

## Gold Chapter 61

### Chapter 61

In the eyes of outsiders, ever since Yu Hai got injured, there seemed to be a lot of ups and downs with his situation. Over the past few days, he had been suffering from a low fever. At times, his fever would be so high that the heat would scald the hand. Except for the people of the second branch, the rest of the Yu Family all felt that he wouldn't be able to survive this hurdle! However, on the sixth day, Yu Hai finally woke up from his coma.

Within the Yu Family, Old Yu and the second branch were probably the only ones who were genuinely happy for him. Yu Caidie, who had a soft temperament and never interfered with other people's affairs, might have also been sincerely happy for him.

"Grandfather, my father hasn't eaten anything in five days. I'll go make a bowl of noodles for him!" Although her father had survived on the mystic-stone water these past few days, eating food was naturally more beneficial for the recovery of his wound.

Old Yu nodded and said, "Alright, cook two fried eggs for your father, too. It's good that he's awake. Our ancestors have blessed and protected him... I'll have Dashan to go to town tomorrow morning and ask Doctor Sun to come check if Dahai is out of danger now!"

Madam Zhang glared at him and wanted to say something, but she held back her words with the thought, 'For the sake of the three hundred taels, I'll tolerate it!'

"Okay! Thank you, Grandfather!" Yu Xiaocao loudly replied with a smile on her face. The crude grain pancake and bean paste soup that they ate for breakfast seriously wasn't something that humans should eat! Since her grandfather had agreed, she mixed the wheat flour with two handfuls of bean flour and made a little more noodles so that her family could also eat something special.

"Mother, I want to eat a fried egg too..." The fat son of the first branch, who was so obese that his eyes were nearly squished together, shouted as he threw the pancake in hands.

Madam Li was so angry that she slapped him, "Eat, eat, eat! Aren't you afraid of dying from overeating!"

Yu Xiaocao held the pancake that she received in her arms and swiftly finished the disgusting bean paste soup with her nose pinched. After that, she pulled Xiaolian into the kitchen.

Little Shitou copied her and quickly finished his bowl of bean paste soup, which had a burnt taste, and then exclaimed, "I'll go help heat the pot!"

After Yu Xiaocao looked through the kitchen, she realized that there was hardly any food except for a few dried up radishes, half a bag of bean flour, and a large bag of sweet potato flour. She briefly thought about it, and then asked Xiaolian, "Do we still have any dried vegetables at home?"

Xiaolian pondered briefly and asked, "We have some sun-dried sweet potato leaves and radish leaves, will they do?"

"Let's use the sweet potato leaves then!" Yu Xiaocao shrugged her shoulders, as if she didn't expect much from the ingredients, "Xiaolian, let's make the noodles with a mixture of wheat flour and bean flour!"

"Second Sister makes the tastiest foods! But, our family is usually reluctant about using wheat flour. If we use too much, Grandmother will scold us again!"

Little Shitou was extremely confident in his second sister's culinary skills. He had also accepted Xiaocao's story about 'taking a tour in hell' and promised to keep it a secret for her. While his second sister was loitering in the underworld, she had unexpectedly won the favor of the God of Fortune and was taught the skills of cooking and money-making. Was this considered a blessing in disguise?

Yu Xiaocao was very skilled in making bean noodles [1]. In her previous life, she and her siblings had experienced a long period of hardship after her parents passed away in a car accident. Thus, she had already developed the ability to make delicious meals with simple ingredients.

Yu Xiaocao smiled as she pinched Little Shitou's nose and said, "Rest assured! It doesn't need a lot of wheat flour. Moreover, we'll be able to get a little benefit from this!"

As she spoke, she soaked the dried sweet potato leaves in the water in order to soften them before putting them in the pot of noodles. Afterwards, she skillfully took out less than half a ladle of bean flour,

and then she took out a large bowl of wheat flour from the basket hanging on the beam. There wasn't much wheat flour within the basket, so nearly half of it was gone after she took out this bowl of flour.

Xiaolian's eyes widened and exclaimed in alarm, "How can we use so much flour for a bowl of noodles? If Grandmother sees this, she'll start scolding us again..."

"Just let her! No matter how well we do, she will always find ways to pick on us. If she wants to scold us, then just let her. We can just pretend to not hear her!" Xiaocao poured some mystic-stone water into the basin and mixed it with the bean flour and wheat flour.

Yu Xiaolian looked at her younger sister skillfully kneading and rolling the dough. Her culinary skills were even better than their mother. After a while, Xiaocao had already rolled the dough into a large flattened circle, sprinkled some bean flour on it to prevent it from sticking together, and said without even lifting her head, "The noodles can't be too thin. If the noodles are too thin, then they will easily jumble together and turn into paste!"

She cut the dough into even strands of noodles. The bean noodles shouldn't be cut into strands that were too wide, but it should be a thickness that was suitable for eating. It would be better to cook the noodles until they had a soft and chewy texture. The only thing that didn't really matter was the length of the noodles.

"Second Sister, it looks really delicious!" Little Shitou excitedly looked at the noodles, which were all nearly the same thickness and had a pale-yellow color. He couldn't help but swallow his saliva as he looked at each strand of bean noodles.

Yu Xiaocao pinched the little fellow's cheeks, leaving white wheat flour stains on his face. She smiled lightly and bowed her head to cut the scallion and dried vegetables that had been soaked.

She glanced at the basket, which held the wheat flour, and found a fat piece of bacon inside. Thus, she took it down on her own initiative and rubbed it on the hot iron pan. A layer of oil immediately formed in the pan.

Xiaocao put the cured meat, which appeared unchanged, back in the basket and asked Xiaolian to hang it back on the beam. After that, she quickly stir-fried the chopped scallions and dried vegetables, and then added some salt in it.

When the chopped scallions were cooked in lard, it exuded an alluring fragrance. Little Shitou inhaled a deep breath of the aroma and smacked his lips, "It smells so good that I'm about to drool!"

Since the dumplings that they had eaten during the New Year, the Yu Family's meals had only consisted of coarse grain. Not only were the meals unfulfilling, but there also wasn't even a trace of oil in them. For Little Shitou who had secretly improved his meals from time to time before the New Year, he was already very happy to be able to eat some noodles made from a mixture of bean flour and wheat flour.

Madam Zhang, who was basking in the sun in the yard after breakfast, smelled the scent of lard and rushed into the kitchen. She swiftly took down the basket, carefully inspected the palm-sized bacon, and glanced in the pot. When she didn't find anything wrong, she purposely shouted, "Do you need to make so much noodles for a bowl of noodles? You bunch of spendthrifts are going to deplete all our family's resources!"

Xiaocao pointed at the bean noodles on the chopping board and said, "It's my first time making noodles, so I didn't get a good grasp of the quantity. But I made the noodles with half bean flour and half wheat flour. So, I didn't use a lot of the wheat flour!"

Madam Zhang picked up the small bag of flour and saw that there was still some wheat flour inside. Moreover, the noodles were yellow and smelled like beans, so she grumbled as she put the basket back and left.

When the water in the pot boiled, Yu Xiaocao scattered the noodles into the pot and cracked two eggs inside. She covered the pot with the lid and simmered it on low heat for a while. It was ready to be served when the noodles became soft and sticky.

Yu Xiaolian and Little Shitou looked at each other. Little Shitou couldn't bear to look at the soggy noodles and asked in a low voice, "Is it slightly overcooked?"

Xiaocao filled a bowl for the little guy, and then suggested with a smile, "Try it. How's your sister's cooking?"

Little Shitou blew on the noodles and took in a mouthful. His dark eyes instantly lit up as he chewed it in his mouth. In spite of the heat, he swiftly ate another mouthful. While he ate, he also mumbled words of

praise, "Delicious! It's really delicious! It's even tastier than the plain wheat noodles that I have eaten in the past!"

Xiaocao picked up another radish with good moisture level and cut it into thin strips to make a cold dish. Bean noodles didn't need to be served with rich side dishes. Cold shredded radish [2] or spicy cold cabbage [3] were the best complements.

Xiaocao added another spoonful of bean noodles to Little Shitou's bowl, and then filled a bowl for herself and Xiaolian. They swiftly began devouring the noodles in the kitchen. The bean noodles and side dish were made with simple and incomplete ingredients. However, with Xiaocao's cooking skills and the enhancement of the mystic-stone water, the three kids ate until they nearly swallowed their own tongues.

When Madam Li smelled the aroma and came over with her son, the siblings had already eaten most of the bean noodles, leaving only a large bowl for their father. They had even finished washing the bowls already.

"You two damned brats, you must be secretly eating in the kitchen. Is there anymore? Take it out and give your Brother Heizi a bowl!" Madam Li opened the pot and stared at the bowl of bean noodles with a covetous gaze.

"No, there's a limited amount of flour at home. Grandfather told us to make a bowl for our father, so we won't dare to make more. Won't Grandmother skin us, if we did? Look, there's only one bowl. Shitou was already salivating, but he still didn't dare to take a bite!" Yu Xiaocao had an expression that said 'if you don't believe me, then see for yourself'.

Madam Li didn't believe her and looked everywhere in the kitchen. When she didn't find anything, she stared at the only bowl of bean noodles, "Your father just woke up after a serious injury. He won't have any appetite to eat so much. Divide it in half and give it to her Brother Heizi..." As she spoke, she was about to pick up the bowl to divide the noodles.

Yu Xiaocao quickly picked up the noodles and ran towards the entrance of the kitchen, while shouting, "My father hasn't eaten anything for five days. Eating more can help him recover faster... Grandfather, Grandfather! Brother Heizi wants to steal the noodles that we made for our father—"

Seeing that Heizi wanted to grab the bowl in her hands, Yu Xiaocao ran and screamed towards the yard. Heizi wasn't afraid of anyone, but he feared Grandfather's glare the most. He was so afraid that he hastily withdrew his hands and allowed Xiaocao to slip away under his nose.

Old Yu usually mended the fishing nets in the courtyard at this time. Yu Xiaocao, who ran out of the kitchen, knew that Madam Li and son didn't dare to brazenly take the noodles from her in the yard. She glanced back at him proudly, and then went back to her room with the bowl of noodles.

Inside the room, Madam Liu was feeding Xiaocao's father water with a spoon. Yu Hai's face was flushed, and he clearly still had a high fever. He moved closer to Madam Liu's hand and slowly drank the mystic-stone water. Madam Liu carefully wiped off the water that had seeped from the corner of his mouth. Her thin and pale face was full of tenderness. The two of them sat face to face silently and glanced at one another from time to time, as if they were the only ones left in the world...

For a moment, Xiaocao felt that interrupting them was an unforgivable sin. Madam Liu was the first one to notice her arrival. Her eyes were filled with shock when she saw the bowl of noodles in Xiaocao's hands. In the past, if anyone in their second branch missed a meal, they would have had to starve until the next meal. There had never been a time in which they were allowed to cook again. This big bowl of oily and savory noodles obviously wasn't something they ate for breakfast...

Xiaolian saw the doubt within her mother's eyes and laughed, "Grandfather heard that Father was awake, so he allowed us to make this. Xiaocao had deliberately made more. Mother can also eat some!"

Although some bean flour was added into the bean noodles, it was still mostly made of wheat flour. Moreover, it also had a rare trace of oil in it. So, of course, Madam Liu was reluctant to eat it and wanted to give some to her children to eat.

## Chapter 62

Xiaocao and her siblings dodged her happily, "We already ate in the kitchen. You can touch Younger Brother's tummy. It's as round as a bloated frog. Mother, you eat it!"

Madam Liu clearly didn't believe them. She was very familiar with her mother-in-law's stingy character. Her mother-in-law knew exactly how much of each ingredient was in the kitchen. It was alright for the coarse grain, but without her permission, they were strictly forbidden to use things such as wheat flour, rice, and eggs.

Xiaolian and Little Shitou also patted their bellies to ensure her that they had really eaten. So Madam Liu slowly fed the noodles to her husband. Yu Hai's heart ached for his wife and refused to eat alone. He insisted that he would only eat after Madam Liu took a bite. In this way, the couple shared the bowl of noodles, taking a bite one after another.

Under Yu Hai's insistence, the family of five enjoyed the two fried eggs that were found at the bottom of the bowl together. The small fried eggs were incomparably precious within Yu Xiaocao's heart because they contained strong familial affection and love.

"Father, Mother! I think that we should take this opportunity to leave this family and live by ourselves!" Yu Xiaocao had already reached the breaking point of her endurance for Madam Zhang's stingy and harsh character. In the past, when her father was still able to hunt and fish, Madam Zhang definitely wouldn't allow them to leave. But it might not be the same now!

"Splitting from the family? Your grandparents are still alive, so they won't agree to dividing the family!" Madam Liu felt somewhat sad within her heart. They were still uncertain about whether her husband could keep his leg. Moreover, the condition of her health made it impossible for her to do heavy labor and their children were still too young. What would they rely on to feed the family if they separated from this family?

Yu Xiaocao didn't agree with her! With the little divine stone as her special weapon, the injury on her father's leg would eventually recover. Although there was the possibility of him being crippled, he would still be able to do ordinary handicrafts. After being nourished for months with the mystic-stone water and herbal medicine, her mother's health had almost completely recuperated. As long as they could separate from this family, with her expert skills in braised foods, they would definitely live in better conditions than right now!

"Grandmother and Eldest Aunt must be eagerly looking forward to us leaving this family! In their eyes, our second branch is just a major burden. As for Grandfather, we will definitely have a chance to way to convince him!" That's right! She had been waiting for an opportunity, a perfect opportunity to suggest splitting up the family!

While Yu Xiaocao and her family were discussing the matter of dividing from the family, Madam Li was also speaking ill of the second branch in the main room, "Mother, since Second Brother-in-law got injured, there isn't a single able-bodied worker in the second branch. Furthermore, Second Sister-in-law and Xiaocao are both medicine guzzling fiends. Think about it. We have already spent dozens of taels in the past several days. Although Second Brother-in-law has woken up, Doctor Sun have also said that one of his legs was going to be useless even if he woke up! Second Brother-in-law's family is filled with sick

and weak people who are all relying on us to support them. Mother, our family's situation just got a little better off. We can't let them drag us down."

