

Fields of Gold Chapter 17

Yu Xiaocao glared at her brother. "Are you stupid? Why would we let Grandmother know? Can't we learn from Eldest Aunt's example? She eats food on the sly all the time!"

Their eldest aunt, Madam Li, never came back from her maiden home empty-handed. However, all of the food she brought back was hidden in her rooms. Only when no one was around would she surreptitiously take out some snacks and eat them with her son.

Yu Xiaocao bought ten more meat buns and had the hawker wrap them up carefully in oiled paper. The wrapped package was then stuffed into their battered ceramic pot. Earlier, they had placed some old rags on the top to hide their precious abalones. They also used the same tactic now to hide their forbidden pastries.

By the time the two of them arrived at the city gate, they could see that Uncle Ma was already there, waiting for them. The older matron who sold vegetables was also there. Her face was lit up with happiness. Judging by the large empty basket next to the woman, it wasn't hard to see why.

"Xiaosha, Xiaocao, hurry up! We're just waiting for you two!" Uncle Ma stood up when he saw them and waved to the two siblings.

"What about the lady who was selling eggs?" Yu Xiaocao inquired as she hopped onto the donkey cart. "She's not here yet."

The older lady who sold vegetables smiled, "Oh her? She sold off all of her eggs earlier and left already. She asked me to help her bring her basket back home. Xiaocao, what's in that pot of yours? It looks pretty heavy."

Yu Xiaocao sighed dejectedly, a sad expression on her little face. "My mother made some fermented soybean paste. We had wanted to see if we could sell them for a few copper coins and buy some coarse grains back home. But we couldn't even sell a copper coin's worth earlier! And now we're down the four copper coins that we used for the ride here!"

When the matron heard it was soybean paste, she lost interest in the contents of the pot. She comforted the little girl absentmindedly and then leaned her body against the side of the wagon and dozed off.

Yu Hang couldn't help but stare at his little sister when he heard her glibly lie between her teeth. Where did she learn to lie so easily? That's not good. When he got back home, he needed to remind his mother to raise her more carefully. Otherwise, his sister might grow up to be too crooked.

When the two siblings arrived back to their village, they saw a familiar, tall figure standing on the road, waiting anxiously for them.

"Father? Father! We're back!" Yu Xiaocao balanced the heavy ceramic pot in her hand as she ran with a staggering gait towards Yu Hai.

Yu Hai put down the game in his hands, effortlessly lifted his daughter up in the air, and faced his son with a stern look on his face. "You're pretty brave, huh? You took your little sister out without a word to anyone, eh? Two little kids running around without anyone to look out for you. What if you guys encountered some bad people?"

He then turned to his daughter and spoke in a softer tone, "Cao'er, in the future, if you want to go into town tell father! Father will bring you there. It's already past lunchtime, you must be hungry right? Father made sure to leave three steamed rolls [1] for you. You should eat them while they're still hot!"

Ehhhh! Doting only on the daughter, he was truly a fool for his youngest daughter! Yu Xiaocao had a bashful expression on her face while being carried by her father. She wriggled out of her father's grasp and said, "Older brother and I have already eaten in town! We ate two large meat buns! I'm so full now, father! I also bought some for you too! You should eat them while we walk!"

Yu Xiaocao knew her grandmother's miserly temperament. Since her father had steamed rolls for them to eat, it meant that he had to go hungry. This man woke up at the crack of dawn to go hunting in the mountains and later had to go into town to sell his game. It wasn't right for him to go hungry.

Yu Xiaocao forced three pastries into her father's hands. She looked at the mangled and bloody game on the ground and felt her heart skip a beat. "Father, I want to eat roasted pheasant. Is it possible to leave one of these for me?" Hunting today went so-so. Yu Hai had only caught some small game: two Reeves's pheasants, three wild hares, and two plump nondescript wild birds.

Yu Hang pulled gently at his sister's sleeves and whispered, "Grandmother already saw the game that father caught today. She always knows how much money these will go for. If he comes back with less money, all hell will break loose! Didn't we already eat some meat buns today? We'll eat some pheasant meat in the future!"

