

Gold Chapter 171

Fields of Gold Chapter 171 - Watermelon Shop

Madam Hu didn't say anything at this time. She was somewhat interested in the idea until she heard that a cart of watermelons cost over fifty taels. If they couldn't sell them, how many years would it take for them to repay the debt?

“Second Maternal Uncle, don't worry about the cart! We're going to buy a horse carriage, so you can borrow our donkey cart! It just depends on whether you guys have the courage to do this!” Yu Xiaocao also wanted to help her maternal grandmother's family. She had already made herself very clear. If her maternal uncles couldn't make up their minds, then there's nothing that she could do.

While Liu Han was still hesitating, Madam Hu's eyes shifted around and she whispered, “Husband, should we... work together with Eldest Brother-in-law?” In this way, they could share the risk with someone. If they needed to repay the money, there would be less pressure with two branches of the family.

Liu Han, who couldn't make a decision, also felt that he should ask for his eldest brother's opinion. 'It just so happens that Eldest Brother took Zhiwei to work at the docks today. I can discuss this matter with him when I see him later!'

“Miss Yu, I brought you the horse carriage!!” Qian Xiaoduo drove a horse carriage over with an unfamiliar worker. Seeing that everyone was busy in the watermelon fields, he didn't treat himself as an outsider and helped them load the watermelons onto the carriage.

They had already signed a supply contract with Zhenxiu Restaurant. Madam Liu saw that Qian Xiaoduo and other staff had come over on two carriages. The brand-new one was for their family, while the other one was for buying watermelons!

“Little brother Qian, how many watermelons do you guys want?” Madam Liu took the scale and asked Qian Xiaoduo with a kind smile.

Qian Xiaoduo said sweetly, “Auntie, just leave it! How can I bother you to weigh such heavy watermelons ah?! Little Haozi, you go help Auntie carry the scale!”

Little Haozi? Yu Xiaocao looked at the thin and small teenager and had a hard time suppressing her laughter. Little Haozi's face flushed and muttered, "My name is Niu Hao. It's the hao from the word vast, not the hao from the word mouse!"

Qian Xiaoduo snickered and said, "Haha! Stop explaining and get to work. After weighing the watermelons, we still need to gather the vegetables!"

It was the first day of Zhenxiu Restaurant's free fruit tray event. They weren't sure if the reactions would be good, so they only bought two hundred catties of watermelons. They still purchased the usual amount of vegetables, filling the carriage to the brim.

Yu Hai picked out all the ripe watermelons in the fields and filled a horse carriage and donkey cart with them. Xiaocao drove the donkey cart, while he steered the horse carriage. The father-daughter pair followed Zhenxiu Restaurant's carriage and headed to town unhurriedly.

Fang Zizhen was currently in the store in town and preparing for the grand opening tomorrow. In fact, Yu Xiaocao didn't plan to operate this store for a long time. Thus, it was furnished very simply. The signboard of 'Tanggu Watermelon Shop' had already been hung above the entrance of the store, but it was covered by a red cloth at this time. Inside the shop, there were custom-made wooden shelves with wooden planks nailed all around the racks to ensure that the watermelons wouldn't fall off the shelves.

The storefront next door had already been rented out. 'Splendid Brocades Manor' was a store that sold high quality fabrics such as silks and satins. At this time, the owner of Splendid Brocades Manor and several noble customers looked at the shop next door from time to time.

"Shopkeeper Feng, do you know who rented the shop next door? What kind of business are they doing? The interior looks so shabby. It won't be a general store, right? If they put a bunch of sundries at the entrance, it will affect your business!" The eldest young miss of the town's Zhuang Family pursed her lips in disdain and shook her handkerchief as she spoke.

Shopkeeper Feng was a woman under the age of thirty, with a fair complexion and a slightly plump figure. She beamed with joy and said, "No, I don't think so! How much money can a general store make? The rent here isn't cheap. Do you guys see? That man, who is busily working, is a government official! He was dressed in an official's robe last time he came here!"

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang's bosom friend, Miss Wang, revealed a curious expression and looked at the layers of shelves next door again. She asked, "Weren't they going to start business tomorrow? Why isn't there any goods in the store today? How weird!"

Shopkeeper Feng was about to say something when she saw a carriage packed with watermelons in front of her store. She was stunned for a moment. Watermelons weren't popularized at this time. She was born and raised in the little town of Tanggu, so she had never seen a watermelon before.

