

Stay At home 271

Chapter 271: I Learned A New Spell Today!

There were five tables in front of the magic screens, and each had a ballot box. The staff wearing red vests were counting ballots. They were also checking each and every ballot with crystal balls. If the crystal ball glowed green, the ballot was valid; if it glowed red, the ballot was invalid.

“Hey, guys, check out this restaurant!” said a short-haired young member of the staff. “Its dishes are so expensive! Tofu pudding, 200 copper coins; roujiamo, 300; Yangzhou fried rice, 600; braised chicken and rice, 800! This customer ate 1,000 copper coins’ worth of food for breakfast. Can you believe that?”

Rood and Arvin were shocked.

“His waitress snuck this ballot in the box, probably,” Arvin sneered. “No one would spend 1,000 on breakfast in that remote restaurant. Each person can vote once every day, so maybe he’ll get 10 ballots.”

“I thought only large restaurants would hire people to vote,” Rood said, angry. “Customers’ total expense on each dish is an important factor in the competition, and his dishes are all overpriced. More and more customers are questioning the fairness of this event. If you ask me, we should make some changes.”

“Keep it down. We shouldn’t talk about things like that,” Arvin whispered nervously, looking around. “Although the Catering Association is a governmental agency, the member restaurants in the Chamber of Commerce are giving us a lot of money every month. We should stay on their good side.”

“I know.” Rood sighed. “I’ve been working here for over 20 years. The competition was never like this back in the day, and the top-ranking restaurants used to live up to their rankings. But, everything has changed after the Moreton Family took over the chamber. We’re just pawns in their games now!”

“I’ve got one from that Mamy Restaurant too. 1,300 copper coins!” another staff member said.

Rood and Arwin were angry as well as surprised.

“Three here. 500 copper coins, 1,000 copper coins, and 1,100 copper coins.”

“I got one—200 copper coins.”

“I found another two!”

As far as they were concerned, this was not normal—not for a small restaurant.

Even the famous Dukas Restaurant couldn’t do this well at breakfast time.

The staff started discussing.

“Isn’t it the first time this restaurant entered the competition? Could it be a dark horse?”

“Judging from these ballots, 800 copper coins’ worth of food isn’t enough to make them feel full. That’s the shocking thing here.”

“The prices must be wrong.”

“But the prices are the same as the registered prices here,” a staff member said, pointing at the record in the notebook.

They fell silent, and looked to the lean middle-aged man. “What do we do, Deputy President?” a staff member asked.

“Let’s not jump to conclusions just yet,” said Robert. “If those ballots can pass the test of the crystal ball, they are valid. I’ll go check this restaurant myself. If they play dirty, we’ll ban them from this competition forever.”

“Deputy President just got transferred here from the castle of Chaos City,” Rood said to Arvin. “He wants to make this competition thing right, but he’s alone and helpless. He is even willing to come out here and do everything himself. If we’d had more officials like him, the Catering Association wouldn’t have ended up like this.”

“There is something wrong about that restaurant, and Deputy President will find out what!” Arvin said, clenching his fist.

The staff got back to work.

“In total, there are 320 ballots from that restaurant, Deputy President. Also, the total number comes to 150,400 copper coins!” said an old accountant who had 30 years’ experience.

The staff all looked angry and shocked.

They had never known a restaurant in the Aden Square to make this much during breakfast time every day.

Besides, this restaurant wasn’t even famous enough for them to know.

“They are cheating!” a staff member said.

“We should ban it, Deputy President. You don’t need to go there to check it,” said another person.

Robert also looked astonished. “No. Give me the files on this restaurant.” *Judging by its morning sales alone, it will easily make it into top 100. If it could do this well at lunch and dinner, it would probably enter the top 50.*

The old accountant handed the files to Robert. “We have confirmation that this restaurant has been open for less than a month.”

Robert read the files, which were not very detailed, and then frowned. *If I can’t ensure the fairness of the competition, the Catering Association will lose its credibility.*

...

Mag was worrying about his ranking, and the fact that sweet tofu pudding people and savory tofu pudding people were giving one star to their undesirable flavor was not helping.

“I’m home, Father! I learned a new spell today!” Amy said. She sounded very excited.

Chapter 272: Wind Fire Wheels

“What did you learn?” Mag asked after he opened the door and let her in.

“It must be powerful, for Lord Krassu is powerful,” Yabemiya said with a smile as she walked out of the kitchen, holding a tray of food.

