

Gold Chapter 37

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They were going just as she planned! Yu Xiaocao fished some money from her hidden stash of cash. After thinking for a bit, she also took out a string of copper coins and put it into her chest pocket. Winter came early to the north, so there was already a chilly nip in the air. Many people had already put on their thick winter coats. Therefore, no one could tell that Yu Xiaocao had about a hundred copper coins hidden on her.

Yu Xiaocao gleefully skipped down the road as she carried a large basket. The equally excited Little Shitou followed her as they went in the direction towards the docks. Although the docks were closer to Dongshan Village compared to the town, it was still about an hour's walk away. Since Yu Xiaocao was in a good mood, she didn't feel too tired by the time she got there. They had arrived at the busiest time at the pier. The fisherman who went out to sea had just come back with their loads. The southwest corner of the wharf had naturally become a fish market.

The stewards in charge of purchasing from large manors were all there early so that they could pick out their master's favorite fish and seafood. In addition, the buyers from the restaurants, taverns, and small eating houses were also waiting there for the fresh catch of the day.

On the docks were a couple of cargo ships that had just gotten to shore. The dock workers under the direction of a foreman were steadily loading cargo from the ships onto some carts. The sounds of hawkers, shouts, and work chants filled the air...altogether, the various noises wove together into the distinctive noise of a busy wharf.

Under the rich and dense atmosphere of the pier, Xiaocao could feel herself immersing into these new surroundings.

"Second Sister, over there is where they sell snacks. I came once with father before and he bought me a giant steamed bun made with white flour. Buns made with white flour are seriously too tasty!"

The little foodie, Little Shitou, pointed at a road on the outskirts of the docks. A couple of crude shacks were built alongside the street and puffs of warm air came with the morning wind that blew from there.

The fishermen and dock workers probably brought along some dried goods with them to eat. However, in the chill of the early morning, it was still necessary to drink a bowl of hot soup to warm the body up.

Where there's demand, there's a market. Under the low ceiling of the shacks were people selling porridge and hot noodle soup. Others had stoves with steaming baskets full of steamed rolls and stuffed buns to sell. There were even some farmers, who didn't have work to do on the fields in the slack season, with baskets full of the dishes or pickled vegetables from the farms to sell.

Schemes began to form in Xiaocao's mind. With her culinary talent in braised dishes from her past life, it would be easier for her to obtain a good living here. Unfortunately, the people here all gossiped and talked. Once her grandmother found out, even the capital money used here would be taken from her completely...

"Is that Xiaolian...or is it Xiaocao?" Xiaocao didn't think she would meet someone she knew here at the docks. She twisted her head around and saw an unfamiliar face.

The swarthy youth in front of her looked to be about fifteen to sixteen years of age and had a tall and broad figure. His large eyes were set under a pair of thick eyebrows, and his face looked oddly familiar...who...who was this? Little Shitou, who was standing next to her, answered her unspoken question. "Eldest Cousin, why are you here? Did you come with Eldest Aunt [1]?"

Ah, so it was Second Uncle's son, the fourteen year old Liu Zhiwei. Although this fellow was only fourteen years old, he looked very strong and sturdy. In terms of looks, he didn't resemble either of his parents. Instead, he looked the most like Eldest Uncle.

Liu Zhiwei chuckled, "Yes, I came along with Eldest Aunt and also Eldest Uncle. I'm looking to see if I can find any work here at the docks... Eldest Uncle often comes here and is familiar with the foreman. He's already unloading the cargo from the ships. They thought I was too young and didn't want to hire me!"

The youth stated all of this with a face full of resentment. Although he was young in age, he still had plenty of strength. Usually he spent time with his father working the fields and had done a lot of work requiring brute strength. How dare they look down on him!

"Xiaocao, Shitou! Why are you two at the docks?" Eldest Aunt, Madam Han, gently asked as she came by with a basket on her arm.

