

Gold Chapter 41

Chapter 41

Doctor You had been gone for two months. The villagers in and around Dongshan Village didn't feel anything was different in the short term. But after a while, they all felt the inconvenience of his absence. In the past, when they had a minor illness or a small disaster, they were able to pay Doctor You ten to twenty copper coins to be seen. Afterward, they just needed to take some medicine and their illness would be gone.

After Doctor You had left, the majority of the villagers who fell sick were able to overcome their illness by bearing with it. But if their condition didn't get better with time, they would have to go to town to see a doctor. However, they had to pay at least several hundred of copper coins to visit even the smallest medical hall.

Everyone knew that the granddaughter from Old Yu's family had studied medicine under Doctor You for a month. But, she was merely a silly eight year old girl and also didn't study under Doctor You for long. They rather endure the illness themselves than to put their own lives in the hands of a little girl. She might even turn their small illness into a serious illness!

Xiaocao was quite talented in studying medicine, and Doctor You felt that there wasn't much that he could teach her anymore. However, three months passed, and Xiaocao didn't receive even one patient. But she didn't take that to heart. Xiaocao's original purpose in studying medicine was to conceal the effects of the mystic-stone water when she used it. Hence, it didn't matter to her whether she had any patients seeking her help or not.

Doctor You often liked to concoct pills for common conditions like the common cold, small fevers, and other minor illnesses. The majority of the villagers from Dong Shan village knew this.

Every once in a while, Yu Xiaocao would be visited by the villagers. She would get the pills or medicine packs prepared by Grandfather You and give it to the sick villager. This was the only role left for her as Doctor You's direct disciple while he was gone.

Taking advantage of the fact that the early winter snow didn't seal the mountain, Yu Xiaocao would leisurely put out some traps every few days when she went up the mountain. With the mystic-stone water as an all-purpose bait, her harvest every time would be quite bountiful. Her private little purse was bulging more and more.

With more money came more worries. In the past, with only one or two silver ingots, she would be able to find a random corner and hide it. But now she had silver ingots and silver pieces inside her bulging purse, it was more difficult to find a safe hiding spot.. After all, the family had Yu Heizi, who liked to go through other people's things.

Xiaocao wasn't treating him unjustly: Heizi had a criminal record. Everyday, Yu Hai and Madam Liu both had more work than they could finish in a day, and Yu Xiaolian was also not allowed to idle around. When Xiaocao set out the traps, she would bring Little Shitou along. Basically, other than when they were eating or sleeping, there was no one in the West Room to witness anything.

One time, Yu Xiaocao had just returned from selling the animals she had caught using her traps in the mountain. When she returned, she saw the West Room's door wide open so she quickly hurried over to take a look. The whole room was a mess after being rummaged through by someone. The tattered clothes inside the trunk were thrown everywhere. Even the blanket on the kang bed was tangled into a lump.

She quickly went to check the place where she hid the money——in the small crack between the kang bed and the mud wall. Fortunately, after she had hid the money in the small crack, she had used some loose dirt to seal it. Otherwise, the money would be hard pressed to escape from Brother Heizi's sinister hand.

Xiaocao was angered by this so she told the head of the household——Madam Zhang. The biased elderly lady only asked a few questions. Due to the lack of evidence, they were forced to leave the matter unsettled. After that, when Xiaocao hid her secret money, she was much more careful.

In the end, she came up with a foolproof way of hiding her money. She dug a small square hole in one of the mud bricks of the wall. She also got a small piece of mud brick that can be easily placed into the hole. After she put the silver inside the small hole, she would put the small mud brick in. Then, she would take some mud and fill the small cracks, making everything look flawless.

As the days passed, the winter in the north finally showed its might. On that day, the weather was gloomy. The entire sky was covered in thick, low, and grayish-yellow turbid clouds.

The northeast wind howled as it wreaked havoc in the wilderness. It seemed as if the wind was holding a sharp sword that could easily pierce through a tight leather coat. So when Xiaocao left to go outside, her exposed cheek was stricken again and again by the wind. Her cheeks ached and it was difficult for her to bear the pain.

The umber-black sky was sprinkled with little pieces of pure white petals. It seemed as if the white petals also had a touch of fragrance on them. Snow as big as a goose feather flew down in great numbers, instantly dyeing the world in white.

In her previous life, Yu Xiaocao had lived in Central China. So even if there was snow, it would only be on a small scale. This was her first time seeing a snow so heavy that it looked like torn puffs of cotton were falling down.

The old and shabby cotton-padded jacket she was wearing wasn't sufficient enough to resist the severe cold of the north. Ever since winter had approached, Yu Xiaocao wasn't willing to go out. She would nestle on the kang bed everyday.

"It's the first snow of the year and yet it's already snowed this much! It seems like it would be hard to pass through this winter! Did we store enough food in the house?" At dinner, Old Yu sat on the kang bed. He looked out to see the snow that had been falling for a day and sighed. From his years of experience, it wasn't uncommon to see the big snow become a disaster.

Madam Zhang thought about the mountains of sliced sweet potatoes in the storage room. Once again, with food in her hand, Madam Zhang didn't panic. She nodded her head and replied, "There is definitely enough food. It's just hasn't been grinded into powder yet. When the snow stops, eldest son and second son will go grind thousands of catties of sweet potato powder and store it.

Old Yu wrinkled his brows and said, "Even if you don't get tired of just eating sweet potato flour for the entire winter, your stomach may not be able to handle it. We still need to buy some coarse and fine grains to store for the winter. If we wait till New Years when the snow has piled almost up to the sky, the prices of the grains would definitely be higher."

Just as they were discussing, the Yu Family's front door was slapped with a heaven-shattering sound. Within the sound of the wind and snow, they could also hear someone crying at the door.

"I'll go check it out!" Yu Hai put down his rice bowl and put on his tattered cotton-padded jacket. He pulled the door open and lurched into the raging storm. The moment the door opened and closed, a few snowflakes entered the house. The snowflakes fell onto the floor and melted into tiny specks of muddy water.

Madam Li continued to eat large mouthfuls of food, yet she didn't forget to complain, "Who is it? Why would they come when it's snowing so much? They also came at this hour. Are they trying to prevent us from eating?"

"Cao'er! Do you have any fever pills made by Grandpa You left? Your Uncle Shuanzhu has a high fever and needs it immediately!" A burst of bone-chilling wind blasted through the door. Yu Hai hurriedly pushed the door open and entered the house. Behind him was Shuanzhu's wife whose eyes were rimmed with red.

Yu Xiaocao swallowed the croquette in her mouth and quickly replied, "All of the medicine that Grandpa You had made is already used up. Is Uncle Shuanzhu burning up really badly? Does he need me to go look at him?"

"You are only a child, what good would there be for you to go? Don't delay a patient's illness. It's better if you send him to town to see a doctor. Don't worry about the money." Madam Zhang was worried that Yu Xiaocao would bring trouble to her family so she quickly interrupted her.

Shuanzhu's wife was so anxious to the point where tears almost fell from her eyes. "Yesterday, my husband caught a little cold. When he woke up today, he felt uncomfortable but didn't think it was serious. In the past he would just bear with the illness until he gets better by himself. But who would've thought that his fever would begin to burn hotter. Earlier, his hands and feet were thrashing about. We are also out of fever reducing medicine. What should I do?"

Madam Li began to make cynical remarks on the side, "Oh my! His fever has burned to the point where he has cramps? That can't be! My maternal family's neighbor also had a fever. His fever was burning fiercely to the point it burned his brain and he became a fool. He's almost forty now and he still can't find a wife! Your family's Shuanzhu's fever has already burned for a day now. I don't even know how he is right now!"

After being told that, Shuanzhu's wife could no longer hold back her tears. She was anxious without any solutions, "Then what can be done? It's snowing badly so we can't even send him to the town to see a doctor. Xiaocao, is there really no medicine left?"

"Human life is worth beyond any value. If I had medicine, I wouldn't hide or conceal it! Auntie Shuanzhu, if you trust me then I will go with you to check on him. You can't just stand there and watch his fever get worse right?" Yu Xiaocao decided to receive her first patient.

Madam Zhang angrily said, "What can an eight year old girl like you do? Is seeing a patient some easy thing? There is a human life involved! How many days did you study under Doctor You? Aren't you afraid of wasting your Uncle Shuanzu's—and his wife's time? Why don't you go to town and invite a doctor?"

If she left for town right now through the snow, it would still take three to four hours to go and return. By the time she arrived at town, it would be nighttime. What's more, it would be hard to say if the doctor would even agree to travel overnight to see a patient in this bad weather.

Shuanzhu's wife was turning to any doctor she could find out of desperation. She put her last hope on Yu Xiaocao, "Xiaocao, your Uncle Shuanzhu and your father are friends who've been through life and death together. They had even fought a shark together at sea. Don't conceal it from me and tell me the extent of your medical skills."

Yu Xiaocao's eyes were steady as she looked at Shuanzhu's wife. She honestly said, "Auntie Shuanzhu, Grandpa You said that I learned about seven to eight points of his skills. The remaining two to three points is because I lack experience. When it comes to a common cold or fever, as long as Grandpa You can cure it, I can do it too!"

Shuanzhu's wife's frenetic and anxious heart gradually relaxed after seeing Xiaocao's calm gaze. She bit her teeth and made a hard but correct decision, "Good! Auntie believe in you. I will put your Uncle Shuanzhu's life in your hands!"

"Aiya! Shuanzhu's wife, how can you believe in a child's boastful words? Our family's Xiaocao is only eight years old. We can't afford it if she treats Shuanzhu incorrectly!" Madam Li had finished eating and drinking. She was watching the show but now she was worried about the consequences if something bad happened.

Shuanzhu's wife once again clenched her teeth. She stamped her foot and said, "Whether she cures him or not, we won't make you take any responsibilities. Xiaocao, let's go quickly. Your Uncle Shuanzhu is still burning with a fever!"

Yu Xiaocao didn't care about her half eaten meal. She quickly went to the West Room to get the medicine box Grandpa You had left behind. She looked at the medicinal ingredients inside the medicine box and saw that it was complete. Thinking about it more, she looked for the Divine Stone's bath water with high concentration of mystic stone water. She poured the mystic-stone water in an empty medicine bottle. Only after she had put on all the clothes she had that could help her resist the cold did she leave the house with Shuanzhu's wife.

Yu Hai didn't feel reassured and couldn't continue eating his dinner. He followed behind his own daughter, helping her carry the heavy medicine box. From time to time, he would support his daughter, making sure that she didn't slip in this snowy weather.

Originally, the walk would take just five minutes. However, with the wind and snow obstructing their path, it took the three of them a quarter of an hour to arrive at their destination. Just as they opened the door, they were able to hear the sharp yet sad cry from the two children of the Liu Family, "Father! Father, please wake up! Father, you can't die yet!"

When Shuanzhu's wife heard their cries, her legs suddenly became soft. She sat on the floor and started crying.

Yu Xiaocao half walked and half ran as she rushed towards the kang bed. She pulled Uncle Shuanzhu's eyelid up and looked at his pupil. She calmly said, "Don't cry anymore. Uncle Shuanzhu didn't die! But the fever has made him go into shock. Auntie, quickly prepare some warm water to lower the temperature of his body."

"What? You want to lower the temperature of the room [1]? It's such a cold day and he's still sick. If you lower the temperature of his body, won't his illness get worse?" Shuanzhu's wife swayed lightly as she got up. Her heart began to waver at her decision to allow Yu Xiaocao to treat her husband's illness.

Yu Xiaocao didn't know whether she should laugh or cry as she said, "Uncle Shuanzhu's fever is burning too much. He needs to lower his body temperature. If he only relies on medication, he would recover much slower. Hence, I need Auntie to use warm water to wipe Uncle Shuanzhu's body. This way, his body temperature will lower faster.

Chapter 42

"Yes! Alright! There's hot water in the pot. I'll go get some!" Seeing that Xiaocao seemed to know what she was doing, a sense of hope reemerged within Shuanzhu's wife's heart. She hastily went to the kitchen to get the hot water. She was so anxious that she almost tripped in the yard.

After Yu Xiaocao carefully examined Uncle Shuanzhu's pulse, she took out some fever-reducing cold medicine from her medicine box and swiftly began decocting the medicine inside the room.

"Little Sister Xiaocao, will my father really be alright?" Liu Shuanzhu's ten year old daughter, Liu Huifang, whimpered as she squatted down to help Xiaocao brew the medicine and asked for reassurance.

Yu Xiaocao put the herbs into a ceramic pot, which was used to brew herbal medicine, and added a few drops of mystic-stone water into the pot. After that, she replied in a confident and firm manner, "Don't worry! He will be fine after drinking two doses of the medication!"

"Here's the hot water. Xiaocao, is this temperature suitable?" Shuanzhu's wife came in with a basin of hot water and a washcloth.

After Yu Xiaocao checked the temperature, she added half a bottle of mystic-stone water into the hot water and nodded, "It's fine! Quickly wipe down Uncle Shuanzhu's body with the cloth, especially the neck and armpit areas. The excessive body heat will dissipate faster!"

"Sister Xiaocao, what did you put in the water? It doesn't look like medicinal herbs? The second child of the Liu Family was the same age as Xiaocao, but he was a few months younger than Xiaocao.

While Yu Xiaocao instructed Liu Huifang on how to brew the medicine, she explained to the Liu Family's second child, whose nickname was Tiedan'er, "This is Grandpa You's secret remedy. It can speed up the recovery of any diseases. This is extracted from forty-nine different kinds of medicinal herbs. Grandpa You only made two bottles in fifty years. Don't you think it's precious? Don't go out and tell other people about this. If Uncle Shuanzi wasn't a close friend of my father, I would had been reluctant to use it!"

Shuanzhu's wife believed her and shed tears of gratitude, "Cao'er, you used up half a bottle for my husband. Wouldn't Doctor You be mad at you when he returns?"

"He won't! Grandpa You said that medicine was made to save people. Uncle Shuanzhu needed urgent treatment for his illness. If we delayed it any longer, then a big hole might be burned into his lungs. His life might be in danger if we don't use this medicine!"