Madam Zhang received an extra three hundred taels as income, but when she saw the money in her hands gradually decreasing every day, it was as if someone was cutting her heart over and over again. When she heard her eldest daughter-in-law's words, she angrily pounded on the kang bed several times and said,

"What are we supposed to do then? Do you think we can just kick them out? Even if we disregard the fact that your father would definitely disagree, the villagers' gossip and criticism alone would be enough to drown us!"

"But we can't just waste all our money on them without anything in return!" Madam Li viciously wrung the rough-cloth handkerchief within her chubby hands, feeling frustrated.

Madam Zhang glanced at her and said, "What ideas do you have? Let me hear it..."

All the meat on Madam Li's face squished together as she smiled and said, "My maiden family knows a trafficking matron [1], who does business with the wealthy families in town. She even has business with some of the rich people in the prefectural city. I heard that a wealthy merchant in town, the Zhou Family, wants to buy a batch of young girls... That trafficking matron has offered the high price of eight taels for the trade."

Madam Zhang lifted her brows, "You mean... we should sell their eldest daughter?" She pointed towards the direction of the second branch's room.

"Who would want that unhealthy wretch, Xiaocao? Xiaolian is competent and well-groomed, so we can definitely sell her for a good price!" Madam Li replied with a crafty smile and narrowed her beady eyes, which had nearly disappeared into the wrinkles of fat in her face.

If they sold one of the useless brats, not only would they earn a few extra taels, but there would also be one less person to feed. Moreover, Xiaolian had a stubborn personality and was also the most disobedient. Without her, it would be even easier to control the second branch! Madam Zhang became interested in the idea...



In the early morning of the next day, Yu Xiaocao carried a bundle of firewood and followed behind Xiaolian. Her heart ached for the weak and small figure in front of her, who was nearly covered up by the mountain of firewood on her back. Thus, she would reach out her hand to help support the firewood on Xiaolian's back from time to time. Little Shitou, who was also carrying a bundle of firewood, followed behind them.

Originally, Xiaolian had planned to gather firewood by herself, but Xiaocao and Little Shitou both expressed that they wanted to 'share bliss and misfortune together'. Thus, they went out to collect firewood together. It was currently the end of winter and the beginning of spring, so dried firewood could be readily found on the West Mountains at this time. Hence, the siblings had obtained a fruitful result this morning.

Yu Xiaolian, who had known how to take care of her younger siblings from an early age, took on the task of carrying most of the firewood. She only allowed her frail younger sister and younger brother to carry some firewood as a token of helping out. In her previous life, Yu Xiaocao had always taken care of her younger siblings, so she felt somewhat weird being taken care of now. She had repeatedly expressed that her health was fine and that she could carry more, but Xiaolian rejected her every time she made the suggestion.

"Eldest Sister, Second Sister, there's a guest at home!" As soon as Little Shitou looked up, he saw Madam Li eagerly invite a colorfully dressed middle-aged woman into the courtyard. Thus, he curiously ran over.

Yu Xiaocao and Xiaolian looked at one another and saw the doubt within each other's eyes. The woman was dressed in a satin jacket and had a golden hairpin on her head. However, normal villagers wouldn't be able to afford these items. The Yu Family also didn't have any relatives like this. So, who exactly was this person?

"Based on how Eldest Aunt fawns on her, could it be that she's here for Brother Heizi?" Heizi, whose real name was Yu Ge, was already thirteen years old. In ancient times, he should be approaching a marriageable age. Yu Xiaocao couldn't think of any other reasons for the snobby Madam Li to treat that woman as if she were her own mother.

"Xiaolian, I'll go take a look!" After Father got injured, Yu Xiaocao had been worried and took care of him for five days straight without going out. It was seldom that they would have a guest, so this incident sparked her inner curiosity.

She jogged into the yard with the firewood on her back while Madam Zhang and Madam Li were happily welcoming the woman into the main house.

Hearing the movement, the woman stopped in her tracks and turned to look at her from head to toe. Her critical gaze, as if she was examining a piece of good that she had just received, made Yu Xiaocao feel extremely uncomfortable.

"Is she the one? She has a decent appearance, fair and clean. Just a little too thin!" Trafficker Zhuang twitched her mouth in a picky manner.

The Zhou Family in town had just released a batch of maidservants, who had reached marriageable age. Thus, they needed to buy twenty to thirty young girls. For the past several days, Trafficker Zhuang had been extremely busy due to this matter. The Zhou Family was a major client of hers, so she couldn't mess up this deal.

Yesterday evening, someone came to inform her that there was a competent and honest young girl for sale at Dongshan Village. So, she hired a carriage early in the morning and rushed over. She hadn't expected that the little girl would be so thin and small that she didn't even look the age of eight or nine.

Madam Li evasively moved away after she made contact with Yu Xiaocao's cautious gaze. She vaguely replied, "It's not her, but her older sister. She's very competent and can do most of the work at home! Her father suffered a serious injury and her mother is weak and sickly, so the family is in need of money. If not, we wouldn't have been willing to do this!"

Trafficker Zhuang looked around the five-room residence, which was bright and spacious, and the fence in the yard, which was made of sun-dried mud bricks. She smirked inwardly as she thought: 'Looking at this house, this family doesn't seem like they're so short of money for them to sell their children!' But, she's only here to do business, so it was none of her concern. She never interfered with the dirty matters in other people's homes.

Yu Xiaocao wasn't an ignorant child. She could feel that something was wrong based on Trafficker Zhuang's examining gaze and Madam Li's guilty expression. Thus, she asked with alert, "What are you going to do with Xiaolian?"

"Go, go, go! What is a child doing here when the adults are talking?! Go somewhere else to play!" Madam Zhang impatiently waved her hand, as if she were shooing away a little chick. After that, she turned to smile at Trafficker Zhuang and said, "Let's talk inside, in the room..."

"How is it none of our business? If you guys are trying to scheme against our second branch, then of course it has something to do with me!" Yu Xiaocao shouted as her suspicions increased.

"Who talks to their elders like you? Is this how your mother teaches you? For the past eight or nine years, we've been raising you, feeding you, and even providing medication for you. Yet you grew up to be an unfilial child who dares to rudely contradict your own grandmother. We should have just let you die from your illness at that time!" Seeing the impatient expression on Trafficker Zhuang's face, Madam Zhang ground her teeth and screamed loudly.

Madam Liu heard the screaming from the kitchen and swiftly walked out. She pulled Yu Xiaocao behind herself and apologized repeatedly, "Mother, she's still a young child who doesn't know anything. Please don't take a child's actions to heart..."

Madam Zhang continued to shout arrogantly, "You're the only one who thinks that this useless wretch is a treasure! You damned brat, go kneel in your room and reflect on yourself! You're not allowed to eat breakfast today!!"

Yu Xiaolian came in with the heavy firewood on her back. When she heard Madam Zhang's words, she quickly threw the firewood down and rushed to her younger sister. She stood in front of Xiaocao and said, "My younger sister was seriously ill right before the New Year. If she falls sick again, won't you have to spend money for the medicine? Grandmother, I'm willing to receive the punishment in place of my sister!"

Trafficker Zhuang had experienced and encountered numerous situations before, so she immediately knew that the child's grandmother and eldest aunt were planning on secretly selling the child without the parents' knowledge. Trafficker Zhuang had always had a good reputation in Tanggu Town. Otherwise, she wouldn't have so many customers of high social status. Thus, she naturally wouldn't ruin her own reputation just for a young girl.

Trafficker Zhuang smiled at Xiaolian and praised her, "Well, you're quite faithful and righteous. Although you're somewhat tanned and thin, you will look decent in two years after growing up a little. When noble families buy maidservants, a good character is the one important quality that they look for. These two girls, one is clever and sensible, while the other is honest and trustworthy. Moreover, they look

exactly the same. Old Lady of the Yu Family, if you sell both your granddaughters to me, I'll give you double the price!"

Earlier, Madam Zhang had already heard Trafficker Zhuang say that an eight or nine year old girl would be worth five taels at most. If the price was doubled for two girls, then it would be twenty taels. Not only would she earn back the money that was spent for the second branch's medical fees recently, but there was also some surplus. If she added that to the money Hunter Zhao got from selling the bear... Madam Zhang suddenly got so happy that she smiled until her eyes disappeared.

#### Chapter 63 - Dividing the Family (1)

Madam Liu almost fainted when she heard that her mother-in-law and eldest sister-in-law wanted to sell her daughters. Were their family so poor that they needed to sell their own children?

"Mother, Cao'er's health is already good enough to help out in the family. Lian'er feeds the pigs, raises the chickens, and takes care of the garden. So, she's already one of the main laborers in the family. Please don't sell our children. Please, I'm begging..." Madam Liu had a weak temperament, so despite being harshly bullied, she had never dared to rebut her mother-in-law in the past. However, since this concerned the future of her two daughters, she couldn't help but cry while begging piteously.

Madam Zhang frowned and had an impatient expression on her face, "Think about it yourself. For Second Son's injury, we have already spent dozens of taels over the past few days. The weather isn't very good at the beginning of spring, so your father and eldest brother can't catch any fish. Thus, the family doesn't have any income right now. If we don't sell your daughters, did you want us to sell your eldest sister-in-law's son? Do you still want to treat your husband's injury?"

Madam Li also insidiously agreed, "That's right, that's right! Doctor Sun said that even if your husband woke up, his leg will still be crippled. Don't we need money in order to support that good-for-nothing? There's also you, who falls sick every now and then. Don't we need money for your medical fees? Third Brother-in-law needs to take the district examination next year and Youngest Sister-in-law needs to get married... Which of these matters doesn't need money?! If you people use up all our family's money, how are the rest of us supposed to live? Can we still survive?"

"Besides..." Madam Li cleared her throat and continued, "The Zhou Family is one of the wealthiest families in town. Zhenxiu Restaurant had even opened another store in the capital. The handmaids in their household eat and dress even more elegantly than the young misses of most families. They not only receive a monthly wage of one tael, but the masters of the family will also give them rewards. If Xiaolian and Xiaocao went, then they will be living a life of ease and comfort!"

Xiaolian nervously supported her mother and furiously said, "If it's so good, why don't you go? Hey Auntie, doesn't the Zhou Family also need to buy senior servants? Eldest Aunt, you can also enjoy an easy and comfortable life..."

Madam Li's expression instantly changed and scolded, "Damned brat, what are you saying?"

Yu Xiaocao coldly snorted and said, "Eldest Aunt, Xiaolian is right. Since you think that being a servant in the Zhou Household is a blessing, why don't you go? After being sold into a noble household, you'll no longer be a free person. Whether you get beaten, killed, or sold again, it all depends on your masters' moods. Eldest Aunt only sees the bright side of being a handmaid, but within the red-lacquered doors of wealthy households, are there any without a few dead maidservants? Eldest Aunt is just trying to kill us!"

It was unknown whether she was angered or frightened, but Madam Liu trembled slightly when she heard this. However, her tone was usually firm when she spoke, "Even if I'm living in poor and harsh conditions, I still wouldn't sell my own daughters! Mother, this matter is not negotiable!"

Madam Zhang was immediately enraged when she heard this. Furthermore, it was about time when the old man came back from fishing. So, she had to send the girls away before he came back. Thus, she didn't allow any disagreements and said, "It's not up to you whether they get sold or not! I'm not dead yet, so I still have the final say in this family! Trafficker Zhuang, you can take these two girls for twenty taels!"

Madam Zhang's daughter, Yu Caidie, was already sixteen. She couldn't bear to see her two cute nieces being sold off, so she couldn't help but speak for them, "Mother, our family hasn't reached the point of selling children. If the villagers find out, how are we supposed to raise our heads in the future?"

Madam Zhang pushed her gently and sullenly said, "Go back and sew your dowry. This has nothing to do with you!"

Yu Xiaocao saw her younger uncle, who seldom came home, holding a book and standing at the entrance with a frown, so she hastily said, "Grandmother, you need to think about Younger Uncle's future. He needs to take the county examination next year. If his classmates find out that he sold his two nieces in order to obtain this chance, how is he supposed to continue attending the academy?"

Originally, her younger uncle, Yu Bo, had disapproved of Madam Zhang's decision because, no matter what, his two nieces were also descendants of the Yu Family. If this got spread out, there was no way he could continue living with such shame. Thus, he decided to speak up to persuade Madam Zhang to give up on his idea.

Madam Zhang had placed all her hopes on her youngest son. Her greatest wish was for him to pass the imperial examinations to become a government official, earning a noble title for her. However, when she heard that this could potentially affect her son's future, she couldn't help but hesitate.

Yu Xiaocao continued, "Grandmother, aren't you just afraid that our family will become a burden for you guys in the future? Let's just divide the family then! No matter what happens to our family in the future, even if our whole family starves to death, we won't take a single penny from any of you!"

Madam Zhang and Madam Li looked at each other with eyes that were twinkling with delight. Madam Zhang put on a stern expression and asked, "Splitting the family? You're just a little girl making empty promises. Can you even make the decision?"

"She can't make the decision, but I can!" The door of the west room slammed open. With an ashen complexion and bloodshot eyes, Yu Hai stood at the entrance. However, he couldn't support himself with just one leg and fell heavily by the doorsill.

"Father!" Yu Xiaolian and Little Shitou shouted in unison. They hurriedly rushed towards Yu Hai and tried to help him up, with a person on each side.

"Husband, be careful! Nothing is as important as your body!" Madam Liu's lips trembled as tears filled up her eyes. During the time when Yu Hai was unconscious, her heart always felt anxious, as if the sky might collapse at any time. As long as her husband was alive, even if he was disabled and they lived in harsher conditions, she would still willingly endure it.

With Xiaolian's help, Yu Hai stood up after such difficulty and sat on the tall wooden stool that Little Shitou brought over. His gaze turned gentle as he looked at Madam Liu. After they got married, his wife had never had a peaceful day. Not only did she work hard every day, but she also suffered mental torture. Her originally fit figure became so thin that she was left with nothing but bones.