The two siblings politely returned her greeting and called her 'Eldest Aunt'. When Xiaocao had had her head accident and was in a coma for three days, her maternal grandmother, grandfather, uncles, and aunts all came over to visit her. They even brought over a hen and half a basket of eggs. Unfortunately, these goods had all been confiscated by Madam Zhang.

In Madam Zhang's eyes, since Madam Liu had a sickly body and Yu Xiaocao was medicine guzzling fiend, the gifts brought by the Liu Family were not enough to make up for these two spendthrifts!

Xiaocao's impression of her maternal family was quite good. She had learned from Xiaolian that Eldest Aunt was an honest and genuine person. From personal experience, this was true.

Right at this moment, the dock workers were about to go on break to rest and eat breakfast. After the foreman rang a bell, about a hundred or so workers, some with food in their hands, others without, started coming over to this area.

The hawkers selling breakfast foods immediately started advertising their wares enthusiastically, "Hot soup, hot soup for sale, steaming hot cabbage soup, radish soup..."

"Hot porridge, hot porridge! Warm and cheap, only 1 copper coin per bowl..."

"Noodle soup for sale! You there, young lad, come eat a bowl of noodle soup! I guarantee one bowl will fill you up completely..."

"Pickled and salted vegetables, very delicious! With one copper coin you can get enough for a few people to split! Good sir, buy some pickled vegetables to eat! In a moment, you'll have enough strength to work again..."

Seeing the situation, Eldest Aunt hurriedly said, "Right now is the time to sell food. I need to start advertising now. You two probably haven't eaten breakfast yet. Zhiwei, here's five copper coins, go buy some steamed rolls and split them with your younger brother and younger sister."

As she was speaking, a dockworker who smelled heavily of sweat came by. His head was beaded with perspiration. He turned towards Eldest Aunt and said, "Madam, can I have one copper coin's worth of soybean paste with some salted vegetables on cooked dough?"

"Okay!" Eldest Aunt swiftly gave him a few pancakes and spread some soybean paste on them. The pickled vegetables had been finely cut and sautéed with lard. In exchange for the copper coin, the food wrapped in a piece of oiled paper and given to the man.

After receiving the wraps, the man started eating one in huge bites and said, "Madam, I gotta say, your soybean paste has the best flavor and the pickled vegetables are perfect, not too salty. After getting used to eating your food, other people's food just doesn't taste right!"

"Of course! Don't you know who's wife is this?" A tall, broad shouldered, middle-aged man came from behind and patted the other man's shoulder. His handsome face was bright and his skin had a healthy bronzed tan. He flashed a grin that showed a mouth full of sparkling white teeth.

Little Shitou gleefully threw himself at the newcomer and hugged the man's shins as he called out, "Eldest Uncle, it's been such a long time since you last visited us. I missed you a lot!"

Liu Pei bent down to pull the little kid into his arms. He bounced Shitou in his arms for a bit to check his weight and looked with pleasant surprise at the boy's now fleshed out face. "Did your family start giving you more food? Looks like you've grown quite a bit, little fella!"

"Nuh uh! Second Sister knows how to catch fish and trap rabbits. They taste so good when roasted! Next time I'll give Eldest Uncle some too..." Had it been earlier, Shitou would have never exchanged meat to get closer to someone. Now that he could eat barbecued meat or stewed meat every couple of days (after bringing game to Auntie Zhao's house and using her stove to cook the meat), he no longer felt that meat was a rare, precious thing to be hoarded.

Liu Pei examined Yu Xiaocao's complexion and his smile deepened. "Xiaocao is really capable to be able to catch fish and rabbits! It gladdens my heart knowing you guys are doing better. That grandmother of yours doesn't mind you using game for your own purposes?"

"What are you saying to the children?" Eldest Aunt glared at her husband. Xiaocao could tell that her business wasn't going well. It wasn't surprising as salted vegetables, cooked dough, and soybean paste were food that every family had. Those who brought food from home would bring the exact same fare, why would anyone spend money to buy more of the same thing?

