

Gold Chapter 29

Chapter 29

Yu Xiaocao learned how to set traps very quickly because she was motivated. By noon, she could already do all the steps independently. Before she knew it, the group had entered the deepest part of the forest.

Bam!

A hard nut fell down and hit Little Shitou's head.

"Yeouch! Who hit me?" Little Shitou held his head and lifted his eyes to find the person who attacked him.

Bam!

Another nut smacked him on the forehead. An ash gray squirrel peeked its head through the leaves and regarded the three humans inquisitively.

"Stupid squirrel, how dare you throw stuff at me!" Little Shitou picked up a rock from the ground and hurled it up towards the trees. The squirrel, with another nut in its paws, darted across the branches and disappeared.

Yu Xiaocao bent over and picked up the 'lethal weapon' from the ground and found that it was a hazelnut. She laughed, "Shitou, we hit the jackpot! This is a hazelnut tree, if we saute these nuts they will taste really good! When we're done setting traps, we should also harvest some hazelnuts so we'll have more variety to eat during winter!"

Little Shitou was not interested in the idea and refused, "I don't want to! All that hard work will not benefit us! We're not going to be the ones eating these hazelnuts!"

Zhao Han quickly ran through ideas in his head and came up with a solution. "If you two trust me, then you can leave the hazelnuts at my home. Whenever you want to eat them, I'll have mother cook them for you. You guys can then eat them at my house!"

That's not a bad idea! Yu Xiaocao grinned in delight. In the future, with the divine stone's water, the amount of game she caught would not be small. However, she absolutely could not bring the game home as she would not benefit from it. Not having a hiding place for her hauls had tormented her. Now, her problem was solved. It was as if she had been sleepy and a pillow had appeared out of nowhere!

Zhao Han scampered up the extremely tall hazelnut tree. He plucked all of the ripe hazelnuts and let them fall to the ground. The harvest was going too slowly for Yu Xiaocao's taste, so she grabbed a thick branch and started whacking the hazelnut tree. Leaves and twigs showered down around them.

This particular tree was on the older side. The hazelnuts it grew weren't very big but the quantity of nuts wasn't small either. Within minutes, the three of them were able to pick a whole basketful of hazelnuts.

"Luckily Brother Han carried a basket all the way here. Otherwise I wouldn't know how we'd get these nuts back to the village!" Little Shitou grinned widely, and his eyes squinted up into small crescents.

As the three of them went back on the same route they came on, Yu Xiaocao kept her eyes wide open to look for the traps they had set earlier. Seeing that, Zhao Han chuckled, "Catching hares takes a little bit longer than that..."

Just as the words came out of his mouth, Yu Xiaocao interrupted him with an excited shriek, "Look! What's that? Is it a small deer? So cute!" This trap was one set personally by Yu Xiaocao. It was obvious that a young creature, barely out of infancy, had been caught by the rope. The animal had a coat of ashy yellow fur, pointy ears that curved up, a dark and round nose, and four slender legs. The fur on its butt and back legs were white and made it look like it was wearing a pair of pants with an open crouch, similar to the ones used for potty training.

The little creature that had been caught didn't struggle it all. It stood in place stupidly and was nibbling on the nearby grass. Zhao Han strode over and, with one hand, caught the foolish little animal. He laughed, "It's not a small deer, it's a dumb roe deer. This little guy is quite stupid. After getting caught, it didn't struggle to get out and is only interested in eating."

Young children all loved small, cute animals. Little Shitou went up to rub the creature's ears and cheerfully said, "Second Sister, this roe deer is a little foodie!"

Shitou naturally learned the term 'little foodie' from his second sister. He applied it immediately to the little roe deer.

Despite being delighted by her catch, Yu Xiaocao feigned being disappointed, "Such a small animal. It doesn't look like it has much meat on it. Not worth much on the market!"

