

## Gold Chapter 71

### Chapter 71

"You're talking about another kind of shepherd's purse, which grows in the grass and has pinnate leaves. This is the one that I'm looking for, which is a type of wild shepherd's purse that grows in early spring. Though it doesn't look very good, it's actually very tasty. If you don't believe, smell it."

Xiaocao dug up a shepherd's purse, which had leaves that were only two centimeters long, and delivered it to his nose for him to smell it. Sure enough, there was a refreshing scent of wild herbs.

"But this kind of shepherd's purse is so small..." With his butt sticking out and humming, Little Shitou also squatted down and dug for wild herbs.

There were a lot of shepherd's purse in this area. It seemed like in a few months there would be a bed of white flowers. Yu Xiaocao picked the bigger ones and dug without stopping as she laughed, "We came a little early. They will be bigger in a few more days. The biggest ones have leaves that are three to six centimeters long! Don't dig out the smaller ones. Let's wait until they grow bigger."

Along the edge of the ditch, the siblings kept searching as they dug. The shepherd's purse on the bank facing the sun had sprouted earlier, so their leaves were evidently larger.

The warm spring sun gradually rose. Xiaocao and her younger brother basked in the warm sunshine while harvesting the first batch of wild herbs of the early spring.

At the foot of the mountains, Qian Wen, who had decided to sit on a rock, seemed to have lost interest in his book. Hearing the joyful cries of Little Shitou from afar, he raised his head from time to time and looked towards the two thin figures who were dozens of meters away. His heart could no longer remain calm.

He simply rolled up his book, stuffed it into his arms, and then walked towards the direction of the siblings. The sister-brother pair were so absorbed in their task that they didn't even notice him approaching.

Yu Xiaocao squatted and moved forward step by step, while she was busily working with a shovel in her hands. Qian Wen moved closer and wondered: 'Are there really wild herbs during this time of year?'

Suddenly, Xiaocao saw a large region of big shepherd's purse in front, so she screamed with delight and jumped up happily. However, she didn't notice Qian Wen, who was approaching from behind, and bumped right into his chin with the back of her head.

Holding her own head, Xiaocao turned around to see Qian Wen also clutching his chin with a painful expression on his face. She felt somewhat embarrassed and apologized, "Sorry, I didn't notice that you were behind me. Does it hurt a lot?"

When Qian Wen was hit, he had accidentally bitten the tip of his tongue, which caused tears to pool up in his eyes. So, he hastily opened his eyes wide and looked towards the sky. He was afraid that he wouldn't be able to control his tears and let the young girl see him crying.

It originally wasn't Xiaocao's fault, so he gracefully replied, "It was my fault. I shouldn't have got so close." He kept sucking in the cool air because of the injury on his tongue. As a result, his voice sounded muffled and he had a slightly distorted expression on his face.

Yu Xiaocao chuckled and said, "Neither of us did it intentionally, so no one has to apologize for it. Did we bother your reading? After we finish digging around this area, I'll take Little Shitou somewhere a little farther..."

"No need, no need! I mainly came out to relax. My teacher said that there should be a proper balance between work and leisure when studying. I'll help you dig for wild herbs." Qian Wen lifted up his cotton-padded robe and squatted down, but then realized that he didn't have a shovel.

Xiaocao shook her head at him, lowered her head to dig up the shepherd's purse that she found earlier, and said, "No need. You should go back and continue reading. I will be at fault if you delay your studies."

Qian Wen smiled and said, "My teacher said that one can't just solely focus on reading when studying. The Analects of Confucius says: 'For someone who can neither do physical work nor distinguish rice from wheat, how art thou considered a scholar?'" As he spoke, he took the shovel from Xiaocao's hands and began digging the shepherd's purse on the ground.

"Hey, hey! Be careful! You have to stick to the surface of the ground when shoveling. Otherwise, the leaves will break apart!" Seeing him clumsily digging the shepherd's purse and destroying a few in the process, Yu Xiaocao felt distressed inwardly and reminded him.

Little Shitou ran over from a distance with a large batch of shepherd's purse in the pocket of his jacket. Seeing that Qian Wen was using his sister's shovel, he put the shepherd's purse in the basket and handed his shovel to his older sister, and said, "Second Sister, you can use mine. I'm a fast runner, so I'll go home to get another one."

Just as he finished speaking, he had already sprinted away.

Yu Xiaocao crouched down and patiently demonstrated to Qian Wen several times. Qian Wen swiftly learned how to properly dig the wild herbs. The two of them squatted side by side on the edge of the ditch and silently dug the wild herbs. From time to time, they would quietly converse when one of them had dug a big one. There was a light sense of peace and harmony between them...

A moment later, Little Shitou returned with a shovel and was followed by a chirping Qian Wu. Qian Wu saw his older brother helping Xiaocao dig for shepherd's purse instead of reading, so he curiously asked, "Older Brother, why are you here? Didn't you go out to read?"

Qian Wen glanced at him and replied solemnly, "I've already finished reading. While working, I can recall the contents of the book, which is conducive to understanding and integration of the subject. Xiaowu, didn't Mother ask you to tend the ducks? Did you sneak out again? You better watch out because Mother is going to beat you with a broomstick!"

Qian Wu was somewhat scared of his older brother, who was three years older than him and often acted like an elder. He shrunk his neck and said, "I already guided the ducks to the pond. They will look for food themselves. There's nothing for me to do... Oh, right! Little Shitou, what's with all the turfs behind your house?" Ah, he needed to quickly change the subject!

Yu Xiaocao looked at him with a smile and noticed that the little guy was completely different from his older brother. The older brother had a fair and clear complexion and a gentle and refined disposition. He also had delicate and fine features. The younger brother had darker skin with thick brows and big eyes. When he smiled, two small canine teeth could be seen. With a dignified and strong appearance, he looked very cute.

Little Shitou proudly straightened his back and said, "What turfs? They're called straw thatches, which are made of wheat straw and rice straw. They're used to keep the vegetable fields warm!"

"To keep the vegetable fields warm? Your family already planted the vegetables?" Qian Wen looked at Yu Xiaocao in surprise. He instinctively felt that she was the mastermind behind this idea.

Sure enough, Little Shitou answered proudly, "That's right! The crops in the front yard had already been planted for three or four days. This morning, when I lifted the thatches to check, I noticed that the seeds have already sprouted tender buds! Isn't my second sister amazing? She can come up with ideas that no one else knows!"

"Oh! They really sprouted? Even the water in the vat still freezes at night. Aren't you afraid that they will freeze?" Qian Wu opened his eyes wide in amazement. In previous years, his family had always planted their seeds at the end of March. They had to wait until at least April or May in order to eat fresh vegetables.

After eating radish, cabbage, pickled vegetables, and soybean paste for the entire winter, Qian Wu felt that saliva swiftly flowed within his mouth when he thought of fresh and green vegetables.

"Does that mean that your family will be able to fresh vegetables soon?" Qian Wu felt extremely envious as he looked at Little Shitou.

However, Little Shitou shook his head and said, "We can't eat it ourselves! We need to sell the vegetables in town for money. Second Sister said she'll send me to the academy to study when we have enough money. Brother Xiaowen, if there's anything that I don't understand in the future, I'll go ask you for help!"

Qian Wen couldn't help but look at Xiaocao again when he thought about their current living conditions. Shitou's family didn't even have enough to eat at the moment, yet his older sister still made plans for her younger brother's academic future.

Xiaocao didn't have outstanding facial features. She had phoenix eyes, which were narrow and slanted slightly upwards. She had faint eyebrows and her nose wasn't very tall. Her lips were fleshy, which didn't meet the current aesthetic of having a small cherry-like mouth. However, the combination of these features on her palm-sized face made her appear very vivid and natural.

Sensing his gaze, Xiaocao replied with a faint smile. After that, with the addition of the Qian brothers, their speed when digging wild herbs increased tremendously.

Although Xiaocao had already transmigrated here for over half a year, she still hadn't become accustomed to eating two meals a day. Noon had just passed, but her tummy had already begun rumbling in hunger. Xiaocao clasped her stomach, which was cramping slightly due to hunger, and her digging speed had also slowed down.

Qian Wen, who was closer to her, had inadvertently heard the sound. He touched the steamed bun within his embrace. After a short deliberation, he quietly moved closer to her as he continued to dig for the wild herbs. When he was about half a step away from her, he took out the steamed bun and swiftly stuffed it into her hands. After that, he stood up and quickly walked away.

Xiaocao looked at the cloth bag in her hands, and then looked at the young man's slender back. She opened the bag and saw a steamed bun that was made of wheat flour. At present, few families in the village could afford eating this kind of steamed bun. Auntie Qian had probably specially prepared it for her son.

She wanted to give it back to him, but he had already walked far away. If she caught up to him, it would be unsightly to push back and forth over a steamed bun. Xiaocao briefly thought about it, and then rewrapped the steamed bun and put it under the shepherd's purse in the basket. She decided to find a chance to give it back to him on the way back.

It wasn't the season to dig for wild herbs and the shepherd's purse seedlings hadn't completely sprouted yet, so they had the advantage of not needing to share with others. After digging for more than half a day, the four of them had filled up two baskets. Both baskets were full and heavy.

Little Shitou and Qian Wu used a branch to lift it up and walked in front. Xiaocao bent down to pick up the other basket, but another hand grabbed it before her.

Qian Wen picked up the basket and smiled at Xiaocao. The shallow dimples on the side of his face were slightly visible as he said, "Let's go..."

On the way back, they encountered Hunter Zhao's son, Zhao Han. He was walking towards Xiaocao's house with a pheasant in his hands.

Hunter Zhao's family had moved to Dongshan Village thirty years ago. At that time, with the two year old Hunter Zhao, Hunter Zhao's father had built a straw shed at the foot of the West Mountains and settled down. Their household registration wasn't in Dongshan Village, so they naturally didn't have any land. Fortunately, Grandpa Zhao was a skilled martial artist, so they were able to rely on hunting to make a living.

Fifteen years ago, Grandpa Zhao suddenly left for a period of time. When he returned, he told Zhao Bufan that he had selected a wife for him, who was Zhao Han's mother. Madam Zheng had a gentle and graceful disposition. Moreover, her demeanor always revealed the upbringing of a young lady of a noble family. So everyone speculated that she might be the daughter of a fallen noble family. However, in Xiaocao's opinion, Auntie Zhao had the agile and competence of a general's daughter.

The young Zhao Han had also learned the skills that his family had passed down. Xiaocao had heard from her father that Grandpa Zhao would personally teach his son martial arts. Her father also mentioned that his skills had become more nimble after Hunter Zhao taught him a couple moves.

"Brother Han, did you just come back from hunting? How's your harvest today?" Little Shitou dropped the basket in his hands and trotted towards him.

As a result of practicing martial arts for years, the thirteen year old Zhao Han was a lot taller than his peers. Based on a rough estimate, he looked to be over 1.7 meters tall. There was a healthy glow to his tan skin. He had a pair of long, straight eyebrows that were slanted upwards. His tiger-like eyes shone brightly from time to time. When compared to the fair and refined Qian Wen, who stood next to him, they each had their own merits. One was a scholar, while the other was a martial artist.

## Chapter 72

Qian Wu also went up and poked the pheasant in his hands, and then said, "Older Brother Zhao Han, can you give me a few of this pheasant's feathers? My younger sister is always pestering me to make a feathered shuttlecock for her..."

Little Shitou didn't give him any face and laughed, "Weren't you the one who boasted that you could catch pheasants? You have exaggerated so much that you don't know how to fix it, right? So you're asking for Brother Zhao Han's help now..."

"You stinky rock [1]! Can't you give your older brother some face? I'm two years older than you after all. Don't you know that you need to respect the old and the wise!" Qian Wu cried angrily. The two little kids began to fight in jest again and appeared very lively.

"Father, we're back!" Before Little Shitou entered the door, he had shouted excitedly as if he was afraid that others wouldn't know about his 'triumphant' return.

Yu Hai, who was immersed in weaving bamboo baskets in the courtyard, heard the noise in front of the door and looked up in surprise, "Xiaowen, Xiaowu, Hanzi, why are you guys here? Xiaolian, quickly get seats for the guests..."

Qian Wen gently prevented Yu Hai from standing up and smiled, "Uncle Dahai, there's no need. Xiaowu and I are going back now. Xiaocao, where should I put this basket of wild herbs?"

Xiaolian put down her embroidery and looked at the basket full of wild herbs in surprise. She exclaimed softly, "You guys dug out so many wild herbs? I never knew that we could gather so many wild herbs during this season!"

Yu Xiaocao directly instructed, "Just put it in the kitchen... By the way, Brother Xiaowen, you should take some back to make soup. It tastes delicious!"

"No need, no need! There are still a lot of vegetables in our family's cellar, so we have enough vegetables to eat at home..." Qian Wen politely declined.

Qian Wu covetly stared at the basket of shepherd's purse and honestly said, "I'm tired of eating vegetables in the cellar, which are nothing but radishes and cabbage. Older Brother, today we also helped to dig up a lot of the wild herbs, so it's alright to take some back."

Qian Wen glared at him helplessly and continued to refuse. But Xiaocao had already packed the vegetables for him. She divided one basket of shepherd's purse into two small baskets. She gave one basket to Qian Wu and had prepared to give the other basket to Zhao Han so that he could take it back to try it.

"Uncle Hai, I caught two wild hares and three pheasants today. My father told me to bring you one."  
Zhao Han put the tied up pheasant in front of the kitchen door and was about to leave right away.

Yu Hai limped over with a crutch and said, "Why are you bringing game over again? These days, your family have sent a lot of things over already. For the bear last time, your family didn't keep any money for yourselves and gave it all to us. Go back and tell your father that you guys don't owe me anything!"

Zhao Han's mouth twitched and slightly furrowed his dashing brows, and then said, "You guys didn't receive any of the money for the bear, right? If we knew that it would turn out like this, my father would have secretly given the money to Uncle Hai and Auntie..."

Yu Xiaocao smirked and said, "Everyone in the village knows that your family sold the bear for three hundred taels. If Grandmother hadn't received the money from you guys, she would have already gone to your house for trouble. Even if the money was given to my father, it would have been snatched away by my grandmother anyways. Well, she's not our real grandmother, so there's nothing I can say. However, my father is Grandfather's biological son. I can't believe he actually helped Grandmother hide it from us..."