Yu Xiaocao knew that it would be difficult to treat Uncle Shuanzhu's illness with just her own abilities, but it was much easier to cure him with the help of the mystic-stone water.

She also had concerns before she made the decision to come treat Uncle Shuanzhu's illness. After all, he was her first patient after she began studying medicine. If anything went wrong, it would be impossible for her to treat other patients in the future. Furthermore, she might get the reputation as 'a quack doctor who had harmed her patients' and wouldn't be able to lift her head in the village anymore.

While she was hesitating, the little divine stone suddenly appeared and sneered, [It's just a mere cold! Even though my powers are sealed, I can still cure such a minor disease. Take this! My, this Divine Stone's, bathing water will surely work without fail! Here, let me add a little more saliva for you—spit. It will definitely not fail.]

The little divine stone's bathing water and saliva had remarkable results. Shuanzhu's wife wiped her husband's body several times and noticed that his body temperature had dropped a lot. Shuanzhu, who had been unconscious due to his high fever, also gradually regained consciousness.

At this time, the medicine was ready. Shuanzhu's wife fed the medication to her husband. His terribly high fever was reduced within two hours after taking one dose of medicine.

"Ay! Brother Dahai, your daughter's medical skills is almost as good as Doctor You's. No wonder Doctor You praised her as a medical genius!" Liu Shuanzhu, who was still somewhat weak after his fever went down, leaned against the bed as he expressed his gratitude and praise for Xiaocao.

Shuanzhu's wife pulled out a cloth bag from the cabinet and took out several strings of copper coins, which had around one hundred copper coins on each string. She gratefully exclaimed, "Older Brother Yu Hai, we're so grateful to your daughter, Xiaocao. Doctor You's medicine must be very expensive, so I'm not sure if eight hundred copper coins is enough. If it's not enough, I'll go borrow some from my maiden family when the snow stops."

If the bottle of elixir and medicinal herbs belonged to his daughter, Yu Hai would never accept the money because of his close relationship with Shuanzhu. However, his daughter said that medicine belonged to Doctor You. Moreover, it seemed to be rather valuable. It was difficult for him to make a decision, so he looked at his daughter.

Since Yu Xiaocao had already spoken, it would be suspicious if she didn't accept the money. After a moment of hesitation, she said, "Auntie Shuanzhu, you're also familiar with Grandpa You's personality. If his patients' family had difficulties, he would waive their medical fee."

"That's right! All the villagers in the surrounding villages compliments our Dongshan Village's Doctor You as a benevolent person. A lot of people regard him as a living Bodhisattva!" Shuanzhu's wife exclaimed.

Yu Xiaocao continued, "If Grandpa You was here, he wouldn't want to see you guys borrowing money to pay the medical fee. I'll make the decision today and just accept two hundred copper coins from Auntie. Uncle Shuanzhu still needs to recuperate for some time and the New Year is coming soon..."

"Two hundred copper coins? Isn't that too little? Doctor You will scold you when he comes back in the spring! Cao'er, just take the money. We're a little short of money because we also bought a new boat this year. Don't worry. Although your Uncle Shuanzhu isn't as good of a fisher as your father, he is also one of the best fishermen within the village. With a new fishing boat, would we still be afraid of a little debt?" Shuanzhu's wife forced the cloth bag into Xiaocao's arms.

The cost for the medicine Xiaocao used for Shuanzhu didn't even add up to a dozen copper coins. The crucial component was the mystic-stone water, which didn't cost a single penny. Thus, she basically didn't spend any money at all. If she accepted the eight hundred copper coins, she would feel guilty. Hence, Yu Xiaocao refused and insisted on only taking two hundred copper coins.

Shuanzhu's wife was also a stubborn person. The more Xiaocao refused to accept the money, the more she wanted to give it to her. After seeing them pushing back and forth for a long time, Uncle Shuanzhu finally couldn't take it anymore and coughed a few times,

"Don't push and shove anymore. Xiaocao, just take it as your uncle taking advantage of you and accept five hundred copper coins. We're spending the New Year at Tiedan's grandfather's house, so we have enough for the winter with the remaining three hundred copper coins."

Xiaocao knew she couldn't decline anymore, so she accepted the five strings of coins with shame. She left behind several packs of herbs and reminded Auntie Shuanzhu to decoct a dose of the combined herbs for Uncle Shuanzhu to take daily.

The mystic-stone water was too effective. In the future, she needed to adjust the dosage to prevent arousing other people's suspicion and greed.

It snowed even more heavily on their way back. The snowflakes were almost like small snowballs since they were drifting so profusely and disorderly. The snow on the ground had already accumulated up to Xiaocao's knees, so she walked unstably in the snow. Her feet were sometimes stuck in the snow, which made it difficult to pull out.

Yu Hai, who held his daughter's small hand, noticed her situation and picked her up with a chuckle. He carried her on his back and strode home.

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at the sky—it's unfair that she had short legs!

The heavy snow lasted throughout the entire night. When they woke up on the next day, the door was blocked by all the snow in the courtyard. When Yu Hai got up in the morning, the first thing he did was to sweep the knee-deep snow out of the yard.

"Brother Dahai, have you heard? Wang Erlan'zi's three-room house was crushed by the snow. Two and a half of the rooms were destroyed. Last night, in the middle of the night, his family of five crammed together in the crumbling half-room that survived. They were lucky that they didn't freeze to death!" Their neighbor, Zhao Da, had already finished sweeping the snow and went around the village to share the news.

With his hands clasped behind his back, Old Yu frowned as he came back from outside. He stamped the snow off his shoes in front of entrance and deeply sighed as he said, "This was just the first snow of this winter, but it was already so big. I'm afraid it's going to be a tough winter."

"The heavy snow has become a disaster. Many houses within the village was more or less damaged by the snow. There were also several elders who didn't make it through last night. I heard that they were already frozen by the time they were discovered in the morning!" Zhao Da shook his head and went into his father's room. He stuffed more firewood into the duct of the kang to keep the kang bed warm.

Nearly every year, during the winter in the north, there would be sick elders and young children freezing to death and dying of illness. However, it was rare to see houses collapsing and people freezing to death so early in the winter like this year.

There were more and more people sweeping snow in front of their door. As they worked, they were also gossiping about the unfilial children, who left their elderly parents to live alone. The snow had crushed the houses of these elders and buried them inside. No one even knew how long they had lain dead...

Yu Xiaocao felt increasingly sad as she listened. She thought of Grandpa You, who was an elder in his sixties and lived alone in this remote fishing village. She was worried about his well-being. Was there was anyone to take care of him as he traveled alone? Would he be lonely and helpless?

"Father, I'm concerned about Grandpa You's house. Let's go take a look!" Seeing all the snow accumulated outside, Yu Xiaocao knew it would be hard for her to walk with her short legs, so she asked for her father's help.

"Alright! I'll take you over to have a look!" Yu Hai held the snow-cleaning tools in one hand, while he picked up his daughter and placed her on his back with the other. After that, he arduously walked towards the west side of the village.

Madam Zhang briefly chased after them before she gave up and shouted, "The snow on our own roof hasn't been swept, yet you have time to meddle in other people's business! Do you guys have too much free time on their hands?"

Yu Xiaocao, who was hugging her father's neck, turned around and shouted back at her grandmother, "Grandmother! My father isn't the only man in the family! Aren't Eldest Uncle and Younger Uncle both at home? Grandpa You is the only doctor in the vicinity. If his house is ruined, can he still live in our village when he returns in the spring?"

The neighboring villages were all envious of the fact the Doctor You stayed in Dongshan Village. It was also very convenient for the villagers of Dongshan Village to have a doctor in the village. There wasn't anything that Doctor You would be worried about except for his two-room house. Thus, it was considered Dongshan Village's responsibility to take care of his house when he was away.

When Yu Hai and Xiaocao arrived, the village head had already gathered several strong men to help clear out Doctor You's courtyard.

Doctor You had a two-room house. The roof for one of the rooms had already collapsed due to the snow. Fortunately, it was a storage room, so there wasn't much loss.

Yu Xiaocao hurriedly entered the room that was still intact, which only had a large kang bed and boxes of medicinal herbs. She carefully examined all the boxes that stored medicinal herbs. She finally breathed a sigh of relief after she made sure that all the herbs were still intact.

The village head was an old man in his fifties with gray hair and beard. He had a tall figure and a somewhat stern appearance. When he saw Yu Xiaocao, he quipped, "Oh, did our village's little doctor come to check on the herbs? Don't worry. Village Head Grandpa promises to repair this two-room house to make it nice and sturdy. No matter how heavy it snows, the herbs will not be crushed."

Chapter 43

Dongshan Village wasn't very big, so news spread really quickly from the east side of the village to the west. Last night, Shuanzhu's wife had traveled through the snow in order to ask the youngest daughter of the Yu Family to see a patient. The news had already circulated around the entire village, so early this morning, someone had gone to Shuanzhu's house to inquire about this incident.

After that, Yu Xiaocao would be invited to treat patients from time to time. She had also learned from her experience and didn't rely on the mystic-stone water for minor illnesses. She would just prescribe medication for minor illnesses and only sprinkled several drops of mystic-stone water into the herbs if it was more complex illness. All the patients she had treated were fully cured. Thus, her reputation as 'the little doctor of Dongshan Village' gradually spread to the nearby villages.

It snowed heavily for seven days before gradually stopping. The entire Dongshan Village was shrouded in a vast amount of white snow. It seemed as if there were only the colors of black and white left in the world.

Twenty households in Dongshan Village had suffered as a result of this blizzard. While all of their residences were more or less damaged, the houses of three families were completely crushed by the heavy snow. Fortunately, there were no casualties.

However, there were many elderly and children who didn't survive the sudden arrival of the severe cold and silently passed away during the winter weather.

The bitter cold and heavy snow also brought hunger and illness to the weak commoners. The heavy snowfall, which lasted for days, caused a price inflation for grains in town.

The price for coarse grain rose from two copper coins per catty to the same price as fine grains before the snow. Fine grain originally cost five copper coins per catty, but the price had risen to ten copper coins now. Furthermore, the price for the white rice, which weren't grown around Tanggu Town, had increased to twenty copper coins! The value for all types of meat had also doubled because a lot of poultry and livestock had either died from illness or froze to death during the snowstorm.

As the days drifted by, the New Year was also approaching. However, the price for food and goods still remained high. This was a heavy blow for the common people, who had worked hard in the past year and had wanted to change up their lifestyles during the New Year.

For several days, the atmosphere was strangely gloomy at the Yu Family's dining table. Madam Zhang's discontent grumbles and complaints made it difficult for people to eat.

"Eat! Eat! Eat! You only know how to eat! The Yu Family's resources are going to be demolished by you people! Why did our Yu Family let such an unhealthy person like you marry into our family? You're seriously a woman who brings bad luck to your husband's family!" Madam Zhang saw Yu Xiaocao getting another piece of potato pancake for her mother and began to harshly reproach them.

The heavy snowfall also caused Madam Liu, who had always been weak and in poor health, to fall ill. Madam Liu was often breathless due to her severe cough. Xiaocao didn't even need to check her mother's pulse to know that she had bronchitis. She prescribed several doses of medicine and added some mystic-stone water in her mother's drinking water. Thus, the cough, which usually lingered for months in the past, had been cured with her treatment.

Madam Liu couldn't suffer from the cold when she was already sick. Thus, Madam Li and the rest of the family had to share a portion of her chores. Madam Li was never a serious worker, so most of the household work fell on the shoulders of Yu Caidie and Madam Zhao's servant.

Madam Zhang was reluctant to let her youngest daughter do chores, but she also didn't dare to push all the work onto her youngest daughter-in-law's maidservant. Hence, she had to do the work herself. When she became irritated from all the work, she would start swearing incessantly.

"Grandmother, my mother didn't spend a single penny when she got sick this time. Didn't she just rest for a few days? With over a dozen people in the family, we can finish all the chores if everyone just helps out a little. My mother's body is still rather weak, so she can't be hungry. If she doesn't properly recuperate, then a minor illness will become something serious. If it becomes a serious illness, do you think I will be able to treat her with my medical skills? Wouldn't we have to call for a doctor from town?"

Yu Xiaocao continued to eat and ignored Madam Zhang's complaints. She would be just torturing herself if she quarreled with this biased old lady who had reached menopause!

Madam Zhang didn't know how to refute to her words, so she just set her chopsticks aside and wailed as she slapped her legs, "What sins have I committed?! Why did I have to encounter such a useless and worrisome bunch? I'm a weak, old lady who works hard to supply food for the entire family, yet I still have to be scolded by a little girl. Oh, heavens! Why can't you open your eyes and take away that unfilial thing—"

After Madam Li devoured her food, she wiped her mouth with her dirty sleeves and happily ridiculed, "Hey, Xiaocao, how can you talk to your grandmother like that? You've made your grandmother so angry. Aren't you going to quickly kowtow and apologize to her?"

Yu Hai hastily interjected and appeased Madam Zhang, "Mother, Cao'er is still an ignorant child, so please don't take her words to your heart. We all know that you're anxious for the family because of the price inflation this winter. But don't worry. When the snow melts, I'll go hunt for some game in the mountain. We can keep half for the New Year, while the other half can be taken to town to be exchanged for some fine white and wheat flour."

As soon as Madam Zhang heard that the problem of the New Year meal had been solved, she stopped crying and looked at Xiaocao, who had repeatedly challenged your authority, with a fierce expression. She turned to Yu Hai and said,

"Second Son, you have spoiled your daughter so much that she doesn't even respect her ancestors anymore. How can she talk to the elders in her family in that manner? You should quickly give that brat a couple of slaps on the face to teach her how to respect her elders!"

Yu Hai, who wouldn't even bear to hurt his precious daughter's fingertip, didn't actually think there was anything wrong with what his daughter said. However, he knew that the old lady couldn't accept being shamed. If he didn't give her a way out of this situation, she would definitely continue to make a ruckus for the entire day.

During Yu Hai's hesitation, he saw the chopsticks in his daughter's hand suddenly dropped to the ground. Her brows were tightly creased as she grasped her chest with a painful expression, "Father... I, I can't breathe..." Before she could finish her words, she had already lost consciousness and directly fell backwards.