He had always felt deeply apologetic towards Madam Liu. In the past, for the sake of peace at home, he had always believed that it was also a blessing to be taken advantage of and that everything would be fine if he just took a step back. However, his stepmother, Madam Zhang, and eldest sister-in-law, Madam Li, became increasingly abusive because of his tolerance.

Every year, he had earned over ten taels from hunting alone. Moreover, without him, it was impossible for their fishing boat to catch so many fish every day. He painstakingly worked for this family, yet his wife and children never had enough to eat nor warm clothes to wear. Furthermore, they also had to suffer from verbal and physical abuse...

While he was in a coma these past few days, he wasn't completely unconscious. He had heard clearly and remembered everything that happened at home. Before he was injured, Madam Zhang had sent his ten year old son to work as an apprentice at a carpentry shop under the pretext that they couldn't support so many people in the family.

He hadn't expected that his stepmother and the first branch would scheme against his two cute and sensible daughters when he was still alive! Even if he had to risk his life, he would never allow his own children to be sold!

Xiaocao was correct! There was no place for them in this family. If they continued to stay here, his family would be broken apart sooner or later. Split from the family! No matter how harsh their living conditions were, their whole family still had to stay together!

"Second Son! You're the one who mentioned splitting from the family. We never forced you!" Madam Zhang suppressed the elation within her heart and immediately exclaimed, afraid that Yu Hai would go back on his words.

Yu Caidie looked at her second brother's injured leg, pulled on Madam Zhang's sleeve, and whispered, "Second Brother hasn't recovered from his injury yet. Isn't it inappropriate to divide the family right now? Father won't agree either!"

Madam Li interjected, "What's inappropriate about it?! Second Brother-in-law was the one who mentioned the separation. As long as he insists, Father can't do anything about it either! Youngest Sister-in-law, stop being so muddle-headed. With such a family dragging us down, you will also have less dowry in the future!"

Yu Hai looked at this stepmother and eldest sister-in-law disappointedly. They had long been eager to kick them out of the family... This was also good. In the future, his wife wouldn't be mistreated at home anymore. His children also didn't need to be worried all day long that they would be scolded or beaten. With his ability, even if one of his legs was crippled, he still wouldn't let his family suffer from hunger and coldness.

Madam Zhang glared at her daughter and shouted, "It's decided then! When your father and eldest brother returns, we'll get the village head and the elders of the Yu Family as witnesses, and then divide the family!"

"Why are you guys quarreling in the morning? What do you mean dividing the family? Who wants to leave? Eldest Son's family?" Old Yu came in from outside, holding the fish that hadn't been sold. The eldest son, Yu Dashan, followed him inside with a fishing net in his hands.

Madam Li hastily explained, "It's not me, Father! Second Brother-in-law was the one who mentioned it!"

"Second Son? It's impossible for Second Son to make this suggestion when he's injured. He still hasn't passed the critical period, so why would he suggest splitting from the family on his own initiative?" Although Old Yu wasn't good at expressing his emotions, he wasn't foolish. He looked at all the strangers in the yard and furrowed his sparse brows.

Madam Zhang quietly approached Trafficker Zhuang, stuffed a handful of copper coins into her hands, and quietly asked her to leave. Trafficker Zhuang held contempt for her behavior, so she pushed the money back and left in the ox cart that she came in.

Old Yu usually kept silent and didn't interfere with the matters at home. But he had the final say in all the important matters in the family. Madam Zhang was still somewhat afraid of him, so she awkwardly explained, "Second Son volunteered to leave the family in fear that he will become a burden to the family. Look, our third son needs to take an important exam next year. I heard that the third part of the county examination will take place in the prefectural city. We need to prepare more money... Also, Heizi is approaching marriage age... there isn't enough space at home..."

Old Yu frowned and glared at her, while saying, "What do you mean there isn't enough space at home?! Caidie will get married in a couple years, so won't we have a vacant room at that time? Second Son's leg hasn't recovered yet, but you're already so anxious to force him out of the house. Aren't you afraid that people will curse at you behind your back?!"



“How did it become me forcing him out? Second Son was the one who mentioned the separation. Even if they curse, it has nothing to do with me!” Madam Zhang screeched, “Alright! So it turns out that this is how you, Old Yu, really thinks of me in your heart! I worked so hard for this family, but in the end, I'm accused of forcing my stepson out of the family. My God! How am I supposed to live now! It's better for me to just die than be an eyesore!”

Madam Zhang sat on the ground, while smacking her thighs and lamenting to the heavens. However, she didn't even manage to squeeze a teardrop out of her eyes for half a day. Yu Xiaocao inwardly rolled her eyes. What a scumbag! Of course, she would go for the clichéd routine of crying, screaming, and killing herself.

Yu Hai shook his drowsy head and looked towards his wife and children. Their faces were wan and thin because of long-term malnutrition. They had been wearing tattered clothes that were covered in patches for who knew how long. After that, he turned to look at the new attires that his stepmother and eldest sister-in-law wore, which were made just before the New Year. He became even more determined on leaving this family. Anyway, they would definitely have a better and more comfortable life than they did right now!

#### Chapter 64 - Dividing the Family (2)

“Father, separating from the main family and living apart was my idea! It has nothing to do with the situation involving Mother and Eldest Sister-in-law!” Yu Hai spoke again as he looked at Old Yu.

Old Yu's frown deepened as he scolded, “What do you mean by separating from the family? Stop making a fuss! When your leg gets better, we can revisit this again!”

Yu Xiaocao suddenly interjected, “If we don't split from the main family, then the whole second branch will be sold out! Grandfather, if Father didn't come out to save us, Xiaolian and I wouldn't be here anymore. We should separate from the family now so no one else gets any ideas to sell us again!”

“Selling people off? Old Yu's normally murky eyes suddenly revealed a coldness that sent shivers down people. He remembered that his wife had gone out earlier and then connected the dots. He glared furiously at Madam Zhang and Madam Li and snarled, “I'm not dead yet. Let's see who has the guts to sell you!! The Yu Family will not do something as disgraceful as selling our sons and daughters!!”

Old Yu seldom had his temper roused, so Madam Li lowered her head in shock and hid behind her mother-in-law's back. Madam Zhang cowered down but still rebutted fiercely, “What's wrong with being a servant girl at the Zhou Family? They won't have to worry about food or clothing and can even get paid one to two taels a month. Where else can you find such a good deal? We spent more than half of our

money on treating Second Son's injuries. At that time, we didn't even know when he would wake up from his coma. His medication costs a few silver bits a day. Lately the family's income has also decreased...I was just trying to think of the future of our whole family, ah!"

"Well isn't Second Son awake now? Don't ever bring up splitting the family up again!" Old Yu was well aware of Madam Zhang's true personality. When his first wife passed away, how did he make such an error of judgement and decide to marry such a troublesome wretch?

In the past, he had also fought with Madam Zhang when she treated Second Son poorly. However, she always threw a colossal temper tantrum and would bewail about the family's troubles and her own difficulties. Sometimes, she would agree to change at the time, but in a blink of an eye would always revert back to her old ways.

Back when Yu Hai was eight years old, he had almost drowned trying to catch fish in the river because he was so hungry. At that time, Old Yu had made a firm resolution to divorce her. However, he didn't expect for Madam Zhang to find out that she was pregnant with his unborn child. After fighting with her, he decided to keep her as his wife. Unexpectedly, after she gave birth to Third Son, Madam Zhang became even more harsh and severe. She was solely preoccupied with her own biological children and no longer took care of the son and daughter from Old Yu's first marriage.

As the years passed by, everytime he rebuked her, she always made a scene and threw a temper tantrum. Gradually, the children grew up. For the sake of keeping the peace in the family, he could only turn a blind eye to her doings...only, it had made things difficult for Second Son's family.

Old Yu always felt somewhat guilty inside regarding his kind hearted and capable second son. Doctor Sun had said that his right leg would likely be unfit for use in the future and if it was serious enough, he might even have to amputate it. Second Son's family had both sick and weak members. If they didn't split the family, as long as he was there, there would always be some food for them to eat...however if he passed away, and Second Son's children were older and could be of use...

Contrary to his expectations, Yu Hai had made up his mind and he sincerely said, "Father! If you truly love me as your son, then you would split my branch from the family! Your son is begging you!!"

Seeing the earnest look in his son's eyes, Old Yu felt a sharp pang to his heart. When his first wife was dying, she repeatedly requested that he take good care of their son and daughter. However, he wasn't

able to fulfill his promise. His oldest daughter had married someone who lived far away. The journey back to visit took around four to five days of travel. Ever since his daughter birthed children of her own, she rarely came back to visit her parental home. As for his first wife's most beloved son? He was now a cripple—when he died, how could he face his first wife?

Lost in his thoughts, Old Yu thought he could once again see that beautiful young girl in the field of green vegetables smiling sweetly at him again...

With Madam Zhang's poor personality and the fact that his Second Son would be staying at home like a parasite in the future, Old Yu couldn't even imagine how cruel and harsh she would be. Forget it, if Second Son wanted to split from the main family then he should leave. In the future, he would just privately help them a little and they should still be able to live out their days...

Following that, Old Yu told Dashan to invite his older brother and the village chief to come over to discuss the details of separating their families.

Old Yu's eldest brother, Yu Lichun, was outraged on his nephew's behalf, "I say, Third Brother! Dahai is the most hardworking person in your family! Try to find your conscience and think a little! Isn't Dahai's hard work the reason why your whole family can live this way? He only just came out of his coma, and you want to push him out already. Can you face his dead mother now?"

"Eldest Brother-in-law, Second Son is the one who wants to split. What does that have to do with us?" Madam Zhang was unhappy. All of these irrelevant people were here criticizing and being opinionated when it was just their own family affair to split off a branch. 'It's all well to talk but getting things done is another matter. If we don't separate, will one of you take care of Second Son's family?'

Yu Hai's second uncle, Yu Lixia, who lived outside the village and rarely visited had a rather fiery personality. He glared at her and growled, "Men are talking here, how can a woman like you interject into official business?"

Madam Zhang grumbled resentfully under her breath, "Our family is the one that's splitting off, how could it not be related to me?"

Although on paper Dongshan Village was a small fishing village, the village chief, Liu Jiashun, still had a lot of prestige. He glanced at Madam Zhang, and she became quiet immediately. Only then did he open his mouth for the first time to speak to Old Yu, "Brother Liqiu, what are your plans on splitting the family?"

Old Yu puffed on his tobacco pipe, thought a bit, and said, "I've already have a plan. We'll split the family assets equally into four. Dashan and his other brothers will all get a piece each, and then I and my wife will get a piece..."

"That's not okay! Caidie hasn't married yet and should also get a share! Otherwise, who will give her a dowry? The Zhan Family offered eight taels as a betrothal gift for her! Also, Third Son will be participating in the preliminary round of imperial examinations in the future. His expenses will be quite a lot. Are you saying that his brother who has left the family will be raising some money for him?" As soon as she heard the proposal, Madam Zhang instantly became unhappy and blurted out her complaints to show her objections.

Old Yu tapped his pipe under the table and said, "Then we'll split it into five equal parts and Caidie will have a portion! After we split the family, your mother and I will live with one of you and in the future our portion will go to that person's branch when we die. After we come to an agreement, it doesn't mean that splitting the family will lead to leaving the family. Second Son's family can still live in the main residence with us, that way we can live in harmony and not drift apart. Dahai earned most of the money for the family's new boat, and his legs aren't good anymore, so the boat will go to him. In the future, renting it out could be a form of income..."

Before he could finish what he was saying, Madam Li forcefully pulled on her husband's arm. Seeing that he didn't say anything, she promptly spoke, "Father, Dashan and Heizi are the first son and first grandson of the family, so it is their duty to look after their parents and grandparents. Naturally, you two should live with us. However, my husband only knows how to go fishing to make an income. If the boat is given to Second Brother-in-law, are we supposed to eat and drink solely from the wind itself ah?"

Madam Zhang had long been holding back her complaints and this time they finally all came out, "Eldest Son's family is correct! As the head of the household, you are clearly being too biased! Without a fishing boat, how are we supposed to make a living? Do you still want Third Son to take his examinations? Do you still want Caidie to get married in the future? What about Heizi's future marriage? You really want all of our lives ah! I don't agree, I absolutely don't agree!"

"Don't we also have three plots of land? Eldest Son and I can go into town and work some temporary jobs again...didn't we also live life like that before?" Old Yu stayed silent for a bit before he finally replied as he was thinking about his studious and talented Third Son.

Madam Zhang's loud, shrill voice pierced the ears of everyone in the room as she hollered, "The amount of crops produced by those three plots of sandy land in one year is only enough to feed our household for six months. In the past we had fewer children, I didn't dare to eat too much or get new clothing in an

effort to save. We were only able to amass this much property with great difficulty. But you, you're giving it all to Second Son! Yes, Eldest Son was from my first marriage, if you don't care about him, then whatever! But aren't Third Son and Caidie both your flesh and blood? You old man, you're not giving us a living road! This is not okay! The fishing boat absolutely cannot be given to Second Son unless you want to strangle the rest of us to death!"

The slow of speech and honest Eldest Son, Yu Dashan, also timidly interjected after being pinched by his wife several times, "Father, other than fishing, I don't know how to do anything else. If I go into town, I won't be able to find any work...I also don't agree in giving the boat to Second Brother..."

"That's right, that's right! Mother and Father are living with us, while Youngest Sister-in-law hasn't gotten married yet. Third Brother-in-law is still in school and still needs to be with the family. Thus, the fishing boat absolutely cannot be given away!" Madam Li hastily agreed and stared at Old Yu pathetically.

Both Yu Bo and Yu Caidie stayed silent with their heads lowered. No one could tell what their thoughts were on any of this.

Yu Hai calmly listened to everyone and only now did he speak, "Father, the doctor told me that my leg will never get better. It's still up in the air whether I can stand on them in the future. Even if I had the fishing boat, I wouldn't be able to go out to sea and catch fish. I don't want the fishing boat. As for the three plots of land, there's a decent amount of harvest to be had from them in a year. So just give the land to us and we'll have my wife and children farm them."