Sally was curious. Amy is very talented, just like Irina, and the latter has already become one of the most powerful magic casters on this continent.

“Master Krassu said it’s called Wind Fire Wheels. But, I haven’t mastered the spell yet.” Amy smiled.

Mag was surprised. “Wind Fire wheels?” *Nezha¹ had Wind Fire Wheels. How did Krassu come up with this name?*

Amy nodded, excited. “Yes. Let me show you, Father. It’s very interesting.”

“Okay.” Mag wanted to see if her Wind Fire Wheels were different from Nezha’s.

“You should back off a little just in case,” Amy warned. She then chanted the spell. “Wind Fire Wheels!”

Two flames appeared under her feet suddenly as if they were flamethrowers. Amy was floating in the air now, about a dozen centimeters from the floor.

Mag’s eyes went wide. How?! And she learned that in such a short time?! Talk about a genius! She will master this magic in no time.

“Impressive! Amy is flying!” Yabemiya exclaimed in astonishment.

So this is Krassu’s magic. Amazing! Sally thought, surprised. It’s very difficult to release a steady amount of magic power. That’s why there are only a few melee magic casters.

“Meow, meow!” Ugly Duckling was running around Amy excitedly. It didn’t get too close, though—because of the fire.

“I’m landing now,” Amy said after floating for about 30 seconds. The flames disappeared, and she landed on the floor. “How did I do, Father?” she asked.

“Your magic is absolutely stunning! And you learned that in such a short time. I’m so proud of you!” Mag said, and touched her hair. He was surprised at her progress. *At this rate, she’ll be much stronger than me. Shame on me.*

“Go wash your hands. Your lunch is ready—braised chicken and rice and tofu pudding,” said Mag.

Amy nodded. “Yes, Father.” She picked the kitten up, said hello to Yabemiya and Sally, and walked into the kitchen.

“I think I’ll eat after they come in, Father. This way, they’ll know how tasty braised chicken and rice is,” Amy said after washing her hands.

“Okay. Have a bowl of tofu pudding, then.” Mag put the kitten’s food on the floor. *She enjoys teasing the customers by eating while they watch on empty bellies.*

Amy nodded, and climbed into the chair. Then she looked down at Ugly Duckling, who was about to eat. “Do not eat too much. You gained weight again.”

The kitten nodded. “Meow, meow.” It started eating its sweet tofu pudding happily, already forgetting Amy’s words.

“Let’s eat,” Mag said to his two waitresses, and sat down to eat.

Yabemiya took a bite of roujiamo, and her tail came out again, wagging back and forth. She didn’t feel uncomfortable showing it anymore.

Sally was eating Yangzhou fried rice slowly. She didn’t eat braised chicken, perhaps because there was too much meat in it. Its price was another reason, of course. If she wanted to have braised chicken for lunch, she would have to eat a tofu pudding for breakfast and a tofu pudding for dinner.

...

Outside the restaurant, the two lines had extended into the square. They were strangely quiet, though.

Yet, there was suffocating tension in the air.

Krassu didn’t understand.

“My lord, those savory tofu pudding guys gave the sweet tofu pudding one star; at this rate, it will never make it onto the list!” a young man said angrily behind Krassu.

“What?!” Krassu knew about the food competition, and he saw the magic screens on his way here.

“Then what did you do in return?” the old man asked.

“We returned the favor, and gave the savory tofu pudding one star,” answered the young man.

Krassu nodded. “Good.” He turned to Urien. “The savory tofu pudding deserves one star,” he sneered.

Urien gave a cold smile. “We’ll just have to wait and see who wins in the end.”

“Look, Lulu! So many people are waiting there. That’s definitely a good restaurant! Let’s go!” Xixi said, holding a green onion bing in her hand.

“But we’ve been eating the whole morning,” Lulu said, giving a wry smile. He was also holding several kinds of food.

“But I’m still hungry... Please...” she begged in a soft voice.

“All right. I’m also a little hungry. Let’s go.” Lulu looked at her with loving eyes, took her by the hand, and walked towards the restaurant.

Chapter 273: Don’t You Love Me Anymore?

At the west gate of Chaos City, six hunter-like men were entering the city with their horses; they were carrying crossbows and bows. "They came here, Boss?" a young man asked the man with whiskers.