Yu Xiaolian had already set down her chopsticks in preparation when she saw Xiaocao frowning. When Xiaocao fell backwards, Xiaolian quickly caught her right before she landed on the ground and prevented her from hitting her head. Xiaocao stealthily opened her eyes and made a gesture of praise to Xiaolian.

"Cao'er! What's wrong, Cao'er?" With a pale face, Madam Liu hugged her daughter's thin body and cried.

Yu Hai swiftly picked up his daughter and strode out, "Father! Mother! Cao'er is sick again! Doctor You said this child has an extremely weak constitution, so her life might be in danger if she falls ill again. I'll go to Eldest Uncle's house to borrow a sleigh, and then take Xiaocao to town..."

Old Yu immediately stopped eating and quickly covered his granddaughter with his fur jacket, "Dress more warmly and don't let the child catch a cold. Old Lady quickly take out the money. The doctors in town don't accept deferred payments!"

Trembling with anger, Madam Zhang stood up and shouted at the old man, "Why should I take out money? That damn wretch is obviously pretending to be sick! She was fine earlier, so why did she suddenly fall ill when I'm asking her to apologize to me? She's trying to threaten me by pretending to be sick! No one is allowed to move! If any of you dares to leave this room, then don't ever step into the Yu Family's house again!"

Old Yu was also infuriated, "You're such an imperious woman! How can you be so cruel to such a young child? Didn't you hear what Doctor You said? The child can't be overly provoked. You tried to hit and punish her earlier, so she got scared and fell sick again. How can you still act this way when you're her elder? Hurry up and go get the money. Don't delay the child from receiving treatment!"

"What's the point in seeing a doctor when she's just a waste of money! I don't have any money. Just chop up this old body of mine to pay off the debt!" Madam Zhang appeared as if she would rather die than give them the money. Thus, the family didn't know what to do with her.

Madam Li smirked and sneered, "Isn't your family's Xiaocao very capable? She had earned money by treating patients! She never turned in any of the money that she had earned!"

"The money was for Doctor You's medicine! Youngest Sister only charged them for the medication!" Yu Xiaolian couldn't help but explain when she saw the scorn on her grandmother and eldest aunt's faces.

Madam Zhang hollered as if she found a mistake they had committed, "You guys only charged them for the medicine? Who would believe that? Everything you eat and drink belongs to me, yet you're still selfishly keeping a secret purse! We can't let the others follow suit, so quickly give me the money!" As she spoke, she was about to personally rummage in the west room.

Yu Hai carried his daughter's small body and gritted his teeth as he watched Madam Zhang's action. His daughter was sick and unconscious, yet her grandmother hindered them from seeking treatment. Furthermore, she also wanted to seize the medicine fees that his daughter kept for Doctor You.

"Father! All the money that Xiaocao kept were fees for Doctor You's medicinal herbs, which he worked hard to dig up! If Doctor You finds out that we took all his hard-earned money, will our family still have the face to ask him to treat our illnesses in the future? If people in the village finds out, will our family still have any dignity?"

Seeing that his father had no intentions to stop Madam Zhang, Yu Hai felt a deep sense of pain and indignation. People often said, 'If you have a stepmother, you'll have a stepfather'. It seemed like that saying was true. Madam Zhang would often bully and suppress the second branch, but his father only spoke up for them when he felt that she went overboard. Today, he actually tacitly consented to her actions when the problem involved their family's finances.

Old Yu also had his own considerations. Since the family had to provide for a scholar, there were a lot of things that they needed to spend money on in the future. If everyone had selfish motives, then with his aging body, how would this family be able to survive? The matter of keeping a secret purse mustn't be tolerated.

However, their Yu Family really couldn't touch the medicine fees in his granddaughter's hands. These days, every household had some minor illnesses and problems that requires the help of a doctor. So, they couldn't offend the only doctor in the vicinity. It would be terrible if he secretly messed with their medicines.

"No one is allowed to touch Doctor You's money! My children's mother, don't you still need Doctor You to treat your rheumatoid arthritis? Also, Dashan's cough..." Old Yu finally spoke up.

Madam Zhang held the box of money that she found, which was mostly filled with copper coins. There were probably at least a few thousand copper coins inside. If all the money were taken into the family account, even if prices remained high during the New Year, the Yu Family would still be able to spend a prosperous New Year.

Old Yu's words had caused her hands, which were reaching for the money, to stop. Madam Zhang inwardly thought that she had a very clear idea about how skilled Yu Xiaocao really was. She believed that the only reason those people asked Xiaocao to treat on their illnesses was because of Doctor You's medicines.

Madam Zhang had suffered from rheumatoid arthritis for over ten years. During the snowstorm several days ago, her disorder had acted up again. At that time, Yu Xiaocao had used the medicinal herbs prepared by Doctor You to reduce her pain (Author's Note: It was actually prepared by Xiaocao.). If they offended Doctor You, wouldn't she need to go to town in order to treat her leg? That would waste so much money!

After a long deliberation, she finally put down the box of money reluctantly. She angrily returned to her room without eating her meal. She ignored everyone as she laid on her bed.

Yu Hai looked down at his wan-looking daughter, who was in his embrace, and said to Old Yu, "Father, even if I need to borrow money, I'll still take Xiaocao to see a doctor."

Chapter 44

"Borrow money? Who's going to pay the debt?" Madam Li interjected.

Yu Hai glared at her and replied with a slightly angry tone, "It's natural that I will repay the money since I was the one who borrow it! Eldest Sister-in-law doesn't need to worry about it!"

"Second Brother-in-law, don't forget that all the money that you earn has to be handed in!" Madam Li reminded him with a smirk.

"What? I'm the one who earns the money, but I can't even use my hard-earned money to get medical treatment for my daughter. As a father, should I just watch my daughter die of illness without doing anything? If I did that, am I still worthy to be a father? What's the point of me earning all this money? Why should I continue to fish and hunt? I might as well just stay at home, and then die of illness or starvation with my wife and daughter!" The honest man finally erupted in rage and vented his anger at Madam Li, who kept provoking him.

Madam Li shouted back, "I didn't even get a single penny from the money that you earned! Why are you screaming at me?"

"Alright, stop talking. Even if you don't talk, no one will think you're a mute!" Yu Dashan noticed that his second brother was really angry right now, so he hastily dragged his wife back to their east room.

With a sorrow filled gaze, Yu Hai looked at his father and spoke with a hoarse voice, "Father, Cao'er is your granddaughter and a descendant of the Yu Family. Are you really going to be so cruel and just watch her..."

Old Yu sighed deeply and said, "I'll go to your eldest uncle's house to borrow some money. You can repay them with the game that you catch in the future..."

The inner room's door slammed open before he could finish speaking. With a grim expression, Madam Zhang fiercely glared at the old man and yelled,

"A certain someone can fish and hunt, so he has a better reputation than you. Why would he need you to help borrow money? There's a price inflation this winter and we're not making any income right now. If we continue to eat like this, wouldn't our family eventually go bankrupt? In the future, we will have a light breakfast, and the pancakes served for dinner will be limited."

After she finished speaking, she slammed the door shut again. She shut the door so hard that all the dust on the house beam drifted down to the ground.

His daughter's life was still in danger, but her grandmother was still only concerned with saving money. Yu Hai despondently looked around the house, and then rushed towards his eldest uncle's house with Xiaocao in his arms.

Yu Hai's eldest uncle, Yu Lichun, raised two big dogs at home. They were useful for pulling the sleigh when it snows. It had snowed heavily a couple days ago, so it would take him at least half a day to reach town by foot. Thus, when he visited his eldest uncle this time, not only would he need to get a loan, but he also needed to borrow the sledge.

With a dazed expression, Yu Hai knocked on his eldest uncle's front door. The person who opened the door was Xiaocao's third uncle.

Yu Jiang looked at his older cousin in surprise. When his gaze shifted to the small figure within Yu Hai's arms, his voice instantly changed, "What happened? Did Xiaocao get sick again? Eldest Brother, Eldest Brother... quickly bring the sledge over! Second Brother needs to use it!"

Yu Lichun had two sons and three daughters. His eldest son was five years older than Yu Hai, while his second son was younger than Yu Hai. Yu Hai was the second oldest, so they called him 'Second Brother'.

Yu Lichun's whole family was home, hiding from the winter weather. When they heard the youngest son's shout, they all immediately rushed out of the house. Yu Lichun didn't even put on his cotton-padded jacket when he hurried over to check on Xiaocao's situation.

Yu Hai went straight to the point and directly stated the purpose of this visit. Yu Lichun immediately turned towards his wife, Madam Sun, and said with a firm tone, "How much money does our family still have? Give them all to Dahai."

Without any hesitation, the old lady went into the room and came back with a gray bag. She didn't even open the bag before directly handing it to Yu Hai, and told him, "Take the whole thing. It's more important for the child to get treatment first."

The eldest son's, Yu Xi, wife's mouth twitched and muttered in a low voice, "If we give all our money to Dahai, what are we going to eat over the New Year? The children are all anticipating the chance to eat some wheat flour during the holiday!"

Elder Yu, who had just set up the sleigh, heard his daughter-in-law's remark and glared at her, "Is eating more important than a person's life?"

The eldest son's wife didn't utter another word, but she criticized inwardly: His parents have so much more money than our family. Why does our family have to pay for the little girl's medical fees? That aunt of hers is seriously a miser who won't even give away a single penny!

Yu Hai had always felt grateful to his eldest uncle. When his birth mother passed away, his eldest uncle and aunt took great care of him and his older sister. If it weren't for his eldest uncle's support, he didn't even know when he would be able to get a wife.

Yu Hai bowed deeply towards his eldest uncle's family. He didn't say anything else and took the bag of money. After that, he got onto the sleigh and sped all the way to the village entrance.

Shortly after they left the village entrance, Xiaocao, who had been attentively listening to her surroundings, pretended as if she had just woken up and called out to Yu Hai, who held her tightly in his embrace.

A trace of expression finally appeared on Yu Hai's face. He smiled at his precious daughter, who was wrapped up like a ball, and softly asked, "Cao'er, you awake? Can you tell Father where you're feeling unwell?"

As Yu Xiaocao struggled to sit up, she shook her head firmly and said, "I don't feel uncomfortable anywhere. Father, don't worry. Earlier, I was just scared by Grandmother and fainted. I'm fine now, so let's go back!"

"We should still go to town and get a doctor to check on you. We need to make sure that your illness is completely cured." Yu Hai touched his daughter face and insisted on taking her to see a doctor.

When faced with Yu Hai's stubbornness, Yu Xiaocao felt moved and helpless. She continued to persuade her father, "Father! I'm really fine! No matter what I can still be considered half a doctor. Wouldn't I know about the condition of my own body?"

Yu Hai gave her a perfunctory reply as he controlled the sleigh, "Father knows that our Xiaocao is very capable. However, the ancients often say: 'Doctors don't treat their own illnesses.' Father will only be at ease after a doctor from Tongren Medicine Hall checks on you."

Without any other choice, Yu Xiaocao came up with a compromise, "Father, let's do this! Let's go to the mountain first and set some traps. We might be able to catch some game. In that case, we will have money for the medical fee. It's inauspicious to owe money during the New Year."

Yu Hai looked at his daughter's rosy cheeks and her liveliness when she spoke. Seeing her persistence, he decided to compromise. So, he ordered the two dogs to turn towards the direction of the mountain forest.

The snow accumulated on the main road had been trampled on by pedestrians and carriages, so it was hard and firm. However, it was different in the mountain because the snow was soft and knee-deep high. When the two dogs travelled in the deep snow, only their heads were visible, which made it extremely difficult for them to walk.

Yu Hai decided to simply unload the sleigh from the dogs and pull his daughter into the mountain himself. He would be too worried to leave his daughter alone on the mountain road when it was so freezing cold.

The snow was beginning to clear, so many hungry little creatures came out to seek food in the mountain forest. After walking briefly, they saw a pheasant flapping its wings and flying pass them.

Yu Hai felt somewhat regretful and said, "It's a pity that I didn't bring my hunting tools with me."

"It's alright, Father! Let's go over to the left side. Brother Han and I hid some ropes for the traps there." Sitting on the sleigh, Yu Xiaocao enjoyed this new experience and curiously touched everything around her. From time to time, she made a snowball and threw it at the branches. She giggled ceaselessly as she watched the snow on the branches falling down.

Yu Hai finally felt relieved when he saw his daughter looking so energetic. A moment later, the two of them found the ropes. Yu Hai broke off some dead branches and set up around twenty traps of varying sizes.

Yu Xiaocao was also working busily behind him. She was either sprinkling some mystic-stone water on the snows around the noose or putting a batch of dry grass, which were soaked with mystic-stone water, around the traps. Ever since Yu Xiaocao freed up two bottles and filled them up with mystic-stone water, she had always carried a bottle with her for emergencies. In order to prevent the animals in

the mountain from causing an uproar, Xiaocao urgently diluted the mystic-stone water with snow water before she sprinkled it.

It took them over two hours to finish setting all the snares. Yu Hai was an experienced hunter, so it was inevitable that he was better at setting the traps than she was. He specifically chose to set the traps on the routes that the animals frequented. After they set the last snare and returned on the same route, they noticed that there was already quite a lot of harvest.

"Wow! Cabot's tragopan! Partridge! There's also blue-rumped pitta!" Yu Xiaocao screamed excitedly. After such a big snowstorm, these live mountain birds should be worth quite a lot of money.

Yu Hai tied up those small game with a rope and put them on the sleigh. After that, they also caught several wild hares.

"Father! Look, what's that? Is it a roe deer?" Yu Xiaocao saw from a distance that there was also some harvest under the few bigger snares that they had lay out. The creature looked similar to their family's Tiny.

Yu Hai swiftly rushed towards the struggling game, pushed it down onto the ground, and tied its limbs with a rope.