Yu Xiaocao didn't know how to catch fish so she really didn't care much about that fishing boat. She was currently thinking about the future. If they were still living together, it still wouldn't be a clean break. If their branch suddenly started living well, with Madam Zhang's and Madam Li's temperaments, wouldn't they still cause trouble for them every couple of days? What did they have to do to live farther from this pack of wolves?

Just as she was thinking, her father spoke again, "Eldest Brother's child is about to grow up and Third Brother can only squeeze into the tiny west room when he visits. If our whole family still lived together, it would definitely be crowded. How about you give the Yu Family's old residence to us? After cleaning it up a bit, it should be livable..."

The Yu Family's old residence was at the foot of the West Mountains and it was a three-room house made of mud bricks. It also had a decently sized courtyard and behind the rooms was a large pond. Back

when Yu Hai's mother was still alive, the whole family had lived there. Later, as their circumstances got better, the whole family moved into the village, where it was closer to the sea.

No one had lived in the old residence for the past ten years. Although every year they would go back and do some small fixes, no one knew how much damage there was on the house. Madam Zhang thought for a bit, decided not to make a fuss, but wished she could still keep those three plots of sandy land. Even though the land didn't produce a lot, not having it meant that in the future they would need to spend money to eat grains and starches. It was not surprising Madam Zhang wanted to keep it. However, compared to the fishing boat, the three plots of land were really not as important.

In the end, other than the shabby, old residence and those three plots of land, Xiaocao's family also got a cooking pot, a few bowls and plates, and some farming tools. When Old Yu raised the issue of splitting the money into five parts, Madam Zhang's face turned so dark that someone might have thought her mother had died.

However, with the village chief and the rest of the Yu Family elders present, no one would believe her if she said that there wasn't any money. She reluctantly fished out a few strings of copper and a few silver bits from a jar and threw them onto the kang bed. She huffily said, "When Second Son got injured, we spent almost all of our money. Look, this is what's left!"

Xiaocao eyeballed the money and estimated that the coins and bits together at most came out to be about ten taels, and they needed to split them five ways. Her family could only get two taels at most. It wasn't even enough to fix their new home!

## Chapter 65

Madam Zhang felt Old Yu's complicated gaze coming over and felt her heart freeze. She was afraid that he might say something that shouldn't be said, so she took a deep breath and screamed at him, "There's no more! It's just this much! We don't have a mountain of money at home! After spending more than ten taels on medication, how much money can be left over?"

Xiaocao could tell that the old woman was using her loud voice to cover up her inner turmoil. She knew there had to be more money at home; however, as long as they could smoothly split their families apart, they didn't need to squabble too much over other things. But, she didn't want Madam Zhang to pull the wool over everyone else's eyes, so she said, "If there's nothing more, then there's nothing more! Why are you yelling? If I didn't know better, I'd think you're trying to hide something!"

"Hide something? What do I need to hide? You little brat, all you know how to do is talk back to your elders. This past morning I really should have sold you off..." Madam Zhang's face twisted into a grim

expression. If the village chief and the rest of the family elders weren't here, she would have long run over and slapped the chit on the face.

"Who are you to be able to say whether you can sell my Yu Family's grandsons and granddaughters?" That morning an unfamiliar woman had stopped by Old Yu house, and the rumors had said that she was a trafficker matron in town. There were no walls that didn't have cracks in the world. The whole village already knew that Madam Zhang and Madam Li had tried to sell the twins.

As the eldest, Yu Lichun glared fiercely at her and looked dignified and imposing. However, everyone had underestimated Madam Zhang's shrewish fury.

In the end, Yu Xiaocao's family had only received two taels, as Madam Zhang's temper tantrum ability and spoiled whining had been turned on to her highest capacity. That night, Old Yu sat at the head of the kang bed and smoked his tobacco pipe, turning an indifferent eye towards Madam Zhang's small acts at currying favor with him.

Madam Zhang let out a sigh and said, "I know you blame me for not taking out the three hundred taels that Hunter Zhao sent to us to split between the branches. But I was doing it for the good of our family! In the past, you had always thought that Second Son was hard working and capable, so the family revolved around him. But he's gotten injured, so now our entire family's hopes are all on Third Son's shoulders now. Didn't the teacher always praise Third Son's efforts? Next year, after the examination is over, if he passes it, then the teacher will recommend him to the academy of the famous scholar, Teacher Yuan. I had asked around and Scholar Yuan is a rare talent who had placed first in the provincial examination, the metropolitan examination, and the imperial palace examination in the past dynasty. His academy has turned out scholars who've placed second and third in the imperial palace examination, not to mention how many other scholars who have passed it too. Didn't they say that our third son has a glorious fate and has the possibility of passing the imperial examinations? We definitely can't let this opportunity go by!"

Seeing that Old Yu's expression had improved perceptibly, Madam Zhang continued cajoling, "I know that these three hundred taels were in exchange for Second Son's leg, but just think, if Third Son makes it, in the future when he has a scholar-official's income, we'll just give Second Branch some more. Then it's fine!"

Old Yu held the tobacco pipe in his mouth but didn't inhale from it for a long time. In the end, he let out a deep sigh and said, "I've failed Dahai's mother, I didn't take care of those two kids...I even stole the money that Dahai's risked his life to get, ah..."

Madam Zhang felt a burst of jealousy rise in her heart when she saw that Old Yu was still thinking of that dead ghost. However, for the sake of those three hundred taels, she restrained herself and didn't start an argument with the old man. With the three hundred taels firmly in her hands and the money spending Second Son's entire family expelled, the taste of sweetness in her mouth was even more delicious than honey.

With their long-standing wish to have the family separate finally fulfilled and their father also looking more energetic, the three siblings were happier than they had been during the New Year celebrations. They surrounded their parents and chattered and laughed endlessly.

Madam Liu's heart was full of uncertainties towards their future. However, the obvious happiness of her children and the thought of no longer being under Madam Zhang's abuse and being in charge of her own household made her gently smile.

It was this exact same, sweet smile that had captured Yu Hai's heart so many years ago. However, ever since she married into the Yu family, the smile that made his heart skip a beat was seen less and less often as the years went by.

Despite the children being nearby, Yu Hai furtively linked his hand with his wife's and smiled at her winsomely. Madam Liu's face flushed a bright red and she made a token resistance before she stopped, leaving their hands together.

Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but laugh, her eyes curving up in joy, when she saw the two of them being lovey-dovey. Yu Hai sensed that she was looking at them and spoke to his most beloved daughter, "Cao'er, were you terribly frightened these past few days?"

"No, I always knew that father would wake up. Father could never bear to leave us all alone!" Yu Xiaocao cleverly sat next to her father and lifted her head to look at him.

"Of course! One is bound for good fortune after surviving a great disaster! In the future, our family will continue to do better and better!" Yu Hai couldn't help but hug his daughter close to him when he thought about how he had almost died and would never see his beloved family and clever daughter again. Although he was her father, Yu Xiaocao was not used to being hugged by an adult man, so she slipped out of his hold and smiled, "Father, the poultice on your leg needs to be changed. I'll do it for you!"



Yu Hai's leg injury was extremely severe as almost all of the flesh on it had been torn into pieces by the black bear. If Yu Xiaocao hadn't been treating him every day with the little divine stone and washing the wound with mystic-stone water, his leg likely would have rotted from the inside out.

Xiaocao carefully removed the bandages and used the mystic-stone water to wash off the old dressings. The scary-looking wound had already started growing new skin and flesh. Yesterday, Doctor Sun had come over to check up on him. The doctor was amazed at Yu Hai's healing abilities. Anyone else with such a wound would have had their leg amputated by this time.

Yu Xiaocao refused her mother's offer of help and pounded the fever reducing medication that Doctor You had left behind into a fine powder. She then mixed the powder with the mystic-stone water to create a thick paste before she carefully applied the mixture to her father's wounds.

Yu Hai sighed in relief as the cool and refreshing poultice covered and soothed the itchy wound. He looked at his second daughter with gratitude and said, "After Xiaocao hit her head, not only did her body get healthy, but she's also become a lot more deft and clever. She easily learned all of the dense and hard-to-learn medical knowledge. Is this another transformation that the God of Fortune did?"

Yu Xiaocao carefully bandaged the dressing on the wound and raised her head to smile at him when she heard his words. She didn't agree or refute what her father had said.

That night, when the whole family was asleep, Yu Xiaocao once again pushed the little divine stone to release its hard earned spiritual energy to heal Yu Hai's ravaged and torn tendons.

The water in this world was clear and pure. In addition, the little divine stone had also helped its master to save her father. All of these factors combined loosened its shackles, and its speed at absorbing spiritual energy had increased immensely. It was convinced that it would soon be able to materialize its physical form and openly appear in front of everyone. However, the energy that it painstakingly gathered every day was always used to treat Yu Hai's leg injury. This made the little stone feel gloomy and depressed.

Luckily, it discovered that every time it used up all its spiritual energy, the shackles confining it would loosen a little more. It was especially prominent whenever it was healing people's injuries, like its master's head wound or its master's father's leg.

The clever little divine stone couldn't help but grumble inwardly: 'Don't tell me that every time I help my master is when the Goddess of Spirit's shackles will loosen on me?' This was the complaint it had lodged within its heart but this was also the reason why it continued to help Xiaocao heal her father's injury.

The next day, Xiaocao's whole family was finally able to sleep until they woke up naturally. When Madam Zhang got up and saw that there was no one feeding the pigs, the chickens were clucking in hunger, there was no firewood gathered, no one was sweeping, and no one was washing the clothes, she couldn't help but rush towards the west room and holler, "How long are you all going to sleep like the dead? Do you know what time it is?"

Yu Xiaocao opened the door and looked at Madam Zhang with a faint smile on her face, 'Grandmother, it must have slipped your mind. We already split our family, so each branch is living independently. If you want us to feed the pigs and chickens, does that mean you want to give us a fifth of those animals?'

Madam Zhang choked down the abuse she had wanted to hurl and glanced at the east room's messily attired Madam Li, who was leaning against the doorframe watching the show. Her fury had found a new target, and she screamed, "Lazy woman, why don't you quickly start getting to work? If you can't finish, don't bother eating breakfast!"

The expression on Madam Li's face changed instantly. She realized that she would have to be like Madam Liu in the future: working endlessly from dawn to dusk. She silently grumbled inside.

After more than ten years of marriage, she had only been ordered around by Madam Zhang during the first year. Ever since Madam Liu married into the family, she had taken it easy and lived a leisurely life. Now that she suddenly had to do housework again, she really didn't know where she should start. For the whole morning, she muddled through the multitude of tasks while being criticized by her mother-in-law the whole time.

Her youngest sister-in-law, Yu Caidie, couldn't stand by idly and watch, so she helped to sweep the floor and feed the chickens. Like this, by the time it was time to make breakfast, they hadn't even gathered the necessary firewood. When Old Yu came back home, the kitchen was still cold and silent. Up until noon, he had to endure his hunger pains, and only then did he get to eat a breakfast that was poorly made.

Old Yu had an ugly expression on his face as he sighed. In the future, without Madam Liu and the others, it would be impossible to have the residence all tidied up and orderly like it was before. He put down his bowl and chopsticks to go to the old residence to see if there was anything he could help with.

As for Xiaocao and company, after enjoying the melodramatic play in the courtyard, they had eaten their breakfast at the crack of dawn and left to go to the old residence at the foot of the West Mountains. Yu Hai was left at the main residence to recuperate.

The old residence and the current Yu Family residence was about a half an hour walk from each other. Although it was said to be at the foot of the mountains, it was really about one to two kilometers away. With the glorious scenery of mountains and water, Yu Xiaocao's good mood could not be ruined even if the old residence was about to fall apart. She had no doubt that they would be able to do well and even thrive in their new environment. Adapting to their new home was not a question.

The shabby old residence was in such bad condition that it made people gasp. Even though every year they would go back and fix things, that was only enough to guarantee that the whole house wouldn't fall down. This year's snows were heavy, so one of the rooms had also been crushed by the weight of the snow. Although in the spring they had hastily fixed it a bit, that room was currently not fit for living inhabitants.

The broken down house had a courtyard with weeds growing everywhere. On the side was a bamboo fence that had mostly fallen over. Wild hares had nested in the courtyard and, when they heard there were people, they zipped out with a 'whoosh' and scared them. Little Shitou cheerfully chased after the wild hares. Madam Liu quietly let out a breath in relief and started to pull up the weeds from the courtyard with her two daughters.

The old residence was located in a more remote area. In the vicinity, there were only a few neighbors. On the left, about two hundred meters away was the Zhou Family who raised chickens to make a living. Madam Fang had married into the Zhou Family and had a good relationship with Madam Liu. When she saw them all stooped over fighting with the weeds, she also brought over her two daughters to help. The Zhou Family had one son and two daughters. The oldest daughter, Zhou Linglong, was fourteen years old and was already on the marriage market. The younger daughter, Zhou Shanhu, was only nine and had an innocent and open personality. Her favorite thing to do was to play with the Xiaocao and Xiaolian together.

Uncle Zhou, Zhou Danian, started out as a street peddler. His son, Zhou Wenhua, had gone to school for two years and then followed his father in buying and selling goods. When it wasn't busy at home, he would go to the village and walk up and down the streets selling household goods, such as needles and

thread. They also had about a hundred chickens at home. Due to that, they were among the small number of families in the village who could afford to eat wheat flour and white rice on the regular.

"Brother Han!" Little Shitou, who was holding a small sickle and was using it to cut the weeds, raised his head and saw a familiar figure. He greeted the person cheerfully.

Zhao Han rolled up his sleeves and also grabbed a sickle. He stooped over and started to work as he said, "I heard you all are about to move here, so I came over. Is there anything I can help with?"

#### Chapter 66 - Maternal Family

Madam Liu replied with embarrassment, "Little Han, there's not much to do here. With your Auntie Zhou here to help, you really don't need to help us..."

"Auntie, your words wrongfully make me an outsider. I consider Xiaocao and Shitou to be as close to me as true siblings are. We're all one family, so don't make it into separate ones. In the future if anything comes up, please speak up!"