"Cao'er! How can you criticize your elders? Is that what Father usually teaches you?" Yu Hai raised his voice and interrupted his daughter's words.

Xiaocao bit her lips and refused to comply, "Why would they be afraid of other's criticism when they're capable of acting in such ways? Grandfather and Grandmother are originally at fault for this matter! If they even gave us one-tenth of the three hundred taels, we wouldn't have to meticulously calculate our rations when cooking every day!"

Yu Hai's gaze dimmed. He sighed deeply and said, "Father is useless. I've made you guys suffer with me..." As he spoke, he limped back to the main room.

Xiaolian looked at her stubborn younger sister, and then looked at her father desolate back. She wanted to say something but hesitated. In the end, she finally said, "Little Sister, I buried a sweet potato for you under the ashes below the stove. Later, you can take it out to eat..." After she finished speaking, she immediately chased after her father and entered the house.

Everyone in the family knew that Xiaocao easily got hungry at noon, so they would bury a sweet potato in the ashes under the stove after cooking every morning. Xiaocao preferred the sweet-tasting roasted sweet potato compared to the coarse grain pancakes and bean paste soup. They saved all the sweet potatoes that their maternal grandmother sent over last time for her. Even Little Shitou didn't bear to eat one.

Qian Wen felt somewhat awkward as he stood there, so he coughed twice and said, "Xiaocao, we've been out for quite a while, so we should go back now." After that, he pulled the slow-witted Qian Wu and left Xiaocao's house.

Zhao Han also planned to take this opportunity to leave, but Xiaocao stopped him and said, "Thank you for sending the pheasant. Like my father said, you don't have to bring us game anymore. We'll accept it this time, but if you continue, we'll just send them back to your house. This is the wild herbs that we dug out today. Bring them back for Uncle Zhao to taste."

Zhao Han didn't refuse and took the basket, "I'll bring the basket back to you tomorrow."

Xiaocao and Little Shitou were the only ones left in the courtyard speechlessly looking at one another. Little Shitou stealthily looked his second sister and whispered, "It seems like Father is really angry. You should go in and apologize to him. Father dotes on you the most, so he won't spank you!"

Whenever Little Shitou misbehaved, his father would always hold him down on his knees and spanked him severely on his bottoms. Yu Hai was used to working and had great strength, so he often beat Little Shitou so hard that he ended up crying while holding his butt. Thus, Little Shitou feared his father's hands the most!

Yu Xiaocao didn't know whether she should laugh or cry, and just sighed deeply. She went into the room and apologized to her father. Seeing that she was sincere, Yu Hai also didn't scold her anymore. Hence, this matter had passed over in this way.

Yu Xiaocao personally prepared dinner, while Xiaolian helped on the side. She asked Little Shitou to buy one copper coin worth of tofu in the village and made shepherd's purse tofu soup [2]. She also made shepherd's purse pancake [3] and several shepherd's purse steamed buns [4], which was made with a small mixture of wheat flour.

Xiaocao recalled the steamed bun that Qian Wen gave her at noon, so she used the cloth bag and packed three shepherd's purse steamed buns inside. After that, she told Little Shitou to bring it over to the Qian Family.

It was Qian Wen's mother, Madam Mao, who opened the door. When she saw the cloth bag in Little Shitou's hands, she couldn't help but mutter inwardly: 'Isn't this the cloth bag that I used to wrap the steamed bun for my son? Why is it in this kid's hand? My son went out for so long today. Could it be that he didn't eat the steamed bun and gave it to someone else instead?'

She was very clear about the situation of Yu Hai's family. After separating from the main family for so many days, the ration of food that they received was probably already running out. Could it be that her kind-hearted son decided to give his steamed bun to the hungry Little Shitou because their family skipped out on breakfast?

With that in mind, Madam Mao forced a smile and asked, "Oh! Isn't this the cloth bag that I gave Wen'er to carry the dry food? Why is it in your hands?"

No, she should keep her two sons stays away from the Yu siblings. Her family didn't have a lot of resources, so they couldn't afford helping them out so much!

Little Shitou didn't understand the undertones of her words, so he replied with a grin, "When we were digging for wild herbs, Brother Xiaowen gave his steamed bun to my second sister because she was hungry. My second sister felt sorry for eating your family's steamed bun, so she told me to bring several shepherd's purse steamed buns for Brother Xiaowen and Brother Xiaowu to try."

As he spoke, he opened the cloth bag and revealed the soft, fluffy steamed buns inside.

Madam Mao saw that there were three steamed buns made of wheat flour inside and knew that there was one for each of her three children. She felt a sense of shame for her narrow-mindedness earlier. She hastily pushed the cloth bag back and said, "It's tough for your family too. You should keep these steamed buns for you and your siblings to eat! Didn't you guys give us some shepherd's purse this afternoon? Tomorrow, we can make the buns ourselves..."

Little Shitou shook his head and said, "Auntie Qian, my second sister has excellent cooking skills. You guys won't be able to make the same taste!"

He held the steamed buns, walked past Madam Mao, and went inside the house while shouting, "Brother Xiaowen, come eat steamed buns. It's fragrant and delicious shepherd's purse steamed buns!"

When Qian Wu, who was eating millet pancake in the room, heard him, he immediately ran out and grabbed the cloth bag within Little Shitou's hands. He directly took one and bit down on it.

Xiaocao had added fried tofu inside the shepherd's purse stuffing. She also minced the dried fish that her youngest aunt sent over and mixed it in the stuffing to enhance the taste. Due to the lack of seasonings at home, she stir-fried the dried chili pepper, and then grounded it into powder. The stir-fried chili pepper was fragrant and appetizing, adding an extra tang to the steamed buns.

Generally, people were reluctant to use oil when making steamed buns with vegetable stuffing. They would only use salt and scallion as seasonings. Qian Wu had never eaten such a tasty steamed bun before. He disregarded the fact that he couldn't eat spicy food and continued eating the bun. Half of the steamed bun in his hand was already gone after a few bites. Little Shitou, who was beside him, anxiously reminded him, "Don't eat it all by yourself! Share it with Brother Xiaowen and Yafang!"

It was so spicy that Qian Wu was tearing up and had a runny nose. He kept sucking for cold air and repeatedly praised, "It's delicious! So addicting! Little Shitou, your mother's cooking is really good. Let my mother learn from her tomorrow..."

"Stinky brat! Since you're complaining about my cooking, don't eat the food I make in the future!" Madam Mao smacked the back of her younger son's head and jokingly scolded. She took the cloth bag in his hands and said, "Have you thanked Little Shitou yet? You only think about eating and didn't even think about letting your older brother have a taste!"

When Madam Mao got closer, she smelled an alluring shepherd's purse scent mixed with the burnt fragrance of stir-fried chili pepper. She couldn't help but swallow her saliva secretly.

As soon as the steamed buns were ready, Little Shitou was immediately sent out to deliver the steamed buns. When he saw Qian Wu eating the steamed buns earlier, his stomach couldn't help but growling in protest. Seeing that he had completed his mission, Little Shitou said his farewells and immediately turned to leave.

Qian Wen ran after him and stopped him, and said, "Go back and tell your older sister that I said 'thank you for your steamed stuffed buns'. Also, the basket has been vacated, so you can take it back. If you guys go dig for shepherd's purse tomorrow, remember to let me know."

Little Shitou took the basket from him, agreed, and swiftly dashed home. There was delicious food waiting for him at home. Behind him, the little roe deer was also running gleefully at full speed.

Xiaocao's culinary skills had won the praise of the entire family. In the shepherd's purse tofu soup, the verdant shepherd's purse and the snow-white, soft tofu was a perfect contrast for each other. When looking at the green and white colors, people's appetite would increase. Xiaocao had also used the dried fish to enhance the flavor of this soup. It was a substitute for dried sea shrimp, but the taste wasn't bad at all.

### Chapter 73 - Silently Enduring

Although wheat flour was replaced by coarse grain flour, the shepherd's purse pancake was baked until it was a golden-brown color in the cauldron . The charred aroma was accompanied by the delicate fragrance of the shepherd's purse, and tasted extremely delicious . The family had never eaten such food before and was immediately conquered by the tempting taste .

Madam Liu silently remembered it within her heart and said with a smile, "I never thought that bean flour and millet flour could make something so delicious even without adding wheat flour . Cao'er, is this method also something that the deity taught you?"

Yu Xiaocao, who was eating the pancake with relish, was stunned when she heard her mother's question . She immediately answered, "I don't know either, maybe? Anyways, I just knew how to do it when I woke up . It seems like someone in my dream told me that we can dig for this kind of shepherd's purse right now and the cooking methods for them . Father, Mother, try the shepherd's purse steamed buns . It should taste better than the flatbreads . "

When she was making the shepherd's purse steamed buns, Xiaocao also made pan-fried tofu [1] and stir-fried chili pepper [2] . She had used one teaspoon of the less than one catty of vegetable oil that her maternal grandmother sent over, which made Madam Liu's heart ache . Moreover, she also used two handfuls of wheat flour to make the outer skin of the steamed buns, which seemed a bit too wasteful in Madam Liu's opinion .

She glanced at buns in the steamer basket and hesitated . Then, she took one and gave it to Yu Hai and said, “I ate two pancakes and drank a big bowl of the shepherd’s purse soup, so I’m already full . Husband, you should try one and leave the rest for the children . By the way, Xiaolian, go to town tomorrow and bring some steamed buns for your older brother . While you’re at it, take the baskets that your father made to the general store in town . ”

Last time, Yu Xiaocao had gone to town in a rush with her father when she pretended to be sick before the New Year . So, when she heard that there was a chance to visit town, she immediately volunteered, “Why don’t I go to town tomorrow with Little Shitou? Xiaolian can stay at home to work on her embroidery...”

Seeing her eager expression, Yu Hai couldn’t bear to reject her and repeated advised her, “You can go, but you have to be careful and don’t talk to strangers... Little Shitou, you have to take care of your older sister and make sure she doesn’t get lost!”

As he spoke, he ripped the steamed bun in half and gave the bigger portion to his wife and said, “Let’s have a taste of our daughter’s cooking . If it tastes good, we can dig more shepherd’s purse and make buns to sell at the wharf in the future . ”

Xiaocao nodded in approval when she heard his words . Her father was quite business savvy!

It took about three hours to get to town from Dongshan Village . So, Xiaolian, who lived in the same room as Xiaocao, had woken Xiaocao up at the break of dawn .

Since the siblings were going to town, Xiaolian had woken up early to prepare breakfast so that their stomachs would be filled before leaving . For breakfast, they had sweet potato porridge [3], which was cooked until it was soft and mushy . The flatbreads from yesterday were also re-baked in the pot .

Xiaocao drank a full bowl of porridge and ate a piece of pancake, and then wiped her mouth and said, “I’m full! Little Shitou, hurry up . I’m not going to wait for you if we’re late!”

Madam Liu wrapped the three remaining pancakes in a cloth bag so that they could eat it when they get hungry later . After thinking about it, she took out a purse from the bottom of the rattan box . She took out twenty copper coins from it and gave it to Xiaocao, while saying, “Here, take this . It’s your first time going to the town market . If there’s anything you want to buy, then buy some...”

Although the twenty copper coins wasn't a lot, they were extremely precious to the Yu Family, who only had two hundred copper coins left . Twenty copper coins was enough to buy more than two catties of wheat flour, or more than four catties of coarse grain flour . Xiaocao want it, but Madam Liu forced it into her hands and said, "It's okay, take it! Just bring it back if you don't spend it .

After that, she turned around and got five shepherd's purse steamed buns for eldest son, Yu Hang . She wrapped them all in the same cloth bag . Xiaolian got five embroidered pouches from her own room and instructed, "Go to Zhenlong Embroidery Workshop and give these to the boss lady . After that, go buy me some silk threads, which cost ten copper coins . You can buy candies with the remaining money..."

Yu Xiaocao's mouth twitched a few times . She had the mentality of a woman who was nearly thirty years old, so can she not be treated like a kid?

After being repeatedly cautioned by their family, the siblings finally embarked on their journey to town . Shortly after going, they saw Madam Mao sending Qian Wen, who was carrying a small bag, out the door .

"Where are you siblings going?" Yesterday, Madam Mao had used the shepherd's purse to make soup . It tasted really good, so she planned to take her children to dig some more back to make steamed buns for her children .

Little Shitou beamed excitedly, showing his pearly whites . As if he was afraid that others wouldn't know where he was going, he loudly replied, "My second sister and I are going to town to bring some steamed stuffed buns for my older brother!"

Qian Wu, who was standing behind Madam Mao and rubbing his sleepy eyes, instantly became energetic when he heard him, "Mother, I want to go play in town with Little Shitou!"

"What is there to play?! If you're not careful, you might be kidnapped by an abductor! Today, you're coming with Mother to dig for shepherd's purse, or I won't give you dinner tonight!" Madam Mao pushed Qian Wu, who was throwing a tantrum, into the yard and turned to talk to her eldest son, "Be careful on your way . When you come back next time, Mother will make delicious food for you!"

Little Shitou looked at Qian Wen's attire and said, "Brother Xiaowen, are you going back to town to study? My second sister and I are going too . Let's go together!"

Qian Wen saw that Yu Xiaocao was not only carrying a bulky baggage, but also holding three small baskets on one hand and a bigger basket on the other . Thus, he went forward and took the heavy basket in her hand and said, "It's a long way to town . If you carry so many things, you'll probably get tired soon . I'll help you hold the basket . "

"No need, no need! When I'm tired, I can exchange with Little Shitou!" Yu Xiaocao clasped tightly on the basket and didn't let go, but she wasn't as strong as Qian Wen . So, he eventually snatched the basket from her hands . Xiaocao couldn't do anything about it, so she just thanked him .

Speaking of Yu Xiaocao, she really wasn't suited to travel long distances . She had originally thought that her body had gotten much better after being nourished by the mystic-stone water . She thought that she would be able to walk dozens of kilometers, but she had overestimated herself . The more she walked, the heavier the things in her hands became . It was getting more and more difficult for her to take the next step .

