods sold by the Zhou Family were supplied by the general store. There was a son in that family who was around the same age as Zhou Linglong, and they had also met before when they were younger. He was a good-looking young man. It was almost a matter of course for the two families to become in-laws. Zhou Linglong was now embroidering her dowry at home and waiting to get married. Zhou Shanhu wasn't someone who could stay idle, so she often came over to the Yu Residence to bother Xiaocao. Well, who knew what trifling matter she was going to exaggerate about now.

Zhou Shanhu was a year older than Xiaocao and her sister. The ten year old girl already knew when to feel embarrassed. She glared at Xiaolian with a flushed face and said, "Xiaocao, you're always bullying me! I'm going to tell Auntie Yu!"

Xiaocao, who was bending over to gather vegetables, felt like she had been shot while lying down. She pursed her lips and said, "I say, Shanhu ah, before you go complain, shouldn't you make sure who the other party is? I haven't said a single word since you came in. How did I bully you?"

Madam Liu, who had put the vegetables into the basket, smiled warmly as she looked at the three flower-like young girls. She felt that, no matter how much she looked at them, they were pleasing to the eyes.

When Zhou Shanhu heard that, she realized that she had mixed up the two sisters again. She smiled embarrassingly and said, "Aiya! You guys look too similar, so I made a mistake again! Xiaolian, when did you learn to speak so recklessly?"

'Okay! So what she means is that I usually speak with a filter ah!' Xiaocao immediately retaliated, "Xiaolian and I are twins, but we're not exactly the same. Your older sister has never mistaken us before! It seems like you have a worrisome IQ ah!"

"IQ? What is an IQ?" Zhou Shanhu widened her eyes and asked with a foolish expression.

Xiaocao picked off a lettuce, gently shook off the soil, and said with peeved expression, "You won't understand even if I told you! Anyways, you don't have that thing, so what's the point in asking about it?"

Xiaolian was laughing her head off beside them. Zhou Shanhu finally realized that Xiaocao must have said something bad about her. She puffed up her cheeks and said, "Xiaocao is always bullying people. Xiaolian, tell me, what exactly is an IQ ah?"

Xiaolian pointed at her own head and laughed, "Think about it yourself!"

Zhou Shanhu wrinkled her brows and thought hard about it. Then she suddenly revealed an angry and embarrassed expression and shouted, "Ok, Yu Xiaocao, you actually said that I'm brainless! I'm not stupid! I'm really smart!!"

Madam Liu watched as the girls made a racket. Though it was very lively, she was afraid that her daughter would actually anger Shanhu. So, she hastily said, "Xiaocao! You're not allowed to bully Shanhu anymore, do you hear me? Shanhu ah, didn't you say that you have some good news to tell us?"

Zhou Shanhu smacked her own forehead and shouted, "Aiya! I almost forgot about proper business! Xiaocao, Doctor Sun of Tongren Medicine Hall came to our village in person and said that he wanted to collect spoon worms for a high price!"

With a face full of doubts, Xiaolian asked, "Collect spoon worms? What does he need that for? Is spoon worm also a type of medicinal herb?"

Xiaocao had studied many books on medicine with Doctor You, so she immediately said, "Spoon worm is also known as sandworm. It is cold in nature, and has a sweet and salty taste. It has the effect of nourishing the yin, decreasing internal heat, and clearing the lungs and restoring deficiency. According

to the medical books, sandworms are the most suitable food for symptoms such as hectic fever, night sweat due to yin deficiency, asthmatic cough, tightness in chest, phlegm, postpartum lactation insufficiency for women, and so on. For symptoms such as tuberculosis cough, neurasthenia, spleen deficiency or dryness in children, it is an effective treatment to drink soup brewed with sandworm, ginger slices, and lean meat. Sandworm can nourish the yin and kidney, so the consumption of sandworm congee will have good therapeutic effect for children with kidney deficiency and people who suffer from frequent nocturnal urination..."

"Aiya! So spoon worms are actually so useful. It's no wonder Tongren Medicine Hall offered to buy them for one hundred copper coins per catty! Xiaocao, Xiaolian, let's quickly go! Otherwise, all the good spots on the beach will be taken!" Before Zhou Shanhu had even finished speaking, she already ran home to get her tools like a gust of wind.

Xiaolian pouted and didn't seem very optimistic, "It's not that easy to find spoon worms. They're all hiding in the sand, and as soon as there's any movement, they would swiftly hide in an even deeper place. Even after digging for a long time, we still might not necessarily be able to find even one of them!"

Madam Liu looked at her pair of daughters with a smile and said, "Go and take a look with Shanhu! Just think of it as getting some fresh air."

Her two daughters, one usually stayed at home to tend the vegetable gardens and watermelon fields, while the other one was always selling braised food at the docks. They seldom had the chance to interact and play with their peers. Madam Liu felt pleased, yet her heart also ached, to have two sensible daughters. Fortunately, her husband's leg had recovered now, and her eldest son had also recuperated from his injuries. Their family wasn't like before when they wished that each person could split in half and work like two people. It was time for her daughters to relax and make some friends.

Yu Xiaocao was quite interested in the sandworms. She knew that, in addition to its medicinal value, sandworm also had high nutritional value. If they were cooked well, they would definitely taste very good. Although sandworms weren't as valuable as sea cucumbers, shark fins, and abalones, they tasted delicious and tender. They weren't inferior to sea cucumbers and shark fins.