The congenial expression on Yu Hai's didn't change throughout the whole interaction between his two children. "Leaving you a pheasant is not a problem! But your older brother is also right, Cao'er. After your latest illness, your stomach is still quite weak. So you shouldn't eat roasted pheasant right now. In a few days, once your body is all better, Father will definitely leave you a nice, fat pheasant for you to eat!"

Yu Xiaocao was pretty sure that there was nothing wrong with her body now. But it was obvious that no one in her immediate family believed that. It looked like she still had to prove herself to them!

Following that, the two siblings ran around the village, looking for their mother, Xiaolian, and little brother. They soon discovered that their mother was at the creek washing the bedsheets. Xiaolian had taken Little Shitou out to the foot of the West Mountains to pick up some firewood.

No one lived at the foot of the West Mountains, and few people from the village went there normally. It was the perfect place—cough cough—for dividing out their secretly acquired meat buns. The two of them split to complete their mission. Yu Hang went to the river to find Madam Liu while Xiao Cao took the ceramic pot with the pastries to the foot of the mountains.

"Mother, mother! Xiaocao, she...ah...you should come over and look yourself!" A lot of other women from the village were washing their laundry at the bank of the stream. Yu Hang didn't dare to explain the situation clearly, and he also was too honest to come up with a good lie on the spot. The only thing he could do was to insinuate there was something wrong with his younger sister.

When Madam Liu heard his half-finished sentence, she hurriedly got up. The sheet in her hands almost slipped out and drifted away into the creek.

Yu Hang instantly felt guilty when he saw how worried she was. He tried to backtrack, "Mother, don't worry! Little sister is fine!"

"You're not a doctor," Madam Liu retorted. "How would you know for sure your sister is okay? I need to see her myself. Auntie Futian, do you mind keeping an eye on these sheets for me? If I don't come back

before you're done, could you do me a favor and bring them back for me?" Liu Muyun wiped her hands dry and then rushed after her son. The two of them pelted in the direction of the West Mountains.

"Ah...it must be Xiaocao again! Dahai's wife has a cruel fate in this lifetime..." All of the women who were doing laundry in the river were used to Madam Liu leaving halfway before she finished her load. Nine times out of ten, it usually had something to do with her sickly daughter.

On the other hand, Yu Xiaocao was having a more difficult time finding her sister and brother. The mountains here covered a large area, and there were plenty of places for two children to pick up firewood. Luckily, Xiaolian and Little Shitou were both cautious and didn't dare to venture deep into the mountain range. The two of them stayed at the foot of the mountains. With a little bit of effort, Xiaocao finally found them.

"Oh my goodness, I'm so tired right now! You two really lead me on a merry chase!" lamented Xiaocao when she found the two of them. She collapsed onto the ground and sat on the long grass, completely out of breath. She used her small fists to punch her legs in an effort to loosen the muscles up. This little body is seriously too weak! Even after walking this short of a distance tired it out! In the distance, Madam Liu, who was following her oldest son, could see what had happened. She ran all the way there, her heart in her mouth. When she got to where Xiaocao had collapsed, she swept her daughter into her arms and repeatedly asked, "Cao'er, where do you feel uncomfortable? Mother will bring you home... Xiaosha, go find Doctor You right now."

Yu Hang didn't immediately leave and instead asked his sister with concern, "Youngest sister, do you really not feel well?"

"What do you mean by 'do you really not feel well'? Are you saying that she's faking it? Go find the doctor!" Liu Muyun exclaimed. She bent down and held her youngest daughter.

Yu Xiaocao saw that her mother's face had gone white with worry, so she quickly scampered up and jumped twice on the ground to show Madam Liu that she was fine. "Mother, I'm fine! Who told you I wasn't feeling well? Tell me and I'll hit them for you! Eldest Brother, were you the one who scared mother?"

"Are you sure you're feeling okay?" Madam Liu inspected her daughter from head to toe. Xiaocao really didn't look like she had fallen ill again. She felt relieved, so she turned to scold her son, "So what did you call me here for? You interrupted me while I was in the middle of washing! I still have half of the sheets to do!"

Yu Xiaocao quickly came to her brother's defense. "Mom, didn't we visit town today? I bought some meat buns for all of us. Here, take a taste!"

[1] Steamed rolls