

The 80s 387

Chapter 387: Surveying the Terrain

Cheng Su had always been a person of action. No sooner had she thought about scouting the terrain near the train station than she arranged her work and went to scope out the area by herself.

The train station was located in the Qing City West District, a major transportation hub, and right next to the train station was Qing City's bus terminal. Because of the high passenger turnover, nine out of ten shops and stalls around were food vendors, selling steamed buns, fried dough sticks, congee, noodles, meals, all kinds of eats were available.

Cheng Su planned to dine in each of the shops on the road between the train and bus stations, starting with a fried dough stick and soymilk shop. A large bowl of soymilk sold for five cents and a fried dough stick for ten cents each. There were also steamed buns, with meat-filled ones costing twenty cents and large plain buns for ten cents; the prices were quite fair.

She sat down and ordered soymilk and fried dough sticks. In those days, there wasn't much adulteration, and the soymilk was thick and rich with the aroma of soybeans, while the fried dough sticks were big and crunchy. And this shop?

It covered just over ten square meters, with a small kitchen or something at the back, and even had stairs leading up to what seemed to be a loft. Inside, there were only four long tables and bench seats. The place was so packed it was unbelievable; sitting down meant back-to-back with another customer. The shop seemed to have some age to it, with an old decor, and the floorboards felt a bit grimy.

The items for sale were displayed at the entrance: a large vat full of soymilk, buns, corn all stored in big steamers, and fried dough sticks on a bamboo winnowing basket. Beside it, a middle-aged man wearing an apron was swiftly rolling out dough and pulling dough sticks before dropping them into an adjacent

vat of hot oil for frying. A woman busily selling buns and taking money next to the man was presumably his wife.

Cheng Su withdrew her gaze, faintly hearing the train station announcements from the square. Inside the shop, tired travelers hauling their baggage would stop and take a look, enquire about the price of the buns, and then sit down with their steamed buns and soymilk to eat. Others, finding no place to sit, would squat by the roadside eating their steamed bun and soymilk, their weather-beaten faces either showing relief from their hunger or satisfaction from looking forward to the future.

Across the table from Cheng Su sat a sister-in-law wearing a patched jacket, her hair a mess. She held a large bun in her hand, her fingernails all blackened. Cheng Su smiled and asked, "Sister, is it your first time in Qing City? Are you here to visit relatives or something?" noting a large white sack beside her.

The sister-in-law grinned and said, "My husband and I are here to find work. Folks back home say Qing City is a big city where jobs are plentiful and pay is good, so we came." She pointed outside to a middle-aged man smoking, "That's my husband there."

Looking outside, indeed, there was a man wrapped in a jacket leaning against a pole, smoking and watching the crowd go by, blowing rings of smoke, his face filled with a longing look.

In the last couple of years, Qing City's economy had improved. Cheng Su had heard from County Chief Ying that next year there would even be an industrial park, and those counties with more pleasant scenery would engage in tourism development. Sister Wang also mentioned that their county's pineapples suddenly became a hot commodity and there was talk of applying for a pineapple cultivation base designation, calling it the "Home of Pineapples," hoping to bring prosperity to everyone.

Overall, Qing City's economy was growing stronger and the number of people coming to work was increasing as well.

These thoughts established a conviction in Cheng Suxin's mind, making her feel itchy with the sense that now was a great opportunity to do just about anything.