Fortunately, Uncle Ma from the neighboring village had a donkey cart and was taking several people to town . Seeing the three children, Uncle Ma warmly greeted them, "Do you guys want a ride? I'll take the three of you for the price of two . "

The group of three rode on the donkey cart and quickly arrived in town . Qian Wen was worried about the siblings' safety and suggested in a gentle voice, "Xiaocao, there are all sorts of people in town . How about you guys follow me to the academy first? I'll put down my belongings, and then take guys to find your older brother..."

Yu Xiaocao politely declined, "No, thanks . My younger brother and I have been to town before, so we're familiar with the road . We shouldn't delay Brother Xiaowen's studies any longer . "

"Goodbye Brother Xiaowen!" Little Shitou waved at him and looked around with his big, round eyes .

After Xiaocao and her younger brother bid farewell to Qian Wen, she inquired about the direction to the general store and prepared to send the bamboo baskets over . The general store was located in a somewhat desolate area . When the shopkeeper saw the siblings bringing newly woven baskets over, he

had a troubled expression on his face and said, “Xiaolian, you’re sending baskets over again! It’s not a busy season for agriculture right now, so bamboo wares aren’t in demand . I still haven’t sold off the ones that you bought over last time . I won’t make it difficult for you this time and accept the products . But... you don’t have to send any more over next time . ”

Xiaocao didn’t correct the shopkeeper’s mistake . She thanked the shopkeeper, and then quietly held her younger brother’s hand as they walked on the street . She felt somewhat downcast . Although her father had hoped to earn some money by selling bamboo crafts, money wasn’t the most important reason for him to weave bamboo wares . By weaving bamboo crafts, it seemed like her father wanted to prove something to himself—to prove that he wasn’t a worthless person .

Ay! It would be great if Father’s leg could recover soon...

When they arrived at Zhenlong Embroidery Workshop, the boss lady warmly welcomed them, “Oh! Xiaolian, I haven’t seen you for a few days, but your skin has gotten much whiter . You also seem to have gotten prettier . Girls really do change as they grow older!”

Yu Xiaocao had learned that after the previous emperor ascended the throne, he had once vigorously promoted the ‘equality between men and women’ . Later, the policy was left unsettled due to various reasons . Nonetheless, the status of women had indeed improved . Women walking and shopping on the streets could be seen everywhere . It wasn’t uncommon for a woman to be a boss, like the boss lady of Zhenlong Embroidery Workshop .

Xiaocao felt somewhat glad to have transmigrated to this era . In the future, it wouldn’t seem strange for her to do some small business and earn money to support her family .

She needed to thank her fellow transmigrators for creating a relatively relaxed environment for her . Through the rumors she had heard about the retired emperor and the current emperor, Xiaocao had confirmed that they were definitely transmigrators, just like herself . Since there were these two, there might also be others .

She didn’t have any major ambitions . She only wanted to quietly protect her own family and live happily as a little farmer girl . At times, she could come up with new ideas and earn some money . The saying of ‘when people from the same hometown meets each other, their eyes will brim with tears of happiness’ wouldn’t apply to all fellow transmigrators . She didn’t want to become someone else’s cannon-fodder . It seemed like she had to keep a low-profile in the future...

“Xiaolian’s skills are getting better and better . You can probably surpass your mother soon . Oh? This time, the patterns are quite unique, and the color assortments are rather novel . For these five embroidered pouches, I’ll raise the price and give you the same amount as your mother, twenty copper coins per pouch . If you make more of such purses in the future, I’ll raise the price for you again!”

In the past, Xiaolian’s purse cost fifteen copper coins each . Thus, she had earned twenty-five copper coins more than before . As a matter of fact, Xiaocao should also take some credit for this because she was one who designed the patterns .

In her previous life, she was interested in art . If it hadn’t been for her parent’s accident, she might have entered the specialty classes in high school . After she took over the braised food store, she liked to draw flowers and plants in her spare time as a hobby . She hadn’t expected that she would be able to use this skill to make money after transmigrating .

After securely putting away the money, Xiaocao took her younger brother to the woodworking shop . In the carpentry shop, that snobby worker from last time was manning the store . He was currently sitting in a chair with his legs crossed and dozing off . When he heard that the siblings were looking for Yu Hang, he stood up reluctantly and grumbled, “Looking for Yu Hang? Didn’t that kid just go home around a dozen days ago? What a hassle!”

When Yu Hang came out, he was wearing the cotton jacket that Xiaocao gave him before the New Year . It had only been a little over two months, but there were already several holes in the jacket, revealing the white cotton inside . Xiaocao was aware of the fact that her older brother was someone who cherished his own clothing and belongings, and thus his new clothes usually wouldn’t turn out like this .

#### Chapter 74

When Yu Hang noticed that his little sister continued to glance at his clothing, his eyes flickered evasively, and he squeezed out a smile, "That uh...when I was moving timber around, I accidentally caught my coat on a branch..."

"If a branch poked a hole into your coat, it should leave a triangle sized hole, right? How did it become little strips?" Little Shitou asked doubtfully. He liked to climb trees and occasionally his clothing would also get caught on the branches.

Yu Hang coughed fakely and said, "If I said a branch grazed my clothing, then it was a branch! Little children shouldn't have too much to say! ...Younger Sister, how's Father's leg injury right now?"

"Father's injury is mostly healed, and he can even walk with crutches right now. Older Brother, our family has already split and we also revamped the old residence. If you don't feel happy staying here, then come home with us! Now we don't have to deal with Grandmother constantly scolding us or Eldest Aunt's sour comments!"

Yu Xiaocao could tell that the marks left on his clothing seemed to have been caused by a whip. In addition, every time she came over to see him, her older brother always seemed to have new injuries on him. Thus, she wanted to bring Yu Hang home.

When Yu Hang found out that their branch had finally separated from the others, a true smile finally appeared on his face. However, when he remembered Shopkeeper Zhang's ruthless personality, he knew that the man wouldn't let him leave easily. He recalled that the last time one of the apprentices' family members came to take him home, they were told they had to give up twenty taels to take him out. He couldn't help but frown at that memory.

When they separated from the family, his stingy grandmother would definitely not give their branch a lot of money. In addition, they had to rebuild the house, buy furniture and purchase household wares. He was sure that his family had to take on some debt. As the oldest son of the family, he wasn't in a position to help them with their issues, thus, he definitely couldn't add to their troubles!

With great difficulty, Yu Hang tampered down his desire to leave and slowly shook his head, "The master at the shop treats me pretty well, and he already taught me a lot of carpentry skills. I want to stay here a little longer and it won't be too late to go home after I master this trade.

Yu Xiaocao tried again to convince him but Yu Hang stubbornly insisted on staying, so there was nothing more she could do. She stuffed a meat bun that she brought over into his hands and gave him fifty copper coins. Only after she did that did she silently leave.

As he watched the slowly disappearing figures of his younger brother and sister, Yu Hang did his best to hold back his tears. He hoped that he could endure long enough to see his siblings again in the future...

"Older Sister, where should we go now?" Little Shitou felt somewhat down as even he could sense something was off.

Xiaocao pondered the question and then said, "It's still early right now, we should go to Zhenxiu Restaurant and see if Third Young Master Zhou is there."

When they got to Zhenxiu Restaurant, the manager told them that the Young Master had gone to the capital to oversee the details surrounding the opening of a branch restaurant. He was so busy that he couldn't even spare time for the condiment factory and could only have Steward Zhou watch it.

After leaving Zhenxiu Restaurant, Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and then took her little brother to look at the food market.

Since they were growing vegetables at home, it was necessary to explore the food market. The market at Tanggu was on the most remote road in the town and was named 'North Market'. At noon, the market didn't have much going on. Only a couple of stalls were open, and they were selling radishes and Chinese cabbages that didn't look very fresh. It was obvious that they had been stored in the cellar for a whole winter.

Yu Xiaocao pulled her younger brother into a pickled vegetable stand and found that there wasn't much variety. There was a black colored thick paste that faintly smelled of mold, a form of dried radish that had been salted, and a watery-looking salted Chinese cabbage...compared to her previous life's supermarkets, which had more than twenty varieties of pickled and salted vegetables, this was quite a let down.

Xiaocao rubbed her nose and started to plan. Should she pickle some salted vegetables and leave them here to sell? However, even if she wanted to make some, she wouldn't be able to do so this year. The family stores of radish and Chinese cabbage were low. She wasn't even sure if there was enough left to pickle for her own family to eat.

"Little girl, do you want to buy some salted vegetables?" The stall's shopkeeper was a sixteen to seventeen year old young man. He greeted them with a friendly demeanor despite their shabby looking clothes.

Yu Xiaocao sheepishly replied, "I was just looking if you had any pickled cucumbers..."

"Pickled cucumbers? Is that also a type of pickled vegetable? You can pickle cucumbers?" The young man asked humbly as his voice carried an undercurrent of excitement.

This pickled vegetable stand was opened by his mother when she was still alive. At that time, his mother was very skilled in pickling and salting vegetables. People from far-flung villages would come and buy a jar from her. His mother later fell ill and passed away, and he had only learned a few pickling methods. In addition, the taste of his pickles could not even come close to how tasty his mother's were. Gradually, the business in his stall declined. Jiang Yu felt anxious and angry as he watched his mother's life's work slowly declining in his own hands.

"Ah...when cucumbers are in season, I'll make some pickled cucumbers and bring them over for you to taste. If you think they taste good, I was planning on placing them in your stall to sell..." Yu Xiaocao smiled winsomely.

Jiang Yu sighed heavily and said, "I'm afraid that my stall won't be able to last until then..."

Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and then said, "Ah, older brother..."

"I'm called Jiang Yu, just call me by my name!" Jiang Yu smiled somewhat bashfully.

Yu Xiaocao nodded and continued, "Jiang Yu, I have a few pickled vegetable recipes and they should taste pretty good...do you know how to write? I can tell you them while you write them down. You can follow my recipe and see how they turn out."

"We're neither relatives nor friends, how could I possibly take your pickled vegetable recipes? ...how about this, if the pickled vegetables turn out good and sell well, I'll give you a portion of the profits. I need to pay rent and taxes, so I'll take seventy percent and give thirty. What do you think?" Jiang Yu was quite young but had a good head for business.

Yu Xiaocao slowly shook her head and smiled to placate Jiang Yu who had opened his mouth to speak, "You need to account for the manufacturing and material costs, while I'm only giving you a recipe. I don't need thirty percent of the profits. How about we split it twenty-eighty, you'll take eighty percent and only need to give me twenty percent."

Jiang Yu couldn't tell what her recipes would taste like but inwardly promised that if the sales went well, he would give her a larger cut of the profits. He replied, "When my mother was still alive, she had sent me to a private school for a few years, later on...anyway, I can handle writing down a few recipes."

In her previous life, she had gone into the workforce early as her two younger siblings needed to pay for both schooling and boarding costs. There was a time when they had a very difficult time making ends meet. In an effort to save money, she had learned how to marinate several different types of pickled vegetables. Her younger brother and sister both said that pickled vegetables sold at stores couldn't even come ten percent close to how good hers tasted. Even after they graduated college and had gone to different cities to work and settle down, they still asked her to make some pickled vegetables and mail them over.

She recited the recipes that she was the best at and let Jiang Yu carefully write down the details. The types of recipes she gave were: spicy and numbing dried radish strips, spicy young radish, Korean kimchi, spicy kelp strips, soybeans in wine, and pickled beans.

Originally she had felt bad that the teenager's business was not going well and didn't want his stall to go bankrupt so she was only planning on teaching him two types of pickled vegetables for the sake of it. But now since she was getting her own share, then it was fine to tell him more recipes. The good thing was that all of the condiments and seasonings, other than MSG which the youth had never heard of, used in pickling vegetables could all be found at a general store or pharmacy.

For example: star anise, fennel, Chinese cinnamon, Sichuan peppercorns were all used by later generations as seasonings and spices. In ancient times, however, these were all medicinal herbs. It was only after the Emperor Emeritus and current emperor ascended the throne that these spices started being used as seasonings in food. These herbs were not very expensive. However, Xiaocao's family could barely feed everyone. In fact, using oil to cook their food was considered a luxury for them. Thus, it was natural that they would be reluctant to shell out money for these spices.

Under Jiang Yu's recommendations, Xiaocao went to a relatively remote section of the food market and found a general goods stall where she could buy cheap condiments and spices. At noon, other than the shopkeeper with a beard like a mountain goat who was dozing off in a chair, not a soul could be found in the stall.

This particular goods stall had very few articles for daily use. Inside the stall were two large vats and they distributed a smell of soy sauce and vinegar. When the two scents combined, it didn't smell very good. Next to the wall was a long table with many wooden boxes. These boxes contained the condiments that Xiaocao wanted to buy.

"Shopkeeper, how are these spices sold?" Xiaocao asked worriedly as she rubbed at chest pocket which held an old embroidered pouch with about a hundred or so copper coins in it.

When the old shopkeeper heard her voice, he suddenly raised his head and sleepily blinked a couple of times. His mountain goat beard moved up and down as he said, "Do you want to weigh the spices separately or all together?"

"How much would it cost to weigh the spices separately versus together?" Yu Xiaocao asked after thinking a bit.

"If you're weighing them separately, Chinese cinnamon is eighteen copper coins per ounce, bay leaves are fifteen coppers, star anise twenty-six coppers, Sichuan peppercorn twenty coppers and fennel is twenty coppers." The old shopkeeper glanced at the two siblings and proposed, "If you're buying larger quantities, it's generally more worth it to buy them separately."

Yu Xiaocao gnawed on her lip and sheepishly smiled, "Then...I should probably weigh them altogether, right? I just want one ounce worth of spices to use for a bit..."

"Okay!" The shopkeeper took out a square shaped piece of rough straw paper and folded it into a tube-shape and started to grab some spices.

Xiaocao hesitated but then spoke up, "Shopkeeper Grandfather, can I add the spices myself?" After running a braised foods shop in her past life, she already knew the ratios of spices needed for her food by heart. Now that she was pressed for money, she didn't want to waste even the tiniest speck of spice.