"Hha! We got quite a harvest today. We actually caught a deer at the edge of the forest! My daughter, this isn't a roe deer. It's an adult male deer! The deer's blood and meat are all very good things. The wealthy people in town really like this!" A smile finally emerged within Yu Hai's eyes. The deer probably weighed over a hundred catties. If he sold it, then he wouldn't need to borrow money to pay for his daughter's medical fees.

By the time Yu Hai and his daughter came out of the forest, the sleigh was already filled with game. After he reassembled the sleigh, they travelled all the way to Tanggu Town on the dog-pulled sleigh.

When they reached the gate of Tanggu Town, it was already noon. They left the sleigh with a family who lived near the city gate and gave them a pheasant as a payment for their help.

After the blizzard, the prices for goods steadily soared, so such a fat pheasant would cost at least one or two hundred copper coins. That family was extremely happy and promised to take good care of the two dogs.

"Hey? Isn't this Brother Dahai? Did you come deliver game to our Fulin Restaurant? Quick, quick! Please come in!" Fulin Restaurant's manager was sharp-eyed and quickly recognized Yu Hai and his daughter. When he saw the game that Yu Hai carried on his back, he, who was usually arrogant, couldn't help but greet them warmly.

Yu Hai was very uncomfortable with his hospitality. As someone who frequently delivered game to town, Yu Hai naturally knew about Fulin Restaurant's Manager Liu's usual attitude and behavior. He was a powerful man who despised the poor. Manager Liu had also incessantly forced him to lower the price for his game.

With the booming business of Zhenxiu Restaurant and their increased demand for game, Yu Hai rarely did business with Fulin Restaurant. Had Manager Liu gone mad today? He actually acted so friendly with him and he even called him 'brother'.

Yu Xiaocao, who was holding several small game, had a terrible impression of this Manager Liu. Moreover, she had previously made a verbal agreement Third Young Master Zhou. If she caught game, she would prioritize Zhenxiu Restaurant. Thus, she naturally didn't want to do business with Fulin Restaurant, since they had unethical business conducts.

Chapter 45 - Getting Rich

"Oh, it's Xiaocao! Did you go to the mountain to set traps on such a cold day?" In the midst of her hesitation, the familiar voice of Third Young Master Zhou sounded from nearby.

Yu Xiaocao turned around and saw a handsome young man, who was dressed in a royal blue colored robe, stepping down from a luxurious horse carriage. Wasn't this Third Young Master Zhou?

"Third Young Master, what a coincidence? I was just about to send over the game that you ordered! Since we caught a lot of game today, I couldn't carry all of them by myself. So, I asked for my father's help!" Yu Xiaocao slightly pushed her father and moved closer to Zhou Zixu.

Yu Hai smiled apologetically, "Manager Liu, I'm really sorry! Zhenxiu Restaurant made a reservation for these game with my daughter. Next time, when I get the chance, I'll work with Manager Liu."

Manager Liu's face violently twitched and his expression instantly darkened. He spat at Yu Hai's back figure, "Just a filthy poor hunter. Does he even deserve to talk 'business' with me? All staff listen up! In the future, we're not taking any of the game that the Yu Family sends over! Just let them cling onto Zhenxiu Restaurant! Humph!"

Although Manager Liu spoke proudly, he felt extremely distressed inwardly. It snowed really heavily this year. During the blizzard, not many hunters would brave the snow and enter the mountain to hunt. Thus, there was a shortage of game for all the restaurants in town. Otherwise, he wouldn't have lowered himself and acted friendly with a mere hunter.

Manager Liu could only enviously look at the game, while Third Young Master Zhou was pleasantly surprised. Zhou Zixu smiled happily as he looked at the buck on Yu Hai's shoulder.

"Uncle Yu, you're seriously such a life savior! At the end of the year, the county magistrate and the aristocrats in town have all reserved a table at Zhenxiu Restaurant. We were just worried about not having any presentable dishes! With this buck, our Zhenxiu Restaurant's reputation will surely go up another level!"

"Xu'er, is this our Zhenxiu Restaurant's great savior who you have mentioned?" A gentle and graceful voice emerged from within the horse carriage.

Third Young Master Zhou smiled at Xiaocao, and then replied to the person within the carriage, "Mother, this little girl is one who gave us the recipe for the oyster sauce. Her name is Yu Xiaocao. We are able to defeat the older and more famous restaurants in town because of the oyster sauce. Thus, it's not an exaggeration to say that she's the savior of Zhenxiu Restaurant."

It was inconvenient for Madam Zhou to come out of the carriage since there was an unfamiliar man present. Thus, she stayed within the carriage as she expressed her gratitude, "Thank you so much, Miss Yu, for being so generous and teaching us your secret recipe. Xu'er, remember to invite the young miss to our estate some other day. Mother should thank her in person."

Yu Xiaocao quickly said, "Madam is being too courteous. If I keep the formula for the oyster sauce for myself, then only my family can taste it. However, if I give it to Zhenxiu Restaurant, more people can try the delicious taste. All recipes and formulas can only reflect its worth in the hands of people who know how to truly appreciate and use it. Don't you think so?"

When Madam Zhou heard her reply, she couldn't help but look differently at the little peasant girl from the mountains. Her manner of speech and thinking were even better than some of the noble ladies in town.

“Mother, you should go back first! I'll need to go to the restaurant and make the arrangements.” Zhou Zixu was completely focused on the game right now. He wasn't just concerned about the money. This matter could also affect the restaurant's reputation.

When the other restaurants couldn't provide decent game to the public, Zhenxiu Restaurant would surely reach new heights by presenting a full deer banquet.

“Xiaocao, you're seriously my little lucky star! The game that we stocked up before the snow has long been sold out. Recently, a few distinguished, regular customers have been clamoring for fresh meat dishes. My hair is about to turn white due to the stress. At the end of the year, if the dishes on the menu are too simple, then it's seriously not presentable!” Zhou Zixu took the game from Xiaocao's hands and walked beside her.

Yu Hai, who walked behind them, was stunned inwardly, 'When did my daughter become so familiar with the young boss of Zhenxiu Restaurant?'

When they arrived at Zhenxiu Restaurant, Third Young Master Zhou instructed the server to take the game into the kitchen. After that, he invited the father and daughter pair into his own private room and heated up the brazier. Looking at Xiaocao's reddened face, he couldn't help but ask with concern,

“You must be freezing, right? Quickly come warm yourself up beside the brazier. There's so much snow in the mountain, so it must be very difficult to catch prey! Uncle Yu, your hunting skills are truly excellent!”

Yu Hai held a cup of hot tea in his hands to keep warm, while he observed the gorgeous and elegant decors in the private room. He inwardly sighed: 'I have been to Zhenxiu Restaurant numerous times to sell game, but I have never enjoyed such treatment before. This was all thanks to his daughter!'

According to Madam Zhou, they had learned to make the oyster sauce, which was one of Zhenxiu Restaurant's specialties, from his daughter. He never knew that his little girl had such skills, and a spontaneous sense of pride and honor surged within his heart.

When he heard the courteous remark made by the young boss of Zhenxiu Restaurant, he quickly straightened his posture and appeared slightly stiff as he replied, "Third Young Master Zhou has overpraised me. I was just lucky today. I also hadn't expected that we get such results by just setting traps."

"Uncle Yu, you can just call me Zixu. I knew Xiaocao was skillful in setting traps. However, I didn't know that the skill runs in Uncle Yu's family!" The ginger soup that Zhou Zixu instructed to be brewed had arrived, so he personally handed them to Yu Hai and Xiao's hands.

Seeing that his daughter had received the ginger soup in a relaxed manner, Yu Hai also dropped the formalities and drank the soup while it was still warm. When his frozen body finally warmed up, he smiled and said, "We're not really a family devoted to hunting. I had learned my hunting skills from Older Brother Zhao, who was also a hunter. In terms of hunting, Older Brother Zhao Bufan is the one who's truly an expert!"

"Our Zhenxiu Restaurant needs to thank Uncle Yu and Uncle Zhao for always helping us out. As an expression of our gratitude, I'll treat you guys to a meal this afternoon. I hope Uncle Yu will accept my sincerity..." Disregarding their business relationship, Zhou Zixu felt that the generosity and help that Yu Hai's daughter had provided him was enough for him to treat the father and daughter warmly.

Yu Hai hastily declined, "Third Young Master Zhou doesn't have to waste the money. We are still in a hurry to go to Tongren Medicine Hall and ask Doctor Sun to check on Cao'er."

"Xiaocao, are you feeling unwell? Tongren Medicine Hall's Doctor Sun's medical skills is very good. Should I get someone to call Doctor Sun over?" Zhou Zixu carefully examined Yu Xiaocao and felt relieved to see that she didn't seem sick.

Yu Xiaocao drank the bitter ginger soup with a troubled face, and then waved her hand at him, "I'm fine. I suffered a little fright in the morning, but I'm alright now. My father is just overly anxious!"

Yu Hai inwardly thought, 'You even fainted this morning, so how am I being overly anxious?'

Yu Xiaocao continued, "However, it has gotten colder recently. I wonder if my older brother has any warm clothes. Third Young Master Zhou, are there any shops to buy ready-made garments nearby? I want to buy a cotton-padded clothing for my older brother."

With a slightly discontented expression on his face, Zhou Zixu exclaimed, "How many times have I told you already? Don't call me 'Third Young Master Zhou'. It makes us sound like strangers. No matter what I'm still five years older than you, so it wouldn't be too much for you to call me 'Older Brother Zhou', right? You don't need to go buy the cotton-padded clothes. I have many quilted garments at home that have become too small for me even before I got to wear them. If you don't mind, you can give them to your older brother to wear."

"No, please don't! My older brother is an apprentice at a shop, so it's improper for him to wear your fancy clothing! It's better to buy those cotton-padded attires made with rough fabric because it's not as eye-catching!" Yu Xiaocao looked at the royal blue brocade robe on his body. It definitely wasn't suitable for poor folks like them.

Zhou Zixu's servant, who was like a shadow without any sense of existence, finally spoke up at this time, "Young Master, this servant's mother had made a cotton attire for me at the beginning of the year. When I tried it on several days ago, I noticed that it had gotten shorter. The clothing was made from a fabric gifted by Madam and I have never worn it before. If Miss Yu doesn't mind..."

"Bring it over for me to see! Also, go fetch two quilts from home on your way. The weather has gotten so cold, so we don't want our Brother Yu Hang to freeze!" After Zhou Zixu finished giving out his orders, knowing that Yu Xiaocao wouldn't stay for the meal, he instructed the server to go weigh the game on the scale.

The waiter came back from the kitchen a moment later and reported, "The male deer is two hundred sixty catties, while the various small game weighed a total of thirty-five catties."

Zhou Zixu naturally wouldn't treat them badly. After a moment of deliberation, he said, "In the past, a buck was worth sixty copper coins per catty. However, according to this winter's market value, it will cost about a hundred copper coins per catty. The deer you caught is still alive. The deer blood and penis are both very valuable things... Let's do this. I'll pay you one hundred twenty copper coins per catty for this deer. The price for the other small game will also be double. What do you think?"

"The venison can be sold for a hundred copper coins, but our deer is only heavy due to its fur. So, how can we ask for a hundred twenty copper coins for each catty! We're already taking advantage of you by taking a hundred copper coins per catty." Yu Hai wasn't someone who would take advantage of others.

Zhou Zixu guffawed, "If you're talking about taking advantage, we're the ones who have benefited the most. I can sell this deer for at least ten times the price that I brought it with. If Uncle hadn't delivered this deer to Zhenxiu Restaurant in consideration of our old friendship, how would we be able to use it to earn money? Uncle Yu, no offense, but you're not as straightforward as your daughter."

Yu Hai was even more astonished inwardly when he saw his daughter's relaxed and satisfied attitude, 'Based on their attitude, this clearly wasn't their first business deal. When did his daughter start doing business with Zhenxiu Restaurant?'

The deer, which was over two hundred catties, was sold for thirty-one taels and two hundred copper coins. The various small game were sold for 1,750 copper coins. In the end, Third Young Master Zhou rounded the total up and gave them thirty-three taels.

"The deerskin is very valuable. Do you guys want it?" The price for the deerskin is calculated separately. A complete deerskin would be worth at least ten taels.

Yu Hai pondered for a moment and said to his daughter, "Let's just keep the deerskin. After we tan the skin, it will be very soft and strong. It's also water-resistant. I can make two pairs of deerskin boots for you siblings. In the future, your feet won't get wet when you go gather seafood at the beach."

If he wasn't her own father, Yu Xiaocao would have replied to him by saying, 'Are you an idiot?!' We could buy so many pairs of shoes with ten taels. Moreover, he wanted us to wear the deerskin boots to gather seafood at the sea. How much seafood would we need to gather in order to make up for the price of a pair of deerskin boots?

"We don't want the deerskin. You can just give us the money for it!" Yu Xiaocao directly made the decision. It was undeniable that her father really loved his children, but he was too indecisive sometimes.

Zhou Zixu didn't say anything and took out a banknote, which was worth fifty taels, from his purse. Without giving Yu Hai a chance to refuse, Yu Xiaocao had reached out her hand to take the banknote, "Wow! So this is the banknote that people talk about! Are there any restrictions? It won't expire, right?"

Zhou Zixu rolled his eyes in an unrefined manner. He smiled as he pinched her cheek and said, "Don't worry! This note is from the old and famous bank operated by the Sang Family. They're the wealthiest family in all of the Great Ming Dynasty. The bank won't go bankrupt! Moreover, with our relationship, even if the bank is gone, you can still come find me to exchange it for cash."

Chapter 46 - Making Up an Excuse

"Thank you then!" Yu Xiaocao flipped the banknote back and forth and examined it for a long time. After her curiosity had been fulfilled, she carefully folded the banknote and put it into the pocket of her jacket. After that, she patted her pocket contentedly.

A fifty taels banknote! In addition to her earnings from selling game last time, she had at least seventy or eighty taels now. It seemed like she had accumulated some savings now!

Third Young Master Zhou looked at Xiaocao, who appeared like a money-grubber. Her big eyes were like a pair of crescent moons and her rosy lips were curled up slightly. Even her shabby and worn-out attire couldn't conceal her cuteness.