"I think so. Their tracks lead us here. Besides, that white cat is a glutton; she would definitely try to find something to eat here. That stupid bear follows her every word. We'll find them in one of the restaurants." His voice was deep and hoarse, his eyes brown and somewhat red.

"I heard the laws are strict here, Boss. Won't we get caught?" asked another man.

"If we do it quickly, nobody can catch us. We don't need them alive." Their boss grinned, revealing his sharp, yellow teeth.

His men gave a cruel smile. "They are the last two. After we kill them, the curse on us should be broken," said one of his men.

...

"The restaurant is right over there, Deputy President," Rood said, pointing. He had volunteered to lead his boss here. But, when he saw the two long lines, he was shocked.

Robert was also taken aback. *So many people are waiting in front of this restaurant? This normally happens only if there is a sales promotion, or in front of top-ranking restaurants during rush dinner hours.*

"They must have known that we're coming. That's why he hired these people to deceive us," Rood said angrily. "Look at them. They're too quiet to be customers."

Robert shook his head. "I don't think so." He strode towards the lines, walked up to Brandli, and bowed slightly. "Lord Brandli, are you here for lunch?"

"Oh, hi, Robert," Brandli said, surprised. "Yes. I heard a new dish came out today, so here I am."

Rood was dumbfounded. *Such a high-ranking official is also waiting in line?* He didn't know Brandli, but he recognized the emblem on his robe.

By then, Robert's suspicion had been dispelled since he knew Brandli as an honorable magic caster. Besides, most of the people waiting here were so well-dressed it was hard to believe they had been hired by the owner here. "The food here is really that good?" he asked Brandli.

Brandli smiled. "Why don't you try it yourself? Join the line before it's too late."

Robert nodded. "If you're waiting here, then it must be good." He went to wait in line.

Rood was shocked. He walked over to his boss. "Deputy President—"

"You stand behind me, Rood," Robert interrupted. "We'll try the food here ourselves."

"Yes, Boss." Rood did as he said. He really respected Robert for his dedication to his work.

But, Rood was still in denial. *He must have pulled some strings to get such a high-ranking official here.*

"Excuse me, why are there two lines?" Robert asked the young man in front of him. He had also sensed the tension between the two lines.

“This is your first time here, right?” Jimmy said. “They have a dish called tofu pudding, which comes in two flavors. The savory one is unbelievable, but the sweet one is practically inedible.” He was taking it upon himself to promote the savory tofu pudding.

“No,” said an old man at the end of the sweet line. “The sweet one is divine; it’s the savory one that is disgusting. You should wait in this line here.”

They started the argument again.

“You’ll stop giving the savory tofu pudding one star if you know what’s good for you!”

“Like hell we are!”

Robert was surprised by their obsession with this dish. *Maybe I should try both the flavors.*

Rood was dumbfounded. He had never seen customers arguing over different flavors of one dish.

“Lulu, you chose savory tofu pudding over me. Don’t you love me anymore?” Xixi asked, disappointed.

Chapter 274: You’re a Savory Tofu Pudding Guy

The two lines suddenly fell silent. Although they were angry, they were never going to fight until their two leaders at the head said so. Now that they thought the two lovebirds were having a disagreement, they all stopped arguing, and started gazing at them.

They looked like the Beauty and the Beast. The girl was small, while the man was big; his arms were as thick as her legs.

“Of course I love you, but I don’t like sweet stuff,” said Lulu with a smile.

“Love me, love my dog,” Xixi said with a sad look.

“He doesn’t deserve you, girl. Ditch him,” said an old man.

“He loves savory tofu pudding. How good can he be?”

“A man should always do as his girl says.”

“No, young man, don’t listen to them. There are plenty of fish in the sea. You can find one who’s not so childish.”

“Yeah. Remember, you’re a savory tofu pudding guy.”

“Ditch her, and I’ll set you up with my granddaughter.”

In fact, they didn’t care if he ditched her or if she ditched him. They were just trying to spice up their disagreement.

They thought the big man would never risk losing face by submitting to his girl’s demand.

Yet Lulu walked over to Xixi and put his hand on her head. “I’m sorry that I made you sad. I’ll eat the sweet one for you.”

Xixi's eyes lit up. "I love you," she said, looking up at Lulu.

"I love you too," Lulu replied.

The other customers were surprised by this turn of events.

"Their love is so sweet, it will give me cavities!" a young man said as Lulu went to wait in the sweet line.

"Oh, this is true love. I hope I can find my one and only someday!" a girl exclaimed.