The old shopkeeper hesitated for a moment and his eyes scanned over the two siblings and their old and patched up attire. In the end, he nodded his head in agreement.

Xiaocao followed the proportions she had memorized and carefully scooped out the spices from the wooden boxes. When the old shopkeeper noticed that she didn't try to play a small trick and take only the expensive spices, he smoothed his beard with a hand and inwardly nodded his head in approval.

When she thought the weight was about right, Xiaocao folded the tube closed and handed it to the old shopkeeper to let him weigh it. The shopkeeper's scale was similar to the ones used in a pharmacy. It

was very small and could weigh things very precisely. The weight came out to be one ounce and three maces [1], which came out to be twenty-five copper coins total.

Xiaocao looked at the two large vats again and hesitated before she said, "Shopkeeper Grandfather, I also want to buy some soy sauce and vinegar, but I didn't bring any containers with me..."

The old man grabbed two small bamboo tubes and smiled, "It's not a problem. Since you called me 'shopkeeper grandfather' then I'll let you borrow these two containers. The next time you come to buy spices, you can just return them to me. Now tell me, how much soy sauce and vinegar do you want?"

She could tell that these two containers were goods that the shop was selling. Once soy sauce and vinegar went into them, it would definitely dye the containers a different color and also leave a smell behind. After being used, these containers likely couldn't be sold again. Xiaocao's heart warmed up.

#### Chapter 075 - Helping Out

She thought for a bit and almost blurted out 'half a catty' but then she remembered that in ancient times half a catty was equal to around eight ounces . After all, wasn't there a saying that said 'a half a catty is eight ounces', which meant 'there's not much to choose between the two'? Thus, she hastily corrected herself, "Please give me four ounces of each ."

The price for the vinegar and soy sauce came out to be five copper coins total . She then calculated all of the transactions she had conducted today . Her mother had given her twenty copper coins for pocket money, and she had sold Xiaolian's embroidery for one hundred copper coins . The embroidery silks cost ten coins, and the spices and condiments were thirty coins . She had also stuffed ten coins into her older brother's hands . After that, she still had eighty coins on hand . So it wasn't like she was a spendthrift right?

Growl... .

They had eaten breakfast early today . Even Little Shitou, who was used to having only two meals a day, hugged his belly, which was rumbling in protest, with a distressed look on his small face . However, he didn't even suggest the possibility of buying something to eat .

The food market had some booths selling breakfast that hadn't closed yet . Xiaocao carefully held her condiments and walked over to the stalls with her younger brother . She bought a bowl of hot soup, took out her shepherd's purse pancake, and soaked a piece of the pancake in the soup for her brother .

The soup they bought was just a plain Chinese cabbage soup and only had some salt in it as flavoring . On the surface, only a few drops of oil could be seen . In actuality, the taste of the soup was quite mediocre . However, it had been simmering on a small stove for a long time and mouthfuls of it easily warmed up the belly . The pancakes they had brought with them from home this morning had long become stone cold . By letting the pancakes soak in the soup, it was warmed up and became easy and comforting to eat .

There was a little child, about four to five years in age, who was at the breakfast booth . He eyed the two siblings' delicious pancake with pure envy . He flailed an arm and complained at his father, "Father, I also want to eat that kind of savory, delicious pancake . Go buy one for me!"

The stall owner had noticed that the pancake contained verdant green vegetables . Perplexed, he asked, "Little girl, where did you buy that flatbread? How could there be green vegetables in this season?"

Little Shitou ate the pancake in large bites and joyfully replied, "My second sister made this pancake, but it doesn't have green vegetables inside . We dug up some wild herbs in the mountains for the pancakes . My second sister is a very good cook, so no one else can make something as delicious as this . "

"I want to eat the pancake, Father, Father, I want to eat wild herb pancakes, wahhhhhh..." After he saw the satisfied expression on Little Shitou's face, the little fellow started to cry and sob pitifully that he wanted to eat it .

Earlier that morning, Madam Liu had packed the remaining three pancakes for the two siblings to bring into town . The two of them had ripped off pieces of one of them to put in the soup, so there was still another whole pancake on the table . When Xiaocao saw this, she hastily said, "We still have one more left . Older uncle, if you're okay with it, then take it to give to the little brother to eat . "

"How could I possibly do that? You two siblings won't have enough to eat then!" The breakfast seller smiled awkwardly at the sister-brother pair as he quietly coaxed the little boy .

“It’s not a problem . We had already eaten breakfast before we came here and just wanted to drink some hot soup to warm up our bodies . ” Xiaocao had seen that the little boy couldn’t be calmed down . He had cried until a trail of mucus flowed down his nose, and his continued sobs produced tiny bubbles in it . She and her younger brother had eaten one pancake and drank a bowl of soup . That was enough to quiet their stomachs, and when they got home in the evening there would be supper to eat . Thus, she offered her remaining pancake to them .

The food stall owner thought for a bit and then said, “Then I thank you . The soup that you two drank is free . Take it as a sign of my gratitude . ”

A bowl of soup cost one copper coin . Every penny saved was a penny earned . After Yu Xiaocao thanked the stall owner, she left the food market with her brother . They went to a spot outside the town gates where Uncle Ma was waiting for them . His donkey cart was already full of people, and they were just waiting for the two of them .

If Madam Liu found out that they had spent thirty copper coins on seasonings and condiments, she would definitely start lecturing them . They almost didn’t have anything to eat at home, why would they buy seasonings?

When they got home, Xiaocao pushed the gate open and carefully poked her head in to look . Xiaolian was in the middle of the courtyard doing embroidery . When she saw Xiaocao’s sneaky movements, she burst out in giggles and said, “Xiaocao, what shameful thing did you do? Relax, Mother isn’t at home right now!”

After hearing that, Xiaocao entered the courtyard with relief . She smirked, “Who did something shameful? I just bought some condiments in town and was afraid that Mother would lecture me for spending money recklessly... Here, this is the money that was leftover after selling your embroidery . ”

“I told you earlier that you could spend the remaining money on whatever you wanted . How could buying seasonings be considered reckless spending?” Xiaolian casually took the money pouch and felt its weight . Surprised, she said, “How much seasoning did you buy? It doesn’t feel like you used too much money . ”

Her five embroidered pouches had previously been sold for a total of seventy-five copper coins . However, the leftover money in the pouch that Xiaocao given her had five coins more than the usual seventy-five, and she could feel the difference .

Xiaocao explained to her sister that the owner of the embroidery shop had given her a better price for the pouches, and then said, "Xiaolian, please don't tell Mother that I bought these condiments . I have something I need them for!"

"What can't you tell your mother?" Yu Hai limped out of the room and grinned at his two adorable daughters . His leg had healed to the point where he didn't need to use crutches to walk anymore .

"Nothing, nothing! Father, do you know how to make this type of bamboo tube? When you have time, can you help me make two? I still need to return what I borrowed to someone!" Xiaocao deliberately changed the subject and handed over the bamboo tube that held the soy sauce to her father .

"This type of tube is one of the easiest bamboo utensils to make, it won't be hard for me . " Yu Hai sniffed at the bamboo container and laughed, "Soy sauce? If we had a catty of fatty, streaky pork right now, we could make a bowl of red braised pork...then we really could eat to our heart's content!"

Ever since his biological mother had passed away, Yu Hai had never been able to taste red braised pork again . He cherished the memory of the taste of that dish .

Xiaocao quickly snatched back the tube of soy sauce from him and emphasized, "I need to use these condiments, so you can't touch them! Oh right, where did Mother go?"

"Next door to Auntie Zhou's place . They had gotten a large order and need to get it done by tomorrow, so they asked our mother for help in killing the chickens . " Xiaolian took the proffered condiments from her sister and put them in a hidden nook in the kitchen .

Yu Hai called out towards Little Shitou, "Son, come with Father to help cover the vegetable fields with their blankets...our seedlings are growing quite well . After only five days, they've already sprouted to a height of a couple of centimeters . I have never seen vegetables grow this fast, even in previous years when the spring was warmer than this..."

Of course they grew quickly . She had watered them every day with the mystic-stone water . Xiaocao rubbed her nose somewhat uneasily and said, "I'm going to visit Auntie Zhou's house and see if they need any help . " With that said, she escaped as quickly as a wisp of smoke .

Madam Fang had gone into town earlier today to sell her chickens and eggs . In town, she found out that Lord Huang's father was going to have his sixtieth birthday celebration and needed around thirty chickens for the banquet . The steward in charge of buying food had made an order of forty chickens and had asked her to get them all prepared today so they could be sent to the residence the next day .

She had rushed back home after receiving the order . There were not enough people at home to help kill, pluck, and clean all of the forty chickens in one afternoon . Additionally, her husband wasn't home . Madam Fang was afraid that her three children and herself would end up ruining this large order, so she asked Madam Liu to help .

When Xiaocao got there, Zhou Linglong and her sister were in the kitchen boiling water . Madam Fang was holding a cleaver and about to kill a chicken . There were five or six roosters lying on the ground with their legs bound up . Her mother, Madam Liu, was next to a large wooden basin and was pouring hot water from a pail into it . Inside the basin were three slaughtered chickens that still had their feathers on .

"Mother, Auntie Zhou, I came over to help!" Xiaocao casually greeted them and frowned when she saw there was a bunch of chicken blood on the ground .

Madam Fang picked up a chicken whose legs were bound and plucked off some feathers from its neck . Just as the knife was about to flash down, she heard a voice and looked over with a smile, "You got back, Xiaocao? If I had known earlier you were also going into town, we could have gone together . Did you have a good time shopping in town?"

"Auntie Zhou, do you not want any of the chicken blood leftover from killing chickens?" Xiaocao irrelevantly answered and regarded the dirt soaked with chicken blood with slight regret .

Madam Fang hesitated in confusion and said, "Why would anyone want chicken blood? It's not even tasty!"

Yu Xiaocao blinked and replied, "You can eat chicken blood! If it's made well, there's not an odd smell or taste either . You need to eat blood to enrich blood, so chicken blood is very good at this . It can also relieve rheumatic pains, improve blood circulation, and open things up!"

“Uh . . . I have never heard of chicken blood having all of those properties . Who did you learn this from, Xiaocao?” The knife in Madam Fang’s hand wavered as she didn’t know whether she should cut off the chicken’s head at the moment or not .

Yu Xiaocao rushed into the kitchen and asked Zhou Shanhu to grab her a basin . She placed it in front of Madam Fang and said, “Auntie Zhou, listen to me! If chicken blood is cooked correctly, it’ll have a tender texture and be very delicious . You can use it together with tofu to make a soup, and it could also be stewed with cabbage . If it’s stewed in a sauce, it’ll be soft and smooth, and be extremely delicious!” “This child, you describe it so well that the saliva has almost come dripping out of my mouth . Okay, all of the chicken blood will be yours . When you finish cooking it, don’t forget to bring your Auntie Zhou a bowl . . .” Madam Fang nimbly wielded the knife to cut the chicken’s neck open . The scarlet blood gurgled down into the basin .

Xiaocao felt as if she could see a host of culinary delights floating in front of her . She gluttonously wished that she could grab the chicken blood and start cooking now . Two months had passed since the New Year celebrations . They couldn’t even eat their fill of coarse grains, let alone get a taste of meat or fish . Living life like this had caused her cravings to go out of control!

“What are you just standing there for? Didn’t you come over to help? Go back home and grab the basin we used to wash vegetables in . We can pluck the feathers off faster this way!” Madam Liu said in an indulgent yet slightly scolding tone of voice as she smiled at her daughter “Okay!” Yu Xiaocao assented and bolted out .

Madam Fang looked at her cheerful steps as her figure got smaller in the distance and smiled, “Younger Sister Muyun, your family’s luck must have changed . Just look, ever since you guys moved out, your husband’s leg has healed, Xiaocao’s body is healthy, and you haven’t gotten sick again . You should relax a bit . In the future, your family will definitely do better and better . When some chicks hatch in spring, go grab a few and bring them home to raise . They can lay some eggs and nourish your children’s bodies . You and your children have such thin bodies, ah...”

Madam Liu raised her head to gently smile at the other woman . After moving out, her smile appeared more frequently . She held in her laugh as her hands continued to pluck the chicken with practiced ease . Steam rose from the wooden basin and there was a slightly fishy smell in the air...

When Xiaocao had gotten back, she saw Madam Liu opening up the chicken’s belly, pulling out the internal organs, and throwing them aside on the ground . She tentatively asked, “Are these all going to be thrown away?” Madam Liu shot her a glance and teased, “Do you really want to eat something so dirty and smelly? There’s chicken poop in them . If you make it, you’ll be the only one eating them .

Okay, stop goofing off and go help me get the chickens that your Auntie Zhou slaughtered . I need to scald them, and you can be in charge of plucking the feathers!”

“Xiaocao, work carefully! If you do well, Auntie will give you ten copper coins as payment...” Madam Fang could tell that Xiaocao was a practiced hand at this work and made her a promise .

Madam Liu interjected heavily, “We’re all fellow villagers and neighbors . There’s no need to give us money for helping you! Also, she’s a little child, how much help can she be...”

Chapter 76 - What a Surprise!

Madam Liu looked over and discovered that her daughter's speed in plucking the chickens was not any slower than hers. In fact, to her surprise, the chickens her daughter plucked were even cleaner than hers.

What a joke, of course Xiaocao was good at this, just look at what she did in her previous life. Her braised foods shop had a chicken dish, braised roast chicken. Every day she needed to slaughter and prepare around thirty to forty chickens. If she wasn't good at this, that would truly be an oddity!

Xiaocao looked around the room and smiled, “I don't need wages. Auntie Zhou, just give me the internal organs from these forty chickens instead!”

“What do you want the internal organs for? You're not going to really take them back home to eat them, are you?! ...Cao'er, mother knows our circumstances at home are not very good and that we usually can't taste any meat during most of the year. However, we still can't eat something as dirty as this! How about this, next time I go sell my embroidery, I'll buy a catty of meat and give you a great feast...” The smile on Madam Liu's face gradually dimmed and a look of guilt and shame rose in her eyes.

“Mother, don't worry about it, I really do have a use for these internal organs!” Xiaocao was inwardly surprised and flabbergasted. Didn't they all say that people in ancient times ate internal organs? Was it just a false rumor?