She enthusiastically took the little spade from her father, picked up a little bucket, and called Xiaolian to go to the seaside with her. Xiaolian decided to accompany her upon seeing her younger sister's rare sense of excitement.

Zhou Shanhu had been waiting with a basket near her house. Her older brother, Zhou Shaohua [1] who was usually out selling goods and rarely home, was standing beside her. Zhou Shaohua was around the same age as Qian Wen and Third Young Master Zhou. It might be due to him following his father around throughout the year, but his skin was slightly tanner than the other two. Also, with the Zhou Family's more prominent facial features, he looked a little older than his actual age and had a slight feeling of a young man. But of course, he was still slightly lacking when compared to Zhao Han!

Ay! It had been over ten days since Brother Han returned to the capital. She really did somewhat miss the days when he was around!

"Quickly, quickly! If Tongren Medicine Hall collected enough, then all our efforts will be in vain!" Zhou Shanhu had a slightly eccentric personality. She talked in a noisy and bustling manner, like a little sparrow.

Under the little girl Shanhu's urging, the four people quickly reached the seaside. There were many busy figures on the beach along the coast.

"Aiya! It's so cold!!" Zhou Shanhu frowned and complained. She was wearing straw sandals, so her feet quickly got wet from the seawater.

Xiaocao was wearing the deerskin boots that she asked Third Young Master Zhou to get for her. The boots were well-made and completely waterproof. However, the deerskin boots being soaked in the seawater was seriously a little distressing. Xiaolian wore boots made of shark skin, which were also quite water resistant.

Zhou Shanhu looked at the sisters enviously and whispered to her older brother, "It would be great if our father can also catch a shark and make a pair of boots for me!"

Zhou Shaohua chuckled and said, "Stop dreaming! There are less people over there. Let's go there!"

Yu Xiaocao had never dug for sandworms before, so she took a shovel and randomly dug in the sand. Xiaolian didn't know whether she should laugh or cry as she stopped her, "There's a trick in digging for spoon worms. You can't dig so recklessly. When looking for spoon worm, you need to find the small holes caused by the worms first. Look, those tufts on the beach are the holes made by the spoon worms. When digging, walk lightly and dig fast. Otherwise, the spoon worms will swiftly hide even deeper at the

slightest movement. Also, don't dig straight down. You should dig at a large angle from the surface of the beach."

Xiaocao picked up the shovel and worked hard to dig into the worm hole. She had to dig very deep before she managed to dig out a plump sandworm. The sandworm had a slippery body, like a fatter version of an earthworm, and looked quite creepy.

"We were too loud earlier, so this spoon worm hid very deeply. Let's spread out. Be careful when digging!" Xiaolian put the sandworm into Xiaocao's little bucket, picked up another basket, and walked towards another direction.

Xiaocao continued to walk along the seaside, and soon found another hole in the sand. She put down her bucket and dug hard. After dug a very deep hole, she prone on the beach with her face against the sand and stretched her hand to search inside the deep hole. Her body and face were covered in sand when she finally caught the sandworm that was trying to slip deeper into the sand.

'So hungry! If only the sandworms could come out by themselves... Wait! Don't I have a cheat—the little divine stone—in my hands?'

[Humph! You're giving me such a low-level task again! It's such an insult to my dignity as a god!!] A golden light shone from the multicolored stone on Xiaocao's wrist, and it slowly transformed into a cute miniature kitten. It held its head high as it paced on the beach in a haughty manner.

Xiaocao touched its head with her sand-covered hands, but her hand was slapped away in disgust. Its golden pupils were widened as it screamed, [So dirty! You actually touched my holy and pure fur with such dirty hands. You're seriously looking down on this Divine Stone!!]

"Dirty? Mhm, it is a little dirty. Wouldn't it be clean after taking a bath?" Yu Xiaocao grinned mischievously. While the little golden cat wasn't paying attention, she picked it up by the back of its neck and threw it into the sea.

[Yu! Xiao! Cao!! This Divine Stone will make you regret what you did to me today!!] The little golden kitten couldn't use its power in front of so many people, so it flew in a parabola and fell into the sea.

Chapter 158 – Cheat

Zhou Shanhu, who was nearby, was slightly worried as she watched the little fellow fall into the water. She asked in a low voice, "Xiaocao, can your kitten swim? It won't drown, right?"

"It won't, it won't! Little Glutinous Dumpling loves to swim! Don't worry!!" Yu Xiaocao saw the little golden kitten paddling with its little paws and had almost reached the shore, so she went to look for sandworms without worry.

The little golden kitten's entire body was wet when it got ashore, and appeared to be in a very embarrassing state. The little divine stone snorted as it approached Yu Xiaocao, who was currently lying on the beach and digging for sandworms in the sand. It shook its body vigorously and shook the seawater onto Xiaocao's face. Then, it raised its head and walked away briskly. While no one was paying attention to it, it secretly used its power to dry its hair.

Xiaocao deliberately moved farther away from the crowd. She found an area with more wormholes, and then used the spade to dig a square pit that was half a meter big. After that, she submerged the multicolored stone on her wrist into the seawater inside the sandpit.