Yu Hai was quite surprised to see his daughter unreservedly putting the banknote into her pocket. When did his daughter become so assertive? She had calmly stuffed a fifty taels banknote into her own pocket. She didn't know how many things fifty taels could buy, does she? Even a five-room house in Dongshan Village wouldn't need so much money to be built.

Third Young Master Zhou had noticed Yu Hai looking at Xiaocao with a hesitant expression when she directly took the money without prior discussion with him. However, Yu Hai didn't say anything in the end. He also didn't confiscate the banknote, which was enough money for an ordinary family to live off for several years.

Zhou Zixu smiled faintly and said to Yu Hai, "Uncle Yu is really a good father, who dotes on your daughter."

Yu Hai looked affectionately at his youngest daughter, who was currently eating snacks. He thought of his poverty-stricken situation of not having any money when his daughter fainted, as well as his other thin and weak children at home. He shook his head gently and replied with a voice full of solemnity and self-remorse, "No, I'm not a good father..."

"Father, if you stop listening to my grandmother all the time and think of our immediate family more, then you will definitely be a good father!" Yu Xiaocao lectured her father as she drank the steaming hot brown sugar ginger soup.

“My mother... who is also your real grandmother had passed away when your father, I, was still very young. Thus, I'm grateful to your grandmother for raising me up. After your youngest aunt gets married and your younger uncle passes the county level examination, there will be fewer burdens at home, so our immediate family can break off from the family and live separately from them. At that time, I'll earn more money by hunting and fishing more frequently. I'll buy more new clothes and hair accessories for our Xiaocao...” Yu Hai felt slightly distressed in his heart as he touched his daughter's somewhat withered and yellow hair.

Yu Xiaocao inwardly pouted her lips. Her father was the breadwinner of the family. If her younger uncle passed the county level examination, then he would want to take provincial level examination and the imperial examination... Her grandmother was a leech, so she was never going to let them go until she had sucked all their blood. Their hope of breaking off from the family was very slim!

Another manservant of Third Young Master Zhou knocked on the door and came in with a bulky bundle. With an embarrassed expression on his face, Zhou Zixu's personal manservant, Simo, took the bundle from him and said, “This servant really hasn't worn this cotton-padded clothes before. If Miss Yu doesn't mind, then...”

“I don't mind! I don't mind!” He was the personal manservant of the young master of the Zhou Family, which was the wealthiest family in Tanggu Town. Thus, he dressed more decently than most of the ordinary people in town. The quilted attire he wore was made of fine cotton cloth, which cost thirty-four copper coins for one-third of a meter!

She took the bundle and saw that it was indeed a brand-new set of dark blue quilted jacket and trousers. They were made with fine cotton fabric and filled with thick cotton, so the set of clothing felt extremely soft. Even if she didn't touch the garment, it was easy to tell that they were made with fresh cotton. This set of cotton-padded clothes would cost at least a few hundred copper coins.

It wasn't easy to work as a servant, so Yu Xiaocao naturally didn't want to take advantage of him. She stretched her hand out towards her father and said, “We'll buy this set of clothing from this young brother. Father, give me money to pay him!”

Third Young Master Zhou was quite amused when he saw the young girl, who had a fifty taels banknote in her pocket, outright asked her father to pay. Moreover, the obedient father swiftly complied to his daughter's orders and paid with his money...

Simo hastily declined the string of copper coins that Yu Hai handed to him and said, "This cotton-padded attire is too small for me to wear, so it's useless for me to keep it. It's also a pity to just throw it away. It's fortunate that Miss Yu wants to take it, so how can I accept money for it?"

In fact, the madam had rewarded the fabric for the quilted garments to him because she saw that he had served the young master wholeheartedly. Simo's mother felt that her son had gained honor for her, so she gladly stayed up for two nights to make the clothes for him. However, he didn't get the chance to wear it since the weather had gotten warmer. He took it out to wear as soon as winter came around, but it had already become too small for him.

His young master's status in the Zhou Family had risen due to Zhenxiu Restaurant's success. Eldest Master had praised his young master more than once in front of the other young masters. Even a personal manservant like him had also received more respect.

Simo, who had become conscious of his position, prevented his mother from altering the clothes. It would be so embarrassing if the personal manservant of the only heir of the second branch came out dressed in a mended attire. Wouldn't he turn into a laughingstock? Thus, a good and brand new set of quilted clothes became useless.

Who was Miss Yu? In merely half a year, Zhenxiu Restaurant had become the best restaurant in Tanggu Town. Miss Yu could probably take at least half of the credit for the success of Zhenxiu Restaurant. Thus, even his own young master treated her with respect and gratitude. She readily accepted the cotton-padded clothes, so how would he dare to take her money?

Yu Xiaocao noticed that the young brother was about to be upset if she continued to give him the money. Hence, she stopped insisting and expressed her gratitude to the manservant again. After that, she stuffed the quilted clothing into her father's hands and bid farewell to Third Young Master Zhou.

Zhou Zixu lamented, "Head Chef Wang came up with a new dish. I wanted to ask you to taste the dish and give us some advice. But it seems like we have to do it on another day. By the way, where do you live, Xiaocao? Leave me your address, so I can find you more easily in the future."

"I live in Dongshan Village, which is southeast of town. It's a small fishing village a little over twenty-five kilometers [1] away." Yu Xiaocao's plan to quietly make a fortune was inseparable from her 'God of Fortune [2]', so she naturally wouldn't reject his request.

When they came out of the private room, they ran into Head Chef Wang, who had hurriedly rushed over. He had a slightly disappointed expression on his face when he saw Yu Xiaocao leaving. He found out that Xiaocao was going to visit her older brother, who worked as an apprentice. Head Chef Wang, who had also begun as an apprentice, naturally knew that pain of being an apprentice. Thus, he ordered the server to wrap a bag of freshly-made steamed buns from the kitchen and told Xiaocao bring it to her older brother.

Yu Xiaocao was so grateful that she repeatedly thanked him. Head Chef Wang chuckled merrily, “No need to thank me! I'm just borrowing my boss's flower and offering it to you, this little Bodhisattva [3]! Miss Yu, if there's a chance in the future, let's exchange our knowledge regarding cooking.”

“My meager culinary skills are incomparable to Head Chef Wang's skills. However, if I have any new ideas in cooking, I'll definitely ask for Uncle Wang's advice.

Yu Xiaocao finally got away from Head Chef Wang's enthusiasm, but before she had the time to breathe a sigh of relief, she was stumped by her father's question.

“The oyster sauce is Zhenxiu Restaurant's specialty. Cao'er, were you the one who taught them? How did you know how to make oyster sauce? Why did the arrogant Head Chef Wang of Zhenxiu Restaurant act so respectful and friendly to you?” Yu Hai voiced the questions he had in his heart.

Yu Xiaocao couldn't immediately answer his questions. She couldn't just tell him: 'Father, your daughter is already dead. I'm a soul from another world, who has maintained my knowledge from my previous life.' If she really told him that, then she would definitely be viewed as a demon and burned to death.

After a brief deliberation, she gathered her courage and replied, “Father, do you believe in the resurrection of the dead?”

Yu Hai's expression immediately changed. His eyebrows were so tightly creased that he could probably catch mosquitoes. He replied, “How can a dead person be revived? Unless the King of Hell didn't accept him because he hasn't completed his predestined lifespan!”

“If I told you that I had been to the Palace of Hell and met the King of Hell, would you believe me?” Yu Xiaocao carefully observed every one of Yu Hai's expressions. If he showed great resistance and aversion, she would use the excuse that it was a joke and stop trying to continue with this lie.

Her only consolation for coming to this world was that she was able to enjoy parental love and care once again. She didn't want to lose her father's doting love and her mother's tender care again...

Yu Hai halted in his steps and bent down to look at her. With eyes filled of agony and guilt, he asked in a warm tone,

“Cao'er, was it that time you injured your head? Your eldest granduncle said that you had already stopped breathing at that time. It was fortunate that Doctor You arrived in time and saved you... Father is really useless. I can't even protect my own children. I don't deserve to be your father...”

“Father! Although you're a little blindly devoted to your parents and have a slightly soft personality, you're still the best father to Cao'er. Father, you don't need to blame yourself. Though I had wandered at the gates of hell, it was actually a blessing in disguise because I had obtained some methods to earn money!”

Since her new father didn't reject the idea of demons and gods, Yu Xiaocao spoke even more recklessly as she continued with her story. After all, she was nearly thirty years old in her past life. Although she tried her best to act like a child, she would inadvertently reveal something suspicious. Furthermore, she definitely couldn't hide her big money-making plan from her close relatives. Didn't people of ancient times regard supernatural beings with respect and fear? Hopefully, she could fool them with her made-up story.

At the thought that his daughter, who he had carefully protected for eight years, almost dying in vain, Yu Hai felt a moment of fear within his heart. He hugged his daughter's thin body tightly and choked up with sobs, “No amount of money is as important as my daughter being alive and healthy. Don't be afraid, Cao'er. Can you tell me what exactly happened?”

“Actually, I'm not really sure either. After I injured my head and fell into a coma, I dazedly saw two men, who were dressed in white and black respectively. They took me to a place to meet a very dignified official. Later, it seemed like they mentioned something about an unfinished lifespan and that they had taken the wrong person. They even said they would compensate me. When I woke up, I felt like certain things would suddenly emerge with my mind. My knowledge of the oyster sauce also appeared after I woke up. However, I had never tried it because our family doesn't have the means to do so.”

Yu Xiaocao tried to speak vaguely since the original host was still only nine years old after the new year. When taken to an unfamiliar environment, she would definitely be scared and wouldn't remember certain things very clearly.

“Cao'er, don't be afraid! Allegedly, Hundred Year Old Zhang of Shangtun Village had also loitered around in the underworld. When the King of Hell noticed that he misjudged, he compensated him with a long life. Thus, Hundred Year Old Zhang lived until he was 108 years old before he died of old age. Our Cao'er will certainly live a long life in the future!”

Yu Hai didn't dare imagine his delicate and frail daughter wandering around in the underworld, which was such an eerie and frightening place. His daughter was originally timid, so how scared would she had been at that time?

Yu Xiaocao was extremely surprised that there was actually a similar real-life case for the story that she randomly fabricated. This was even better since it increased the credibility of her story.

The father and daughter pair walked side by side on the empty street. Yu Hai tightly clasped onto his daughter's small hand with his big hand for fear that his daughter would be taken away if he loosened his hold.

Chapter 47

Xiaocao felt her heart warm with gratitude. Even though she had told such a ridiculous story, her father, who clearly loved her, decided to believe her completely and continued to show concern for her. It was something that made her feel happy and grateful.

In the eyes of Yu Hai, his precious daughter was as pure as water from a hidden spring deep in the mountains. Prior to her head injury, she had never stepped out of the house and spent most of her days recuperating on the bed. How would she learn how to deceive people?

Furthermore, how would an eight year old child know about the Black and White Impermanence deities who escorted the dead, the judge of the dead, King Yama, and what the Palace of Hell looked like? Would she be able to describe these things so clearly had she not experienced them herself? He couldn't help but tighten his grip on his little girl's hand. His daughter hadn't had an easy life and almost had a brush with death. He silently made a decision in order to not waste her second chance at life...

"Father, we've reached the carpentry shop!" Yu Xiaocao noticed that her father was so lost in his thoughts that he almost passed the woodworking store, so she couldn't help but pull on his hand to remind him.

Yu Hai pulled his mind away from his train of thoughts, saw a man with his hands in his sleeves standing next to entrance, and went up to him and said, "Sir, would you mind bringing Yu Hang out? I'm one of his family members and I'm here to give him a padded cotton coat."

This man was clearly more polite than the one from last time. He looked at the father-daughter pair and only replied with a hint of impatience, "Wait here, a couple of the apprentices are currently being punished, the shopkeeper may not necessarily let anyone out!"

As the man walked towards the back hall, he mumbled quietly to himself, "They don't look like people who can't afford to raise their children, so why did they harden their hearts and send their kid to this tiger's den?"

After her body was rejuvenated by the mystic-stone water, Yu Xiaocao's natural senses were sharper compared to the average person's. She could faintly hear the fellow's grumblings and it reminded her of the bruises she saw on her older brother's face the last time she visited him. Uneasy, she said, "Father, can we bring older brother back? I feel like learning carpentry from here is not as good as him going off with you to learn how to hunt and fish!"

Yu Hai often came into town and had also heard rumors of the carpentry shopkeeper's poor temper. Apparently, whenever the man got drunk, he would use his fists on his associates and apprentices. Yu Hai frowned and then sighed softly, "Let's decide after we finish celebrating the New Year. Because we had to borrow money to let you see the doctor today, your grandmother will definitely take advantage of this and throw a few temper tantrums. If we brought your brother back without asking for her opinion, no one in the family would be able to enjoy the festivities this year!"

The father and daughter pair stood out in the cold for quite a while before they saw Yu Hang running out of the side door. It had been almost two months since Yu Xiaocao last saw her brother. She gazed at him from head to toe sorrowfully. Although she couldn't detect any new wounds on him, the color of his face was poor and his whole body had become painfully thin.

She asked with a voice full of worry, "Older brother, you've become so thin. Does your master not give you any food to eat?" Yu Hang placed his hands in his sleeves and did his best to keep a smile on his face. He shook his head gently and replied, "I just grew a bit. Nothing I eat seems to stick on me. Don't worry, little sister! The amount of food I get here is about the same as what I get at home!"

It was the same amount as home, when they were still being rationed and couldn't eat their fill, but now he also had more work to do. However, Yu Hang had a sensible personality and wouldn't voice these inner thoughts in front of his family in order to keep them from worrying.

Yu Hai gently smoothed his son's brittle and yellowing hair. The child had indeed become thinner. In fact, his son's appearance was not much different compared to the time when his grandmother was restricting their rations as his two cheeks were still sunken. His daughter wasn't wrong, he really needed to bring his son back home as soon as possible.

Yu Xiaocao used a lot of effort to blink back the tears in her eyes and fished out a few meat buns from her pocket. She stuffed them into her older brother's hands and said, "Older brother, these meat buns had just come out of the steamer, you should eat them now while they're still hot!"