Madam Fang smiled and tried to resolve the dispute, “When children get older, they start having their own ideas. Younger Sister Muyun, just let her try! Xiaocao, the chicken blood and internal organs are all yours! I'll also give you money for your help!”

Xiaocao shook her head and replied, “Auntie Zhou, I really can't take your money for the work. Last time when we had moved in and had a banquet, you and Older Sister Linglong were busy for the whole day

helping us. You guys didn't even get to eat lunch. I'm only helping out a little. If I wanted money for it, isn't that too much of me? A relative afar is less use than a close neighbor. Neighbors helping each other out is the right thing to do!"

Madam Liu agreed, "Cao'er is right! Missus, if you keep bringing up giving us money, I will go back home right now..."

Seeing that both the mother and daughter persisted in refusing her offer, Madam Fang no longer brought up the subject of paying them. It took the two adults and three children a whole hour to finish slaughtering and cleaning up the chickens. Yu Xiaocao's speed and abilities were even better than her mother's and was neck to neck to the old hand, Madam Fang. Madam Fang repeatedly praised her skills...

Afterwards, Madam Fang went into the room to take out the cakes and pastries she had bought in town earlier that morning. She shoved them into Xiaocao's hands and insisted that she bring them back home. The Zhou Family sold chickens and eggs, and when it was the off-season for farming, her husband would peddle goods. They were the only family in the village who could afford to buy some sweets for their children to eat from time to time.

Madam Liu held the wooden basin filled to the brim with chicken offal as she watched her daughter who held the pail with chicken blood in one hand and pastries in the other. She frowned and said, "Do you really know how to prepare chicken blood? Don't talk a big game and not be able to follow up, otherwise Auntie Zhou and her daughters will laugh at you."

"Mother, stop worrying, when did I ever promise more than I can deliver?" Xiaocao struggled with holding the chicken blood in one hand so she placed the string that tied the pastries together in her mouth. Her freed hand joined the other one in lifting the basin as she stepped forward quickly.

When they got home, Xiaolian had already finished making the meal and was waiting for them before she started serving. Xiaocao proudly shook the pail in her hand and smiled, "Don't start serving yet, I'm going to make something delicious to add to the meal."

"What sort of good thing?" Little Shitou stood up from his seated position and dashed toward her. After he saw the contents of the basin, he frowned in disappointment and said, "This is chicken blood! Second Sister, you can't possibly be saying that this will be the tasty dish, right?"

“What sort of expression is that? You don't believe your older sister? Once I finish making it, you don't get to have any!” Xiaocao glared at him, feigning displeasure.

Little Shitou remembered his older sister's out of the ordinary culinary skills and backtracked immediately to apologize, “Second Sister, I was wrong. Everything you make is top-notch. I'm just a wimpy little kid, don't lower yourself to my level, Second Sister...”

“Go, go! Buy a copper coin's worth of tofu from Er Gouzi's place!” Xiaocao cheerfully dispatched him out and entered the kitchen with the basin of chicken blood.

Xiaolian followed her inside and said, “I'll help! What do you need me to do?”

“Boil some water in the pot, I need to blanch the chicken blood in that!”

The blood in the basin had already started congealing into blood clots. Xiaocao used a knife to cut a few lines to divide them into a few 'tofu pieces'. She took out a block of blood and carefully cut it up into smaller pieces. She placed it into the boiling water to blanch and waited until it changed color before she ladled it back up.

She was making 'spicy and sour chicken blood [1]'. The family didn't have any pickled chili peppers, so she used the pickled vegetables her maternal grandmother had sent over as a substitute for the sour. After cutting the vegetables into tiny cubes, she started chopping up the dried chili peppers. She also sliced the ginger into thin strips and smashed some garlic heads to be used as well.

Xiaocao ladled a small spoonful of oil from the oil pitcher and put it into the pan. The cubed pickled vegetables, dried chili peppers, the julienned ginger, and smashed garlic were lightly fried in the oil to bring out the flavors. Afterwards, the chicken blood was lightly stir-fried in the aromatics. It was important not to overcook the chicken blood to not ruin the final texture. It had the tender mouthfeel of tofu but had a much better flavor than tofu.

After thinking a bit, she made the decisive decision to add some vinegar to remove the fishy smell and also added some salt and soy sauce. After sauteing everything until it was mixed well, it was ready to plate.

“Smells so good!” Little Shitou ran all the way home after buying the tofu. He panted heavily but continued to inhale the smell and had a gluttonous expression on his face.

Xiaocao also made a 'tofu and chicken blood soup'. The snow white tofu floated at the top of the broth and the dark red color of the chicken blood was faintly visible. With the addition of chopped scallions, the green color of the herb contrasted beautifully with the other colors. It was a fragrant and visually attractive soup.

“Time to eat! Time to eat!!” Little Shitou impatiently rushed towards the dining table but was pulled back by Xiaocao.

“Don't be in such a rush! Come with me to bring some food over to Auntie Zhou!” She had deliberately made an extra portion of each dish so there was enough for the Zhou Family too.

Little Shitou pouted and held the 'spicy and sour chicken blood [2]' in his hands as he walked and inhaled the smell of the food. Xiaocao laughed and said, “You greedy cat. Be careful, other people might see you like this. How shameful!”

Little Shitou closed his mouth, smiled, and with great difficulty managed to hold back his desire and said, “Second Sister, who would have thought that chicken blood could be used to make something that smells so good. When our family used to slaughter chickens to eat, we would always throw away the blood, what a waste! Oh right, you had mother bring back the inner organs of a chicken, can't they be used to make food too?”

“Of course! Are you brave enough to try?” Xiaocao slanted her eyes at him as she faintly smiled.

Little Shitou emphatically nodded his head and said, “Of course! Of course I'm brave enough! As long as Second Sister makes it as tasty as the chicken blood, I'll eat it! What's there to be scared of?”

“In your dreams! That will all be used to sell for money, how can I bear to let you eat it?” Yu Xiaocao wrinkled her nose at him and made a funny face at him. She then knocked on the front door of the Zhou Residence. “Coming, coming! Oh! Xiaocao, have you eaten yet?” Madam Fang had come to the door to see who was there. When she saw Xiaocao and her younger brother, both with delicious smelling plates of food in their hands, a look of surprise crossed her face.

“Auntie Zhou, I finished cooking the chicken blood. Little Shitou's holding spicy and sour chicken blood and I have the tofu and chicken blood soup. Have you and your family eaten yet? If not, then you don't need to make anything.” Xiaocao gleefully walked into the courtyard and gave the food to Zhou Linglong who had just walked out of the kitchen.

The Zhou Family had been busy earlier slaughtering chickens, so they hadn't had the time to make food. She had come at the right time.

“Smells good! Did you really use chicken blood to make this food?” Zhou Shanhu was about the same age as Xiaocao and slipped over to smell the food in awe as she showed an infatuated expression.

Yu Xiaocao smiled and nodded her head, “Yes! Auntie, in the future when your family slaughters chickens, make sure to keep the blood and offal. I will teach you how to make them into delicious dishes. We have to go now, you can give the plates back to us tomorrow, Auntie.”

The Yu Family ate a sumptuous meal that satisfied everyone's taste buds. The spicy and sour chicken blood not only had a rich and dense flavor of chicken meat, but also had the tender texture of tofu. Each bite was addicting and made them want to eat more. Even Little Shitou, who usually couldn't eat spicy foods, couldn't stop eating it as his tears and mucus traveled down his face.

The tofu and chicken blood soup had a vibrant color and savory taste. It tasted exquisite and fresh, and the broth was full of rich flavor. The whole family praised it continuously. Even Madam Liu, who usually tried to leave good food for her children, couldn't help but drink an extra bowl.

The large cauldron full of tofu and chicken blood soup, other than the large bowl that had been given to Madam Fang, had almost been nearly wiped out by Xiaocao and her family.

Little Shitou had eaten so much that his stomach had bloated into the size of a small watermelon. He lay on the bed, contently groaning. Madam Liu was afraid that the little fellow had almost eaten until he was sick, so she sat on the beside and helped him massage his tummy. At the side, Yu Hai burped and smiled somewhat uncomfortably, “It's been a long time since I've been so full. Second daughter's culinary skills are truly remarkable. She can use something that other people throw away and make it into a delicacy.”

Madam Liu's face gentled significantly at the thought of her younger daughter. She said, “Ever since Cao'er hit her head and lost her memories, it feels like she's completely changed personalities. Not only has her body become healthy, but she's also no longer as cowardly and timid as before. In addition, she

has a lot of new ideas and recipes. For example, yesterday we had advised her that there weren't any wild herbs to be found in this season but she stubbornly disagreed. It turns out she was right and she was able to dig up a lot of shepherd's purse."

"Changing is good. In the past, you and the children have suffered greatly at home. Xiaocao's previous timid personality probably had an outside cause. It was I who was useless as I couldn't protect you or the kids..." Yu Hai's eyes dimmed at the thought of his stepmother's callous, biased heart and his older sister-in-law's greedy and lazy personality.

Madam Liu interjected hastily, "Don't say stuff like that. I and the children are still waiting to have a good life with you in the future. Oh right, Xiaocao also brought back that chicken offal. Do you really think she'll use them to make food? They're so dirty and stinky. I definitely am too afraid to try them!"

Little Shitou flipped his body around, sat up, and giggled, "Second Sister had said earlier that she was planning on using that stuff to make food to be sold for money."

"Sell that for money? Has Cao'er gone crazy at the thought of making money? If other people eat it and end up having problems, then we would get in trouble with the law. As her father, you need to guide and watch over her. She absolutely cannot become someone who makes money off of the misfortune of others." Madam Liu frowned as she lectured worriedly.

Yu Hai, on the other hand, was not in the least bit worried. He had been observing his second daughter these past few days and he knew in his heart that she didn't have any malicious intentions. He replied in a calm and unhurried voice, "The type of person that Cao'er is, shouldn't you as her mother know as well? You definitely cannot let her overhear such talk, it'll hurt her feelings! Don't worry, I believe that child's heart is in a good place, so don't worry over nothing."

Little Shitou nodded his head furiously and supported his second sister, "Mother, chicken offal may not necessarily be inedible. Just think, didn't we also throw away chicken blood in the past? But didn't Second Sister also use that to make something so delicious? I'm on Father's side. I believe in Second Sister's abilities."

"Okay, okay! You're both the good guys, and I'm the bad guy!" Madam Liu's lips twitched slightly and she glared at the father and son pair before she left the room.

In the rear courtyard, the twin sisters were currently next to the well cleaning up the chicken offal! Xiaolian lifted a bucket of water out of the well and pursed her lips when she saw her younger sister separating the chicken liver, gizzard, and intestines from each other. In the end, she couldn't help but ask, "Are you sure that these can be used to make something to eat? Were the condiments and seasonings you bought earlier supposed to be used this stuff?"

Xiaocao rolled her eyes and said, "Relax, have some faith in me! I am absolutely not wrong!"

## Chapter 77

She used a pair of scissors to cut open the chicken intestines and then used cold water to wash out all of the feces. When they were fixing up the rear courtyard, she had deliberately directed people to create a channel next to the well that connected to the outhouse's latrine pit. By having this, they could wash laundry and vegetables and the dirty water would just flow away.

"Cao'er, what can I do to help?" Madam Liu couldn't bear to just watch the two sisters being busy and walked over.

Yu Xiaocao smiled at her and said, "Mother, you came at the right time. Do we still have any coarse salt left at home? You can grab it and use it to forcefully scrub the inside of the chicken intestines. This will remove any weird odors from it."

"Use coarse salt to scrub? Are you sure you can sell this for money? When the time comes, I hope you can sell out because otherwise we won't be able to eat it and would have wasted all of these materials!" Although coarse salt was cheap to buy in areas by the sea, about one copper coin could buy half a jar of it, Madam Liu was used to being frugal and couldn't help from warning her daughter.

Xiaocao pouted her lips and said, "Mother! Relax! My methods are given to me by the God of Fortune and they definitely won't fail!"

After the little girl used the god's name as a rebuttal, Madam Liu didn't say anything more and squatted down to scrub the chicken intestines clean with salt. She was very thorough in her work as she was afraid that if they weren't clean, she'd end up causing more problems for her daughter.

Xiaocao started to fully concentrate on preparing the chicken liver and gizzards. The most important part when cleaning the liver was to cut off the gallbladder on top. This was delicate work because if you weren't careful, it was very easy to cut into the gallbladder and leak out its contents. With the spillage,

the liver would have a bitter taste that would influence the taste of the final dish in a bad way. Luckily, she had more than ten years of experience from her past life in preparing this and could even do it in her sleep.

The gizzards, on the other hand, were slightly more troublesome as she needed to cut them open, wash out the feces, and then cut off the inner layer of yellow colored film. However, this yellow chicken gizzard lining was an important medicinal ingredient and was also called 'fowl's inner gold'. If a child had indigestion from eating too much, the sun-dried fowl's inner gold could be ground into a powder and taken. After taking it, the digestive problems would go away.

Xiaocao was an expert in peeling off this membrane. Out of the forty-so chicken gizzard linings she had to take out, every single one was intact and not a single rip could be seen.

After the chicken intestines, liver, and gizzards were all cleaned, Xiaocao told her mother to go rest. She then pulled Xiaolian into the kitchen with her. The plan was to finish braising all of these meats tonight and then go into town the next day to see if she could sell them.

"You want to sell this in town? The townspeople are snobbish and picky. If they found out that you had made these dishes out of the innards of a chicken, they would probably beat you to death. In my opinion, you should try your luck at the docks instead. First of all, we live closer to the docks as it takes less than two hours to walk there. Second, the people who work there, such as the fishmongers and dock porters, all wake up early. Most of them either bring their own breakfast from home or buy something. These people don't have high expectations for their food. As long as it tastes good and the price is reasonable, they won't think anything of spending a couple copper coins for food." Xiaolian had overheard her eldest maternal aunt describing her small business on the docks and proposed this idea to Xiaocao.

Xiaocao thought for a bit and then nodded her head, "Ok! You are right. It's very lively and bustling at Tanggu Docks. There's a decent market for food even if we only count those dockworkers. We'll go there tomorrow to try our luck!"