The little golden kitten, who ran out of nowhere, saw its true form being soaked in the muddy seawater. It walked around her anxiously and said, [This seawater is too dirty! This Divine Stone likes to bathe, but you can't use fishy and dirty seawater ah!] f(r)eewebnovel.com

Yu Xiaocao squatted beside the sandpit and watched a sandworm come out of the sand on its own initiative and slowly approached the multicolored stone. She replied nonchalantly, "What else could I do? I want to use your spiritual energy to attract the sandworms. If you don't want to soak in it, then give me a better method?"

The little divine stone angrily threw a tantrum at her, and then helplessly said, [Take my body out. I can release my spiritual energy at will now!]

"Oh! Your power advanced again? Congratulations!!" Yu Xiaocao sincerely congratulated it because she knew that she would be the one who benefitted the most from the improvement of the little divine stone's power.



The little divine stone watched her take its body out of the sandpit, and then it supervised her to wipe clean the multicolored stone. After she put it back on her wrist, it lazily stretched out its little paw and emitted a little bit of golden light into the sandpit.

“So little? Will it work?” Beside it, Xiaocao expressed her doubts.

The little divine stone rolled its eyes at her and said, “It’s enough! If I released anymore, these ugly bugs will explode from the overconsumption of spiritual energy!”

As they spoke, all the sandworms in the sandpit rushed out one after another. Xiaocao happily picked them up one by one and put them in the bucket. After she picked up all the sandworms, the little divine stone waved its paw again and retrieved the remaining energy, lest it attracted other marine creatures.

The little divine stone could now control and freely retrieve the spiritual energy it produced. For example, it had filtered and screened the mystic-stone water used to water the Yu Family’s watermelon fields so that it would only be useful for plants. If they used the mystic-stone water that could attract game like before, the watermelon fields would definitely be completely devoured!

Yu Xiaocao chose another place and dug an even bigger sandpit. Although it was bigger, it wasn’t very deep. She was able to dig the sandpit with ease even with her small body. During this time, Xiaolian had come over to take a look. She thought that her younger sister had given up digging for sandworms and was digging the sand for fun. But Xiaolian didn’t force her younger sister to keep working. Tongren Medicine Hall offered a high price, but with the Yu Family’s current income, it wasn’t really that attractive to her.

When Xiaocao finished digging, the little golden kitten came to the pit and waved its paw while also complaining, [That damned seawater made my paws wet. It feels so uncomfortable. How can you be a master like this? Can’t you just put me in your pocket?]

Yu Xiaocao sewed a pocket inside her jacket, which was originally made for her to put her valuables when going out. Thus, it was more than enough to carry a miniature cat.

The tide had just receded at the beach, so it was still wet. There were also small puddles at some low-lying areas. The little golden kitten was super miniature in size and wasn’t even as big as her palm. It was really quite hard for it to walk on such a wet beach with its short legs.

Yu Xiaocao picked up the kitten mercifully, let it dry its wet paws, and then stuffed its tiny body into her jacket. The little golden kitten held onto her collar with its claws, revealing a glittering little head.

Sandworms crawled out one by one and wiggled their fat bodies into the sandpit. Xiaocao counted the sandworms. There were over ten plump sandworms in this sandpit. After washing the sand off the sandworms with seawater, it still looked rather disgusting to see all the fleshy worms gathered together. But when she thought of their value, she could endure it.

Two hours swiftly passed just like this. Zhou Shanhu waved her hands at her and shouted in the distance, "Xiaocao, Doctor Sun has started to purchase the spoon worms. Come here quickly!" As she shouted, she ran towards a direction along the shore. She needed to occupy a good position, lest Tongren Medicine Hall collected enough and they ended up working in vain.

Xiaocao carried her heavy bucket, so she definitely couldn't walk very fast. Xiaolian had already quickly arrived at that place, but when she saw her younger sister's slow and struggling appearance, she ran back to help her.

She had originally thought that with Xiaocao's speed of playing while working, she surely wouldn't get much harvest. But she hadn't expected that when she took Xiaocao's bucket, she almost couldn't carry it due to its weight. There was a lid on Xiaocao's wooden bucket. She couldn't see the contents inside, so she assumed, "Younger Sister, sandworms aren't fish. They won't die quickly after leaving the sea. Putting so much water in the bucket makes it really heavy ah! Let me help you pour some out."

As she spoke, she leaned the wooden bucket to one side and took the lid off with her other hand.

"Don't..." Yu Xiaocao didn't expect her to move so quickly. When she tried to stop her, some of the sandworms in the bucket had already slid out of the bucket and landed on the beach. She quickly squatted down and picked up the sandworms that had fallen on the sand and put them back into the bucket.

Xiaolian was obviously stunned. She looked at the sandworms crowding in the bucket. There was actually more than half a bucket! She roughly weighed it with her hands and realized that there were at least twenty or thirty catties. No wonder her younger sister was struggling with the bucket.

Earlier, she had been paying attention to her little sister, but she didn't see her digging seriously. How did she dig out so many spoon worms in such a short period of time? It was obviously her younger sister's first time digging for spoon worms when she first started! Was this the so-called 'just like being helped by the gods'?