Xixi followed him to the end of the line.

Lulu was surprised to see his girl when he turned around. "What are you doing?" he asked, smiling.

"I want to be with you," Xixi said as she looked up at him.

The others watched with surprise.

"Then you stand in front of me," said Lulu.

"When did you fall in love with me, Lulu?"

Lulu shook his head. "I don't remember. When I realized I don't want to see you with any boy or girl, I knew I have fallen head over heels for you."

Xixi giggled happily.

Now the others watched with envy.

Thankfully, the restaurant had opened by then, so they quickly headed in.

"Let's go, Xixi. But, I'm not sure if there're still seats available," said Lulu.

Robert was surprised when he walked in. *It's not very big, but the tables, the chairs, the paintings, the chandeliers... Everything about this place is so beautiful and relaxing. The environment deserves five stars.*

"I'm sorry. We don't have any vacant seats right now. Would you rather wait or order roujiamo to go?" Yabemiya asked Robert.

Robert smiled back. "I'll wait."

Yabemiya nodded. "Okay."

I'll give the service five stars too, Robert thought to himself. She keeps her distance from the customers, and her smile is so warm.

If the food can match the atmosphere here, it may prove to be a dark horse, Robert thought, looking to the kitchen with quite some expectation. Wonderful smells were floating in the air.

They saw Amy sitting there with a braised chicken and rice in front of her.

Smells good! Robert thought. He noticed the earthenware bowl before the silver-haired half-elf girl. *What is that?*

Chapter 275: I Want To Have A Lot Of Babies

Now, everyone was gazing at Amy and her food, craning their necks trying to get a better look at whatever was giving off such a tempting smell.

Amy picked up her chopsticks, put a piece of brown chicken into her mouth, and started chewing happily. There was a trace of soup on her lips. After she swallowed, she licked her lips with a delighted smile.

Everyone's mouth started watering.

"It's very good," Amy whispered. Then she ate a piece of shiitake. She added some soup into the rice and took a bite, swinging her body side to side.

Some customers couldn't resist their urges anymore.

"Oh, look at her! That food she's eating must be really good!"

"Excuse me, I'd like a braised chicken and rice, please!"

"I only have eight gold coins on me; it seems I can't eat tofu pudding today. I'll have a braised chicken and rice."

He's having her eat here on purpose. A smart move! Robert thought as he looked at Mag. *Maybe I'll have a braised chicken and rice too.*

She doesn't like the food—she's just faking it! Rood told himself, but he couldn't tear his eyes away from the braised chicken. He continued swallowing saliva.

"She's so cute! I want to have a lot of babies, Lulu," Xixi said, turning to face him.

"Okay. I'll make money to provide for our big family," Lulu replied, but there was something sad in his smile.

Xixi smiled. "We'll have to find a place where they can't find us." Then she looked at Amy again and touched her stomach. "I'm hungry..."

Lulu smiled at her lovingly. "Let's order something for you to eat."

Xixi nodded happily.

"Excuse me, can I have the food that little girl is eating?" Lulu said to Yabemiya.

Yabemiya shook her head with a smile. "I'm afraid you'll have to wait. You can order braised chicken after you're seated."

"Thank you. It won't sell out by then, right?" Xixi asked.

"No, it won't," answered Yabemiya. Thanks to Amy, some people had ordered braised chicken, but most customers couldn't afford it.

"Thank you," said Xixi, smiling.

Yabemiya found herself envious of their love for each other. *I don't think anyone will ever love me.* She cleared her mind of such thoughts and got back to work.

More strong and distinctive smells came out as Mag cooked. The customers waiting got hungrier by the minute.

They argued outside, but once inside, nobody speaks loudly, Robert thought. Then he turned his eyes on Harrison, whose fat was shaking wildly. *He isn't faking that; he's really enjoying his food. No, everybody is enjoying their food. It's unbelievable.*

Now, Robert considered it completely normal for Mamy Restaurant to have over 300 customers in the morning and earn 150,000 copper coins. *This restaurant may dominate the food competition.*

No. The food is terrible; the customers are all hired by the owner, Rood thought as he stared at the roujiamo in a man's hand, his mouth was still watering.

Most of the customers were very considerate; they finished their food quickly to let the people waiting have seats.

When Robert sat down, he picked up the menu. *It's so smooth and soft! And he put such a fabulous menu on each and every table.*

He looked at the menu for a moment, and then handed it to Rood, who was sitting opposite him. "It's my treat. Order anything you want, Rood."