"Didn't I tell you that you don't need to buy me food to eat? If Grandmother found out you were buying random things, she would definitely be angry at our branch!" Yu Hang stared at the white and puffy meat bun that gave off a delicious aroma. He couldn't help but swallow back the saliva that pooled in his mouth. How long had it been since he last ate something made of white flour?

The rolls in the carpentry shop were all made of the lowest quality, roughest type of grain there was. The bread stuck to one's throat and they were only given a piece the size of a child's fist to eat. As for the soup, other than a few pieces of broken cabbage, it was mostly water. Not even a single drop of oil could be found in the broth. And they never had any vegetables to eat!

The shop originally accepted around a total of seven to eight apprentices, but about half of them left due to hunger. The rest would have quit long ago had their birth families not been too poor to raise them. Just a moment ago, he had been cruelly punished along with two other apprentices who were slightly older than him. The three of them had been sentenced to kneel on the snow covered ground and had to hold a basin full of ice cold water in their arms. Yu Hang's eyes dimmed at that recent memory.

"These steamed rolls were gifted to us by Zhenxiu Restaurant's Head Chef Wang, so we didn't spend any money. Hurry up and eat them, they won't taste good when they're cold." Yu Xiaocao explained persuasively. She suddenly noticed that the hand that her older brother used to hold the bun was trembling incessantly. She couldn't help but ask impatiently, "Older brother, what's wrong with your hand?"

Yu Hang evasively replied, "We didn't finish all of our tasks so the shop manager punished us. It's not a big deal, I'll be fine after I rest a bit. Father, little sister, did you eat already?"

"We already ate. Xiaosha, is the work in the store exhausting? Just endure for a few more days. When I get back I'll negotiate with your grandmother and after we finish celebrating the new year, we'll bring you back home." Hearing that his obedient and hardworking son had been punished solidified Yu Hai's desire to bring him back home.

Yu Hang could no longer hold back. He took out a steaming hot meat bun and bit off a large mouthful. The boy almost burst into tears after tasting the combination of the soft and tender bread with the rich and fragrant ground meat.

After hearing what his father said, he hesitated for a moment before he shook his head, "Father, Grandmother will not agree. It doesn't matter how much work any of us children do, it doesn't mean anything in her eyes. She will not allow me to go home to 'live an easy life'! Furthermore, if we want to break the apprenticeship contract, we need to pay the shop manager money. Father, do you really think Grandmother will take out money for anyone other than our Younger Uncle?"

This past half year of being a carpentry apprentice had been nothing but a nightmare for Yu Hang. Not only could he not eat his fill and get enough sleep, but he was also punished for every little thing, and the penalties changed on a whim. It exhausted him physically and mentally. In fact, had his father and little sister not come to visit him, it was likely he would not have been able to endure holding that water basin for much longer.

If he couldn't hold out, then he could only end up becoming soaked by the icy, cold water. As an apprentice who came from a poor family, he was considered fortunate to even have one piece of warm clothing. Had it become wet, he didn't have any other clothing to swap. Without something to keep him warm in this type of freezing weather, wasn't that asking for his life?

That was why he didn't reject the offer to bring him back home. Even though he was normally very sensible, he only voiced his worries regarding the plan.

Yu Hai's resolve solidified and he patted his son's bony and sharp shoulder. The rims of his eyes were reddened as he said, "Don't worry about it! Father can resolve the money issue. Hang in there for a little longer... take this string of cash and keep it safe. Whenever you're hungry, you can buy some steamed buns and meat buns to fill your stomach. After the New Years celebrations, Father will come and visit you again."

Yu Xiaocao looked at the string of copper coins and her attitude towards her father changed for the better. It appeared that her father's filial piety wasn't to the point where he was without reason now.

"Older brother, this coat was sent by Third Young Master Zhou and it's quite thick. Remember to wear it when you go back." Yu Xiaocao had noticed that her brother's hands were covered with pus-filled lesions from frostbite and also had cracks in the skin filled with blood. A ten year old child had hands that looked like someone much older. The sight made her feel bad. Next time she definitely needed to make some frostbite ointment for her older brother with some extra mystic-stone water. That combination should fix his hands up!

After seeing Yu Hang eat three meat stuffed buns in a row, Yu Hai warned him to stop, "Don't eat anymore, you can end up bloated. Drink some hot water when you get back and leave the rest of the food for tomorrow. It's getting late, your little sister and I need to head back. Take care of yourself."

Yu Hang carefully wrapped up the remaining steamed meat buns and inserted the packet of food into the package containing his coat. He was reluctant to say farewell to his father and little sister. If only Father could convince his grandmother to bring him back earlier. Otherwise, he would likely end up like Little Mu and be on the verge of death before his family would get notified to bring him back.

Silence reigned as the father and daughter pair traveled on. When they passed by the Tongren Medicine Hall, Yu Hai insisted on having his daughter being checked by Doctor Sun.

[Haha! Spiritual energy is everywhere, I can absorb more spiritual energy now!] The little divine stone 'whooshed' towards the cabinet full of precious medicinal herbs and sat on top like a gecko who had found a resting place and refused to let go. In any case, no one else could see it other than its master, so it didn't really matter what its appearance was.

Doctor Sun still had an impression of the father daughter pair. He stroked his long beard while asking the little girl, "Where are you feeling unwell?"

"I feel fine.." Before Xiaocao could finish replying, her father interrupted her.

"Doctor Sun, my daughter fainted this morning. Please take a look at her and check to see if this is a recurrence of her old illness." In the past, Xiaocao often became sick at the slightest touch, and those

experiences had left a deep impression in Yu Hai's heart. There were a few times when Doctor You couldn't do anything for her and only Doctor Sun was able to save his daughter's life.

Yu Xiaocao knew she couldn't fool the highly skilled Doctor Sun and hurriedly said, "Father, earlier I was only scared a bit by Grandmother. I already said that I've long recovered from my old illness, why do you still not believe me?"

Doctor Sun carefully took her pulse and inspected Xiaocao's complexion. He smiled slightly and said, "Don't be concerned, this little girl's chronic condition has definitely been healed. A little extra care should be given in the future. The child shouldn't be frightened as sometimes being overly scared can cause another big problem to occur."

"Thank you doctor. Please prescribe some medication to stabilize her condition..."

"Doctor Sun already said that I'm fine. What's the point of prescribing medication?" Yu Xiaocao really did not want to drink bitter medication.

"Every medication has a side effect. This little girl has a good head on her shoulders and does not need to take any more medication." Doctor Sun's words were like a beam of light in darkness and he was able to cut off Yu Hai's stubborn persistence. The old man then smiled profoundly at Xiaocao.

Yu Xiaocao smiled in embarrassment. This Doctor Sun was quite an interesting old fellow. Suddenly, she remembered her own mother's grave condition. She described her mother's symptoms and pulse condition at the onset of the recent attack with great detail to Doctor Sun.

"Little girl, you have some medical knowledge?" Doctor Sun revealed a flabbergasted expression.

Yu Xiaocao chuckled and said, "It's really not much. I only spend some time with Doctor You, our village doctor, for a few days and picked a couple things up. It's not true medicinal skills, and I don't dare to show my poor skills in front of you."

Doctor Sun smiled and didn't respond further. He pondered for a short period of time and then explained, "From what you described to me about her pulse condition, I can tell that this is an old illness. If it continues to go on without getting treated, she'll end up having chronic lung disease. First, have her

drink the medications I'll prescribe her. After a few days of that, it's best that she comes in person to be evaluated."

Chapter 48

After receiving the medication, the father and daughter pair thanked Doctor Sun profusely over and over. The two of them then went to the outskirts of town to pick up their sledge. On the way there, Xiaocao bought a few meat stuffed buns from a roadside stall and used the buns to feed the two energetic dogs until they were stuffed full. In addition, she added a couple drops of the mystic-stone water to the dog's drinking water.

The two dogs instantly became lively and full of energy. On the road back home, the two animals pulled the sled at lightning speed. They even caught up and passed a fellow who was driving a horse-pulled sleigh. The driver exclaimed in admiration at the speed and strength of the two dogs and even said that his own horse would not be able to catch up with them.

The two sturdy and brave dogs finished a distance of around twenty-five kilometers in less than an hour. Before they arrived at the entrance of the village, the father and daughter pair took a detour to check on the traps they had set earlier. It was not a surprise to Xiaocao that more than half of their traps had some sort of game to be harvested.

Out of the two large snares, one of them had been damaged while the other one had caught a fat and fleshy roe deer. However, it appeared that too much time had passed since the roe deer had been trapped. The animal had already died a while ago and had been frozen stiff. The other smaller traps had mostly caught wild hares and pheasants but one of them had even snapped a badger!

Xiaocao was not familiar with badgers, so she curiously poked the animal a couple of times. A slight smile had finally appeared on Yu Hai's face as he said, "A badger's fur is very warm. After Father finishes tanning its pelt, I'll have your mother make a badger fur vest for you. The meat from the badger is also very tasty and has the ability to nourish the body. We should keep for ourselves to eat. You should take the badger fat so that when Doctor You returns you can use it to brew some burn ointment."

"This badger probably weighs at least twenty or so catties, even if we're estimating on the low end. It could be sold for a couple hundred copper coins. Do you think grandmother will really allow us to eat it?" Yu Xiaocao casually replied without much expectation.

"This badger was caught by us, if I say we eat it, then we shall eat it!" Yu Hai had a much more resolute and determined air around him compared to before.

They had quite a large haul from their traps, and altogether it came out to be around two to three hundred catties worth of game. Yu Hai stacked the prey on top of the sleigh and walked alongside the vehicle. From time to time, he would ask his daughter if she was either hungry or cold.

Yu Xiaocao had been wrapped up until she resembled a large cotton ball. Other than her eyes and nose, everything else was under layers of cloth. She couldn't help but sigh inwardly: 'The way Father treats me, his daughter, is beyond words!'

The father and daughter pair first went to Yu Hai's uncle's home to return the sledge. On the way there, Xiaocao had already convinced her father that he should temporarily not repay the money he had borrowed. With a debt to pay off, he will have an excuse to not give up the money he obtained from selling game. At this time, it was necessary for their own branch to have their own purse!

After the past few events, Yu Hai was very clear on the importance of having some cash on hand. His wife had a poor constitution ever since she gave birth to Shitou and even coughed up blood several times. Although his youngest daughter had said she was feeling fine, but he still wasn't completely convinced by her. If he didn't have a single copper coin in his hands, what could he do in the future? Would he be destined to watch the two of them suffer the next time they got ill or encountered a disaster?"

Thus, he didn't say a word when his daughter received the fifty taels note earlier. Furthermore, when his daughter suggested to delay settling the debt, he also agreed to the idea without a single hesitation. In the future he will continue to work hard and expand great effort for the family as a whole but he would never disregard his own branch and be foolishly filial again!

"Dahai, quickly bring the child into the room so she can sit on the kang to get warmed up. It's a cold day, you must be frozen right? How are you Xiaocao? You look pretty wan and listless!" Yu Lichun stooped down to pick Xiaocao and the blankets combined and quickly entered the house.

The warm air from the room hit her immediately and before she could take a good look at her surroundings, Xiaocao had been inserted directly into the blankets covering the kang. The toasty warmth of the covers was incredibly comfortable, and it made her feel drowsy.

"What did the doctor say?" Yu Xiaocao's third uncle, Yu Jiang, asked as he held two bowls of piping hot ginger soup. After giving one bowl to Yu Hai, he carefully cajoled his niece to drink the ginger soup.

The Yu Family's ginger soup was only made with fresh ginger that had been simmered for a long time. It tasted primarily of ginger and its distinctive spiciness lingered in the throat. Yu Xiaocao grimaced and wanted to avoid the torture of consuming the soup but her third uncle pried her mouth open and poured it down into her. Although her body had warmed perceptibly, the uncomfortable sensation endlessly tormented her throat and mouth.

Yu Hai had gulped down his bowl of ginger soup in one go. After seeing his daughter's uncomfortable expression, he chuckled wickedly and said, "Tongren Medicine Hall's Doctor Sun looked her over and prescribed a few medications. There's nothing seriously wrong with her!"

He definitely would not say that his child didn't have any health problems. Yu Hai was very familiar with Madam Zhang's character—money was her life! If she never had to bleed a little bit, then she would never know what true pain was. In the future if she wanted to treat his daughter poorly, she would need to think about the consequences first!

Madam Sun took out a few delicious baked sweet potatoes [1], peeled off their skins, and put them into Xiaocao's hands and said, "Eat these, it'll help change the taste in your mouth. As long as your fine, that's what matters. This child has endured a lot over the past few years!"

"Thank you, Eldest Grand aunt!" Xiaocao had a fondness for baked sweet potatoes, but it was a pity that she had a witch of a grandmother with Madam Zhang at home. She rarely had the opportunity to eat any. The sweet and fragrant taste of the roasted sweet potato momentarily eradicated the wound on her heart which had been caused by the ginger soup.

Yu Hai chatted casually with his eldest uncle and cousins. When he saw that his daughter, who had finished her sweet potato, rubbing her eyes in drowsiness, he stood up and said, "Eldest Uncle, I will definitely return the money I borrowed from you before the end of the year. I will always remember your kindness to me."

Yu Lichun hastily replied: "We're family, no need to say anything about remembering kindness! Don't blame your father, he's always been that type of weak-willed person. Your stepmother... aish, just don't mention it! Don't make the borrowed money a burden on yourself, my family doesn't need it urgently!"

Yu Hai helped his daughter put on a thick leather coat. The coat was so large that it almost touched the ground. As if she was in a daze, Xiaocao stumbled blindly behind her father on the bumpy road. After

making sure things were okay, Yu Jiang lifted the little kid up in preparation to send the father daughter pair on their way.

Yu Hai picked out a plump hare and pheasant out of the pile of game and spoke to his eldest uncle: "Before we went to town, I made a detour to the mountains to set a few traps. Perhaps it was because the snow made it difficult for the animals to find food, but I unexpectedly caught a lot of game. This hare and pheasant should be given to Eldest Aunt so she can let them freeze properly. Then, there will be some extra dishes for the New Year celebration feast."