Xiaolian remembered that her younger sister's abilities had always exceeded all expectations after they separated from the main family, so she stopped thinking about how she was able to catch so many sandworms. She didn't want to let her younger sister hold something so heavy, so she said, "Younger Sister, you run faster and wait in line. I'll carry these sandworms!"

Since someone was willing to help her carry it, Xiaocao was naturally very happy to comply. With her thin arms and legs, she had never really done any heavy labor since she was reborn. Xiaocao swiftly ran at full speed towards the long queue.

Zhou Shanhu, who stood closer to the front of the line, saw Xiaocao running over while panting, so she waved her hands and said, "Xiaocao, come quickly! I told my older brother to save a spot for you!! Why are you and Xiaolian so slow ah?!"

Yu Xiaocao looked at Zhou Shaohua, who gave up his position, and then looked at the long line behind him. She felt that it seemed somewhat unethical to cut in line. In the midst of her hesitation, Zhou Shaohua pulled her arm and led her into the line. He whispered, "I gave this spot to you, so it doesn't count as cutting in line."

Yu Xiaocao gave the person behind her a slightly apologetic smile and noticed that it was an acquaintance—Auntie Shuanzhu. In fact, most of the people lining up to sell sandworms were the fishermen of Dongshan Village. As fellow villagers, even if Zhou Shaohua didn't give her his spot, they could still forgive a little girl for cutting in line.

There were around ten catties of sandworms, which were cleaned very well, in the basket that Shuanzhu's wife carried. She looked at the kitten's little head in front of Xiaocao's chest and laughed, "Oh! Xiaocao, this little kitten that you're raising looks very spirited and has a very bright color. Xiaocao, you're standing in line, but where are the sandworms that you dug out?"

Xiaocao smiled bashfully and said, "Xiaolian is carrying it! She's over there and will come over soon! Auntie, you got a good harvest today. You can probably sell them for one or two taels!"

Shuanzhu's wife beamed with delight and said, "That's right! Your Uncle Shuanzhu went out to the sea, so I was idle at home. I heard that someone was buying sandworms, so I came out to earn some money. I didn't expect myself to be so lucky!"

It wasn't the first time Tongren Medicine Hall collected sandworms. Doctor Sun came with quite a few workers and had even brought three or four scales over. Each person's harvest was weighed one by one and there was a person responsible for bookkeeping and paying, so their working speed was quite fast. By the time Xiaolian arrived, there weren't that many people in front of her.

When it was Zhou Shanhu's turn, the little girl and her older brother dug out a total of twelve catties of sandworms and earned one tael and two mace. Zhou Shanhu held the silver bits happily and smiled like a blossomed flower.

When it was Xiaocao and her sister's turn, the smile in Doctor Sun's eyes deepened. He had a very deep impression of the Yu Family. He had been a doctor for decades and there were very few instances in which he had misdiagnosed and made the wrong judgement. But it was different for the Yu Family.

Yu Xiaocao was born with a weak constitution. Even if she was nourished with medication, it would still be difficult for her to live beyond the age of ten. However, this little girl, who was already nine, was not only alive and kicking, but after diagnosis, all her previous symptoms had disappeared.

Half of Yu Hai's body had been severely bitten by a bear. Other people would have died a long time ago, let alone keep that fleshless leg. Yet, he not only recovered well, but he could also walk with ease now.

Yu Hang, who worked as an apprentice, was beaten until he had internal bleeding, and even several of his sternal ribs were broken. For cases of internal bleeding like this, ninety percent of them ended up being hard to save. However, with Yu Hang's body constitution, his bleeding was quickly stopped, and his bones also recovered very quickly. It usually took a hundred days to recover from serious injuries. But Yu Hang was able to follow his father to the town market in less than two months. After taking his pulse, he noticed that not only had his bones recovered, but Yu Hang's body had also gotten stronger.

He was seriously perplexed by all these cases! Could it be that the Yu Family's physique was different from that of ordinary people? But there didn't seem to be anything different from their pulse ah!

With this thought, Doctor Sun took the initiative to greet her, "Little girl, how's your harvest today?"

“Hello, Doctor Sun!” Whether it was in her past life or this life, it was necessary to have a good relationship with doctors. Yu Xiaocao greeted him politely and said, “Should be pretty good! Will your pharmacy be able to use so many sandworms?”

Sandworms? Worms in the sand! This little lass was really out of the ordinary. Actually, this name was quite vivid.

Chapter 159 – Intimidated

Doctor Sun smiled and said, “After the spoon worms are cleaned and dried, it won’t be very heavy. Tongren Medicine Hall has branches in the capital, prefectural city, and several cities in the south, so there’s a high demand for them.”

Xiaolian gave the five to six catties of sandworms that she dug out to the staff in charge of weighing, and then carried Xiaocao’s bucket to the front. Xiaocao was afraid that she would sell everything, so she hastily stopped her, “Xiaolian, save some for me. I’ll make a sandworm feast for lunch!”

“What? Sandworms can also be made into food? It looks so disgusting. Who would dare to eat it ah?!” Zhou Shanhu, who had already received her payment, came over and wrinkled her nose as she looked at the soft, fleshy sandworms with disgust. She pursed her lips and said.