"Thank you, Deputy President," Rood said. He was just a lowly worker; his monthly salary was only 4,000 copper coins.

"We'll put their food to the test," said Robert. He could tell that Rood was still harboring some doubts.

"I'll have a roujiamo, then," Rood said after hesitating a while.

Chapter 276: Roujiamo! Roujiamo! Roujiamo!

"I'd like a braised chicken and rice," Xixi said, looking at the menu. "And a sweet tofu pudding. This roujiamo is that bread and meat thing, right? I'll have one. Also, a plate of Yangzhou fried rice. What do you want to eat, Lulu?"

"I'll eat your leftovers, honey." Lulu turned to Yabemiya. "That's all."

"Okay," Yabemiya said, and walked to the next customer.

"I'd like a braised chicken and rice, a roujiamo, a sweet tofu pudding, and a savory tofu pudding," Robert said, looking at Yabemiya.

"I'm sorry, sir, but one person can only order one tofu pudding."

"We're a party of two," Robert said, pointing at Rood.

"It's too much, Depu— a roujiamo is enough for me," Rood said. He almost gave away who they were.

“No. Of course you should try this tofu pudding that is driving people crazy.”

Yabemiya nodded. “Okay, please wait a moment.” She went back into the kitchen.

“Did you see the two lovebirds, Boss?” Yabemiya said. “They are really sweet on each other.”

“They’re pouring dog food¹?” Mag turned to look, and saw a big guy brushing a girl’s bangs with his big hand. He was so envious.

Sally was using the dishwasher. She was happy when she saw them, but she never showed it.

“Pouring dog food? What is that?” Yabemiya asked as she put two bowls of braised chicken on the tray.

“Um,” Mag said, “when a couple show affection towards each other, they may trigger envy, jealousy, and self-pity among single people. They’re pouring dog food. It’s a saying from where I’m from.”

“Oh.” Yabemiya nodded. “But why dog food?”

“Because we call single people single dogs.”

“I see.” Yabemiya smiled, and went back to work.

Suddenly, Mag spotted Rood among the customers. He had a good memory, so he recognized that Food Association staff member right away. *The man sitting opposite him is well-dressed. He is probably his boss.*

What are they doing here? Mag frowned. They suspect I am cheating?

They can go ahead and investigate all they want. I have a clear conscience.

Yabemiya was serving quickly, and Sally had become very good at clearing and cleaning tables.

There’re only three of them, but they’re a well-oiled machine, Robert thought, looking at Mag juggling several dishes in the kitchen.

“Your braised chicken and rice, roujiamo, sweet tofu pudding, and savory tofu pudding. Enjoy your meal,” Yabemiya said with a smile.

Robert nodded. “Thank you.” He was already totally attracted by the food.

The pleasant smells were tickling his nose, making his mouth water. *How did he make them? They smell so good!*

“Do you want to eat the sweet tofu pudding or the savory one?” Robert asked Rood.

“Either flavor is fine with me.”

“I’ll have the savory one, then.” Obviously, he liked the savory one better.

Rood’s eyes were glued to the roujiamo. He had never smelled anything so aromatic.

He had been to almost every restaurant in the Aden Square, but no food in those restaurants had ever whetted his appetite so much. His stomach had been rumbling ever since he saw other people eat, and now that the food was in front of him, he could barely resist his craving for food.

"I don't think it will be good..." Rood said stubbornly, but brought the roujiamo to his mouth and took a bite in spite of himself.

The bread was soft, the meat was tender, and the juice seeped out. His taste buds started cheering.

Rood felt like he was in heaven; he was completely enslaved by the food.

This is so good! This is divine! This food is from heaven! It should rank first! Rood thought. *300 copper coins each is not expensive at all!* Now, he didn't care if the owner here was hiring these people; he didn't care if the owner was cheating, either. A voice was screaming in his head, "Roujiamo! Roujiamo! Roujiamo!"

Chapter 277: It's Unbelievable!

After Rood swallowed, the taste lingered in his mouth, and he felt a warm current rushing wildly through his body. He suddenly felt young again.

A moan escaped his lips. *The food makes me feel so good! It's so different!*

"It's good, isn't it?" Robert asked as he picked up a piece of chicken. *He insisted the food here was terrible, but now he's enjoying it. It's really hilarious.*

Rood nodded. "Yes." He took another large bite of it.