"Aiya! It's here, it's here!!" Miss Wang put down the cloth in her hands and took two steps towards the door. Sure enough, the carriage stopped in front of the shop next door.

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang was holding a brocade embroidered with lotus flowers against her body and examining it. When she heard her words, she said, "What's coming? Can you stop making a fuss! So embarrassing!"

Regardless of their foundations in Tanggu Town or family background, the Zhuang Family was stronger than the Wang Family. As a result, Eldest Young Miss Zhuang would always unconsciously display a sense of superiority.

Miss Wang didn't take it to heart and said, "The goods for next door has arrived! Hey, it looks like the watermelon that I ate at your house!"

"Watermelon? How can there be people selling watermelons in our Tanggu Town? The watermelon from last time was brought back by my older brother, who went on a study trip to the capital!" With a face of disbelief, Eldest Young Miss Zhuang continued to look at the fabrics.

Miss Wang looked at the big and round watermelons being moved into the store next door and said with slight uncertainty, "Maybe it's not? The watermelon that I ate last time at your house wasn't as big and fresh!"

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang threw the cloth in her hands, glared at her, and said, "You're complaining that the watermelon at my house is small and not fresh? Then why don't your family take out a bigger and fresher one ah! I didn't hear you complain that it's not fresh when you were eating it! I didn't even eat as much as you!!"

Miss Wang's face flushed bright red upon hearing her words, and she murmured, "Ah-mei, don't be angry. That wasn't what I meant..."

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang wasn't in the mood to shop for fabric anymore. She went out the door of Splendid Brocades Manor with heavy footsteps and was about to enter the shop next door.

"This young miss, please stop! Our shop hasn't opened yet, so it's really messy right now. It's better not to dirty your embroidered shoes!" Yu Xiaocao was ordered by her godfather to stand on the sidelines and watch them move the watermelons. She, who was bored stiff, said to Eldest Young Miss Zhuang, who was about to enter the door.

When Eldest Young Miss Zhuang heard her words, she really stopped in her tracks. She looked at Xiaocao's clothes with a scrutinizing gaze, and then revealed a look of contempt. She asked in a haughty manner, "Little girl, what exactly are you guys selling in this shop?"

Yu Xiaocao was someone with a keen sight. Eldest Young Miss Zhuang was dressed in exquisite clothing and fine jewelry. It was obvious that she was a young miss from a noble family, who could be one of her potential customers ah! Customers were top priority, customers were supreme.

Xiaocao politely said, "We are a watermelon shop! Not to boast, but our watermelons are sweet and juicy. Absolutely high quality and inexpensive!"

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang watched as Wu Yun passed by with a large watermelon in his hands, enter the shop and put it on the shelf. She asked in disbelief, "What? You're really selling watermelons? Where did you guys get these watermelons? It looks really fresh!"

With a slightly proud tone, Yu Xiaocao replied, "We planted them ourselves. We just picked them from our fields this morning, so of course, they're fresh!"

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang exclaimed unbelievably, "Someone in Tanggu Town is growing watermelons? Why didn't I hear about this before? Little girl, you aren't lying, are you?"

"What's the point in lying to you? It's also my family's first time growing watermelons. We asked the young boss of Zhenxiu Restaurant to help us find the seeds, but we didn't expect that it would really grow—Godfather, Uncle Li, Uncle Wu, thanks for the hard work! Come sit down, wash your hands, and rest for a while! I'll go cut a watermelon for you guys to quench your thirst!" Seeing that her godfather

and his two subordinates were almost done unloading the watermelons, Yu Xiaocao hastily called out to them.

Her godfather and his two subordinates were such good workers. A portion of the unloaded watermelons were organized on the shelves according to their size, while the rest were stacked inside a room in the rear courtyard.

Fang Zizhen chortled as he looked at his goddaughter busily looking for a knife and washing the watermelon, like she was a little squirrel storing autumn food. He felt a sense of 'everything was well with a daughter' within his heart.

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang should have left, but her eyes were glued to the shelves after shelves of watermelons. Just like what Miss Wang said, the watermelons were big and round. But... was it possible to grow watermelons in Tanggu Town? Were these watermelons edible? She couldn't move her feet at all.

She quietly stared at the little girl, who was dressed in ordinary clothing, pick out a big watermelon, wash the skin, and cut it on top of a table in the shop. With a cutting tool that looked like a long knife, she neatly cut the watermelon in half. The red pulp and black seeds appeared before her eyes, and she could smell a refreshingly sweet fragrance from afar.