Yu Xiaocao smiled at her mysteriously and whispered, “If you haven’t tried it, you won’t know. But once you eat it, you won’t be able to forget it. Let me tell you, sandworms are not only delicious, but they are also nutritious. They aren’t inferior to sea cucumbers and abalones.”

Doctor Sun asked with interest, “Oh? Do you know how to prepare these sandworms?”

“You can make soup with it. It can also be steamed, stewed, and stir-fried. Of course, it can also be eaten raw with a sauce!” Yu Xiaocao had a confident smile on her face as she talked about it.

Zhou Shanhu had an even more disgusted expression on her face, “How can it be eaten raw?! Who can even eat that?”

“Like eating raw fish fillet, you just need to dip it in sauce. Wouldn’t it be fine if you don’t think about what it looks like when you’re eating?” Yu Xiaocao pinched her wrinkled up face and laughed.

Doctor Sun stroked his beard and smiled faintly, "Although raw fish fillet is a dish hand-picked by the current emperor, it's not a dish that most people can get used to. We're still used to cooked food."

"That's right, that's right! Raw fish fillet doesn't taste good!" Zhou Shanhu nodded in agreement.

Xiaolian had also heard that villagers used to eat spoon worms to fill their hunger during the years of famine. When there was food to eat, no one would actually eat it. However, Xiaolian was still rather confident in her younger sister's culinary skills. She turned her head and asked, "Younger Sister, how much do you want to keep for cooking?"

"Keep half of it!" Ten catties only cost one tael, which wasn't much to the current Yu Family.

But Zhou Shanhu got anxious. She stomped her feet and said, "Why are you keeping so much? You can't keep sandworms for a long time. If you don't finish them and it goes bad, wouldn't that be too wasteful? I think you should just keep two to three catties. That's enough for a meal at noon. If you want to eat more tomorrow, I will accompany you to dig some more when the tide ebbs!"

For most families in Dongshan Village, one tael of silver was considered a lot of wealth. It was enough for the entire family to eat for several months. To keep the sandworms that were worth one tael as a cooking ingredient, that person was either a fool or a spendthrift.

Yu Xiaocao, who had always kept a low profile, noticed the probing eyes around her and hastily said, "Alright, I'll listen to Shanhu and just keep two to three catties. It's my first time using sandworms as ingredients to cook, so I wanted to keep more for training!"

In the meantime, the worker of Tongren Medicine Hall had already finished weighing their harvest. The sisters dug out a total of twenty-eight catties of sandworms, which was much more than many of the adult workers. Shuanzhu's wife repeatedly praised the sisters for being so capable.

After removing the three catties of sandworms that Xiaocao wanted to keep, Tongren Medicine Hall gave the sisters a total of two taels and five mace. Under everyone's envious gazes, Xiaocao and Xiaolian carried their tools and went home.

As luck would have it, they encountered Madam Zhang on their way back. It had been a while since they had seen Madam Zhang. The old lady's hair had gotten a lot whiter and she seemed to have gotten thinner. Her cheekbones became more prominent, and there was a gloomy look in her saggy eyes. fr  
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She had naturally heard the news about Tongren Medicine Hall purchasing sandworms. But, Old Yu and Yu Dashan had gone out to fish in the sea, and Yu Heizi had left for the docks before the sky had even lit up. That brat was becoming more and more slick. After Madam Zhang seized more than half of his first income, he didn't bring money home anymore. Instead, he just put it on account and waited until it reached a certain amount before withdrawing them all at once.

The only ones left at home were Madam Zhang and her daughter, and the lazy and gluttonous Madam Li. Madam Zhang wasn't originally from the fishing village, so she didn't know how to dig for sandworms. Yu Caidie was someone who rarely left the house and stayed at home the whole day, and Madam Li was someone who was even less reliable.

Seeing others bringing home hundreds and even thousands of copper coins home, Madam Zhang felt as if there were twenty-five mice on her heart—a hundred claws were scratching her heart. She heard that Xiaolian and her sister had also gone to the beach, so she deliberately waited on the path that they would definitely walk by on their way home.

"You're back?" Madam Zhang asked insidiously, "Did you get a good harvest today? How many taels did you get?"

"A few taels? Grandmother, do you think that spoon worms are just blown over by the wind? Did you go look at the beach? It takes a long time to dig up one sandworm! Xiaolian and I have slender arms and legs, so it's already pretty good that we can dig out a few of them!" Yu Xiaocao knew that nothing good would come out of seeing Madam Zhang, so she used the 'tactic of mourning soldiers 1' first.

Madam Zhang got choked off by her. After a while, she glared fiercely at her and said, "You little wretch, you have become bolder after separating from the family! You actually dare to talk back to me, your grandmother! Is that what your parents teach you?"

Yu Xiaocao feigned a smile and said, "Grandmother, I'm just telling you the truth. How did it become me talking back to you? Or is it in your eyes, as long as I don't go along with you, it is considered rebutting and disobedience? As the ancients says: 'An unkind mother should not blame her child for being unfilial...' What are your thoughts after hearing that?"

“You damned brat, useless wretch! Aren’t you just indirectly saying that I’m unkind? Who talks to their elders like you? You think that you’re so great now just because I haven’t been disciplining you!” Madam Zhang took off her shoe and prepared to beat her up.