Little Shitou giggled and said, "We cook the meat in the mountains and then give portions to the people in our immediate family. Grandmother has no clue."

"Don't forget to sneak some to your mother. Your mother has had a hard life lately!" Liu Pei felt bad regarding his only sister's hardships as he was unable to help her as much as he would have liked.

At that time, his father should not have married his sister into a family with a stepmother. Where there was a stepmother, there would soon be a stepfather. At first it was still tolerable, but once the Yu Family's third son left to go to school, even Old Yu's feelings became biased.

"Yes! I have left chicken and rabbit legs for Mother. The legs have the most meat!" The little boy knew how to ingratiate himself with his elders.

After greeting her eldest uncle with her brother, Yu Xiaocao had stood at the side smiling silently. Only now did she chirp, "Shitou, quickly come down! You should let Eldest Uncle rest a bit and eat something."

"Not a problem! How much can a five year old weigh anyway?" Despite his words, Liu Pei still let the little boy down. The foreman had told him earlier that in a moment they needed to load a high ranking official's boat. They could not afford to be sloppy at this task.

The dock workers in the surrounding area ate as they discussed the official's vessel. Yu Xiaocao had eavesdropped on their conversations and found out it was a seafaring ship that was owned by a royal prince from the capital. It had apparently travelled to far-flung places and found some new creatures. From the idle gossip of the people around her, Yu Xiaocao found out that the current emperor had also like traveling by ship when he was still an imperial prince. All of the current large, ocean-faring ships were all purchased by the emperor as an imperial prince in his teens.

Prior to his ascension, Jianwen Emperor had travelled several times out to sea. He went to the Southern Seas, Western Seas, and to even further places. On one of his trips, he brought back the high-yielding crop, sweet potatoes, and some strange spices. Some other examples of new goods he brought back included: hot peppers so spicy that they caused a man's mouth to swell, the fresh and crispy cucumber, and the refreshing and thirst-quenching watermelon.

Yu Xiaocao suddenly remembered that, in her previous life, the Ming Dynasty had also conducted several maritime voyages. However, the person who sailed on the West Seas was the Sanbao Eunuch, Zhang He, and not an imperial prince. Admiral Zhang He in her previous life had no connection whatsoever with Jianwen Emperor. Was it possible that the founding emperor and Jianwen Emperor had transmigrated into this life?

Ah! Transmigrating doesn't come without risks and one must be cautious! In fact, many novels about political fighting and scheming often harped on this point. When there was more than one person who transmigrated over, they rarely worked together. Instead, they were often locked in a fight to the death! Since I'm ultimately a small fish in the sea, there's no point in trying to fight with the emperor! It's better to keep my head low and live a subdued life!

In the end, the two siblings didn't allow their Eldest Aunt to buy them steamed buns. They both claimed that they had already eaten breakfast. They stayed on the docks, and, before long, an official came over to ask them to move. The royal prince had set out, so the idle and unnecessary personnel should give away. The two siblings weren't the only commoners who were shooed away. In fact, even the people peddling wares from baskets had been driven away from the docks. Only the merchants in the shacks were lucky enough to not have to leave.

Little Shitou whined that he wanted to see the royal prince. Against her sensibilities, Yu Xiaocao could only tightly hold onto his head and squirm through a spot between the people pushed away by the bailiff to find a place for them to see.

Within about fifteen minutes, the once raucous and noisy wharf had become quiet. A long line of horse carts, all piled with goods, appeared. There were so many wagons that they couldn't see the end of the line. In front of the carts were a few haughty people dressed simply. All of them were riding horses, and they surrounded a young man clothed in expensive robes.

"Second Sister, is that older brother the royal prince?" Little Shitou's voice wasn't very loud. However, in the stark silence where even the sound of horse hooves was apparent, his voice sounded exceptionally clear.