"Second Sister, we can bring it back to raise. Once it gets bigger, we'll have meat to eat!" Little Shitou was a foodie down to his bones. He challenged himself to take on the difficult task of carrying the roe deer back to the village. Although he managed to lift the animal off the ground, he could only stagger a few steps before he fell. The roe deer tumbled over with him. Fortunately, the ground underneath them had a thick layer of grasses and weeds so neither of them were hurt.

Yu Xiaocao dismantled the noose from the trap and then tied up the little roe deer with a lasso around its neck. She then gathered a couple handfuls of dried, yellow grass and poured the last bit of her celestial stone water on top of it. With that, she led the roe deer behind her. The rope was in one hand, and the grass was in the other. The small creature opened its large, dark, innocent eyes and followed her from behind, like a clever and obedient child.

"Second Sister, do you think this little roe deer has been raised by humans? How come it's not afraid of us and even wants to get closer to us?" Little Shitou skipped beside the animal and occasionally ran a hand across its fur.

Zhao Han guffawed, "We're in the deep wilderness, not a household is in sight! Where would someone raise this? In my opinion, I think this little guy got lost from its mother. It probably thinks you two are its substitute mother!"

Yu Xiaocao wanted to cover her eyes in exasperation. Although her clothes were very dull and gray, this didn't come even close to the roe deer's coloring. How bad would the creature's eyes have to be in order to mistaken them as its mother?

As they headed down from the mountain, more than half of their traps had caught some game. The other half had been destroyed by some sort of animal or other. Zhao Han was astonished by their luck. After carefully inspecting the surroundings, he realized that the vegetation near the broken traps had pretty much all been eaten down to a stubble.

"Looks like the wild animals on the mountain are pretty lively today. Are they all starting their winter preparations early?" Zhao Han, who had never seen such a sight, was perplexed by the odd circumstances. He decided to ask his father what was going on today after his father got back from hunting.

Yu Xiaocao was pleasantly surprised when she discovered that her scheme to making money had worked. She exclaimed, "Brother Han, we had a fruitful trip today!"

"Yes, yes! Not only did we catch some hares but we also caught some pheasants. Even better is that most of them are still alive. My father told me that live game is easier to sell!" Little Shitou excited said.

Zhao Han had to agree with them. "Our luck today was quite good! However, with all this game, we can't possibly eat them all. In the afternoon, my father and Uncle Yu were planning on going into town to sell what they caught. How about we also let my father sell some of our game?"

"I want to go into town too!" Yu Xiaocao eyed the ten animals that were on the ground. Judging by what she knew about Brother Han's personality, she figured she could get at least two or three from their harvest.

Zhao Han was aware of her family's circumstances and thought a bit before replying, "I've been to town many times and I'm pretty familiar with how to get there. How about I take the two of you there together?"

Yu Xiaocao became pleased beyond expectation when she heard his suggestion. Although she could convince her father to leave behind one or two pieces of game to feed her and her siblings, it was unlikely he'd ever be okay with having a separate, hidden purse from the rest of the family.

From his perspective, he was helping the Yu Family produce a future county scholar-official or possibly even a provincial official. Having an official in the family would also benefit his children's futures greatly. This was the reason why he was happy to work so hard to earn money for them.

If he knew his own daughter had her own supply of cash, he wouldn't sell her out. However, should Madam Zhang ever complain about not having enough money, he'd be hard-pressed not to let the secret out! With that thought, Yu Xiaocao became more resolute in her decision to hide her own money from her mother and father.

She looked up at the sky and figured that it was still pretty early. She told Zhao Han to bring the hazelnuts and game back to the Zhao residence while she ran with Little Shitou back to their own home. They needed to retrieve that old ceramic pot.

"Oh ho!" The two of them almost collided with their grandmother as soon as they crossed into the courtyard.

Madam Zhang's eyes squinted in dislike and deep furrows appeared between her eyebrows. "You little brat! You disappeared at the crack of dawn! Do you not know how to help the rest of the household do some chores?"