Xiaolian swiftly went forward and blocked her younger sister. Yu Xiaocao pulled her back a few steps. Suddenly, she covered her chest, breathed heavily, and weakly said, “Grandmother! My health isn’t very good, so I can’t be frightened! If I get ill from you scaring me, I’m going to have to rely on you. I’m going to eat and live with you, and you will have to take care of my medical fees...”

Madam Zhang was stunned by the speed at which she changed her face. She was actually timid inwardly, but she put up a fierce front and said, “Stop pretending! Don’t think that I don’t know the trick you’re playing. You’re deceiving others by pretending to be sick! Who would believe you ah! Unless you die in front of me, or else...”

“Who dares to curse my daughter! Do you want to die?” Madam Zhang was scared by a rough, thunderous voice and she almost sat on the ground.

Yu Xiaocao turned around and saw her godfather, Fang Zizhen, and Yu Hai, who jumped off the donkey cart behind him. Fang Zizhen’s face was full of anger, and even his beard had curled up. He used every ounce of his energy to control the horsewhip in his hands in order not to lash it at Madam Zhang.

Yu Hai’s eyes were red as he stared at Madam Zhang with a gaze filled with grief, indignation, disappointment, and unfamiliarity. His stepmother hated him so much that even his children had been implicated. His daughter, who he loved so dearly, was cursed viciously by her grandmother to die in front of her. Such hatred, such resentment!

He believed that he had a clear conscience towards the Yu Family and Madam Zhang. It turned out that his tolerance and sacrifice before they had separated from the main family were done in vain. He could never warm up Madam Zhang’s ice-cold heart. Yu Hai’s heart was like dead ash in an instant, ‘So be it. In the future, I will give them everything that I’m supposed to give them, not one penny less. But for things that I don’t need to give them, I won’t even take out a single coin.’ He wouldn’t be concerned about that side of the family anymore just because his family was eating and living better. Because—it wasn’t worth it.

Madam Zhang was someone who bullied the weak and feared the strong. When facing the furious General Fang, she immediately became listless. She stammered, “My... My Lord! I... I’m not cursing her. I just said it carelessly...”



Fang Zizhen whipped the horsewhip that he was holding in the air several times, and a clear and crisp sound could be heard. Madam Zhang trembled in fright and nearly wet her pants.

“Careless remark? Then why don’t you also tell yourself to die? Why don’t you tell your own son to die? Our Xiaocao used to be in poor health. It must be because you cursed her! If I hear you cursing my daughter again, be prepared to go to jail!”

Fang Zizhen felt that there was a need to frighten this stupid woman. Even with his support, she still dared to fearlessly bully his family’s Xiaocao. If he wasn’t around, then his dear daughter would be bullied to death... Pah, pah! Why was this word mentioned again? How inauspicious!

Madam Zhang shivered and muttered, “I... I’m her elder, so it’s not considered a crime to scold her...”

“What kind of elder are you? Which family’s elders would refuse to pay for their sick granddaughter’s medical fees and force them to borrow money in order to treat her illness? What kind of parents would take the three hundred taels that their son exchanged his life to get, and then force them out of their home with barely anything? Whose elders would hate seeing their son’s family living well and come cause trouble for them from time to time? Madam Zhang, you’re only a stepmother, and you’re a vicious and biased stepmother. The law will never tolerate people like you!” Fang Zizhen glared at her fiercely. His dignified aura caused Madam Zhang’s legs to go soft and she kneeled down.

Yu Hai turned his face to one side and solemnly said, “Brother Fang, please spare her this time! Madam Zhang, when we divided the family, it was clearly written on the contract that I just need to give you guys two hundred catties of grain every year or convert it into money. In the future, I won’t pay even a single coin more! Please don’t come and bring disgrace upon yourself again!”

When facing Yu Hai, Madam Zhang’s imperious temper flared up again. She sat her butt on the ground, smacked her legs, and cried, “The heavens don’t have eyes—giving me such a unfilial descendant ah!! How shall I live in the future——”

Suddenly, her voice stopped abruptly as if someone had strangled her neck. It turned out that she had been frightened by Fang Zizhen’s furious expression.

Fang Zizhen said impatiently, "Brother Yu had given you the food according to the agreement without missing anything. So how is he being unfilial? In my opinion, he's much more filial than your good-for-nothing son who only knows how to stretch out his hands and ask for money at home! Daughter, if this wicked old lady bullies you again, tell me! Godfather will avenge you!"

After he said that, he bent down to hold Xiaocao under his arm. Then he lifted her onto his own tall steed. He, on the other hand, acted like an extremely caring father and guided the horse in front.

When Madam Zhang saw Xiaocao being doted on by the official, her heart beat like drums, for fear that the official would remember all her past mistreatments towards the little lass and come get even with her later. In the following days, she became much more quiet and well-behaved.

Under the envious eyes of the villagers, Yu Xiaocao sat on the back of the tall horse. Her godfather was so cool today. There was finally someone who could stop that wicked old lady. It should be a lot more peaceful for her family in the future.

"Godfather, when did you return from the capital? Why didn't you tell me in advance? I could have prepared a feast for your return ah!" Yu Xiaocao laughed happily. She must treat 'this great god', who could subdue Madam Zhang, with great care.