Little Shitou was gleefully happy and a large smile bloomed on his face, "Brother Han, in the future our two families will live closer, so coming and going will be much more easy! I used to eat your family's food all the time, but from now on you should come over and taste my second sister's skills! My second sister is a really good cook; she even made bean flour noodles taste better than wheat flour noodles!"

"Alright! Then in the future my stomach will be very fortunate!" Zhao Han raised his head to look at Xiaocao's back for a second and then bent over again to cut the weeds.

Perhaps it was because the family branch had split off, but Little Shitou finally revealed his lively side as a small boy. He chattered non-stop but it didn't delay his work. The small sickle in his hand flashed constantly in being swung around.

The little roe deer next to him had seemingly also been infected by his excited mood. It leapt through the underbrush and would occasionally lower its head to snip a plant off and present it like a treasure to Xiaocao, as if it was trying to ask for compliments and rewards.

On the other side, Madam Liu and Madam Fang also kept busy. The two of them worked as they talked.

After looking at the shabby old house, Madam Fang couldn't help but say, "The Yu Family's matriarch really is something! Brother Dahai earned so much money for the family but they only gave two taels to you. What can you do with two taels, it's not even enough to fix the house! Younger Sister Muyun, if you don't have enough money, feel free to tell me. We don't have a lot at home but we definitely can take out several taels worth. The weather is still cold now, so no matter what you guys should get that house fixed up."

Liu Muyun was so moved by her words that tears came to her eyes. She threw herself into pulling up more weeds to hide her emotions and replied quietly, "Thank you in advance, Danian's wife..."

"What are you thanking me for? In the future, we'll be neighbors. A relative afar is less use than a close neighbor. If there's anything I can do to help, please tell me!" Madam Fang swiftly swung the sickle across the ground to cut the weeds. At a glance, one could tell she was a hardworking woman.

The family on the west side opened the gate in their rear courtyard and let a flock of ducks into the pond behind the residence. When the person saw that there was activity here, she came over to look things over and said, "Hey! Dahai's wife! You guys are really moving over? Oh my oh my, Uncle Yu and Auntie Yu are really heartless. How can anyone live in this shabby old house..."

Yu Xiaocao raised her head and saw a woman with high cheekbones and thin lips. How come the more she thought about it the more she felt that the woman's words seemed to be implying that she was taking delight in their poor circumstances?

"Don't give her any attention! If you take Madam Mao's words to heart, then you will really die of anger. Just pretend it's a sparrow chirping and you'll be fine." The Zhou Family and Qian Family were the only two neighbors within a one kilometer vicinity of the old residence. The Zhou Family raised chickens, and the Qian Family raised ducks. The market for chicken eggs and live chickens were obviously better than the demand for ducks. The Qian Family's daughter-in-law, Madam Mao, also had a sharp tongue and a big mouth, and whenever she saw Madam Fang she only had prickly words to say.

In the beginning, Madam Fang would also bicker a bit with her. Later on, after the two families had come to an understanding, she knew that Madam Mao didn't truly have any personality problems besides her ability to make someone hate her as soon as she opened her mouth. Most of the women and girls in the village had all shied away from her as a result of that. It was only Madam Fang who didn't let it bother her too much in an effort to keep the peace between neighbors.

Madam Mao apparently also realized that what she said earlier didn't sound too good, so she hastily interjected, "If you need someone to help you fix up the house, come to my house and ask. My husband may not have any other skills but he sure is strong. In the future we'll be neighbors, so it's right and proper that we help each other. Don't stop your work on account of me, I need to go to the docks to see if there are any fish for sale. I need to buy one for my son, Wen'er, to nourish his body..."

Madam Fang quietly commented, "Madam Mao's eldest son goes to school in town and it's said that he's doing quite well. She'll brag about him at any opportunity she can get. Like today, Qian Wen is coming home today to take a break and she has to bring it up."

"I know, I know! Brother Qian Wen is really awesome, and he even placed first on the last exam!" Little Shitou interjected as he followed Zhao Han like a little tail, roving around happily.

Madam Liu watched her noticeably more lively son and smiled gently, "All parents treasure their children. In a mother's eyes, their own children are always the best."

Madam Fang thought a bit then smiled, "That's true, that's true! Even though my son, Hua'er, doesn't have scholarly talents, but since he was young he has helped his father peddle goods on the streets. He doesn't think it's hard work and instead takes great pleasure in it. We have about a hundred or so chickens at home, but with my two daughters at home, I hardly have to ask and they'll take care of them..."

Madam Liu glanced at her two daughters who were both steadily clearing out the weeds. Her eyes revealed a faint glow of happiness and she said, "Our children are all sensible and hardworking..."

Yu Xiaocao turned her head around and grinned, "Mother, Auntie Zhou, you should speak softer! If people overheard this conversation, they'll all think the two of you like to give false praise!"

Madam Liu and Madam Fang both laughed and looked at her. Madam Fang replied, "Splitting the family was a good thing. Xiaocao's personality has become more lively; she's even making fun of us."

Madam Liu nodded her head and said, "Cao'er's body has also gotten better, and she's become much more lively. As her mother, I now feel a lot more relieved. If only her father's leg would get better..."

"It'll get better, it'll get better! Good things will happen to good people, Brother Dahai's leg will definitely be cured!" Madam Fang had also heard of Yu Hai's wounded leg and hastily comforted Madam Liu.

"Second Sister, Second Sister! Look! Brother Xiaowu and I found some wild pheasant eggs in the grove, there are three total!" Later on, Eldest Sister can boil them, then Father, Mother, and Second Sister can each have one to eat!"

Just as everyone had almost finished clearing the weeds from the front and back courtyards, Little Shitou, who had gone out with the next door neighbor, Qian Wu, came back. No one knew where they had gone, but Little Shitou still had leaves and grass in his hair as he held the pheasant eggs in his hands with a large grin on his face.

The second daughter from the Zhou Family, Shanhu, deliberately teased him, "You want your eldest sister to help cook the eggs, but you're not giving her a share. Little Shitou, are you not afraid of Xiaolian accusing you of being biased?"

Little Shitou glanced at Xiaolian, and then gleefully replied, "Older Sister wouldn't do that! Father is injured while Mother and Second Sister's bodies are weak. If Eldest Sister had good food to eat, she would also give it to them first."

Madam Fang rubbed the little guy's head and smiled, "Younger Sister Muyun, your son is so sensible. People like us, ah, we don't need to envy other people, we just need to live our own lives to the fullest."

No one wanted to monopolize the three pheasant eggs. Thus, Xiaocao proposed to use them to make egg drop soup. Every single member of the five person family happily drank a bowl of the soup.

At around lunch, Xiaocao's maternal grandmother, three uncles, and aunts all came over with a borrowed ox cart. The cart was stuffed full with household goods meant to be used in this new home. The largest items were tables and stools, the smaller items were pots, bowls, ladles and basins. Some were new and some were items that were pre-owned.

When Yu Hai first got injured, Grandmother Liu had come over to see them and even left behind two taels for her daughter to give to her grandson and granddaughters to buy food to eat. As soon as the Liu Family left, the two taels were confiscated by Madam Zhang who said that she needed to take them to pay for Yu Hai's medical fees.

Xiaocao's maternal grandmother, Madam Yao, could tell that her daughter and grandchildren's complexion had all improved a lot, and felt the worries ease in her heart. She hugged Shitou closely and spoke to Madam Liu with a slightly choked up voice, "It's good to split, it's good to split! At least in the future you won't have to be your mother-in-law's punching bag anymore."

Madam Liu wiped the corners of her eyes and smiled, "Yes, that's true. Although our future may be a little harder, it's good to be the one in charge of the household. I don't have to think about other people's moods or worry about my children being beaten and scolded. Living in hardship will still taste sweet."

Madam Liu's maternal family lived on the other side of the mountain, and they only had four plots of dry land to farm. Thus, they also didn't have a very comfortable life. Madam Liu had two older brothers and one younger brother. The eldest one, Liu Pei, had a strong and muscular body. During the off season, he often went out to take temporary jobs. His wife, Madam Han, usually went to the docks to sell things and could often earn a couple bits to subsidize the income at home.

Eldest Uncle's family only had two girls. The oldest one was named Liu Feiying and was fourteen years old. She was already betrothed and was just waiting until she reached marriageable age, fifteen, before she married. Their second daughter, Liu Feiyan, was around the age of Xiaocao's eldest brother, Yu Hang. The two families had even joked about having them marry each other in the future.

Second Uncle, Liu Han, was an honest and hardworking man. He was the expert in planting, and the few fields they had were managed by him and Cao'er's maternal grandfather. The output from these fields were somewhat better than other people's. Although Second Aunt, Madam Hu, was a little bit selfish, she didn't have any other glaring problems. She had birthed two sons and a daughter, so she felt that she was superior to Eldest Aunt, who didn't have a son.

Third Uncle, Liu Hao, was the youngest in the family and it could be said that Madam Liu had done half of his upbringing. Therefore, he was the one closest to his older sister. The year before last, he had married Madam Bian, and they had a son who had not yet turned one. Liu Hao had been apprenticed to a village carpenter and had learned woodworking. Thus, he often went out to find carpentry work to make money. Third Aunt, Madam Bian, was skilled at embroidery and could often sell her work every month.

The Liu Family had not split its branches off, and the three sons were all filial and respectful. All the money they made was given to their mother, Madam Yao, to keep. However, Madam Yao was not like



the stingy and parsimonious Madam Zhang. Other than spending the money on the family's food and clothing, from time to time, she would also give her daughters-in-law some spending money. The Liu Family had few providers but a lot of mouths to feed, so they didn't have a lot of income. Thus, they weren't able to save a lot of money from year to year.

The previous evening, Madam Yao had heard that her daughter and son-in-law had split off from the family. Madam Liu had a lot of young children and an injured husband. In addition, their branch was only given three plots of sandy land and an old, broken-down, three-room house. With her daughter having such poor resources, Madam Yao couldn't idly sit by. This morning, at dawn, she had packed up household goods, such as bedding and utensils, and borrowed an ox cart to rush over there.

The Liu Family lived in Xishan Village and the West Mountain was in-between Xishan Village and Dongshan village. Traversing by foot through the forests of the mountain usually only took one hour. However, bringing an ox cart over required skirting around that area on a different road, which took twice as long as the mountainous trail.

Before the sun rose, Madam Yao and her sons and daughters-in-law left home to go to her daughter's new home. They had only arrived at noon and even had to eat their breakfast of dried rations on the road.

When she saw that the old house's roof had almost fallen off, Madam Yao felt angry and distressed. Their in-laws were really too excessive! They almost let her daughter and her son-in-law leave with barely any clothes on their backs. Having a stepmother really meant that one had a stepfather! Madam Yao was also very familiar with Madam Zhang's shrewish and crafty personality. Even if she confronted the old woman, it would be of no use.

She fished out a bulging embroidered pouch from her pocket and stuffed it into Madam Liu's hands and said in a voice choked with emotion, "Yunzi, the pouch has ten taels in it. Take it and use it to fix the house. The earlier you move out, the better it is, so you can avoid the enmity of others. As for those three plots of land, don't worry about them. This past year, we have more sweet potato seedlings than before, so during spring I can have your brothers come over and help you plant some..."

## Chapter 67

Madam Liu also knew that her maternal family's circumstances were not great. Saving a couple taels a year was considered good for them. Because she had a weak constitution, her mother would subsidize her from time to time. When her children's father had an accident, the family had already taken over two taels to help...to be able to give her ten taels now, she didn't know where her mother had gone to borrow the money.

She pushed the pouch back and said, "The mud bricks on the house are still usable. As long as we chop some trees down to fix the beams of the roof and then rethatch it with straw, it will be livable. Mother, you and the family also don't have an easy time at home. My older brothers and their wives all live frugally and it's only with great difficulty does the family get to save some money. How could you continue to subsidize, me, a daughter who has already gotten married?"

Madam Liu's eldest sister-in-law, Madam Han, took the embroidered pouch from Madam Yao and stuffed it into her younger sister-in-law's hands and said, "You and your family will be living in this house, so it's important that it gets completely fixed. I already looked it over, the kang beds in all of the rooms are unusable. Also this bamboo fence...Younger Sister's family lives far away from the village and next to a large mountain, this fence is not safe enough. With all these expenses, ten taels may not even be enough! Quickly take it, don't be polite to your own family members!"

The expression on her second sister-in-law's, Madam Hu, face continued to darken. The family had so little resources but her mother-in-law had taken all of it and given it to her younger sister-in-law. A married daughter is like spilt water. How could the maternal family continue to subsidize her? She didn't have the guts to rebel against her mother-in-law's wishes but when she heard her elder sister-in-law's words, a tiny sneer slowly grew on her face. She twisted her head around and lightly "tsked..." a breath.

Second Son Liu Han heard her, and he frowned and gave her a glare in warning. The expression on his face seemed to say, 'if you decide to be a shrewish woman and say something unpleasant, then you're in for it when we get home'. Madam Hu had a cold-hearted, selfish personality but Xiaocao's second uncle could keep her in check. She knew that her husband was very filial, and she usually only dared to bicker with her fellow sisters-in-law. However, in front of her mother-in-law, she never had the guts to say a word.

After receiving a glare from her husband, Madam Hu immediately settled down and lowered her head. Not a peep could be heard from her.

The third son, Liu Hao, unloaded a sack of sweet potatoes for the cellar and grinned, "Older Sister! Just take the money. If you don't, mother will be angry ah!"

Madam Liu wanted to persist in refusing but Yu Xiaocao came up and took the pouch for her and said, "Mother, this money is the sum of Grandmother's, Uncles', and Aunts' good heart and intentions for you. You should take it. That being said, we really do need this money. If you feel guilty about taking it, then think of it as a loan. Later on we'll return it after we earn some money."

"That's right! Yunzi, you're not even as clever as your child! You must be Xiaolian, right? After not seeing you for a few days, it looks like you've become a lot more pale." Madam Yao linked her hand with Xiaocao's and repeatedly complimented her.