The two sisters went into the kitchen and lit the fire to boil water. After the water reached a boil, they first blanched the chicken to remove any odd odors. Next, they needed to make the seasoning sauce. Whether or not a braised dish tasted good depended heavily on its sauce. There were three general types of seasoning sauces for braised food: red sauce, white sauce, and yellow sauce.

In her past life, Xiaocao had received the authentic recipes for the sauces from her shop's boss. All of the sauces were her proprietary specialties. She thought for a bit and then asked Xiaolian, "Xiaolian, give me a couple more coins, I need to go to Doctor You to buy some herbs and then I'll come back..."

At the beginning of spring, Doctor You had returned to the village with a young boy around the age of ten. It was said that this boy was his grandnephew or some sort of relative. Xiaocao had already returned the medicine trunk with all of the money she had earned during the fall and winter back to him. The villagers were also relieved. Although most people had recognized her medical skills, fellow villagers still preferred to have an older doctor to take care of them.

"Medicinal herbs?" Can you really cook with those?" Xiaolian asked, perplexed.

Xiaocao grinned, "Of course. Don't the more wealthy families often eat ginseng chicken and angelica sinensis stewed with chicken? Don't those dishes contain medicinal ingredients?"

Xiaolian muttered under her breath, "How can we compare to those rich people?" However, she still went back to the room and took out the embroidered pouch Xiaocao had returned to her that afternoon and placed it back into her younger sister's hands.

The medicinal herbs that Xiaocao needed were all very common ones and, thus, were cheap. She only spent ten copper coins on a bunch of different types. After she got home, she started to make the sauce. Since the weather was cold now, she made sure to blend a large portion of the seasoning sauce.

The seasoning sauce of a braised dish could be used multiple times as long as it was stored properly. In fact, the more times the sauce was used and the longer it fermented, the better the taste and quality. This was because the percentage of soluble proteins in the sauce increased as time went by. This was also the reason why the braised dishes made with older sauces had a more mellow and rich taste compared to the newer sauces.

Xiaocao started measuring the ingredients. Her recipe required: 20 grams of star anise, 20 grams of chinese cinnamon, 50 grams of dried orange peel, 20 grams of Sichuan peppercorn, 15 grams of fennel, 20 grams of bay leaves, 15 grams of licorice root, 100 grams of dried hot chili pepper, 150 grams of scallions, 150 grams of fresh ginger, one catty of yellow wine, 400 grams of soy sauce, 200 grams of salt...(Author's note: Please don't try to make this at home, this is a simplified recipe.)

When Xiaolian saw forty copper coins worth of materials being wrapped into a cheesecloth and being thrown into the basin, she hastily said, "Is it okay to make so much on the first try? What if it turns out bad..."

"There won't be a problem with it!" Xiaocao interrupted her firmly. Perhaps her confidence made Xiaolian feel more confident since she didn't make any more comments and only followed Xiaocao's instructions in increasing or decreasing the heat on the stove.

"Smells so good! Mother, do you smell it yet? This must be the smell of Second Sister's finished offal dish. I'm going to go look!" Little Shitou, who had been laying on the bed digesting his food, was like a police dog who had smelled something interesting. He scrambled off the kang bed, hastily slipped on his old and worn cotton shoes, and bolted out the room. He ran so fast that he almost tripped on the threshold of the door.

Madam Liu could only laugh and shake her head, "This child...Shitou's father, let's go look too?"

Yu Hai was also bursting with curiosity so he nodded his head and put on his shoes quickly to go to the kitchen.

The forty portions of chicken offal had been stewed together in one big pot and was simmering merrily at low heat on the stove. Little Shitou waited impatiently at the side of the stove, his eyes flickering with a feverish, excited light. He resembled a little puppy who had spotted a juicy, meaty bone. All he lacked was a wagging tail and a lolling tongue.

Xiaocao felt that the time was about right and opened the lid. She ladled up some chicken intestines and blew on them a couple of times before offering them to the little fellow's mouth.

Little Shitou shook his head in refusal, "This will be sold for money, I shouldn't eat it..."

"It's just a small bite, we don't need to save it" Xiaocao forcefully pushed the food into the little boy's mouth. The braised intestines had a delicious flavor and the texture was very crispy which gave it a very good mouthfeel. The little fellow closed his eyes in bliss and carefully chewed on the food as he wanted to savor the flavor as long as possible.

Xiaocao also gave everyone else a share to let them all have a taste. Yu Hai and Xiaolian very willingly opened their mouths to eat it. Madam Liu, on the other hand, was much more hesitant. She asked her husband doubtfully, "How's the taste? Does it smell or taste bad?"

Xiaocao didn't know whether she should laugh or cry and said, "Mother, do you really think my cooking is that bad?"

Yu Hai soothed her ego by nodding his head profusely, "Delicious, very delicious! You really can't tell these are chicken intestines. They have the flavor of chicken—no, they're even better than your red-braised chicken pieces! Yes, if you're going to sell these, there will definitely be people who'll want to eat it!"

Xiaolian also vigorously nodded her head to express her agreement. Xiaocao also took a taste herself and slightly frowned and said, "Too bad we don't have any MSG or bone broth. The taste is not as good as it could be. However, it's still quite good!" Once Madam Liu saw that everyone was praising the food ceaselessly, she got the courage to try a mouthful. As soon as she put it in her mouth, the fragrant and dense flavor stunned her, "This...is this really the flavor of those dirty chicken intestines? This is truly, truly too inconceivable!!"

Xiaocao also put the leftover chicken blood from the previous night into the stew. After braising it together, she was planning on selling it together with the chicken offal.

"How much should I sell one catty for?" Xiaocao somewhat worriedly talked to herself.

Yu Hai gave her a very good idea: The dockworkers could usually earn around thirty to forty copper coins a day. When business wasn't as good, they could still get more than twenty coins. The braised food that Xiaocao made still had the taste of meat even if it was made with chicken offal. If she sold it by the catty and the price was low, then she wouldn't make much money. On the other hand, if the price was high, then no one would buy it.

However, if she split into small packets of food and sold it for one copper coin a packet, then the workers definitely wouldn't care about spending one to two copper coins. After all, it was food that had meat in it and was tasty and cheap. How could it not sell?

Xiaocao felt like she had reached the light at the end of the tunnel and regarded her father with gleaming and admiring eyes. She had to admit, her father really had a head for business!

Yu Hai felt his pride swell when he saw his daughter's worshipful gaze. He chuckled as he went to find some oiled paper. The whole family worked together to make sixty little portioned packets of the braised chicken offal. Each packet had some intestines, liver, and gizzards. The chicken blood was not easy to pack into the oiled paper so instead they put it all into a jar. When they were selling the food, they could add a little chicken blood to each portion. This way, the portion size of each one copper coin packet wouldn't be small!

That night, Xiaocao was so excited that she tossed and turned on the kang bed for a long time but still couldn't fall asleep. It was only after about 3 in the morning did she finally doze a little before she woke up at dawn. When Yu Hai saw the dark circles underneath his younger daughter's eyes, he laughed and teased her, "Still inexperienced, huh! Aren't you super confident in your own skills, eh? What are you worrying for?"

'Hey, do I look worried, eh? I was excited, ok?'

After finishing breakfast at the crack of dawn, Xiaocao refused her father's offer to come with her. Instead, she brought along the equally excited Little Shitou and started walking in the direction of the docks, with a large basket holding their goods.

As the rays of the early morning sun shone upon the docks, the area was as bustling and lively as before. The sounds of hawkers advertising their wares, shouts, and work chants...wove together again. A cargo ship from far away had just reached the shore and the dock workers were in full swing unloading the goods.

This was her second time coming to the docks. As before, Xiaocao took in the sights and sounds of the scene with an interested curiosity.

"Second Sister, where should we go to sell our braised food?" Little Shitou had a lot of confidence in his sister and was eager to get started.

Xiaocao thought a bit. The dock workers and fishermen most likely had brought food from home with them. However, in the chilly air of dawn, most of them still needed to drink a hot bowl of soup to warm themselves up. Therefore, she walked towards a row of low straw sheds with her basket in hand.

The stalls here sold porridge, hot noodle soup, or steamed buns fresh from the stove. There were also people like her with baskets on their arms, selling some small appetizers from home or some pickled vegetables. For example, Xiaocao's eldest maternal aunt was one of these people.

#### Chapter 78 - Opening Day

“Is that Xiaocao ah? I didn't get the wrong person, right?” Eldest Aunt greeted the two siblings warmly when she saw them with a loving smile on her face.

“Eldest Aunt,” Little Shitou impatiently shouted, “Eldest Aunt, my second sister made some delicious meat and vegetable dishes and we're going to sell them at the docks. Second Sister's food is really good. Eldest Aunt, Eldest Cousin, do you want to try some?”

Eldest Aunt shook her head, “You're going to sell your food, so we won't try any. However, a dish that contains meat can't possibly be cheap, right? It might be hard to sell here...”

“If you guys want to talk, go to the side and talk! All of you standing here will ruin my business!!” Behind them was a place that sold hot noodle soup under a makeshift shelter. Under the awning was a couple of shabby looking tables and chairs. The single woman manning the area, who had crankily interjected, had high cheekbones, thin and sparse eyebrows, and a pair of narrow eyes.

“Auntie, I'm only selling a couple of side dishes and won't be competing with your business, could I possibly...” Xiaocao knew that the workers who had the money to buy noodles would definitely not be so stingy that they couldn't afford a copper coin to try a braised dish.

“No, no! Leave, you're hindering my sales right now! Can you afford to pay me back?” The woman with the high cheekbones glared at them in disdain from the corner of her eyes. The expression in them showed that she regarded them as beggars.

Eldest Aunt pulled Xiaocao, who had wanted to say something, away and softly said, “Let's go. This woman is infamous for being difficult. You can go to Grandpa Liu's booth and try there. His family also sells noodles.”

Just as they were talking, the dockworkers had been let out for a break. A sea of dark-colored heads started rushing this way.

When Eldest Aunt saw the group of men coming over, she hastily said to the two siblings, "Right now is the time to sell food and snacks. You two need to quickly start advertising. Do you guys know how? Do you need me to help you?"

Xiaocao shook her head in refusal and said, "Eldest Aunt, you should go back to your own work. Before we came here, our father already told us on how to advertise to customers."

After Eldest Aunt left, the two siblings went over to the front of a stall with an old man who had kind looking eyes. They politely asked, "Grandfather, can we sell our appetizers next to your booth?"

This old man was the same Grandpa Liu that their Eldest Aunt had spoken about earlier. He was someone who was very easy to talk to. He felt sympathy for the two siblings, who had to sell things at such a young age, and easily agreed to their request.

The two siblings found a spot next to the stall and smiled at each other. Little Shitou immediately started to shout, "One copper coin for a meat dish, only one copper coin for a meat dish! Excuse me, older uncle who has some food from home, buy a packet of this meat dish and try some. If it's not tasty, we'll give your money back!"

"Oh what? There's someone selling a dish with meat in it? For only one copper coin a portion?"

"Are they stupid? Meat is so expensive right now. If they're selling it for one copper coin, won't they be losing instead of making money?"

"A copper coin's worth of food with meat would probably not be enough to even get stuck in my teeth...forget it, us brothers should go buy some salted, pickled vegetables to eat instead."

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Although Little Shitou's advertising had stirred the interests of many of the dockworkers, of the people who came over to look, none of them actually bought any.

Little Shitou started to feel anxious and looked at his sister and said, "Older sister, what should we do? This food is so delicious, why won't they buy any?"

Xiaocao had long predicted that this type of situation might happen. Most people needed some time to pass in order to get used to something new. She thought and then opened the basket and unwrapped one of the oil paper packets containing food. She borrowed Grandpa Liu's knife that was used to cut noodles and sliced the chicken offal into small bites. She walked up to a man who was eating noodle soup and smiled, "Older uncle, try my meat dish. It's completely free. If it doesn't taste good, then you won't be losing anything right?"

The man hesitated for a second and was about to take the proffered bite of chicken gizzard when he was stopped by one of his companions next to him who said, "Don't! Old Hao, who knows whether or not she's a swindler. If you eat it, she might insinuate that you owe her money and then what will you do?"

When the man heard that, he withdrew his hand. Little Shitou's eyes opened wide in worry and anxiety.

However, Xiaocao was as cool as a cucumber. A bright smile graced her face as she said, "Older uncle, just look at me and my little brother. We're tiny and there's no way we can fight against even your finger. How could we possibly swindle you?"

Old Hao stroked his chin and decided that the little girl was right. If he said that the food didn't taste good and refused to give them money, then they'd be out of luck. The money was in his own pouch, and there was no way the two children could steal it from him, right?

He took a bamboo skewer from Xiaocao, speared a piece of chicken liver, and carefully chewed it after he popped it in his mouth. The mellow and savory flavor of the chicken liver slowly spread across his mouth, and his eyes started shining in delight at the taste. "Good, so good! It really is incredibly delicious!! Is it just one copper coin? Give me a portion!" Old Hao fished a copper coin from his pouch without any hesitation.

His companion shook his head and said, "Is it really that delicious? One copper coin's worth is not going to get you much. Old Hao, you've been had!"

Little Shitou glared fiercely at the other man and said, "My father had told us that it is important to be honest when we're doing business. This our first time selling something, so we wouldn't do something as stupid as to ruin the trust of others."

Xiaocao took out a packet of pre-wrapped food from her basket and said cheerfully, "That's right, that's right! In the future, we'll continue selling one copper coin's worth of meat dishes, and the types of food we bring will rotate constantly. We definitely want to keep our good reputations. Older Uncle Hao, here's your braised appetizer dish..."

With the alluring taste of the food still lingering in his mouth. Old Hao ripped into the packet of oiled paper impatiently. He found that inside the packet was not only the dish that he had tried, but that there were also other varieties available. All of the food combined together was enough to fill about half of a small bowl. He took a little taste of everything and discovered that even though the textures were all different, every single bite was tasty and delicious.