#### Chapter 160 – Deliberately Making Things Difficult

Under his adoptive daughter's admiring gaze, Fang Zizhen said in a somewhat smug manner, "I got back last night. It was too late, so I rested in town. I went to the docks this morning and got hungry from smelling your family's braised food. After I hastily listened to the reports, I hurriedly rushed over. During the past few days when I was at the capital, I really missed my daughter's cooking!"

Yu Xiaocao feigned a troubled expression and sighed, "Godfather, I didn't know that you were going to come back early, so I didn't prepare enough ingredients. What should I do?"

Fang Zizhen couldn't stand seeing his goddaughter being unhappy, so he quickly said, "Good daughter, Godfather loves to eat anything that you make! Like lettuce with oyster sauce ah, braised eggplants ah, stir-fried eggs and tomatoes ah... Just casually pick some vegetables from the fields, and my daughter can make the most delicious dishes."

Yu Hai's heart felt slightly sour as he looked at their benevolent father and filial daughter appearance, as if his most beloved treasure had been robbed from him. Actually, it was also pretty good that Brother

Fang became his daughter's godfather. There would be another person to dote on her and protect her. Ay... It seemed like his daughter had rarely enjoyed a day of happiness with him. He was really useless; he couldn't even protect his own daughter!

Xiaocao seemed to have sensed her father's depressed mood. She turned around, smiled brightly at him, and said, "Father, why did you come back so late today? Did the braised food not sell well today?"

Yu Hai hastily sorted out his emotions and smiled at his daughter, "The braised food sold out very quickly. Didn't I just happened to meet Brother Fang at the docks? Considering that there was nothing good to eat at home, I went to the market to buy a few catties of pork belly, as well as your favorite spare ribs."

During this era, people usually chose the area with more fat when buying pork. Spare ribs were mostly bone and didn't have much meat. If it weren't for Yu Xiaocao, who liked spare ribs, Yu Hai wouldn't have bought them. Fortunately, spare ribs weren't expensive. With the money for one catty of meat, he could get more than two catties of spare ribs!

"There's spare ribs ah! That's great, we can have spoon worms and spare ribs soup for lunch! The delicious soup will definitely make you guys want second servings!" Yu Xiaocao pretended to be very happy in order to lift her father's dejected mood.

Yu Hai's expression slightly relaxed and he asked in a soft voice, "Spoon worms? Oh right, you guys went to dig spoon worms today. How was it? Xiaocao has never dug for spoon worms before. It wasn't easy, right?"

Xiaolian, who was next to him, laughed, "Father, you're looking down on Younger Sister. She dug out more than me. We dug out the most in the entire village and got over two taels from selling them! We earned more than you, who had been working all morning at the docks!"

Yu Hai looked at his pair of daughters approvingly and said with a smile, "My daughters are really capable!"

"That's right! Just look at whose daughter I am!!" Yu Xiaocao raised her head with her nose pointed towards that sky as if unbeatable.

Fang Zizhen guffawed and said, "Yes, that's right! You're definitely worthy of being Fang Zizhen's daughter! You take after me!"

Yu Xiaocao deliberately feigned a look of disdain. She looked at his beard filled face and said with a scrunched-up face, "Godfather, why do I have this feeling that you're not praising me? If I take after you, will I still be presentable?" As she spoke, she touched her own face with a worried expression.

Her funny expression and humorous words amused everyone. Fang Zizhen laughed the loudest and refused to concede, "Daughter! Do you know why your godfather, I, grew out a beard? When I was young, I was also a very handsome and good-looking man, and had the nickname 'Jade Face Young General' on the battlefield. I felt that it was too feminine, and my face didn't look intimidating enough, so I grew out a beard. Once your godfather, I, shave my beard, I definitely won't look inferior to that of your Uncle Zhao!"

"I don't believe you! You're just saying it and there's no proof. You can only prove it by shaving off your beard!" Yu Xiaocao's disbelieving expression of 'you're bluffing' caused Fang Zizhen to nearly have the urge to shave his beard on the spot!

They laughed and chatted all the way back to the Yu Residence. Yu Hang, who had just finished watering the melon fields, put down the carrying pole in his hands and heard the sound of laughter coming from behind him. He said with a gentle smile, "Uncle Fang is back ah! Quickly come sit and have a drink."

Xiaocao carried the basket of sandworms to the well in the backyard and prepared to make lunch after cleaning them. Madam Liu, who was washing clothes beside the well, saw the fat and fleshy worms inside the basket, and the fine hair on her body nearly stood up. She chided in a low voice, "What did you dig these worms for? It looks so creepy!"

Xiaocao stirred the basket of squirming sandworms, like it was a treasure, and excitedly said, "Mother, these sandworms might look disgusting, but they're very tasty. In addition to cooking, it can also be dried and grinded into powder, which can enhance the taste of food! I'll go find some bamboo sticks and teach you how to clean the sandworms!"

Yu Xiaocao ran back into the front yard and asked her father to cut a few bamboo sticks that were half the thickness of chopsticks. Then she pulled Xiaolian and ran back to the rear yard. Yu Hai cried behind her, "Do you want me to help?"

“No need! You should go and drink tea with Godfather!” Yu Xiaobao’s crisp voice could be heard from the backyard.

Madam Liu looked at the sandworms, resisted the discomfort in her heart, picked one up and asked, “What do I do with this thing? Just wash it in the water?”