"Let me try this braised chicken." Robert put the chicken in his mouth and bit into it. *The meat is so tender, and the soup is so tasty!* He had a pretty high standard for food like a food critic, but he found himself unable to criticize this dish.

"This is fire chicken, but it tastes better than normal," said Robert. "The meat has such a tender and soft texture. He cooked it just right. Also, the soup is just scrumptious!"

"The secret lies in the shiitakes. It's worth 100 gold coins each, and there are four in each braised chicken," said Jimmy, who was sitting at the same table.

"Shiitakes?" Robert picked up a piece of shiitake. "This kind of mushroom is worth 100 gold coins each?" He didn't know what shiitake looked like, but he recognized it by its smell. He put it into his mouth and bit into it. The delicious soup came out immediately.

"No mushrooms could compete with this! This is the mushroom of mushrooms!" exclaimed Robert. *I have never heard of this kind of mushroom before, so it must be extremely rare. It's probably really worth 100 gold coins each.*

Robert added some soup into the rice like Amy had done, and spooned some rice into his mouth. He chewed slowly. *The soup goes perfectly with the rice!* He took another bite.

This is worth more than 800, Robert thought. His body felt warm. *To think I suspected the prices.*

Rood put down the bag, his face red from the rushing blood. "It's unbelievable!"

Robert was too engrossed in eating to reply.

Rood took a bite of tofu pudding. It was so sweet that he was immediately lost in it.

“Excuse me, can I have another bowl of rice?” Robert asked Yabemiya, his braised chicken half eaten.

Yabemiya nodded. “Sure.”

Robert and Rood entirely forgot why they’d come here in the first place

That roused a sense of triumph in Mag.

Then Mag noticed the girl with a black veil sitting in the corner. *She comes here every day, and she always sits in that corner, eating her tofu pudding and Yangzhou fried rice. Who is she?*

Her clothes are brighter and more colorful; I guess she’s not as gloomy as before.

Gloria felt someone was staring at her. She raised her head, and met Mag’s eyes.

Her heart started pounding. *He is looking at me?* she wondered, nervous. *No, why would anyone look at me?*

Mag returned to cooking. He wasn’t falling for her; he was just curious.

Gloria felt relieved, and also a little disappointed. She started eating her tofu pudding again.

“You’re so beautiful, Big Sister,” Amy said to Xixi with Ugly Duckling in her arms. “Are you an elf or a Flower Fairy?”

Chapter 278: I Feel I Can Eat 10 More Bowls Of Rice

Xixi smiled. “She’s so cute, and she calls me big sister!” she said to Lulu. Then she turned to Amy and shook her head. “No. I’m not an elf or a Flower Fairy, but I was kind of an elf 100 years ago.”

Lulu looked at Xixi and Amy with a big smile.

“So you’re over 100 years old?” Amy was astonished. “But you look so young and pretty.”

“Thank you. I thought I was old.” Xixi beamed, stroking Amy’s hair. “What’s your name?”

Amy found her really pleasant. “I’m Amy, and this is Ugly Duckling.”

“Your name is as beautiful as you. You can call me Sister Xixi. But, it looks like a cat. Why do you call it Ugly Duckling?”

“It came out of an egg, so it must be a duckling. But it’s so ugly, so I call it Ugly Duckling. Although it’s ugly now, it will grow into a swan, and then...” Amy dropped her gaze to the kitten, staring at it as if it were a gourmet dish.

“Meow, meow,” Ugly Duckling cried, suddenly frightened.

“So lovely! Come on, give me a hug,” Xixi asked.

“You want to hug Ugly Duckling?”

“No. You’re lovelier than it is. I want to hug you,” Xixi said, looking at Amy with loving eyes.

Amy hesitated a moment and then nodded. “Okay.” *She looks so kind and gentle.*

“Thank you.” Xixi gently lifted her up onto her lap and touched the kitten’s head. “Ugly Duckling is cute too. Your father is so lucky to have a lovely girl like you.”

Normally, Ugly Duckling would shun strangers, but not this time. It was enjoying her touch; it even rubbed its head against her hand.

“No. I’m lucky to have him. He is a great cook and so handsome. My father is the best man in the world,” Amy said solemnly.

Xixi laughed. “I’m sure he is. It must be great to have a father who’s a talented cook. You get to eat all kinds of yummy food.”

Lulu clenched his fists and looked a little sad. His mouth opened and closed.