Yu Xiaocao gently giggled, "Grandmother, I'm Xiaocao. Xiaolian took Little Shitou with her to pick up firewood."

Yu Xiaocao and Xiaolian were twins, so naturally, they looked very similar to each other. However, when Xiaocao was first born, she had a very weak body and was the thinner and paler of the two. On the flip side, Xiaolian had grown up doing household chores with Madam Liu, so her skin was on the tanner side. When the two girls stood next to each other, it was very easy to tell them apart. However, after consistently drinking mystic-stone water for half a year, Xiaocao's body had recovered immensely and Xiaolian's skin had become more white. It was becoming more and more difficult for people to distinguish between the two.

Madam Yao watched the energetic Xiaocao contently and spoke to Madam Liu, "With Xiaocao's health better, it must be a large weight off of your shoulders. From my point of view, it looks like your complexion has become more rosy too. Did your mother-in-law have a sliver of conscience and decide to invite the doctor over lately for you?"

"How could she ever bear to spend money on me? Whenever I got ill in the past, she always accused me of faking it and refused to let Xiaocao's father to get the doctor, let alone now. I feel like my body has gotten healthier over the past half year. Also, Dahai had surreptitiously made me take medicine the whole winter without the rest of the family's knowledge. Although I felt more tired lately taking care of the children's father, I still think my body feels more limber and dexterous than before. The other day I had fallen asleep on the side of the bed inadvertently but the next day I didn't get sick. I think my illness has finally healed. Mother, please don't worry about me anymore."

Madam Liu felt baffled and joyful at the same time. If even she fell ill in the household, then their family really had nowhere to go.

Yu Xiaocao rubbed the five-colored stone on her wrist and sniggered inside. The Liu brothers first cleaned and organized the wooden rooms. After fixing them more or less, they started to move the items they brought inside. Madam Liu took her two daughters-in-law (Author's note: Third daughter-in-law's child was still young, so she couldn't pull herself away to come) and cleaned up the courtyard in another round. Before any of them could stop and take a break, they rushed home with the ox cart.

Although Madam Yao wasn't entirely satisfied with leaving things as they were, but she knew that with her daughter's family of five all squeezed into one room, even if they stayed overnight there would be no place for them to sleep. They needed to get back to Xishan Village before the sun set. Thus, they only said, "We'll see you again in two days", and left in a hurry. In contrast, the three Liu brothers stayed behind to help their younger sister and her husband to fix their house before planting season started.

Yu Hai was an honest and kind hearted man. If another family needed help, as long as they asked him, he would always help them enthusiastically. He had a good reputation in Dongshan Village. When the villagers heard that he needed to fix up the old residence, many of them came one after another to help.

The oldest son of Dahai's Eldest Uncle, Yu Lichun, knew how to lay bricks. Under the urging of his father, he stopped taking outside jobs and came over to help. For the next several days, Yu Lichun brought over his three sons and two grandsons, and they were always the first to arrive and last to leave. Although Dahai's Second Uncle, Yu Lixia, lived far away, he only sent over one son over as he himself wasn't feeling well.

A bunch of Dahai's old friends who had played with him since they were tots had also come over to form dirt bricks, build a wall with the bricks, and cut down lumber...and they all did so enthusiastically. Hunter Zhao, who was good friends with him, also punctually came over every day with his son, Zhao Han, to deliver game and help them after they finished hunting. In addition, their new neighbors on their left and right also come over every day without anyone to ask.

Generally speaking, when you had people over to help you with your house, you needed to be responsible for two meals. All of these people knew that Yu Hai had just split from the family and didn't have much food in storage, so all of them brought their own food over every day and refused to eat even a mouthful of theirs. The whole family felt incredibly grateful and Xiaocao had finally experienced the simple and good-natured kindness of those who lived in the ancient times.

Many hands make light work. The work on the three-roomed house, courtyard, and wall had been finished in ten days. Madam Liu shed tears of joy when she saw the brand new house with its large and spacious courtyard. The three siblings chattered in the courtyard with bright smiles on their faces. They were incredibly happy—all of them finally had a home of their own...

The Liu brothers had chopped enough firewood to fill the whole storage area in the kitchen and also cleaned up the well before they left. After letting the house air out for two days, Yu Hai, whose leg has healed enough for him to walk on crutches, brought his family to move in.

During the past ten or so days, other than Old Yu and Dashan coming over every afternoon to help, not even the shadow of the other family members were seen. With the house finished, Yu Hai invited the villagers and neighbors over to celebrate. Only then did Madam Li bring her son over to visit.

Whenever anyone in the village constructed a new house or moved into one, it was necessary for them to celebrate with a party. The construction of this house was done entirely by the help of others. In addition, most of the materials used was from the local area. The muddy clay used for the bricks were dug from the side of the village levee. The beams and rafters came from lumber from felled trees in the mountains. Even the rice straw thatching came from the villagers gathering it up from all over the place.

Originally, Xiaocao wanted to buy some ceramic tiles for the roof to create a house that was similar to the current Yu Residence. However, when she remembered she only had ten taels on hand, she discarded that idea. Once again, she regretted investing all of her money in Third Young Master Zhou's business venture. She looked on the bright side and consoled herself by thinking, 'A sod house is also good, warm in the winter and cool in the summer...'

Argh! This Third Young Master Zhou was so busy. At the start of spring, he was so busy that his feet barely touched the ground. Not only was he establishing the workshops but he was also planning on opening a Zhenxiu Restaurant in the capital. He travelled constantly between the capital and Tanggu Town, and no one ever knew exactly where he was. Xiaocao had actually wanted to ask him for help but she could never find him!

Luckily, the house had been restored and it didn't take more than a few taels to do it. Yu Hai felt deep gratitude in his heart for the villagers who had helped them. Thus, when they were preparing for the party, he made sure to get some good food to thank them.

When Hunter Zhao heard that Yu Hai only received two taels after splitting from the family, he felt both angry and guilty at the same time. In order to save him, Yu Hai had almost died to the bear's fangs. After killing the bear and selling it, he gave the Yu Family three hundred taels and said it was for Brother Yu Hai's medical fees. However, he had never thought that Yu Hai's callous father and ruthless stepmother would funnel the money Yu Hai had sacrificed life and limb for into their own pockets.

In a rage, Hunter Zhao wanted to find Old Yu and giving him a talking to, but Yu Hai stopped him. Yu Hai said the three hundred taels were considered repayment for all of the years Madam Zhang spent raising and nurturing him. Zhao Bufan felt deeply guilty towards his Brother Yu Hai and often gave them some game to strengthen Yu Hai's body. In addition, he and his son enthusiastically worked on their new house. For the upcoming banquet, he also especially entered the mountain and caught more than ten pheasants and hares for them.

Yu Hai didn't decline his gift and also bought fifty chicken eggs from their close neighbor, the Zhou Family. At the town market, he bought about ten catties of meat. At the end of winter and beginning of spring, there were not any green vegetables for sale. However, each and every family stored plenty of white radishes and cabbages in their cellars. Furthermore, most also had the dried vegetables from autumn. Families with a good relationship with them had also sent some, and Madam Liu also went to the market and bought some.

Madam Yao had heard that her daughter was giving a party for the villages and was afraid she had more work than she could deal with alone. Thus, on that day, she brought over her eldest daughter-in-law to help. Her daughter's courtyard was large and spacious with tall, lofty walls surrounding it. The three-room residence spanned from north to south, and the inside of the rooms were sparsely decorated and seemed empty and desolate. However, for a family of six, the house did not seem overly crowded.

Little Shitou pulled on his grandmother's hand and enthusiastically toured the house for her, such as: which room was his parents' room, which room were for his sisters, and which room was for him and his oldest brother...He even brought her to the shed for firewood and kitchen. One by one, he dutifully showed them all for Madam Yao to see.

"Tonight Grandmother and Eldest Aunt will be living in this room, which is usually for older brother and me. I'll be sleeping with mother and father!" Little Shitou's eldest brother, Yu Hang, was still an apprentice at the carpentry shop and seldom came home. The owner of the carpentry shop was not a reasonable man. He had only let Yu Hang off for half a day when their father got injured, and he was only given a day to help with constructing their new house. At that time, it was obvious he had gotten much thinner.

His older brother wasn't at home, so in order to save on firewood, Little Shitou slept on the same kang bed as Yu Hai and Madam Liu. However, to show off that he also had his own room, he deliberately said it like this.

On this day at dawn, Yu Xiaocao had followed Madam Liu in starting the work early. The previous two days, she had written the menu. The non-vegetarian dishes were: braised rabbit meat [1], sauteed spicy

chicken pieces [2], Chinese cabbage stir-fried with meat [3], stewed white radish with pork [4], and scrambled eggs.

The vegetarian dishes were: pan-fried turnip cake [5], stir-fried daikon [6], deep fried radish balls [7], lightly pickled sweet and sour radish [8], spicy stir-fried Chinese cabbage [9], stewed tofu and cabbage [10], dry stir-fried Chinese cabbage [11], and sauteed assorted pickled vegetables [12].

## Chapter 68

A dense and flavorful pork bone soup was made by gently simmering pork bones an entire night. The staple food for the banquet was steamed rolls made from a mix of wheat and millet flour.

Every table had eight vegetarian dishes, four meat dishes, and a tureen of the rich soup. Out of all the banquets that had occurred in the village, this feast was considered one of the best. In addition, some of the dishes had never been tasted by any of the villagers before. Although the raw ingredients were simple, they were prepared in a way that was exceptionally refreshing and delicious. Everyone who ate at the banquet praised the food endlessly.

Some of the married women who had a good relationship with Madam Liu surreptitiously asked her how she managed to make so many different and delicious types of dishes using just radishes and cabbages. Madam Liu gazed fondly at her daughter and replied with pride, "Most of these dishes were thought up by Cao'er. She told me and Eldest Sister-in-law what to do."

All of the villagers were familiar with the story of Madam Liu's second daughter, Yu Xiaocao. After getting knocked unconscious the past summer, she had forgotten a lot of things. However, none of them would have expected that she would become more clever and lively despite losing most of her memories. In addition, she had a natural gift and talent at cooking. They couldn't help but praise her over and over.

Madam Li had appeared right when the food was ready to be set out. Jealousy surged into her as she inspected the completely new old residence and she remarked in a sour tone, "We're not as fortunate as second sister-in-law. Your whole family occupies an entire courtyard and gets to live in a giant house."

The kitchen bustled with activity. Several of Madam Liu's friends from the village had come over earlier to help. Despite Madam Zhang's disapproval, Yu Caidie had also come over to help wash the vegetables and set the tables, and was cheerfully busy.

Madam Li, on the other hand, didn't even help them to bring out the food. Instead, she pulled her son to a table and sat heavily down. When they were eating, they gobbled down the food as if they had been starving for a long time. Madam Li's chopsticks flew at light speed and quickly snatched away prime mouthfuls of meat and vegetables into her and her son's bowls. Their tablemates could only watch her with disapproval and shake their heads.

A total of ten tables were at the banquet. Madam Liu had prepared more than enough food for it and there were plenty of leftovers for each dish. After Madam Li ate and drank to her fill, she didn't leave immediately and lazed in the courtyard under the sun. Generally speaking, the leftovers were given to the people who had helped prepare the food and everyone would get a share to go home.

Madam Li balked the tradition and didn't help to either prepare or clean up the food. Instead, when it was time to dole out the leftovers, she brazenly squeezed in and said, "Ah, Second Sister-in-law, you guys can't possibly finish all of this leftover food. Give me some to bring home so Mother and Third Brother-in-law can try your culinary talent..."

"Dashan's wife, it's not like you haven't tried her food before you guys split off. Did you miss her cooking so much after just a few days?"

The next door neighbor to the Yu Family, the wife of Hai Xing, was a quick-witted woman and had a relatively good relationship with Madam Liu. The two of them often gathered firewood and cut fishwort together. From time to time, she would also ask Madam Liu's advice on embroidery. At this time, she was obviously satirizing Madam Li.

Madam Li pretended not to hear her and grabbed an already cleaned basin and started to fill it with food. She specifically chose the dishes that had meat, such as the rabbit meat and chicken pieces. In the end, almost half of the meat-containing dishes had gone to her. The amount of food in the basin was piled into a small mountain. She avariciously looked at the soup pot and reluctantly left, her fleshy waist swaying as she walked.

When Heizi heard his mother calling for him, he scuttled out from the rear courtyard. In his hands was a small pheasant whose wings were bound together. He shamelessly said, "Second Aunt, your rear court still has two hares and a pheasant, give one to me to bring home, ok. I haven't tasted meat for more than a month!"

Yu Xiaocao almost wanted to laugh out of fury, 'Who was the person who took almost half of the chicken dish? Also, did the hare and chicken meat disappear down some other person's stomach?'



Madam Liu was well familiar with this mother-son pair's temperaments and didn't want to bother with those two. She only wanted these two demons to leave faster. All of the other women who helped could only shake their heads in disbelief. Yu Hai had an injured leg, Madam Liu couldn't do heavy work, and their children were still small. As the eldest sister-in-law, Madam Li didn't even help them and only came to take things from them. Madam Liu was quite unlucky to have relatives like her.

After sending off a couple people who had helped, Madam Yao could tell it was getting late by the color of the sky. She also left with her eldest daughter-in-law. That night, Yu Xiaocao and her two other siblings squeezed onto their parents' kang bed. The five of them were counting their expenses together.

"Although the construction of the house didn't require us to spend much money for the labor, but when you add on the materials and furniture we bought, we spent around five taels. Building a house is tiring. Even though everyone brought their own food, Xiaocao had proposed we give each of them a steamed roll and a bowl of porridge at lunch. The steamed rolls were made with a combination of wheat flour and millet flour or sweet potato powder. Buying all of those grains cost another tael." When the house was getting built, Yu Hai's leg was still injured, so he spent his days recuperating at the main residence. Madam Liu was telling him their expenses right now.