“No! Sandworms have sand sacs and sand in their stomach. If they’re not cleaned properly, then you can’t eat them. I know one of the most convenient ways to clean sandworms. Look, first put the sandworm inside the water, insert the bamboo stick from one end, and poke it out from the middle. Then, slowly invert half of the sandworm. After that, insert another stick inside the other end and poke the stick out from the same place, and then flip the other half inside out. See, this is the guts and sand in the sandworm. You just need to wash them in water!” Yu Xiaobao demonstrated while explaining. She worked skillfully with her little hands, and swiftly cleaned a sandworm.

Xiaolian had already picked up one in her hands and followed Xiaobao as she demonstrated. Although her movements were a little clumsy, she still completed the task of turning out the internal organs of the sandworm and washing it carefully in water.

Madam Liu wasn’t an unreasonable person either, so she swiftly overcame the obstacles in her heart and skillfully flipped the sandworms inside out. The three of them were all swift workers, so they quickly finished cleaning the three catties of sandworms. Yu Xiaobao was afraid that the sand inside had not been completely cleaned, and rinsed it several times with clean water.

When she appeared in the front yard again, she noticed that there was an extra person in the courtyard. After looking closely, she realized that it was Zhou Zixu, Third Young Master Zhou, who she hadn’t seen for a long time. During the past month or so, he had been staying at the site of the harbor construction, and had even gotten a shade tanner. However, his hard work and efforts weren’t in vain because the construction of the oyster sauce factory had finally been completed. After being simply furnished, it should be ready for use next month.

“Third Young Master, such a rare guest! What sort of wind blew you over today?” Yu Xiaobao joked with him.

As if he was guarding as a thief, Fang Zizhen examined Third Young Master Zhou from head to toe. What kind of relationship did this youngster have with his goddaughter? Why did his daughter sound so familiar with him?

Third Young Master Zhou chuckled and said with a smile, "The authentic northwest wind! I just came back from the docks. Our factory should be able to start operating soon. I must share this good news with you as soon as possible. What delicious food did you make today? I specially came at this time ah!"

'Stinky brat! Talking so familiarly with my daughter, he wouldn't have some improper intentions, right? No! Such a good daughter, I must keep an eye on her!'

General Fang, you think too much. Xiaocao was only ten years old. What kind of inappropriate thoughts would a little kid like her arouse? He wasn't a pedophile!

Fang Zizhen raised his composure as a government official, coughed twice, and said, "You are the third young master of the Zhou Family, who built a factory at the docks? Have you been approved to build a factory at the docks? The harbor is being reconstructed right now, so everything must be properly arranged..."

Third Young Master Zhou was able to obtain his present achievements in the business industry at such a young age, so he naturally had his own connections. Knowing that the person in front of him was in charge of the harbor constructions, he hastily bowed and greeted him, "The location of this youngster's factory is still a certain distance away from the harbor, so it won't interfere with the construction of the port."

"Oh? How do you know that your factory won't interfere with the planning of the new harbor?" Fang Zizhen didn't like this weak-looking youth and decided to make things difficult for him.

Third Young Master Zhou was puzzled about when he had offended this lord, the imperial envoy. He seemed to be picking on him on purpose. He continued to speak in a humble and respectful manner, "Before this youngster prepared to build the factory, I have made several confirmations with the county magistrate, so..."

Fang Zizhen frowned and said, "You started to prepare for the construction of your factory several months again, right? At that time, the detailed regulations for the harbor construction hadn't come out yet. So, who gave you the confidence that your factory won't affect the construction of the harbor?"

Just as Third Young Master Zhou was drenched in sweat from being interrogated by the imperial envoy, Yu Xiaocao, who had heard a few words in the kitchen, poked her head out and asked, "Godfather, our factory affects the planning of the port construction? What should we do? It wasn't easy to build it. Do we have to wait a few months and rebuild the factory again?"

'Our factory? What does that mean?' This was a sign that his daughter was helping the outsider ah! No, he had to nip that thought in the bud!

Fang Zizhen moved closer and whispered to Yu Xiaocao, "Daughter, what do other people building a factory have to do with us? You don't have to worry about this matter!"

"How can it be none of my business? I have twenty percent of the shares in the oyster sauce factory! Delaying the operation by a day means that I will get my dividends a day later! Godfather, quickly think of a solution!" Yu Xiaocao actually wasn't short on money these days. Zhenxiu Restaurant's osmanthus duck was selling very well, so she received at least a thousand taels every month. But who would dislike earning more money? Of course, it would be better to get more of the shiny, white silver ah!

Fang Zizhen widened his eyes in anger, 'This good brat is giving my daughter twenty percent dividends for no reason at all. Who the heck would believe that he doesn't have any malicious intentions?! He wants to deceive my precious daughter with a mere twenty percent bonus! Don't even think about it! Not only is there no door, there won't even be a window!'

Fang Zizhen glared fiercely at Third Young Master Zhou, and then bent down and did his best to advise, "Daughter, we shouldn't take shares that some weird people randomly give you for free! If you need money, Godfather has it ah! When the harbor construction is completed, Godfather will buy several stores for you in the best locations. It's up to you if you want to open a shop yourself or rent it out. Let's not take those shares, okay?"