Yu Lichun could not accept such a gift and said: "Dahai, it's not easy for you to go hunting in such freezing weather. When Xiaocao finishes her medication, she might need to get more. You should take the game for yourself and go back to town tomorrow to sell them for money..."

"Eldest Uncle, if you don't accept them, then it means you're looking down on me, your nephew! Had it not been for you giving me money today, I really don't know what I would have done instead... This is me showing my filial respect for you, please, you really need to accept this!" Yu Hai was very resolute in his request. Yu Lichun had long known that this nephew of his had a stubborn personality. If he really continued to refuse the game, the man in front of him might become even more determined out of anxiety.

By the time they left Eldest Uncle's dwelling, it was already dusk. Yu Hai tread on the snow that was frozen solid and went towards the direction of his home. As he walked, his heart gradually became cold and froze over.

The doors of the room were all tightly shut, the kitchen stove was ice-cold... hearing the sounds of people, only the door in the west room opened eagerly. His wife and children hurriedly came out. He had truly been stupid in the past in letting his wife endure slights repeatedly. In the end, his wife's health had deteriorated and his daughter almost lost her life.

The door to the main room remained as tightly closed as before. The faint sounds of scolding and fighting could be heard from the outside. In the east room, the window was secretly opened up a tiny crack. Inside, a pair of eyes met his line of sight and then abruptly disappeared. The sound of the window closing seemed all the more obvious in the otherwise silent evening.

Yu Jiang frowned, placed the drowsily sleeping Xiaocao on the kang bed in the room, and then left to go outside. Her grandmother wasn't related to her by blood, but did that mean her grandfather wasn't as well? Second Uncle's decisions in the past couple of years have become more and more muddled!

However, this time Yu Jiang had wrongly blamed Old Yu. After he finished the evening meal, Old Yu got dressed and went outside after seeing that his son and granddaughter hadn't come home yet. He wanted to welcome them back and so wandered around outside. However, the father and daughter pair were in the mountains harvesting the traps, so they missed each other.

As Yu Hai was preparing the medication under the eaves, Old Yu came in from the outside. As soon as he arrived home, he hurried towards the west room. He went inside and saw the sleeping Xiaocao. After asking about her out of concern, he also said: "Did you two eat yet? Go tell your wife to make a bowl of noodles and also cook Xiaocao a poached egg."

Yu Hai glanced at the main room and shook his head: "We don't have a lot of white flour left in the household, so we should set it aside for the New Year's dumplings. Today I caught a badger. After I finish preparing it, it'll be used to make a bowl of meat stew to drink."

Seeing that his son had a plan for the game, Old Yu was about to say something without considering the mood. He caught his words before they came out and then instead said: "That's also good! A badger's meat can nourish the body, you should give more to the child to eat."

After he finished, he clasped his hands behind his back and slowly walked back to the main room. Old Yu had sensed the slight difference in his son and he sighed inwardly—seems like my son's feelings had really been hurt this time!

Yu Xiaocao had been woken up by the tantalizing smell of meat. A badger's meat was naturally very delicious. When that was added with Madam Liu's culinary skills, the simmered meat stew could bring out anyone's inner foodie.

The whole family sat in a circle on the kang bed and enjoyed the savory and tasty meat stew. Yu Hai looked at the meat in the bowl and was silent for a bit before he said: "I'll go send two bowls to the main room!"

Madam Liu paused in her motion in eating for a short bit before she lowered her head to continue to eat, but didn't say anything. Little Shitou, on the other hand, sneered and complained: "Grandmother didn't want to give any money to treat Second Sister when she fell ill. Why are you sending her meat stew?"

Xiaocao chewed on her mouthful of meat before she swallowed it down. She pinched the little fellow's cheek and said: "She's one of the elders at home. She can treat us poorly but we cannot be disrespectful to her."

Yu Hai glanced at his daughter and inwardly nodded his head. It was true, 'being filial' was a law greater than heaven. If word came out that the younger generation of their branch ate meat without sending some to their elders, then their reputations would be ruined. Furthermore, the family had a notorious gossip-monger, Madam Li. Once she knew something, the whole world would know!

Yu Hai came out of the kitchen with the bowls of meat stew in his hand. As he walked, he saw Madam Li at the doorway of the east room, craning her neck towards the kitchen, looking around. Her glutinous son was behind her complaining: "Meat stew! I want to drink meat stew! Why can the people in the west room secretly eat it and not give us any?" Yu Dashan forcefully pulled the mother and son pair back into the room. Just as he was about to close the door, he looked at Yu Hai and said with a foolish smile on his face: "Dahai, your nephew has been spoiled by his mother. Please don't mind him..."

"There's more meat stew in the kitchen, if you want some, you can go get some yourself." Yu Hai walked into the main room with bowls in hand.

Madam Zhang narrowed her eyes as she looked at him. Her voice was sharp and shrill as she commented: "Oh! This old woman doesn't have the good fortune this year to drink soup and eat meat! If I do, I might shorten my life!"

Old Yu glared at her and rebutted: "Stop saying so much! I agreed to let them slaughter the badger. Second Daughter-in-Law and Xiaocao both have weak constitutions and should eat something to strengthen their bodies. How can we shorten our lives by eating meat that we have hunted ourselves? If you don't want to eat it, then I'll eat both of our shares!"

Chapter 49

"Eat! Eat! Eat! They take medicine and also eat meat! How are we supposed to support all of this? I am so old yet I ration my food and clothing. Who do you think I'm scrimping and saving for? It's one thing to not receive any benefits, but I also get blamed for everything! I... the heavens..., you should just take away this old lady ah! I'll stop being an eyesore for some people then..." Madam Zhang sat on the kang bed while she slapped her leg and pulled at the fleshy parts of her legs. She howled incessantly yet a single tear drop could not be seen.

In the Yu Family, this type of act could be seen every few days. Yu Hai was mentally and physically exhausted and did not have the energy to match with her 'acting' anymore. He silently placed the stew bowls down, turned, and left the room. The view of his back seemed especially desolate and down.

As soon as he left, Madam Zhang acted as if a switch to her megaphone had been turned off and instantly became silent. She furrowed her brows furiously and her triangular shaped eyes beadily stared at the door. Her mouth curved down into a frown.

She noticed that Old Yu had finished one of the bowls of meat stew and was about to grab the other one. The old woman hastily snatched the bowl away and started to eat it in large, heaping gulps while she spoke to Old Yu: "Dahai's father, why do I have a feeling that Second Son is a bit off today? Does he want to rebel?"

"Why are you talking about rebellion? If your daughter had fainted from illness and your parents refused to give you money and instead caused trouble, wouldn't you cause the sky to fall with your fiery temper? Other people have tempers too. When Second Son becomes stubborn, even three large oxen can't pull him away from his views!"

Old Yu wished to continue to wipe his mouth and to savor the taste of the badger's meat. There was clearly someone at home who was a good hunter, yet they hadn't been able to even get the tiniest taste of meat in the past few months due to inner turmoil. How was this still living?!

"How can say that? Whose daughter had fainted from illness? Are you saying my daughter isn't your daughter?! How can your curse your own daughter? You need to kneel on the ground and beg for forgiveness! Don't blame us Buddha, it was just a slip of the tongue, don't blame us, don't blame us..." Madam Zhang piously clasped her hands and started bowing left and right.

That night, Madam Zhang tossed and turned on the kang bed incessantly as if she was a pancake being flipped on the stove. No matter what she did, she couldn't fall asleep for some reason. She punched the loudly snoring Old Yu and worriedly chattered: "Old man, do you think Second Son's brat had to spend a lot of money this time? They saw a doctor from the Tongren Medicine Hall and came back with a lot of medication."

Old Yu impatiently turned over, his voice muffled as he replied: "I'm not a doctor of Tongren Medicine Hall, how am I supposed to know whether the medications are expensive? Stop chatting endlessly, if you don't want to sleep, that doesn't mean other people don't want to sleep! No matter how much money they spent, you don't need to worry as not even a single copper coin will need to come from you!"

Madam Zhang pushed him once more with all her strength and said: "What do you mean that the money isn't coming from my hands? I just went outside to check and Second Son caught a lot of animals today. Even when estimating on the low end, the game could be sold for a couple hundred copper coins. If he didn't owe any money, wouldn't all of the proceeds from his sale go to me?"

As soon as she saw the pile of game, they had been transformed into a pile of money in her eyes! Madam Zhang's heart was full of uncomfortable feelings, as if she had a tiny kitten running around and scratching things.

The frustration within Old Yu's heart bubbled over as he sat up on the bed suddenly. A padded coat was draped over his body as he glared at her: "Who was the one making the fuss today? If it wasn't for your horrible temper, the child wouldn't have been frightened, and then Second Son wouldn't need to borrow money from Eldest Brother. Even though we as grandparents clearly have money in our hands, yet you refused to take any out for an ill child. What kind of face do I have left now? How am I supposed to go out in the future?"

"So what? Whoever tries to talk behind our back, I'll make sure to confront them in person. How much money is that old face of yours worth anyway? Is it as valuable as Third Son's future prospects?" Madam Zhang pulled a fallacious argument out to counteract him.

"Third Son's future prospects?! From my perspective, Third Son's future prospects will someday be ruined by his mother who's basically a bull in a china shop!!" Old Yu furiously laid back down on the bed.

Madam Zhang acted as if she was a cat whose tail had just been stepped on. She leapt up quickly and forcefully pulled on the quilt that was on Old Yu. She slapped and hit the old man as she screamed: "You stupid old fool! After you cursed our daughter, you go on to curse our son! How could Third Son's future prospects be ruined by me? If you don't give me a reasonable explanation, don't even think about sleeping tonight!!"

"Why are you acting so crazy in the middle of the night?" Old Yu didn't quite know what to do with his lunatic wife. He tried to block her blows somewhat fearfully.

"Stupid old fool! I've already seen through your true thoughts. You only treasure the son and daughter who were given to you by Zhu Xiuyun. Our Xiaobo and Caidie are not considered Yu Family descendants in your eyes, right? For the sake of a half dead chit, you not only cursed our daughter to become ill but

also cursed our son's future prospects. In the future, will there be a living road for the three of us in this family?" Madam Zhang had reached the end of her rope this time. She howled and screamed as she continued to beat the old man thoroughly.

The usually taciturn Old Yu was nowhere close to being her opponent. The old man could only wrap the blanket tightly around him and shield his head as he endured her blows.

In the room west of the main room, the third daughter-in-law, Madam Zhao, heard the ruckus and frowned sternly. She gently patted her son who was sleeping fitfully and spoke to Yu Bo who was reading under the light of a lamp: "Look, they're arguing again! What's wrong with your mother that she has to throw a fit two to three times in one day? With them screaming like this, will you really be able to study? In my opinion, I think we should pack our bags and go back home to town tomorrow. We'll come back on the 27th to 28th day of the new year."

"Aish, just forget about it. The weather is so cold now, and our son is still young. There's no point in making another round trip. Tomorrow I'll tell my mother that she needs to calm down during the New Year festivities!" Yu Bo abandoned his books with frustration and sat next to Madam Zhao. He pulled at her toasty warm and tender white hands in an attempt to pull her into his embrace.

Madam Zhao made a token protest and gave him a sidelong glance. She gently pushed him away and said: "Be careful to not let the people next to us hear. They'll scold me again for not being a good example and delaying your studies."

Under the lamplight, Madam Zhao was as beautiful as a blooming flower. Her sparkling eyes carried hints of welcome, and Yu Bo could feel his heart tremble as he lowered his head to meet her luscious, pink lips. His hand went up to grip that soft and plump... just as they were about to become more passionate, their little fellow next to them 'coughed' and whispered a couple of sentences. The couple instantly separated.

Madam Zhao's cheeks were flushed as she glared at her husband. She pulled her son into her arms to help him go to the bathroom when she suddenly remember the scene from the morning. She lightly sighed and said: "Husband Yu, I'm not trying to criticize your parents' decisions. However, your mother was definitely in the wrong in the situation that happened today. A human's life is beyond value. As a grandmother, how could she be so callous to watch her granddaughter fall ill and refuse to give money to have her get medical treatment? That's a child's life at stake!"

"Ah...you can't blame my mother. When Xiaocao was born, the doctor said that her lifespan would not be too long. A lot of money has been spent on her health expenses over the past few years. My mother is doing this for my sake, for my future!" Due to his mother, Yu Bo did not have a lot of sentiment regarding his young niece.

Madam Zhao's eyes flickered as she replied, "Husband Yu, you definitely cannot say this where it can be heard by outsiders in the future. Just think, if word came out that for the sake of your future we neglected the life of your niece, what do you think will happen? Even if you pass the county level examinations, you won't have anywhere to go. The reputation of a scholar-official is the most important thing and you should be afraid of any stains."

"This... What should we do then? There's a proverb that says: 'good news never goes far, but bad news travels a thousand miles'. I'm afraid that the news about Second Brother going to Eldest Uncle to borrow money has already spread throughout the whole village..."

Yu Bo trusted his wife a lot, as she was the daughter of a scholar who had passed the county examinations. After hearing her warning, his body immediately became covered in cold sweat from head to toe. He couldn't help but rub his hands incessantly as he didn't know what to do.

"Don't worry, let me think..." Madam Zhao lowered her head to ponder the situation for a bit. She looked at her husband and then said, "Tomorrow, you should give some money to Second Brother and have him use it to pay back his debt to Eldest Uncle... never mind, I should go instead! Go sleep, tomorrow your wife will definitely smooth everything over for you."

Yu Bo glanced at his beloved son and, seeing that he was sleeping peacefully, quickly hugged his wife's delicate body and kissed her fiercely on the neck and said: "My good wife, you are truly a virtuous wife. Being able to marry you is the culmination of the blessings from three lifetimes..."

The next day, it was a rare nice day in the middle of winter. The winter sun shined brightly, its rays giving off as much warmth as it was possible. When Yu Hai left to check over the traps they set yesterday and to bring the game they caught to town, Yu Xiaocao could only lay on the bed, pretending to be an invalid.

