

RISE OF THE POOR

Chapter 8: Even Pigs Won't Eat It

The forest was dense, and morning fog filled the air. In the distance, faint roars of wild beasts could be heard, adding an eerie and frightening atmosphere to Woniu Mountain. Though frightening, the forest was also generous. Various mushrooms grew abundantly among the decaying leaves at the base of the trees, and wild fruits and unknown flowers and grasses were scattered everywhere.

After walking through the forest for about the time it takes to burn an incense stick, Zhu Shouyi gradually slowed his pace, carefully examining the ground around them. He then signaled for Zhu Ping'an and his brother to stay still. Next, Zhu Shouyi set down the basket he was carrying, placing it gently in the bushes to the side, and took out some ropes from it.

"These footprints belong to wild rabbits. Wild rabbits don't like to take detours and always follow the same straight path, hopping along. So when setting traps, you have to place them higher. Don't disturb the surrounding flowers or grass; it needs to look the same as before. Rabbits are very timid, and if the environment changes, they won't dare to come near..." Zhu Shouyi explained

to his two sons as he set up the traps. "Rabbits hop fast and won't notice our traps. Once they run into the trap, they won't be able to get out."

Zhu Ping'an noticed that his father's trap was quite simple, using readily available materials like sticks, branches, and rope to make two loops. The first loop was for catching the rabbit, which would tighten around the rabbit once it stepped into it. The second loop was a protective one, set to block the first loop, leaving just enough space to catch the rabbit without harming it. The trap's two components were essential—one to catch the rabbit, and the other to ensure it was caught alive.

After setting three traps, their father led them down a different path, saying that if they were lucky, they might find some fat rabbits waiting for them on the way back down the mountain.

Gradually, the three of them began to gather some rewards: two wild chickens, which Zhu Shouyi had trapped by finding a wild chicken nest and setting a snare outside; five large carp weighing around two to three jin each, caught in a shallow mountain stream. They had blocked off a section of the stream with stones, and there were many fish inside—if they hadn't been picky about size, they could have caught more than a dozen. They also collected about ten jin of mountain mushrooms and wood ear mushrooms, with Zhu Ping'an contributing about one jin.

When passing by a bamboo grove, Zhu Ping'an remembered the bamboo shoots mentioned in 'A Bite of China', and eagerly called out that he wanted to eat bamboo shoots. His father's eyes lit up at the suggestion, and he swiftly put down the basket, taking out a pointed hoe from it.

Zhu Shouyi was an expert at digging up bamboo shoots. By merely observing the color of the bamboo leaves, he could tell where the shoots were and how big they would be. Before long, he had dug up eight or nine short and thick bamboo shoots, each around twenty centimeters long—just the right size for eating. They also had cured meat at home, and bamboo shoots stir-fried with cured meat was simply the most delicious combination.

They had lunch on the mountain, picking some wild fruits, catching three more slightly larger fish from the stream, and roasting them over a fire, along with the dry rations they had brought from home. To top it off, their father even found a gourd, which he cleaned out and used to make a fish soup with the stream water. The milky white fish soup bubbling in the gourd released a pure and natural aroma that was irresistible. Their father's basket was like Doraemon's pocket—he even had salt with him.

With oil dripping from their lips and their bellies full, Zhu Ping'an felt this was the best meal he had had since arriving in the Ming Dynasty. It was at least a hundred times better than what they ate at home.

After lunch, they rested for a short while before continuing their search for good things in the mountains.

The small animals in the forest were very alert, likely scared by hunters over time. Each one seemed to have become as cunning as a fox, disappearing at the slightest sound. At that moment, Zhu Ping'an couldn't help but long for the silly deer from the 'Where Are We Going, Dad?' TV show from a distant era. If there had been one here, they could have easily caught it.

Unfortunately, this was Anhui-Hubei, and there were no silly deer around. Although there were no silly deer, Zhu Ping'an did find something good. Beneath a nearby tree, there was a large patch of white and gold flowers in bloom.

It turned out to be honeysuckle! Zhu Ping'an's eyes lit up, and he eagerly ran over.

"Zhi'er, don't run around." Father Zhu quickly followed.

Zhu Ping'an ran to the honeysuckle bush and carefully examined it. The flowers here all grew like sticks—thick at the top, thin at the bottom, with a slight curve. The surface of the flowers was yellowish-white or greenish-white, with a layer of fuzz. After looking at them for a while, Zhu Ping'an confirmed that they were indeed honeysuckle, as described in the "Compendium of Materia Medica." According to records he had read before, honeysuckle was

one of the easiest traditional Chinese medicines to prepare. After simple sun-drying and air-drying, it could become a medicinal herb used by students of medicine. The "Compendium of Materia Medica" recorded: bitter in taste, cold in nature, good for clearing toxins from the upper body and the surface of the skin. Since it was listed in the compendium, its price wouldn't be too cheap.

If he picked these honeysuckles, brought them home to dry, and sold them to a pharmacy, it could turn out to be a good source of income.

Zhu Ping'an made a mark nearby. If he could sell them this time, he could come back to pick more in the future. There were plenty of honeysuckle plants here, so Zhu Ping'an only picked the best, selecting just the buds. This method would yield premium-grade honeysuckle, which was the most valuable.

By the time Father Zhu, who was worried, had caught up, Zhu Ping'an was already happily picking flowers with great enthusiasm, his little figure working away with delight.

Picking flowers?

Father Zhu's eye twitched a little. Could his youngest son be the type to mingle among women as a playboy?

"Why are you picking flowers? Come, Daddy will take you to pick some fruits to eat!" Father Zhu felt it was his duty to correct any bad habits in his son early on.

Zhu Ping'an looked up at his father, shook his head, and continued picking flowers.

"The fruits are sweet and delicious," Father Zhu continued to try.

"These can be sold for money," Zhu Ping'an mumbled as he kept picking.

Father Zhu pouted. What kind of money could these wildflowers possibly fetch? The hills were full of wildflowers and weeds—he had never heard of anyone selling them for money! Patiently, he explained to his son, "People in the city buy flowers like peonies and roses, the good ones, not these. These flowers are so worthless even pigs wouldn't eat them!"

Not even pigs would eat them?

See, this is why the villagers are so poor!

Whether something can be sold for money is not determined by whether pigs will eat it!

"Little brother, let me help you." Zhu Pingchuan, feeling sorry for his younger brother, set down his basket and helped to pick the flowers.

His thinking was simple: whatever his little brother wanted, his older brother would make sure he got it.

"Make sure you only pick this kind." Zhu Ping'an showed him a perfect example of premium honeysuckle.

"Got it." His honest and straightforward older brother nodded and helped pick the honeysuckle.