"Is this called braised food? I have never heard of it! Quite good, it's delicious and a good deal!! Give me another portion, I need to bring some back to give my wife and children a taste!" Old Hao mixed the rest of the braised chicken offal into his bowl of noodle soup. The addition of the meat had made the noodles that had tasted heavily of beans immediately taste better.

"Okay!" Xiaocao took the copper coin and then took out another pouch of braised chicken offal. She even ladled up a spoonful of braised chicken blood from her jar and placed it into Old Hao's bowl and said, "This blood tofu is too soft and tender. If I put it in the oiled paper packets, it would have gotten smushed into smithereens. It's better for me to add some on top of your noodles!"

"Wow! This is such a great portion size for one copper coin!" Old Hao felt like he was the one taking advantage of them.

The people around them all saw Old Hao praising the food endlessly as he scarfed it down bite by bite. One copper wasn't a lot of money to them, so they all lined up, one after another, to buy a portion to taste. A couple of them put the food into the flat cakes they had brought from home, while others put it directly into the vegetable soup they bought. A few other people bought some warm steamed rolls and ate it with the braised food...

Many people discovered that the food was tasty and came back for a second helping. Even the cheapest meat sold at the markets was priced at more than ten copper coins a catty. One copper coin could, at most, get you two small slices of meat. The food that the little girl was selling not only tasted better than the food they had at home but also had a decent portion size. It was a good deal! Without much effort, Xiaocao had sold off forty portions of braised food. The money she had spent on seasonings had been earned back, so Xiaocao was as happy as a clam. Next to her were a few people who had come by late and were afraid that they had missed out.

“It's so loud over there, what's going on? If someone's causing trouble, don't blame me if I have to expel them from here!” The foreman was at the only shack in the area that sold stir-fried dishes. He had ordered a few of their house specialties and politely poured the steward a cup of wine.

“Sir, I'll go over there and look!” The foreman always had a few errand runners next to him. The man ran towards the area that was wreathed by people.

“Steward Liu, the conditions here are too simple and crude. A little further from here is a small market and there are a couple of restaurants there that have decent food, how about...” The foreman looked at the few dishes in front of him and felt they looked quite pitiful. He was afraid that the manager would not be satisfied with the area's offerings and would not do business with him in the future.

Steward Liu shook his head and said, “The cargo I have right now is urgently needed in the capital. I can eat any time, so it's more important to get the cargo loaded before we discuss other things.”

“Alright, alright! Don't worry, Steward Liu, I promise that I can get all of the cargo loaded before one in the afternoon!” The foreman raised his wine cup and toasted Steward Liu. Steward Liu was a steward for a well-known, wealthy merchant in the capital. If he took good care of him, then in the future, the Liu Family's monthly business would all go to him and not get taken away from his arch-business rival.

“Sir, there's no one causing trouble. There's a little girl selling a copper coin's worth of braised meat dishes. All of the others said it's very good, so I also bought a portion back. You and Steward Liu can try some.” The errand runner was perceptive and had dipped into his own pockets to show respect to his boss. If he took good care of his boss, then wouldn't he get more benefits in the future?

“What kind of food can one copper coin buy? What kind of meat? Is it edible?” The foreman grumbled as he took a bite. Eh? The taste was really not bad. “Steward Liu, this braised meat dish is quite delicious. It actually tastes better than the food at the restaurants in the markets. Do you want to try some?”

As the chief steward of a large merchant household, Steward Liu had tasted all kinds of dishes. However, when he picked up a piece of chicken gizzard and put it into his mouth to eat, the expression on his face softened immediately. He had travelled extensively as a part of his duties, but he had never eaten something as delicious as this before.

Steward Liu casually asked, "From what I can tell, this is neither pork nor beef nor lamb. It seems to have the flavor of chicken but I have never encountered food made this way before. Not bad, not bad! The taste is also very palatable!"

When the foreman noticed that Steward Liu ate several bites of the food in a row and seemed to want to continue, he hurriedly directed the errand runner, "Erzi, it's hard to find something that Steward Liu likes. Go buy two more portions now!"

Steward Liu didn't stop them and a satisfied look crossed his face. The foreman smirked inside—It looks like this big customer is finally mine!

"Sir! The one copper coin's worth of braised meat dish has all been sold out...however, I brought over the little girl who was selling it. Her basket still has some blood tofu left. She wants to know if you want any?" Erzi was unable to buy the braised chicken offal and huffily came back.

"Blood tofu? Is that the dusty brown lumps that's in here? Didn't know it was called 'blood tofu'. It's more tender than tofu and the taste is much better too!" Steward Liu lightly picked a piece of the braised chicken blood in his chopsticks and placed it in his mouth with avid pleasure.

Since he could tell Steward Liu liked it, the foreman turned and spoke to Xiaocao, "I want the rest of the blood tofu in your jar. If I give you ten copper coins, is that enough?"

Xiaocao grinned winsomely and shook her head, "Foreman Uncle, it's not worth that much! I at most have about a bowl's worth of blood tofu left. Just give me two copper coins and it's a done deal!"

Steward Liu glanced over and said, "I would have never expected that something so inexpensive could taste so exquisite and delicious. What is this blood tofu actually made of?"

Xiaocao thought a bit and then replied, "Steward Uncle, are you able to accept foods that are not commonly eaten?"

Steward Liu guffawed and said, "I'm in charge of a lot of business and travel all the time. What haven't I eaten before? In southern Guangdong, I've even eaten mice and vipers! Oftentimes what sounds scary to eat actually tastes just fine. Tell me, little girl, you can't scare this old man!"

## Chapter 79

Xiaocao was now relieved. She nodded and smiled, "I didn't expect that Steward Uncle is also a big eater! To be honest, my blood tofu is created using a secret method to braise the chicken blood. Although it doesn't look elegant, the taste is still pretty good."

"Chicken blood? I didn't even smell a trace of blood when I ate it. Yet the tofu is still so smooth and tender. Wonderful! Wonderful!" Steward Liu didn't slow down his eating speed as he talked. He had heard that the people of Jinling used duck blood to make soup but didn't expect that chicken blood could also be consumed!

When the foreman saw that Steward Liu was happily eating the blood tofu, his heart settled back down with relief. He took out five copper coins and gave it to Xiaocao, "Here, the remaining money is to reward you. In the future, will you still be selling blood tofu at the dock?"

Xiaocao also didn't act too formally. She smiled as she took the copper coins and said, "In the future, I will still be selling meat dishes for one copper coin with my little brother. However, I might not be selling blood tofu. But foreman, don't worry. The taste of my meat dishes won't be worse than my blood tofu!"

"Xiaocao, your Eldest Aunt had told me that you were selling things here, so I came to find you." Xiaocao's Eldest Uncle, Liu Pei, walked towards her in large strides. He asked with concern, "Did you eat breakfast yet? Eldest Uncle found work today, so I came to invite you and Shitou to eat white steamed buns."

"Eldest Uncle, we already had breakfast before we came here. You didn't eat yet, right? Oh right, I still have half a portion of some braised food. Why don't you eat that with a flatbread?" Xiaocao knew that whenever Eldest Aunt came here to sell things, she would always bring food for Eldest Uncle. Therefore, she stuffed the remaining free samples of braised chicken into Liu Pei's hands.

"This is what you're selling? It smells very fragrant! I can just eat flatbread with pickles. Why don't you sell the rest of this?" When Liu Pei smelled the fragrant dish, he secretly swallowed his saliva. But he wasn't willing to take advantage of his niece.

Xiaocao didn't take back the paper pouch that the braised food was in. She blinked her eyes at her Eldest Uncle, "My business was pretty well today. The braised food that I had brought here has all been sold out. How can I sell half a portion of a dish? It's not like I can split a copper coin in half. Eldest Uncle go do what you need to do. I will go to the market and have a look....."

After she finished speaking, she pulled her little brother's hand and ran away.

When the foreman saw the scene, he laughed, "Brother Liu, she is your niece! The meat dishes she sells for one copper coin taste good. Even Steward Liu from the capital felt that it tasted good. If you don't want it, then you can just sell it to me."

All the braised food that he had bought earlier had entered Steward Liu's stomach. He only had two bites of blood tofu. Now, he craved it.

"Ah! Foreman Sun, what are you saying? If you like it, you can just take it. Why are you talking about buying or selling?" In order to work at the docks, they must first be inspected by Foreman Sun. If they had a good relationship with Foreman Sun, then it would be easier to find a job in the future.

Foreman Sun was very pleased with Liu Pei taking the high road. He ate the rich and delicious braised food when he suddenly said, "Didn't your nephew come with you a few days ago? Did he come with you today? The young man looks tall and strong. He seems like he has a lot of strength. Once he has eaten, let him help with unloading too....."

The person that foreman is talking about was the son of the second branch of the Liu Family, Liu Zhiwei. Because of his young age, the foreman usually didn't like to hire him.

It was common knowledge that a worker could earn twenty to thirty copper coins in a day from loading and unloading goods at the dock. When Liu Pei heard what Foreman Sun had said, he was overjoyed. He repeatedly said, "Thank you Foreman Sun! My nephew has also come today! Don't worry, that kid is used to doing manual labor! He is very honest, and he definitely won't disappoint you!"

"What are you thanking me for? In the future, make sure your niece leaves a meat dish behind every day. Just eating a little isn't really satisfying. But don't worry, I will pay for what it's worth!" Steward Liu had left after eating and drinking his fill. Foreman Sun was now happily eating and drinking and felt very satisfied with the food.

The Tanggu Docks had a moderately sized market. On every 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 15th of a month, as well as New Years, the people from the nearby villages would come and sell their own products or buy goods that they needed.

Although it was called a market, it felt more like a street than a market. On both sides of the market, there were short houses made of grass. Occasionally there would be an eye-catching brick house. But whether it was a house made of grass or brick, it was only open when the market was open. Usually, their doors would be tightly closed.

Today was February 16th, and it was a market day today. Even though the market was small, there were still quite a bit of people here. On both sides of the street, the houses towards the front had become a simple vegetable market.

Some people carried their frozen radishes and cabbages for sale on their shoulders, while others carried varieties of chicken, duck, and eggs they had raised to sell. There were also street vendors who sold daily necessities. All of these vendors tried their best to attract customers. The sounds of people selling their products, bargaining, and even the sound of gossipers talking all wove together and made it a lively scene. Xiaocao held her little brother's hand and walked through the crowd. But, from time to time, they would sway unsteadily from being squeezed by the crowd.

"Xiaocao? Shitou? Did you come here by yourself? Is it because there's nothing to eat at home?" What a coincidence, before they walked very far, they met another acquaintance again. The person who had just spoken was Xiaocao's grandfather. Following behind him was her uncle, Yu Dashan, who was carrying a fishing basket.

Although Xiaocao was dissatisfied with her grandfather and her inarticulate uncle, she didn't harbor any malice towards them. She gave them a faint smile and replied, "No, Shitou and I just came here to take a look."

Old Yu looked at his grandson and granddaughter who had become somewhat alienated from him. He thought about how his second son had left the house with practically nothing. If it wasn't for the

relatives who had sent money to his son and the villagers who had aided him, they probably wouldn't have a house to live in such a cold day. Thinking back to that, he couldn't help but feel guilty.

After thinking about it, he turned around and took the fish basket from Dashan. He poured the remaining ten small yellow croakers that they couldn't sell into Xiaocao's basket. Old Yu stroked Little Shitou's head using his fishy hands and said, "Take these fish home to eat...do you have any money on you? If you don't, Grandpa can buy you what you want." Yu Dashan's mouth moved as he glanced at his father. But in the end, he didn't say anything. These days, without the fishing expert, Yu Hai, they had caught fewer and fewer fish. In addition, the varieties of fish they caught had also dwindled. They had lost quite a few regular customers in town. Now, their business was getting worse and worse.

Every time they brought home money, Madam Zhang would complain that it was too little and that it was not enough for the family's expenses. The money they had earned by selling fish this time, was the lowest amount they had earned. If they also bought things for the children, he was afraid that they'll never hear the end of it when they returned home.

When he saw Xiaocao sensibly shaking her head and heard her say, "Grandfather, there's no need. We brought money with us," he felt relieved. At home, his mother kept harping on about money, and his wife talked too much. All of this made him feel very annoyed.

After saying goodbye to their grandfather, Xiaocao continued walking forward. Suddenly, she was attracted to a pork stall in the distance. She pulled Little Shitou and walked over. The swarthy and plump butcher had a tangled and coarse beard. His eyes were especially big, which made it seem like he was glaring at people whenever he looked at them. He appeared to be quite fierce looking.

However, the people who knew him all knew that Butcher Wang was famous for being a good person. Whenever he sold meat, he never gave the customers less meat or change. He even gave his regular customers some things that are of little value. His reputation was quite good in the nearby villages.

"Little girl, are you buying meat?" Butcher Wang knew that his appearance often scared children and made them cry. So, when he saw the sister and brother pair, he hurriedly showed them what he believed to be a kind smile. He also softened his voice as he called out to them. But he didn't know that this kind of expression made him look even more fierce.

Little Shitou was scared by the butcher and hid behind his second sister. But after thinking about it, he stepped forward and walked in front of his sister. At home, he had boasted that he would protect his

sister well. However from his clenched fist, trembling body, and reddening face, it was obvious that he was about to cry. Everyone could sense his fear and nervousness.

When Butcher Wang saw that his smile produced the opposite of his desired result, he awkwardly scratched the back of his head. But he didn't forget to praise Little Shitou, "Little guy, you are very brave. You know how to protect your sister. You really are a young man!"

From his manner and tone, Xiaocao determined that this man was a blockhead who had a mean-looking face but a heart of gold. She held her brother's shoulders and ruffled his head, smiling as she said, "Uncle is praising you, aren't you going to quickly thank him?"

Little Shitou bashfully lowered his head. In a small voice, he replied, "Thank you for your praise..."

"Good child, what a good child...what do you want to buy? Uncle will give you a discount!" Butcher Wang laughed out loud, his voice was loud and clear like the rumbling of thunder.

Yu Xiaocao looked at the meat in the stall. She saw that what was remaining was less than two catties of a moderately sized, not too fat and not too thin leg meat. There was also some fatty oil, a few pig bones, and a large pig head.

