

Gold Chapter 26

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Old Yu took another serving of the eggplants sauteed with garlic. Because his teeth had started to fall out of his mouth, he liked eating soft and tender foods like the stir-fried eggplants. Unconsciously, he devoured about half the plate of eggplants by himself.

After hearing Yu Hai's opinion, the old man, satisfied by the meal, naturally didn't stint on his praise. "Yes, yes! The taste is indeed very good! Our family's Xiaocao has talent, her hand at cooking is better than her mother's. Xiaocao's mother did a good job raising her. There's a well known saying—the student has surpassed the master. Third Son, is that how it goes?"

Old Yu was quite proud of the phrase he remembered and thought quite highly of himself. He held his beard out of the way as he sipped a mouthful of wine and smacked his lips in pleasure. Our Yu Family is quite cultured!

"Father, you said it perfectly. However, Xiaocao's dishes were all stir fried with oil. Our family usually only boils vegetables with some salt. There's no fat added, so of course it's not as delicious as vegetables stir fried with oil. In the future, our family should continue cooking vegetables this way!"

After finally eating a satisfactory meal at his family's house, the third son, Yu Bo, was in a good mood and topped off his father's glass.

Old Yu shook his head after he heard what his son said, "You should know your mother's personality. If we bought pork every day to make lard, it would hurt her stingy heart more than cutting her flesh directly would!"

At this point, Yu Hai interjected, "We don't need to use lard, vegetable oil could be used instead. Didn't our family save some dried soybeans from last year? We could bring them to the oil mill in exchange for some soybean oil for cooking. The food cooked with the oil should still taste good."

If they used soybeans as the trade instead of money, maybe his wife would be more willing? Old Yu carefully calculated the possibility of his wife agreeing to this.

When Yu Bo saw how happily everyone at home was eating the food cooked with oil, he considered their circumstances again. Choked with emotion, he couldn't help but set down his chopsticks and urged his father quietly, "Father, if other people found out that our family found it too much of a burden to even get a bottle of soybean oil for the sake of my education, can I still in the academy anymore? Would no one actually expose this? Father, please advise mother to not be so stingy. There are already people at school who are gossiping behind my back..."

Scholars valued their reputations the most. Yu Bo had already heard bad rumors about himself, such as: 'He lives in a large manor in town, eating and drinking good food, while his parents and siblings back home have to count how many pancakes made with coarse grains they could eat for each meal...'. His main goal in coming back this time was to persuade his mother to stop being a miser for the sake of his reputation and to stop the rumormongers from discrediting him. However, as her son, he was very familiar with Madam Zhang's temperament. Therefore, he could only talk about it with his father and have him discuss the situation with his mother.

The old woman always wished she could spend half a copper coin for something that cost one. She was stingy to everyone in the family, including herself, and always restricted how much food people could eat. His second son's children were all on the brink of starvation with their bone-thin frames and their unsteady gaits...but, for the sake of his youngest son's education, Old Yu usually turned a blind eye towards his wife's miserly ways.

However, if her thriftiness was starting to impact their son's reputation, then it could no longer go on! Their youngest son had the fate to become an official, and it would be a disaster if his wife's penny-pinching ways caused his son to lose that chance. Old Yu came to a resolution and decided he needed to talk to his wife about the situation.

That night, under the light of the lamps, the old couple discussed their circumstances. For the sake of her son, Madam Zhang obviously had no objections. The very next day, the old lady went on her own to the oil mill and traded half a sack of soybeans for a pitcher full of soybean oil. In addition, she no longer restricted how many coarse grain pancakes people could eat anymore.

Without her heavy restrictions, the family's store of food naturally disappeared more quickly. Madam Zhang's heart trembled at the sight of the increased expenditures and inwardly screamed, 'Who's the one spewing nonsense from their mouth, all day speaking nonsense. I hope a rat goes and eats his tongue!'