Yu Hai ruffled Xiaocao's hair and smiled, "Cao'er did the right thing. Although we don't have a lot of money, we can't let other people starve when they're helping us out. Most villagers don't get to eat much. In the morning they'll probably have some mixed grain flatbread which is not enough to last until noon, so it is necessary we add a meal for them. I heard Older Brother Li complimenting our family for being sincere and honest as our rolls all contained half wheat flour. He said he always brought an extra flat cake made from bean flour as he couldn't bear to eat our steamed roll. Instead, he would bring the roll back for his children to eat to their heart's content!"

Dongshan Village was a small fishing village next to the sea. Most of the villages relied on fishing to make a living. The surrounding land was mostly sandy and only a limited variety of crops could be grown there. The majority of families only ate bean flour, sweet potato starch, and millet flour as their source of carbohydrates. It was only during the New Year celebrations that they would be willing to buy some wheat flour to eat. Thus, even a steamed roll that was composed of half wheat flour was considered something delicious to eat in the villagers' eyes.

Madam Liu looked at her second daughter who was becoming more and more clever and witty with every passing day. She smiled and continued, "Most of the ingredients for today's banquet was given to us by Older Brother Zhao. As for the pork, we spent about three hundred copper coins, if we add the

amount we spent on grain and vegetables, about one tael was spent in total. Originally we had twelve taels on hand and now we have around five taels left."

Yu Hai thought for a bit and then said, "Your mother's family doesn't have an easy life and still gave us ten taels after borrowing from others left and right. We definitely cannot let your parents carry debt for us. We should find someone tomorrow to bring the remaining five taels back to your mother. It's okay if we our lives are a little harder, but we cannot be a dead weight on your whole maternal family."

This was what being a family meant. When someone was in need, the others would spare no effort to help. Everyone worked together and was concerned about each other...

Xiaocao could feel the warmth of having a family. Although she lived in poverty, she wasn't alone in the struggle. She still had her father, mother, and all her other siblings. She smiled brilliantly and shifted to her father's side to lift up the quilt covering his leg and said, "It's time to massage your leg. Father, please receive your daughter's loving, filial care!"

The wound on his leg was healing very quickly, and the vast majority of the scabs that had formed had already fallen off. A few days ago, Yu Xiaocao went with him to town to the Tongren Medicine Hall for a checkup to see Doctor Sun who had previously told them there was nothing he could do. An expression of awe was on the doctor's rosy face, and the old man was excited and exclaimed continuously over this phenomenon.

Even if they were in the modern times, this would also be considered a medical miracle. His calf had been shattered, and there wasn't a single piece of flesh on his leg that wasn't torn into pieces. A huge hole had been clawed into his back such that one could almost see his internal organs peeking out. Yu Hai had fallen unconscious due to such a serious wound on his leg. The fact that he was still standing and alive without the help of modern medical equipment and medications was incredible. If this wasn't a miracle, then what was?

At this time, Doctor Sun was amazed and could only say that his innate constitution was very good and that he must have had a very strong desire to live. He must have also had a god taking care of him.

After inspecting his leg and back wound, he palpated Yu Hai's pulse again. After confirming he had no issues, Doctor Sun said, "You don't need to take medication anymore. The injuries to your tendons and veins on your leg are very serious. The leg should be massaged frequently. I can't say for sure but he might be able to walk without crutches in the future."

At that time, Yu Xiaocao had asked Doctor Sun for guidance on massage techniques and made sure to note them down carefully. Since then, she used the massage times as an opportunity to use the little divine stone to rub her father's leg injury. She made the stone use its spiritual energy to slowly heal the fractured, injured tendons and vessels.

The multi-colored stone on her wrist seemed to inadvertently slide on the dense scars that criss-crossed over the leg as she massaged the limb. Only Xiaocao could see the faint golden streams of light slowly flowing into the leg's arteries and veins.

All Yu Hai could sense was that wherever his daughter's little hands massaged his leg, a feeling of comforting warmth would follow. The aches and pains on his leg slowly disappeared and he drowsily closed his eyes. Under his daughter's massage, he comfortably fell asleep...

"Cao'er, you must be tired. Teach mother how to massage and in the future I'll do it." Madam Liu saw her daughter shaking out her sore hands afterwards and felt bad.

Xiaocao shook her head and said, "Mother, this is my chance to show my respect and filial piety to Father. Don't stop me. Xiaolian had also asked me many times to teach her, but I refused! Father and Mother treat me so well and took on a lot of burdens for me. It's right and proper that I help Father massage his leg."

After working hard for a whole day, the entire family fell asleep at an early time. Yu Xiaocao lay quietly on the toasty kang bed. Under her was a layer of rice straw and the blanket covering her had hard cotton lumps with patches all interconnected to each other. Despite that, it was still more warm and comfortable than the shabby old kang bed that the entire family had to squeeze onto in their old home.

After she was sure Xiaolian, who was next to her, had fallen into a deep sleep, Xiaocao raised her left wrist and quietly spoke to the little divine stone, "Little Glutinous Dumpling, Little Glutinous Dumpling..."

[If you keep calling me by that name, I will stop responding to you!] A faint golden light came up and slowly formed into a small golden kitten with a large head and pointy ears. The little fellow stared indignantly at Xiaocao with its large and round eyes.

Yu Xiaocao used a fingertip to poke at the little fellow's smooth and slippery head and grinned, "Okay, okay! I won't call you Little Glutinous Dumpling then, but what should I call you by? How about I give you a new name then, hmmm... like Little Baldy, how's that?"

The golden little ball beat its wings to dodge Xiaocao's finger and raged, [In the future when I materialize myself, I will be female. 'Little Baldy' is seriously such a bad name. This divine stone already has a name that was given to me by the Goddess Nuwa. It's called 'Circle', now doesn't that sound nice?]

"Pfft—circle? Then I'm a square! I still don't think it's as good as Little Glutinous Dumpling. That name describes your round figure very well and sounds cute to boot! So we've decided on it, in the future, I'll call you Little Glutinous Dumpling. Complaining about it will have no effect!" Yu Xiaocao forcefully gave the little divine stone a name.

"Little Glutinous Dumpling, in your opinion, how much longer until my father's leg gets better? Do you think he can walk like normal then?" Yu Xiaocao asked with a little bit of worry in her tone. For the past few days, although her father had always pasted a smile on his face when he was in front of them, but she could tell that there was a faint outline of loneliness in that smile.

Her father had previously been a high-spirited and optimistic man. He was good at fishing, hunting, and could even make some simple bamboo tools. If he was doomed to using crutches for the rest of his life, she would bet that would make him extremely depressed...

## Chapter 69

Little Divine Stone hadn't planned on paying attention to her, but when it felt her faint feelings of sadness, it proudly opened its mouth, [You actually don't trust me, this divine stone! Let me tell you, my powers have improved a lot recently. I can already turn into a physical form. As long as I, this celestial stone, help him clear his meridians [1] and circulate his vital energy every day, he will definitely be able to walk within half a month. But, he did suffer a serious injury after all, so he might walk with a limp.]

Yu Xiaocao was completely relieved now. She excitedly hugged the little golden kitten and kissed it a few times, and then said, [You can turn into a physical form? Doesn't that mean that your powers have improved quite a lot? That's great, Little Glutinous Dumpling. You're seriously my lucky star! Thank you so much!]

The little divine stone felt slightly shy and awkwardly exclaimed, [Go away, go away! I want to transform into a girl in the future. You lesbian...]

"Hha..." Seeing the little kitten being shy, Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"Youngest Sister, what's wrong?" Xiaolian, who was beside her, was startled awake. She rubbed her eyes and asked with sleepy eyes.

"No... Nothing!" Xiaocao quickly put away the multicolored stone and stuffed the little golden kitten into her blanket. She pretended as if she had just woken up and said, "I had a dream and woke up laughing..."

"What kind of good dream did you have to be so happy?" Xiaolian flipped over and lay on the bed facing her.

Yu Xiaocao hastily closed her eyes as if she was very sleepy and replied, "I don't remember..."

She was afraid that Xiaolian would continue asking, so she deliberately slowed down her breathing and pretended to sleep. She didn't know when, but she really ended up falling asleep as she pretended...

After they sent the five taels over, they didn't have much money left at home. They couldn't plant the three acres of sweet potatoes until May and it would take over half a year until they could harvest them. How was their family going to survive during the half a year?

Xiaocao carefully calculated their family's resources. In the kitchen, besides the two wild hares that were left over from the banquet, there were still five cabbages and a few radishes. They had about two catties of wheat flour and four or five catties of millet flour. Sweet potato flour was the thing that they had the most of, but there were only less than ten catties left. In the backyard cellar, they had a little over a hundred catties of sweet potatoes that her maternal grandmother gave them. If they lived frugally, they could last for a little over a month.

They only had forty-something copper coins left at home. They were reluctant to eat the two hares, so they took them to the town market and sold them for more than two hundred copper coins.

The winter blizzard had become a disaster. Even though the government had stabilized prices, the common folks still lived a tight and frugal life.

Yu Xiaocao had learned that the prices in early spring were much higher than when she first transmigrated here. The prices in the grain shop was a good example. Coarse grains, such as millet flour and sweet potato flour, used to be two copper coins a catty, but it cost three or four copper coins now. Refined flour, which cost five copper coins per catty last year, cost at least eight copper coins now. Of course, the price for white rice was even higher. It had risen to fifteen copper coins per catty at its peak. It cost thirty copper coins a catty for pork right now, while the price for eggs had also risen quite a lot.

They only had two hundred sixty copper coins left. Their family would probably consume at least one hundred catties of grain per month, so after making a rough calculation, they didn't even have enough money to buy coarse grain. Ay... No wonder most of the villagers couldn't eat wheat flour throughout the year!

In her opinion, being frugal wasn't enough. They needed to expand their sources of income!

Madam Liu also understood the fact that they couldn't just sit idly while eating away all their resources, so she found a job in town to help people wash their clothes. She had to go once every three days. She went out early in the morning and returned at around three to five in the afternoon. She earned fifteen copper coins each time she worked. In the early spring, the weather was still relatively cold in the northern regions. Madam Liu's hands were red and swollen due to prolonged exposure to the cold water. Yu Xiaocao's heart ached when she saw the bloody cuts on her mother's fingers.

Every day when Madam Liu came back, Yu Xiaocao would help her mother warm her hands and feet with boiled water that the divine stone had soaked in. With the mystic-stone water's nourishment, the frostbitten areas on Madam Liu's hands were healed in a few days. The calluses on her hands had also disappeared. Her hands had become so fair and delicate that she didn't need to worry about accidentally scraping the threads when she did embroidery anymore.

When their mother went to work, Yu Xiaolian took on all housework at home. As if she was a little housekeeper, she gathered firewood, cooked, washed clothes, and also cleaned the yard. When she was free, she would sit under the warm sun and embroider purses and handkerchiefs to help support the family.

Yu Xiaolian's embroidery skills were nearly on par with Madam Liu's. However, before they had split from the Yu Family, she was too busy and didn't have any time to sew.

Yu Xiaocao seriously admired this young eight year old girl. In her previous life, Xiaolian would have just been a second grader in elementary school. However, she had shouldered most of her family's burdens on her weak shoulders.

In fact, Xiaocao should call her 'older sister'. But even when the original host was still alive, she had never called her in that way. The reason was that, when Madam Liu gave birth, they hadn't expected that she would give birth to twins. During the confusion, the midwife had mixed them up and didn't know who the older and younger sister was.

Later, due to Xiaocao's weak constitution, Xiaolian, who was more sensible, always took care of her and protected her. Thus, the family began calling Xiaolian 'the eldest daughter' and Xiaocao naturally became the younger one.

However, Xiaocao had always felt that she was the older one and was unwilling to call Xiaolian 'older sister'. Their family decided to just let her be and didn't correct her...

The renovated old residence had a large courtyard with at least half an acre of land. There was a small entrance in the backyard that led to the pond behind the house. During the late winter and early spring, there was little rain and the water level of the pond was low. There were also plenty of fertile, empty land beside the pond. So, Xiaocao made plans to use the vacant space in front and behind their house.

In modern times, there was greenhouse farming, so most vegetables weren't limited to certain seasons. People could buy whatever vegetables they wanted to eat in the supermarkets throughout the year. However, in ancient times, late winter and early spring was the time when the new crop of vegetables wasn't ripe yet. Even if people wanted to eat greens and had the money to buy them, it probably wasn't even available anywhere. If someone could grow fresh greens at this time, they could definitely sell them for a good price.

Due to the restrictions of her living conditions, Xiaocao definitely wouldn't be able to make a big greenhouse and brooder, but she also didn't plan on doing so. She was almost certain that the emperor had also transmigrated here, just like her. So, she didn't want to do anything out of the ordinary. She had made up her mind to 'silently make a fortune'!

However, she could first use the indoor temperature to grow the vegetable seedlings, and then transfer them to the yard when the weather became warmer. In this way, they would certainly be able to sell the vegetables in the market earlier than if they planted them during early spring.

Just as Xiaocao was enthusiastically considering the type of soil she should use to fertilize the seeds with, the Little Divine Stone muttered beside her ears, [Why go through so much trouble? You can just soak the seeds in this divine stone's bathing water. Not only will they become resistant to the cold and pests, but it can also reduce the ripening time of vegetables...]

Yu Xiaocao felt elated inwardly when she heard its words. She held Little Glutinous Dumpling's tiny body and kissed it fervently, which provoked the little divine stone to repeatedly protest against her action.

Right now, the little divine stone had already transformed into the form of a little kitten and became a part of the family. As for the origin of the little fellow, Yu Xiaocao's explanation was that she had found it at the foot of the mountain when she went to gather firewood. Seeing that the little kitten was about to freeze to death, she kindheartedly brought it back.

The whole family readily accepted the proud golden kitten, and thus Little Divine Stone became the second popular pet of the family after the little roe deer.

But, the little divine stone didn't care about anyone else except for its master, Yu Xiaocao. Its favorite thing to do every day was to lie down on its master's fluffy head and sleep. From afar, it looked as if Xiaocao was wearing a golden headdress.