Her line of sight was instantly attracted by the pig head. She proceeded to ask, "Uncle, how is this pig head sold? Do you also sell pig liver, pig heart, pig stomach, and the large intestines of pigs?"

During this time period, almost all the pig heads were used as a sacrifice to the gods. Very few families in the villages would eat them. The main reason that people didn't eat pig heads was that they disliked the distinct flavor of the pig heads. If the flavor isn't properly taken care of, then the oil, salt, firewood, and the grains they used would be wasted on the pig's head.

But since both the twelfth lunar month and the first month of the lunar year had passed, no one had been interested in the pig head. After hearing her questions, Butcher Wang asked her with good intentions, "Little girl, why does your family want a pig head? What are they planning to do with it? Pig heads don't taste good. Why don't you buy some pig bones and make a stew with it? I can sell you the pig bones for a cheaper price. As for the pig liver and pig hearts, it has been all sold out. The filthy and smelly pig stomach and pig intestines have either been thrown out or fed to the dogs. Is your family raising a dog?"

Just as she had expected...the people from this time period didn't have a method to cleanse the dirty and smelly internal organs of animals. Because they didn't have a method to cleanse it, they didn't dare to eat them. However, the pig stomach and pig intestines tasted delicious after being braised. In addition, the braised pig head dish was one of the most popular braised foods her shop had sold in her previous life!

"Uncle, I also don't know what they're going to do with those items. It was my father who had told me to buy those items. How much does the pig head cost per catty? Also, please give me all of the pig stomach and pig intestines....." Xiaocao pointed at the pig head with a smile, confidently asking him to sell her those items.

Butcher Wang nodded his head and said, "There's no need to weigh the pig head. Pig heads are usually sold after the buyer and seller comes to an agreement. A pig head usually costs eight copper coins. But since it's off-season right now, I'll sell it to you for six copper coins. The pork stomach and intestines haven't been thrown away today. I'll give them to you for free if you want it."

Wow! A pig head usually weighed around seven to eight catties, but it was only sold for six copper coins! It was so cheap that it was almost ridiculous. What's more, the pig stomach and intestines were offered to her for free! Yu Xiaocao felt that she had gotten a huge deal for this trip!

Thinking about her long-term business, she suddenly asked, "Uncle, seeing that there aren't many things left in your stall, your business must be doing good. How frequently does your family to kill a pig?"

Butcher Wang laughed out loud and proudly replied, "Thanks to the blessings from the villagers, my meat stall business has been doing well. Almost every time the market opens, we kill one pig. At other times, we are busy catching pigs in the village!"

## Chapter 80 - Causing Trouble

Yu Xiaocao earnestly asked, "The next time you kill a pig, can you leave me the pig blood, pork tripe, and pig intestine? I can give you the money for it....."

Butcher Wang was very curious and puzzledly asked, "What do you want these things for? Little girl, these things are both smelly and dirty . They really don't taste good!"

Yu Xiaocao mysteriously smiled and said, "I know, but I have a use for them . How about this? I will place an order on those items for two copper coins . You usually throw those things out, but if you sell it to me, you will earn an extra two copper coins!"

Butcher Wang's business was pretty good, so he didn't care for an extra two copper coins . He smiled and said, "Okay, okay! I will keep those items for you . But you don't need to pay for it . Consider it as a gift from this uncle . If your family needs to buy meat in the future, just remember to take care of my business . That will be enough ."

"Do you want me to use straw ropes to tie up the pig head for you? I will also go to the house to get some pork tripe and pig intestines for you!" Butcher Wang didn't forget to get some rice straws to carefully make a cushion inside Xiaocao's basket . He feared that the pork tripe and intestines will dirty the fish on the bottom of the basket .

Xiaocao allowed him to also put the pig head inside the basket . She considered this to be a rewarding journey because she had profited a lot . After that, she spent another ten copper coins to buy a jar of soybean oil . The basket was stuffed to the brim with items, so it was quite heavy . Little Shitou picked up a wooden stick from the roadside . Utilizing the stick, both the older sister and younger brother carried the basket together . On their way home, they walked and took occasional breaks from carrying the basket . Because of this, they didn't get home until it was afternoon .

They had just walked to the entrance of the village when they saw a familiar figure pacing back and forth . The small shadow underneath its foot followed the figure as it wandered back and forth . When the little roe deer saw the sister and brother, it took the initiative to run over to them . First, it ran over to Xiaocao's feet and acted like a spoiled child, rubbing its head against her leg a few times . After that, it ran over to Little Shitou to play with him .

"Haha! Tiny, we haven't seen each other for half a day, did you miss me? Our Tiny is the most sensible for coming over and greeting us . Second Sister, I'm afraid that we don't even know where your Little Glutinous Dumpling has run off to . Father is right! It's hard to get a stray kitten to become close to you!" Little Shitou held the little roe deer as it licked his face . His face was covered in saliva, but he was still taking pleasure in it .

The mini golden kitten that the little divine stone had taken the form of was very proud and haughty . It didn't pay heed to anyone from the family besides Xiaocao . Little Shitou wanted to get closer to it but he was scratched by its claws, leaving behind a few red marks . Little Shitou loved the kitten but he also feared it . Thus, he would always make sour remarks about it .

Xiaocao found the situation to be rather funny . She pinched Little Shitou’s face and said, “What? Has Little Glutinous Dumpling offended you again? You really are too much for holding a grudge against a kitten!”

Ever since the little divine stone had a physical form, it would bring its real body, the multicolored stone, out to look for the spring water with the most amount of spiritual energy in the forest . Every day, it would leave early and come home late . It would soak in the spring water for the entire day and obediently return home at nighttime .

Xiaolian, who had been pacing around the entrance of the village for a long time, gasped for breath as she ran over . She took over the basket from her siblings and was astonished when she felt the weight of the basket .

When they went out, the basket wasn’t this heavy . So, when Xiaolian felt the weight of the basket, she thought that they didn’t sell any of the braised chicken giblets . She comforted her younger siblings, “Tonight, there will be a lot of fine food! The small piece of chicken gizzard that we tasted yesterday was tasteless . But tonight, you’ll be able to eat your fill . Little sister, thanks to your blessing, our dinner will be more sumptuous than the New Year’s!”

Xiaocao was just about to lament about her appetite when Little Shitou was unable to wait any longer . He noisily shouted, “Eldest Sister, all the braised food dishes we have brought there today were sold . We didn’t even have enough to sell! Guess how much money we have earned? Quickly guess!”

“You sold everything?” Xiaolian opened her mouth in surprise, “Do I really need to guess? I was the one who had divided the servings of braised food . When I was dividing them up, I counted a total of sixty servings . So, it would be sixty copper coins at most, since it only cost one copper coin each . But, did you guys really sell everything?”

When Xiaocao saw the uncertain expression on her sister’s face, she giggled . She replied, “We sold everything in less than half an hour! We didn’t even have enough to sell! Many people, who either bought or didn’t manage to buy our food, asked me if I would still be selling tomorrow! Even a steward, who had come from the capital, praised the taste of our braised food!”

“That’s great! But unfortunately, Auntie Zhou’s family doesn’t often have the chance to kill that many chickens...” On one hand, Xiaolian was very happy with the results from today . But on the other hand, she felt regretful because it was just a one-time business opportunity .

However, she quickly pulled herself together . She weighed the heavy basket in her hand and asked, “Little sister, what did you buy? You didn’t spend all of the sixty copper coins that you earned, did you? No wonder Mother always says that you can never save any money.....”

“I didn’t! I only spent sixteen copper coins! This time, we have earned back the money that we spent . In the future, we will only be gaining profits when we sell . When we have enough money later, we should also make a hut at the docks, selling all kinds of braised food!” Xiaocao patted the place where her purse was placed . She was confident in her braised food business .

“Xiaolian, Xiaocao, and Little Shitou, where did the three of you come from?” The village idiot’s wife had her eyes fixed at the heavy basket in Xiaolian’s hands . She was full of laughter when she asked .

The village idiot’s wife was a famous gossip in the village . She and Madam Li were quite a pair since their ability to gossip were on par with each other .

Xiaolian didn’t want to pay her any attention . In a perfunctory manner, she replied, “Little sister had said that she wants to take a look at the dock . So, I made Little Shitou take her there . Auntie, my little sister, and brother haven’t even eaten breakfast yet . We will be going first.....”

The village idiot’s wife looked at the three siblings’ backs as they hurriedly left . Her mouth twitched and scoffed, “You brought a basket to play at the dock? I don’t know what kind of good things are in that basket! By the way, didn’t Li Guihua complain that the money her father-in-law and husband brought home was less than before? Could it be that Old Yu secretly gave his fish to the siblings? No! I have to go and tell her!

The village idiot’s wife went to find Madam Li, adding oil and vinegar as she told her the story . When Madam Li heard the story, she became extremely angry . Good! No wonder they were earning less and less money from selling fish recently . It turned out that they have been supplementing the second son; that group of rubbish and invalids .

Xiaocao and her siblings had just reached home and hadn't even put the content of the basket in their kitchen, when Madam Li arrived right behind them .

She boldly and confidently kicked open Xiaocao's family's front door . If their front door wasn't newly built, it would have probably been broken by Madam Li's kick . She hadn't even entered the door when her pheasant-like voice loudly shouted, "Second Brother in-law, come out! We have already separated our households yet you're still clinging onto the old man, trying to suck his blood dry! Do you still have a conscience? Quickly bring out what you have taken from him!"

Yu Hai, who was making bamboo utensils in the courtyard, was stunned and at a complete loss about what she was yelling about . He replied, "Eldest Sister-in-law, you can't make irresponsible remarks . After separating our branch, I haven't taken anything from your family . When you accuse other people, you need evidence!"

"Humph! You didn't take money or things from the family? Then how did you build this house? How did you build those pieces of furniture? Don't tell me that all of that was supplemented from Second Sister-in-law's family? We all know the situation with the Liu Family . How are they able to give you a dozen or more taels of silver? Do you want evidence? Good! The items in that basket are evidence!"

Madam Li looked around the courtyard with her triangular eyes . Then, as if she had gotten evidence that she could use against them, she pointed at the basket that Xiaolian had just put down while coldly sneering .

Fortunately, Xiaocao's family lived some distance from the fishing village . There were only two to three families living nearby . Otherwise, with Madam Li's loud voice, it would've attracted a crowd of people to come here and watch the show . Even so, their neighbor from the west side, Madam Mao leaned in front of her front door, trying to eavesdrop on what was going on . Madam Fang also came over and tried to convince Madam Li in a low voice .

Fortunately, today was the day that Madam Liu went to town to help people wash their clothes . Otherwise, she would have been angered by Madam Li's words .

Xiaocao, who had been drinking a bowl of warm boiled water, poured the water on the ground when she heard Madam Li's accusations . The warm water had almost landed on Madam Li's foot . Xiaocao bluntly said: "Do you want to calculate? Okay! Then let's carefully calculate! Disregarding everything else, just the money earned from the game that my father hunted in the mountains and sold were worth more than ten taels a year, right? I won't mention anything too long ago, so let's calculate it from

when Little Shitou was born . In the six years since Shitou was born, my father has given grandmother at least sixty taels of silver . After subtracting two taels each year for expenses, there should be at least fifty taels remaining . Furthermore, there was still the money earned from selling fishing . Even after using them for daily expenses, there should still be some money leftover .

“Yes, we have spent over a dozen taels for my father’s injury . Let’s just round it up to twenty taels! Then there should still be around thirty taels remaining at home . When we were separating from the family, how much did we get? When we separated our branches, it was as if you were trying to get rid of beggars, giving us only two taels of silver .

“The house we lived in was broken and water easily leaked in . The food that we got from splitting the household wasn’t even enough to eat for half a month . What is two taels of silver enough to do? If it’s not for my maternal grandmother borrowing some money for us and all the uncles from the village helping us rebuild the house, we would still be living in that run-down house that has cracks and leaks rain!

“Are you saying that Grandfather is giving us money? Even if other people don’t know how much they earned from selling fish every day, but wouldn’t Eldest Uncle know? If Grandfather takes his hard-earned money to supplement us, would Eldest Uncle not complain? Wouldn’t he tell you?”

After being rebuked by a little girl, Madam Li’s face turned from red to pale . However, she couldn’t defend herself and refute her claims . She was right . Her father-in-law might feel sorry for his second son, but her husband was always there when he went fishing and selling fish . If the old man had subsidized them, her husband might help him hide it once or twice . However, if it continued for a long time, he would definitely have some complaints .

Then... what about the basket that was full of things that the village idiot’s wife was talking about? With her brother-in-law’s current situation, it was impossible for him to buy so many things . When Madam Li thought up to this point, she was immediately full of life again like she was cockfighting:

“Are you saying that Father-in-law didn’t supplement you with anything? Then what is in that basket? Weren’t you just crying about how you didn’t even have enough to eat? Then where did you get the money to buy so many things? If you have the guts, open the basket and let this old lady have a look . Just what is inside?”

Xiaocao sneered and asked wickedly, “Eldest Aunt, are you sure you want to take a look?”

“Of course, I want to take a look! That is the evidence that Father-in-law is being partial to your family!” Madam Li jumped as she hooted and the fats on her face trembled along with her movements . Her face right now looked really similar to the pig head that Xiaocao bought today .

“Okay! If that’s the case, I will fulfill your wish!” Xiaocao bent over and opened the basket . She took out the pig head from inside the basket and using some force, she threw it at Madam Li .

Madam Li only saw a black shadow flying at her, so she subconsciously reached out her hands and caught it . She lowered her head and looked at the thing she was holding . Oh my mother! An ugly pig with its eyes rolled to the back of his head so only the whites of his eyes were showing . It was staring straight at her...

“Ahhhh—” Madam Li screamed as she quickly threw the pig head away .

“Didn’t you want to see it? I’ll let you look! I’ll let take a look!” Xiaocao was thinking, if it weren’t for Madam Li who had pushed the original host of the body to death, perhaps she wouldn’t have transmigrated . Maybe, the Lin Xiaowan from the modern world wouldn’t have died . As she thought about it, the resentment in her heart increased greatly . She grabbed the stinky pork tripe and pig intestines and threw them directly at Madam Li’s face .