Acting as a sick person took effort, so she kind of regretted her decision to do so. She repeatedly reminded Xiaolian to keep the money from selling game in her hands and to make sure to not let the main house's and the east room's inhabitants find out how much money they had, etc..

Madam Liu was decocting the medication in front of the door and when she was done, she transferred the medication to let it cool before she drank it. Yesterday, her husband and daughter took the initiative to also buy about two taels worth of medication for her. It really made her heart ache. However, the medication had already been bought. Even if she didn't take it, the money wouldn't come back. She had to use her daughter as an excuse to prepare the medication but she needed to drink it herself on the sly. Ah, this type of life, how much longer did they have to endure?

After Madam Liu finished drinking the medication, she took the pile of dirty clothing to the pond at the foot of the mountain where she had to break the ice in order to wash the laundry. Little Shitou hugged the little roe deer as he sat on the kang and chatted with his second sister.

At this time, Youngest Aunt Yu Caidie looked around for a bit before she quietly slipped into the west room. In her hands was a bowl of piping hot sugar water with a poached egg floating in it.

Seeing that her young niece was listlessly sitting on the kang (Author's note: She was actually bored to death.), she softly said: "Xiaocao, your aunt has made some sugar syrup with egg. Quickly eat it while it's still hot."

Xiaocao glanced at the contents of the bowl. She knew that whenever her youngest aunt was about to have her period, grandmother would have her drink some sugar water with egg [1] starting three days prior. It was said to enrich the blood and nourish the body, and was supposed to be very good for a woman's health. To her biological children, Madam Zhang was considered a pretty good mother.

"Youngest Aunt, if Grandmother found out that Second Sister ate your nourishing egg in syrup, she'll hit Second Sister." Little Shitou grimaced and spoke like a young adult.

Yu Caidie pinched his plump cheeks and stuffed the bowl with the sugar water and egg into Xiaocao's hands and said: "Don't worry. My mother went to town to help me buy some needles and thread. Quickly eat it, once its cold it won't taste good anymore."

Yu Xiaocao hesitated for a moment and then slowly drank the sugar water under her Youngest Aunt's earnest gaze.

A slight smile had finally appeared on Yu Caidie's face. She lightly sighed and said: "Xiaocao, yesterday your grandmother was in the midst of a temper tantrum. You know your grandmother's personality. The more other people urge, the angrier she gets. Do you blame me for not speaking up for you?"

"I won't, Youngest Aunt. Thank you for the sweet soup, it's really sweet!" Yu Xiaocao couldn't really say whether she liked or disliked her youngest aunt, who had a weak and pliable personality and was almost invisible in this family. Regardless, she didn't plan on having too much involvement with her. At any rate, she only planned on repaying the people who treated her well in the future.

Chapter 50

Yu Caidie ruffled Xiaocao's hair and her smile deepened a bit: "As long as you don't blame me, it's fine. Rest now, tomorrow I will send you more of the sugar water with egg again."

Youngest Aunt had a soft personality like flour. In a glance one could tell that it would be easy to grasp her in the palm of one's hand. It was hard to say whether she would be bullied in the future by her in-laws. Madam Zhang had such shrewish and fiery personality; how did she end up raising a daughter as weak and sweet as her?

Yu Xiaocao thought: Did they take home the wrong infant? Ehhh...in this time period, all births were delivered at home with the help of a midwife. There was no way for someone to take home the wrong child, okay!

Out of boredom, Yu Xiaocao teased the little roe deer, Tiny. This little roe deer was quite odd. They had already raised it for a few months and fed it consistently. In fact, from time to time, it was even given some mystic-stone water to nourish it. But how come it hadn't grown in height at all? It was still small and seemed very adorable. Its continued diminutive size made certain people, who wanted to 'kill it once it got big to eat meat', feel quite disappointed.

However, as a pet, this miniature sized roe deer was truly so cute that one could burst. In addition, the little creature loved cleanliness and was full of intelligence. It never relieved itself inside the room and didn't have the characteristic gamey smell of a roe deer. In fact, it smelled faintly of grass.

Little Shitou loved to hug the animal and would take it everywhere he went. The village children were green with envy. Wuzi, who was on the best terms with Little Shitou, did his very best to convince Shitou to lend him the little roe deer to play with for a couple of days. However, Tiny absolutely refused to follow. Even when the animal was forcibly carried back to Wuzi's home, the creature always managed to 'break out of prison' and run back home.

One time, when the door at home was shut tightly, the little creature stood in the snow foolishly and froze for an entire night. The next morning, it had almost become an ice sculpture from the cold, and Little Shitou felt very bad. From then on, Tiny was never lent out to other people again.

At this moment, the little roe deer was tractably lying next to Xiaocao and didn't have any ill will towards the hand that was messing its hair up. On the contrary, from time to time it would extend its warm and moist tongue and lick Xiaocao's hand.

In her previous life, she had raised a small dog who liked to lick people more than this creature, so Xiaocao didn't feel much about it. However, the little divine stone on her wrist had other thoughts: [Hey, can you push away that fellow? The rock is my body, so how can I suffer having such a lowly beast sullyling it?]

Yu Xiaocao ignored the stone and deliberately placed the wrist that had the multicolored on it closer to the little roe deer's mouth. The multicolored stone inadvertently emitted a small bit of spiritual energy, which made the sensitive and clever roe deer beyond pleased. Its licks increased perceptibly.

[Go away, go away now!] The little divine stone erupted in fury and its golden kitten spiritual form flew out towards the little roe deer's head. It scratched incessantly at the deer but it didn't have enough energy to materialize into a physical form. With its revenge thwarted, the kitten hissed and expanded until it looked like a hedgehog.

"Little Glutinous Dumpling, ah, Little Glutinous Dumpling! How come you haven't learned how to be obedient yet? Your fate is grasped in my hands as I'm your master. Therefore, you need to be more respectful to me and more polite! Do you understand?" Yu Xiaocao was bored silly so she deliberately teased the arrogant little divine stone.

[You're not allowed to call me by 'Little Glutinous Dumpling'! This name is not impressive at all! Please call me 'Lord Divine Stone'...yeouch! Make it quickly leave! I'm all covered in saliva and it's disgusting!]

The little divine stone was like a tiger out of its native territory. There was nothing it could do against the nasty human and the weak creature in front of it. In the past, it could have settled the two of them without even moving a single finger.

[Okay! Master, my dear master! I concede, please push it away and help me take a bath!] As the Goddess Nuwa's divine stone that loved cleanliness the most, the Little Glutinous Dumpling finally admitted defeat to its vile master.

The little divine stone bit on a small handkerchief: 'Goddess Nuwa, did you know that your most favorite stone is being tormented in some nameless corner of the world? Please save me quickly!'

Although the little divine stone didn't want to admit it, but Goddess Nuwa had also given it a name that was very similar to the one that its current master's little brother had given it! This is also why when Xiaocao previously asked its name it refused to tell her. As a grand and magnificent heavenly divine stone, having a name that was given by weak human with mucus dripping out of his nose made the stone feel very ashamed. (Author's note: Little Shitou's protest: When I was very young, I didn't have a runny nose, ok!)

By the time Yu Xiaocao had almost fallen asleep from boredom, the door to the west room was pushed open again. A chubby and pudgy figure, who looked almost exactly like ball, snuck through the crack in the door. Behind him was a little servant girl who was repeatedly saying: "Little master, be careful of the doorsill. Don't fall down!"

"Tiny! Tiny, Doudou wants to play with Tiny!" The little child Doudou saw the little roe deer on the kang bed and rushed over to climb onto it. However, his little legs were too weak. His hands pushed on the bed as he tried to climb up, but still failed after a good amount of time.

Xiaocao chuckled wickedly at the scene and had no intention to help the little boy. Little Doudou's eyes held back tears as he looked at her accusedly.

At the corner of her eye, Yu Xiaocao could see a graceful figure walking into the room. She hurriedly coughed a couple of times and pretended to be weak and powerless. She quietly said: "Doudou, your older sister is sick right now. You shouldn't climb up here and inhale the air from my illness. If you like, you can bring Tiny back to your room to play..."

Before Little Doudou could agree, he was interrupted by his mother's cough: "It's not a big deal. Let Doudou sit with Shitou at the head of the kang bed and play. I, your aunt, would like to have a talk with you."

The servant girl bent down to lift the little master onto the kang bed. Under Madam Zhao's hint, she left the west room and even closed the door in passing.

"Xiaocao, your grandmother was in the midst of a temper tantrum yesterday. As her daughter-in-law, I can't willfully disobey her wishes, right?" Madam Zhao sat on the side of the kang bed and pulled at Xiaocao's hand. She seemed to be full of sincerity.

Xiaocao sneered on the inside: 'Who doesn't know that the person the old hag fears the most is you, Madam Zhao. The old lady would think even your farts smelled good. Yesterday, had there been the slightest movement in the east room, Madam Zhang would have dialed back a ton. Younger Aunt, ah, Younger Aunt, you're trying to trick a little child!' (Author's note: You're a little kid right now!)

The blank expression on Xiaocao's eyes (Author's note: Actually, it was just her being lost in her thoughts while roasting her aunt.) made Madam Zhao feel a bit powerless. She didn't try to skirt around the issue anymore and directly said: "Xiaocao, your younger uncle and I are in town, so we need to rent a house, pay for his tutor, and buy your uncle brushes and ink. We also need to spend money on food and drink. After trying to scrimp and save, your younger uncle and I were only able to save just one to two taels. How much money did your father borrow from Eldest Uncle? Take this first and repay some now!"

Xiaocao quietly coughed a few times in order to show that she 'was very weak'. She looked down at the silver bits in Madam Zhao's hand and couldn't help but sneer on the inside: 'She really thinks other people are fools, eh! Every month, Madam Zhang would send more than enough money to cover her son and daughter-in-law's living expenses. From Madam Li's sour comments, I know that the amount of money she's given her youngest son in a month is more than equal to the amount of money our whole family spends in half a year.'

In a short three years, the couple not only didn't have to worry about their food and living expenses, but also bought a little servant girl to help them. With the rest of the money, they also bought a little stall in a somewhat desolate street in town to conduct a small grocery business.

On the outside they claimed that the shop stall was the dowry from the Zhao Family. However, as a dowry, how come it wasn't given to them when they got engaged and was only sent three years later? Such a story could only fool a simpleton ah!

However, in front of Younger Aunt's 'goodwill', Xiaocao would not expose her lies and instead tactfully refused the offer: "Younger Aunt, Doudou is still little and Younger Uncle needs to continue his

schooling. You guys have a lot of expenses ahead. Xiaocao thanks Younger Aunt for your good intentions; however, you should keep these silver bits and bring them back home!"

"Older sister, older sister! The money is for you to visit a doctor!" Little Doudou crawled over from the head of the kang bed and attempted to grab the silver bits from his mother and put them in Xiaocao's hand. With great effort, he managed to stand up and press his forehead against hers. Whenever the little fellow became sick, his mother would also treat him the same way.

The concern of a child was never cheap or discounted. Xiaocao felt her heart soften and she pinched the little guy's chubby cheeks and said gently: "Our Doudou is really sweet. Older sister will get better soon. When the snows melt from the mountain, I'll go there to catch some small fish and simmer Doudou's favorite fish stew!"

"Okay, okay!" Little Doudou clapped his hands and jumped while squealing in delight on the kang bed. On accident, he tripped on the quilt and fell head first into the soft blankets. He puffed and struggled for a long time but wasn't able to pull himself up. It was only with Little Shitou's help that the little fellow finally got rescued.

"Older Sister, get better soon! You need to catch fishies and simmer stew for Doudou to eat!" Little Doudou didn't care that his butt was still tender from falling and instead sweetly came over and laid on Xiaocao's quilt. He fixed his damp and shiny dark eyes on Xiaocao. The expression on his face looked exactly like the little roe deer's hungry expression whenever it wanted to drink more mystic-stone water.

"Okay, okay, okay! I'll simmer fish stew for Doudou to eat!"

After getting Xiaocao's promise, Little Doudou grinned happily and his attention was once again taken away by the lively roe deer that was running around on the kang bed. The fat little boy went on all fours and chased after the little roe deer in a rollicking chase.

Yu Xiaocao handed back the silver bits that were stuffed in her hand by the little fellow and said: "Younger Aunt, although we did borrow a lot of money this time, I overheard father saying that because of the snowstorm, the town is really lacking game, so we can sell them for a good price. On the flip side, if there wasn't a lot of snow, then father could just go up to the mountains more times and would still be able to almost return the money before the end of the year. If this one tael was given to Eldest Granduncle, it wouldn't be close to enough to return the money we owe. It's probably better to sell some game and save it until we can return all of the money at once."

"What kind of medication was prescribed that cost more than a couple taels?" When Madam Zhao found out that a couple taels of money would not be able to pay back the debt, she couldn't help but feel a little bit suspicious.

Yu Xiaocao lightly sighed and said: "Doctor Sun said that my innate constitution was really too weak. It should have been carefully nourished but the food I got wasn't enough to keep up. So he needed to add some strengthening tonics and so forth to the medication, which is why it's more expensive. He also said that after I finish the medication, my father needs to bring me back to town for another visit. If my body is still weak and not properly nourished, then I might need to continue to take medication."

As she spoke, she furrowed her brows and scowled, as if she hated to take medication but was stuck without a choice.

After finishing this medication, she might need to take more? No wonder her mother-in-law said that this girl was a medicine guzzling fiend! Madam Zhao took back the money in her hand without hesitation and said: "Xiaocao, don't worry about the money. It's most important to take care of your body. When I get back, I'll negotiate with your younger uncle and see if we can raise some money, ok? Doudou, let's go back now, don't disturb your older sister's rest."

"No! Doudou wants to play with Tiny!" Because of the snow storm, Doudou had been stuck inside and seldom went out, so naturally he didn't want to go back to their room again.

Madam Zhao tried to convince the little fellow to leave but saw that he was almost in tears. Against her will, she could only agree to let Doudou stay in the west room and she left to go back to her room by herself.