Yu Xiaocao blinked her eyes deliberately and looked at the elderly woman innocently. "Grandmother, I also want to help gather fishwort, chop firewood, and other chores. But you know I have a weak body. What if I got sick from exhaustion and needed to spend money to see the doctor? For someone like me, it's probably better that I don't cause any trouble. Don't you think that makes the most sense?"

Madam Zhang didn't know what to say since everything Xiaocao said was true. Seeing that the little girl was carrying the large ceramic pot out, the area between her eyebrows smoothed out slightly. The old woman nodded in approval.

"Are you going out to catch some fish with that? Although the fish you caught last time were on the smaller side, they still had a good flavor. Your younger uncle's son, Little Douzi, really enjoyed eating them. Catch some extra and I'll send some over tomorrow to your uncle."

Yu Xiaocao frowned for a split second before she adjusted her expression into a congenial smile. "There's no need to wait until tomorrow. Uncle Zhao's son, Brother Han, had caught some wild hares today and wanted to go into town to sell them. How about I go with him after I catch some fish? That way Younger Uncle will be able to eat some fresh and flavorful fish stew tonight."

Madam Zhang didn't even hesitate before she agreed. "This urn of yours is too small, how much fish can it carry? How about you bring a jug that we use to pickle vegetables instead? That should be able to carry enough fish to last your uncle a couple of meals."

Yu Xiaocao recalled the size of the earthenware crocks, which were about a foot and a half in height, and stared at her grandmother in mute silence before replying, "Grandmother, do you really think my tiny body has the strength to carry something that large? Then again, those fish aren't exactly easy to catch. I'm not sure I'd be able to catch enough to fill even this pot! Grandmother, I'm going to leave now. Brother Han might leave without me if I'm too late."

Before Madam Zhang could reply, she pushed the ceramic pot into Little Shitou's arms and scuttled into the kitchen. On the stove were three piping hot steamed rolls that had just been cooked. She grabbed two of the three buns from the basket, used some oiled paper to wrap them up, and placed them into her small carry-basket that was on her shoulders.

"Hey! You little minx, those rolls were for your grandfather and the other men..." Madam Zhang, who had followed closely behind, cried out in distress.

Yu Xiaocao had already clasped hands with her little brother and ran out the gate. Her voice floated back, "It'll take us a couple hours to walk to the town, if we don't eat, how will we be able to get there? Don't worry, grandmother! I promise that your precious grandson will be able to drink some fresh fish stew tonight..."

Although Madam Zhang wanted to chase after them, it was too late. The infuriated old woman stomped loudly around the courtyard and her curses filled the air.

By the time the two siblings finished catching the fish in the valley and came back, it was almost nine in the morning. When they arrived at the bottom of the hill that housed the Zhao residence, they saw Zhao Han at the top of the hill, carrying a large basket on his back. They could see the youth waving at them in the distance, hinting at them to not climb the hill.

The thirteen year old was already over 1.7 meters [1] in height. In addition, he practiced martial arts all year long, so carrying a load of more than ten pieces of game was a piece of cake for him. Zhao Han strode over with his long and powerful legs and quickly reunited with the two siblings.

The youth snatched the ceramic pot out from Xiaocao's hands in a natural movement and grinned, "I noticed that you two really seemed to like that dumb roe deer, so I made the decision to leave it back home. Do you guys want to bring it back to your family or have it live at my place? It's your choice."

Little Shitou's eyes were bright with happiness and he had a small smile on his face. "Second Sister, let's bring it back home to raise? The little roe deer doesn't have much meat on it, so grandmother won't want to eat it right now."

"Okay!" Yu Xiaocao agreed without thinking too much about it. The little roe deer was quite adorable, and with the celestial stone water, it would probably stay docile.

"If you're afraid your family members will harm it, just tell them that I caught it and wanted you guys to raise it for a bit." Zhao Han twisted his head around to talk to them as he continued to walk forward.