“Your braised chicken and rice. Enjoy,” Yabemiya said, putting the dish down in front of Xixi. She was surprised to see Amy being held in her arms. *I thought Amy only liked to be hugged by Mag.*

Amy got down from her laps. “Try it, Sister Xixi. It’s very good.”

“Its smell is so inviting! And there are little moons in the rice grains!” Xixi’s eyes were shining with surprise. “Let’s eat, Lulu.”

Lulu shook his head. “I’ll watch you eat. I’ll eat after you’ve had enough.” His eyes were filled with love and care.

“Lulu? Your name is so strange, Big Bear,” Amy said to Lulu.

Xixi laughed. “Big Bear. I like this nickname. Thank you, Amy.” She picked up a piece of chicken and held it to his mouth. “Eat this, honey. There may be nothing left after I’ve had enough.”

“I don’t think you can eat all of it,” he said, but he opened his mouth and ate it. His eyes lit up.

They had been to many places during all these years of running. Every time they arrived in a new place, they looked for restaurants to eat in since Xixi was a foodie. They sometimes got found or ambushed because of that, but Lulu always indulged her.

He had tried so many kinds of food, but none of them could compete with this; it was on a different level.

Xixi knew Lulu to be indifferent to the food he put into his mouth, so one look at his face, and she could tell the food was good. “Is it really that good?” she asked.

“Yes. It’s very good. Go ahead and eat,” Lulu answered with a smile, pushing the bowl towards Xixi.

“Eat with me, then.”

“No. I’ll watch you eat.” He stroked her head. “You’ll like it.”

“Okay.” She put a piece of chicken into her mouth. She had eaten a lot of fire chicken as they often traveled through the woods, but she had never thought it could taste this delectable.

Then she ate a piece of shiitake. *The soup is intoxicating!*

She put some soup into the rice, and sent a spoonful of rice into her mouth.

“It’s so good! I feel I can eat 10 more bowls of rice!” Xixi said, excited.

Lulu smiled. “Eat as much as you want.” He reached out his hand, plucked a rice grain off her cheek, and put it into his mouth. “Excuse me, we’d like another braised chicken and 10 more bowls of rice,” he said to Yabemiya.

Chapter 279: The World Tree

Yabemiya looked at him uncertainly. “10 bowls of rice? That’s a lot.”

“Four, then. We can always order more later, right?” Lulu asked.

“Sure.” Yabemiya went back into the kitchen.

“This braised chicken is amazing, Amy,” said Xixi with a radiant smile. “I envy you for having such a talented father. This is the most delicious food I’ve ever eaten!” She decided this dish had blown away all the other foods she had ever had.

Amy was very proud and happy. “Father is the best cook in the world!”

Suddenly, Xixi felt warm in her belly. She looked down, incredulous. She thought she had imagined it, but the warm feeling was becoming clearer by the minute as if her wound was healing.

Xixi made a heart shape with her hands over her belly, and whispered some spells. A green light appeared from her hands and circled her belly; then, a 10-centimeter-tall seedling slowly came out.

The tree had shriveled and looked dead, but on the top of it, a small leaf was turning green; it looked extra conspicuous.

Xixi was so happy that she cried. She looked at the little tree as if it were her own baby. “The World Tree has revived!”

Lulu stood up quickly. “Thank God!” He walked over to her, crouched down, and looked at the tree with a blissful look, his hands shaking with excitement.

Xixi’s tears were streaming down her cheeks.

Lulu held her in his arms; she buried her face in his chest, tears wetting his shirt. “You’ll soon be able to bear children again,” Lulu said. “We will revive the dryads.”

Over 100 years ago, the dryads had got wiped out. Lulu and Xixi had escaped with a seed of the World Tree, but their enemies had never stopped hunting them. Many times, they had found themselves trapped in dangerous situations.

Xixi got pregnant 30 years ago. They found a secret place in a valley near a lake to wait for the baby to come, but clearly it was not secret enough. They were found.

With a baby in her belly, Xixi was not as agile as before. They barely made it out alive, but a poisoned arrow caught her in the belly and killed the baby.

The seedling gave its vitality to her and brought her back from the brink of death, but it shriveled.

They had tried countless ways to revive it—they had even bought some water from the Spring of Life—but to no avail.

Because of her wound, Xixi lost her ability to bear children. It was cruel, especially for a girl who liked kids.