The people who profited the most with this change, naturally, was Yu Xiaocao and the rest of the second branch. At least now, everyone in the family, large and small, could eat until they were full. In addition,

every few days Yu Xiaocao would intercept some game from her father for their own use. Gradually, the members of the second branch started to flesh out.

That's right! Under the attacks from Yu Xiaocao's strategic pleads and skillful begging, Yu Hai, who already blindly loved his daughter, could only surrender to her whims after a minimal struggle. Every time he came back from a hunt, Xiaocao would always be at the foot of the mountain waiting for him, with no one else around, to choose the fattest piece of game to leave behind. She would then take the game into that hidden valley to either barbecue or simmer the meat in the ceramic urn until cooked and bring home later for the household to eat.

Sometimes Zhao Han would divvy out some meat he caught from his traps to give the kids an extra meal. They also plundered the creek's store of small, white fish frequently.

For most people, the wild fish were slippery and hard to catch, but Yu Xiaocao never had difficulty harvesting the fish. Although Zhao Han inwardly felt it was odd, he never tried to figure out how the little girl caught the fish.

Adolescent boys could always out-eat their elders. In fishing villages near the sea, young boys and girls, other than gathering seafood or tending the courtyard gardens, weren't of much use.

For the sake of her youngest son's reputation and future career, Madam Zhang's heart palpably ached when she increased the family's food ration. Two months after the change, the family's expenditures had more than doubled.

The increased spending combined with her entrance into menopause caused Madam Zhang to hate everyone she saw. When the men left for the sea, if the old woman wasn't berating the adults, she was hitting the children. Complaints flew out of her in an endless stream.

During mealtimes, Madam Zhang barely managed to stem her complaints in an effort to soothe the men's egos. However, her eyes flitted around like daggers. Whoever grabbed an extra flatbread was subject to a hateful glare. Naturally, she hoped that her daughters-in-law and their group of brats would tactfully eat less.

But her hope was in vain, her eldest daughter-in-law wouldn't know tact even if it hit her in the face. As long as there was food at the table, she would eat it. Her eldest grandson had inherited his mother's habits and gobbled down food at the table as if he was a starving animal.

Although her second daughter-in-law had a weak and timid personality, her two daughters were nothing like their mother. Even though Madam Zhang would glare at them until it felt like her eyes would pop out and her face would burst, the two brats ignored her as if nothing was going on. If they weren't giving their mother another pancake, they were grabbing their brothers another serving of vegetables.

Now that there was oil added to their food, it didn't matter whether the dishes were stewed or stir-fried, the taste of all the food had improved tremendously. Every meal, with her eldest son's family leading, became a brawl to snatch as much food as possible. Those who had slow hands wouldn't even be able to lick the leftovers off a plate.

The two chits' hands flew so quickly on the table that one could only see their shadows. After their hands had stopped, their timid mother who never dared to grab food, even-tempered older brother, and tiny youngest brother, all had their bowls filled with food. Not only did her two granddaughters grab food for their family but their own appetites were also voracious. Seeing all of this made Madam Zhang's heart throb with pain.

In the past, with only Xiaolian being unruly, it was easy enough for Madam Zhang to smack the girl a couple of times and then have the brat comply. Now that there was an additional troublemaker, Yu Xiaocao, it had become more difficult to maintain discipline because of the wretch's sickly constitution. Hitting the minx was obviously out of the question, but even yelling at her was enough to 'scare' her into a dead faint.

A situation that happened before her third son and his family had left was a perfect example of the difference now. At the time, three steamer baskets full of steamed rolls had been brought to the table. The little hellion had immediately transferred one to her mother, and also gave a serving to her two brothers who hadn't even sat down yet. She acted as if she was the master of the house!

Madam Zhang really couldn't stand these perceived transgressions anymore at the time. Her personality was never one to take an insult sitting down, and so, as her temper flared, the old woman slapped a heavy hand down on the wooden stool. However, before Madam Zhang could open her mouth to start yelling, the little brat's eyes rolled into the back of her head, and the chit fainted.