Yu Xiaocao was overjoyed when she found out that Little Divine Stone could enhance the quality of the seeds, "Little Glutinous Dumpling, you're seriously my big lucky star! I'll go plow the field immediately..."

Under her father and Xiaolian's questioning gaze, Yu Xiaocao took a hoe and went to plow the land.

Little Glutinous Dumpling paced leisurely around her feet and spoke in a voice that only Xiaocao could hear, [If it wasn't because of the fact that helping you can help me lift the shackles placed by the Goddess of Spirits, I wouldn't have bothered to help you! Not only do I have to help treat your father's leg at night, but also soak the seeds. I need to replenish my spiritual energy, so I strongly demand that you throw me into the water vat...]

Frequent contact with water would be helpful for the restoration of its powers. Xiaocao would usually just let it bathe inside a pot, but it had long been interested in the water vat in the yard.



Yu Xiaocao eventually surrendered to its Monk Xuanzang-like [2] naggings. She took off the multicolored stone bracelet from her wrist and threw it into the water vat. The little golden kitten gracefully jumped onto the water vat and sat on the edge of the vat, wagging its tail. Little Shitou couldn't help but worry that the little fellow would accidentally fall into the tank. Since then, all the water, even for washing vegetables and clothes, used by Xiaocao's family were mystic-stone water.

"What are you guys doing?" Madam Liu, who had returned from work with hands reddened from the cold, curiously asked when she saw Yu Hai and the three siblings kneeling in the yard and excitedly turning over the soil.

Yu Hai could walk a few steps without his crutches now. He was in a good mood, so when his second daughter suggested that they plow the field and grow vegetables, he went to help without any hesitation. He pulled out the grass root from the plowed land and threw them aside. Then he lifted his head and said, "Cao'er is planning on planting various vegetables in the front and back yard. In the future, our family won't have to worry about not having anything to eat. Our daughter is so competent!"

Madam Liu was annoyed and amused at the same time, so she replied, "Of course we need to grow vegetables, but it's only February. The water in the tank still freezes up in the evening. It's not like we're in a hurry sow the seeds, so why are you guys rushing to plow the land?"

"We have nothing to do anyways so we might as well work on the field first!" In terms of pampering children, no one would dare to take first place even if Yu Hai identified himself as second. He had always done his best to fulfill all the requests made by his children, let alone a proper matter like plowing the field and growing vegetables.

Madam Liu couldn't win over them, so she also rolled up her sleeves and joined in. By evening, the front yard's half an acre of land had all been turned over, leaving only a small path to walk in the center.

In the evening, Xiaocao asked Madam Liu for the seeds that her maternal grandmother had sent over. Madam Liu looked at her and asked, "Cao'er, are you planning to grow the vegetables right now? It's not time yet. If you sow the seeds now, it won't sprout at all and the seeds will be wasted in vain."

"Mother, the God of Fortune came to enlighten me again last night. He taught me a method to keep the vegetable field warm. Think about it. When other people's vegetables have just sprouted, we can already sell ours. The town folks have already eaten radishes and cabbages for the entire winter, so they

will definitely buy them despite the high price!" Xiaocao, who was mentally a modern person, knew better than anyone else about the principle of 'hoarding a rare commodity and selling it at a high price'.

## Chapter 70

Yu Hai's eyes lit up and was the first to understand, "Do you really know a way to grow vegetables at this time?"

Yu Xiaocao patted her chest and vouched for herself, "I can guarantee that there's absolutely no problem! Father, Mother, you can rest assured!"

On the next day, Xiaocao spent twenty copper coins to buy two ox carts of straw from a villager who came from a village with more farmlands. She personally taught Yu Hai and Madam Liu how to weave a straw thatch. Although Little Divine Stone had promised that the vegetable seeds that were soaked in the mystic-stone water would definitely be able to overcome the severe cold of early spring, Yu Xiaocao was still worried. Straw thatches were widely used in greenhouse farming in her previous life to keep the vegetables warm. It was better to be prepared than to feel sorry later!

With the help of the skeptical Madam Liu, Xiaocao scattered the seeds that she had soaked last night in the plowed field. In the half an acre of land in the front yard, they planted vegetables with relatively shorter growth periods, such as bok choy, spinach, and mustard greens. They strived to earn their first bucket of gold by taking advantage of the fact that other people hadn't planted their vegetables yet.

After sowing the seeds, Madam Liu took Xiaolian to loosen the land in the backyard. Madam Mao, who was tending the ducks by the pond, saw them and reminded them, "You're turning up the soil so early? It's not suitable to grow crops beside the pond. The water level will rise during the rainy season of late spring, so they will drown in the flood."

Madam Mao had a sharp tongue, but she didn't have bad intentions. Madam Liu smiled at her and said, "We're preparing to grow some bok choy and mustard greens, and then harvest them before the water level rises."

Madam Mao nodded and said, "Then you should enclose the field with a fence. We usually breed our ducks in the pond, so if they ate your vegetables, I'm not going to compensate you!"

As expected, Madam Mao spoke in an unlikeable manner. She was obviously reminding them out of kindness, but why did she have to say it in such an annoying manner?

Madam Liu smiled good-naturedly and said, "Thank you for reminding us, Madam Mao. I'll set up the fence tomorrow."

By evening, Xiaocao and her father had compiled more than ten straw thatches after working for the entire afternoon. Yu Hai had woven mats before. A straw thatch was easier to weave than a summer sleeping mat since he didn't need to be too meticulous. He learned very quickly and had even woven two more thatches than Xiaocao.

Xiaocao and Madam Liu spread the straw thatches over the vegetable fields, as if they were covering the field with a blanket. Little Shitou, who had also helped a lot, asked with slight concern, "Second Sister, can we keep the vegetables warm like this?"

Xiaocao caressed his little head and laughed, "Don't you feel warmer when you cover yourself with a blanket in the winter? It's the same logic. The ground absorbs the heat from the sun at noon, so when we cover it with the thatches, the heat won't dissipate during the evening. Thus, the vegetables won't be afraid of the cold now."

The little fellow nodded in realization and exclaimed, "So we're covering the vegetable fields with blankets! But, won't the areas without the straw thatches be freezing?"

"It's okay. The seeds were just scattered and haven't sprouted yet, so it won't be cold. We'll make more straw thatches tomorrow, and then cover all the fields with blankets so that the veggie will swiftly sprout and grow up!"

Xiaocao vaguely remembered her younger brother of her previous life when she looked at the six year old Little Shitou. When her younger brother was the same age as Little Shitou, he wasn't as obedient and clever. Her parents were still alive at that time, so as the only son in the family, he would act like a spoiled child in their mother's arms...

It took them three days to cultivate all the lands in the front and back yards. When the water level increased, a lot of black mud would accumulate on the land beside the pond. After cultivating the soil, it would be a good fertile field. Unfortunately, there was a lot of rainfall every year at the end of June. The water in the pond would also rise, so they couldn't grow crops that had a long growth period.

With four months to go before the rise of the water level, Xiaocao planted crops with around two or three months of growth period on the land beside the pond, which had about one acre of land. So, winter melon, string beans, eggplant, and kidney beans were planted beside the pond. In the backyard, she planted chives, cucumbers, garlic, and chili pepper. There were also sponge gourds and pumpkins on the edge of the fence.

The whole family worked overtime for exactly three days before they finished making all the straw thatches that they needed for the vegetable garden. Little Shitou had also woven several smaller thatches. Although the density and thickness weren't as good, they were still useable.

During these past few days, the meals at home were just coarse grain pancakes and bean paste soup. For vegetable, they only had cabbage, radishes, and pickled vegetables. They had to carefully chew the coarse grain pancakes because the pancakes might scrape their throats when swallowing. The bean paste soup also had a strong bean smell. If they weren't hungry, they seriously wouldn't be able to eat them at all. Boiled vegetables that lacked oil and seasonings really gave Xiaocao a headache during mealtime.

With the current living conditions of Xiaocao's family, even with such meals, they still needed to carefully ration their meals for fear of using too much food. If their current food supply wasn't enough to support them until they could harvest the vegetables, their whole family might have to starve.

Apart from washing clothes every three days, Madam Liu also got sewing jobs from an embroidery shop. So, she burned the midnight oil every day to work on her needlework. Yu Hai asked Hunter Zhao, who lived at the foot of the West Mountains, to help him cut down some bamboo and bring them back for him. He made bamboo baskets and hampers, and then put them up for sale in the general store in town.

Xiaocao became idle after she finished planting the vegetables in early spring. Xiaolian had taken on all the housework at home and didn't let her interfere. Little Shitou followed the youngest son of the Qian Family from next door, going up mountains and exploring the river. However, he wasn't just purely playing and would bring back some eggs at times. He would also tactfully bring back two bundles of firewood every day.

Qian Wu, who was the youngest son of the Qian Family's Madam Mao, was eight years old. His personality was very different from his older brother, Qian Wen, who was interested in studying. He was very active and usually wouldn't go home until mealtime every day. The shouts of his mother, Madam Mao, calling him to come home to eat could be frequently heard, "Little Wuzi, where are you horsing around again? Come home to eat..."

Madam Mao's two sons were quite different in character. One was quiet, while the other was active. The older son, Qian Wen, was a bookworm who carried a book wherever he went. Sometimes he would be so focused on reading that he would walk into a tree without even knowing. Xiaocao had once seen him reading while walking, and then accidentally falling into a ditch. Fortunately, there wasn't any water in the ditch at that time. Otherwise, that idiot would have been freezing.

On this day, Xiaocao carried a basket and took a shovel to see if there were any wild herbs to dig up nearby. Based on her knowledge, wild shepherd's purse should be out during this time of the year. In her previous life, she really liked to dig shepherd's purse and make soup or steamed stuffed buns, which tasted very delicious.

Along the path in front of the door and all the way to the West Mountains, Little Shitou cheerfully skipped behind her. He was very delighted inwardly: 'Second Sister said she was going to make shepherd's purse stuffed buns for me. Everything Second Sister made was of high quality and bound to be delicious. Although it wasn't the season for digging wild herbs, it was good for Second Sister's health to come out for a walk.'

Little Shitou had refused Qian Wu's tempting invitation to go dig out bird's eggs in the mountains and volunteered to serve as his second sister's bodyguard. As long as they didn't go deep into the West Mountains, it wouldn't be dangerous. He was just afraid that his second sister, who rarely left home, wouldn't be able to find the way home.

Qian Wen, who was staying at home during his break from school, leisurely walked out of his house with a book in hand. Little Shitou warmly greeted him, "Brother Xiaowen, are you going to read in the mountains again?"

The Qian Family raised over a hundred ducks and they were very noisy all the time. Whenever Qian Wen came back during a break, he liked to go up in the mountains with a book and pick a quiet place to read. They hadn't expected to meet him when going out today.

The eleven year old Qian Wen had a fair complexion and elegant features. He had refined manner and was a clean, handsome youth. Even though it was her second time seeing him, Xiaocao still felt that he was pleasing to the eyes.

Hearing his voice, Qian Wen raised his head and looked at Xiaocao and her younger brother. He greeted them with a smile, "Yes, I want to find a quiet place to read. What are you siblings doing?"

Little Shitou said, "Second Sister wanted to see if there's any wild herbs. She wants to dig some up and make soup."

Qian Wen glanced at Xiaocao, who he initially thought was Xiaolian. He had long heard that Uncle Dahai's second daughter had a weak constitution and often ill. The doctor had said she wouldn't live a long life ever since she was born. He had originally thought that she was a sick and listless little girl who wouldn't even be able to get up from bed. However, seeing her today, she didn't appear like a sick person at all. Although she was a little thin, she had rosy cheeks and walked energetically.

"You probably have to wait until March in order to gather wild herbs. At this time, the ice in the river hasn't melted yet, so it's not the time to pick wild herbs." Qian Wen kindly reminded them.

Yu Xiaocao had a faint smile as she said, "It's okay. I'm just looking for a chance to go out for a walk. You should get back to what you were doing. We don't want to delay your reading."

Qian Wen had heard from his gossipy mother about Uncle Dahai's family splitting from the main family. If it hadn't been for the help from his in-laws and the villagers, their house would probably still be rundown and filled with cracks! For them to come out to find wild vegetables at this time, there must be a lack of food at home.

Qian Wen touched the dry food that his mother gave him in case he got hungry while reading. It was a steamed bun that was made of wheat flour mixed with some millet flour. He began to speak, but ended up not saying anything.

After all, it was only his second time meeting the young girl. If he suddenly gave her a steamed bun for no reason, she would probably feel that he 'gave her the food out of pity and contempt'. Forget it, he should just find opportunities to help her out in the future when they became more acquainted.

The weather was still quite cold during February. Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but shiver when a gust of northeast wind blew. Her jacket was already old and worn-out. The old cotton inside were taken from her older brother's old clothing, and then stuffed into his younger siblings' jackets. Hence, the cotton was so stiff that they were almost packed together. It not only felt stiff and uncomfortable when worn,

but it wasn't very warm either. Why didn't she think of buying some new cotton to stuff into their jackets when she had money?

Xiaocao blew on her hands, which felt painful due to the cold, with her warm breath. She carefully searched for the familiar plant along the edge of the roadside ditch. Little Shitou was full of energy as he skipped and ran the whole way. He saw his older sister shrink her neck as if she was very cold, so he held her hand with his warm little hand and said with a grin, "Second Sister, I'm filled with heat, so let me warm your hands!"

Xiaocao was so moved that she took him into her embrace and kissed him on his tender face. The little fellow's face immediately turned red. Ancient people usually expressed their love in a more subtle way, so even his own parents hadn't kissed him before.

Little Shitou shyly shook off his second sister's hand and ran away quickly. Xiaocao ran behind him, but still couldn't catch up to him even when she was panting for breath. However, her body had finally warmed up now.

"Wait a moment! Youngest Brother, I found the shepherd's purse!" On the dry riverbank, there were small grayish-brown plants growing on the ground. The jagged leaves were exactly the wild shepherd's purse that she knew of.

Little Shitou turned around, went to take a look, and said, "Second Sister, shepherd's purse doesn't look like that. Its leaf is green and long. It also has a white flower in the center."