It really broke Lulu's heart every time he saw her play with children.

But now, everything might change. If the World Tree revived, it could provide her with energy and power. Her wound would heal, and she would be able to bear children again.

Hope had been ignited; they had found their purpose in life again.

Amy didn't understand why they suddenly started crying, but she decided not to disturb them.

The customers nearby looked at them, confused.

"The food is so delicious that it made her cry?" a customer whispered.

"Probably. I'm halfway through my life, but it's the first time I've eaten such delicious food. It's so sad when I think about the fact that I don't have many years to live to eat this," a middle-aged man said, wiping the tears off the corners of his eyes.

"You're so embarrassing, Father." His young son picked up his bowl and turned away.

The middle-aged man slapped his chopsticks down on the table. "Oh, am I?"

"I'm sorry, Father. Please don't do anything rash that might lead to us being banned."

His father looked at Amy, picked up his chopsticks, and started eating again.

Xixi's sobbing wasn't loud, so she didn't disturb other customers.

"I think the World Tree was revived because of this braised chicken, Lulu," she said. She had stopped crying, but her eyes were still red. "So I decided to have one more bowl."

Chapter 280: You're Lying Again, Big Bear

"Okay," Lulu said, smiling, wiping off the tears on her face.

"But I may get fat if I eat too much. Promise you will love me no matter what."

"I promise. You're in my heart, baby. When you get fat, you'll be trapped inside and never be able to leave." Lulu smiled.

Xixi laughed happily.

"If a man said that to me, I'd marry him on the spot," a fat girl said with an envious look in her eyes.

"You're too fat to get into any man's heart," her mother said.

"You hurt my feelings, Mom."

"Oh, are you so inconsolable that you can't eat? If so, I'll eat your tofu pudding for you. Your father said my skin had got softer."

"No! I need some comfort food right now." The girl picked up her tofu pudding quickly and started eating.

"You're lying, Big Bear. Your heart is so small; how can Sister Xixi get in?" Amy asked solemnly.

Lulu was stumped.

"Big Bear may look like an honest man, but he's lying to you," Amy said. "And I heard dishonest men make bad husbands. If you get fat, Sister Xixi, you might become less attractive, and men all like attractive women. We should be independent of men. That way, they'll take us more seriously."

The other customers felt quite happy now that Amy's little speech put a damper on their jealousy-triggering relationship.

Amy was a child, so she was the perfect person to tell them that without affecting their love for each other.

Xixi nodded. "Amy is right. If I got fat, I wouldn't be able to put on beautiful dresses." She stroked Amy's hair. "How do you know so much?"

Amy smiled. "I learned it from gossip."

"Okay," Xixi said, and turned to Lulu. "Promise me you'll never lie to me, Lulu."

Lulu nodded earnestly. "I promise. You're my everything."

"You're lying again, Big Bear." Amy pointed at the bamboo basket by his feet. "You have this too. I saw you carry it in."

Lulu took a look at the basket, and didn't know what to say.

Attagirl! the other customers thought.

Xixi guffawed and looked very happy.

Lulu scratched his head, grinned, and resumed his seat. He was a little afraid to speak in front of Amy now.

An interesting couple. Why does the World Tree sound so familiar? Are they dryads? Mag wondered.

There was nothing about dryads in Mag Alex's memory, but Mag had bought an old history book about the Norland Continent the other day. The bookseller had told him that it was over 100 years old. After

some haggling, Mag had taken it home for one gold coin. He read it when he had time, and now had a general idea about the history of the Norland Continent.

The book said little about dryads.

Apparently, dryads were a branch of elves, but they preferred to call themselves night elves. The Wind Forest wasn't their holy land, and they had their own holy tree—the World Tree.

The war that happened 100 years ago spread to dryads. Their holy land was laid waste to, the thousand-meter-tall World Tree got cut down, and the dryads, among other species, were wiped out.

The writer of the book speculated that the elves were behind the massacre because they had always considered dryads a threat.

I don't know what really happened to them, Mag thought, but if they are dryads, they might be the only ones who survived the massacre.

“Your braised chicken and four bowls of rice. Do you want the other dishes to be served now?” Yabemiya said.

“No. Serve them later, please,” replied Lulu while Xixi picked up a bowl of rice.

Yabemiya nodded. “Okay.”

“Enjoy your meal, Sister Xixi.” Amy smiled, and went to help Sally collect money.

Xixi immersed in the food immediately.