The watermelon was cut up into small pieces. Fang Zizhen had already picked up a piece in haste and ate it with big mouthfuls. The red juice had dripped down his beard, but he didn't bother to wipe it.

For the sake of his daughter's store, Fang Zizhen had made an all-out effort and he had been busy from morning till now. He didn't even have time to rest and drink a sip of water. The sweet and juicy watermelon moisturized his dry and thirsty throat. The cool feeling penetrated into the bottom of his heart.

Seeing their master eating with relish, Li Li and Wu Yun couldn't help but pick up a piece each and lightly take a small bite. Their eyes suddenly lit up, and before they had even swallowed their first bite, they already took another bite impatiently. They didn't even want to spit the seeds out.

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang used her handkerchief to cover her mouth in disgust when she saw the three men eating in a boorish manner. But she couldn't help swallowing the excessive saliva within her mouth.

“Gulp...”

Miss Zhuang was shocked and thought that she was the one who made a loud swallowing sound. How could she allow herself to make a fool out of herself? She was about to turn around and leave, but she noticed Miss Wang was swallowing her saliva incessantly beside her. She breathed a sigh of relief inwardly. 'I knew it! That embarrassing sound just now, how could it have possibly come from me?'

“Stop embarrassing yourself here! If you want to eat it, just wait until they open for business tomorrow and buy it!” Eldest Young Miss Zhuang covered her face with her handkerchief and returned next door to Splendid Brocades Manor. Miss Wang walked away unwillingly and looked back repeatedly at every step.

“Three older sisters! This is the watermelon that we're selling in our shop. Please try it! If you like the taste, you are welcome to visit us tomorrow!” Yu Xiaocao placed the small pieces of watermelon neatly on a plate. She carried the plate on a tray and walked into the fabric shop with a smile.

Miss Wang widened her eyes in surprise and exclaimed, “You're letting us eat it? For free?”

Fields of Gold Chapter 172 - Grand Opening

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang scornfully rolled her eyes at her close friend. If she could choose again, she would rather not know this person. She was seriously too disgraceful! Even her own class had been dragged down by her!! However—she really didn't want to admit it, but she also slightly coveted the watermelon in her heart.

Shopkeeper Feng had been doing business for many years, so she could more or less guess what her customers were thinking. Based on her observation, Miss Zhuang was slightly reserved but she couldn't help peeping at the plate of fruit. Miss Wang, on the other hand, didn't hide her interest in the watermelon. She looked like she wanted to eat it but was too embarrassed to accept it.

She took the tray very understandingly, smiled at the delicate and smart little girl in front of her, and said, “Thank you very much! May I ask for your surname?”

“My surname is Yu. Older sisters, if you guys like the taste, remember to come support us tomorrow ah!” Yu Xiaocao smiled sweetly at the boss lady, waved her hands, and returned to tidy up her shop.

They were going to open early in the morning tomorrow, so today, she had asked for her father's permission to stay overnight in the store. Most of the stores on this street of Tanggu Town had a two-entrance courtyard with wing rooms behind the shop.

Shopkeeper Feng watched as the little girl went back next door, touched her own face, and said with a smile, "This little fellow, I'm almost old enough to be her mother, yet she called me 'older sister'? Do I really look that young?"

Miss Wang asked eagerly, "Shopkeeper Feng, she's letting us try this watermelon, right? What a generous little girl ah!"

"It's something homegrown and won't cost much money for her, so what's so generous about that? But, how can a peasant family afford to rent such an expensive shop? When did farmers become so rich?" Eldest Young Miss Zhuang looked at the watermelon, which was cut into small pieces and had a toothpick stuck into them, and spoke in a slightly mean manner.

Miss Wang knew her temperament, so she automatically filtered the unpleasant parts of her words and said with a smile, "Maybe the watermelons were grown on their own plantation? But, I have never heard of a family surnamed Yu among the wealthy households in Tanggu Town!"

Shopkeeper Feng furrowed her brows, thought for a moment, and then said, "Surnamed Yu? I think the landlord of this shop that I rented is surnamed Yu. But, the person who signed the contract with me was the official that I mentioned earlier."

"This might be her family's store ah! Just now, I heard the little girl call that bearded man 'godfather'! Let me try the taste of the watermelon produced in our Tanggu Town!"

Miss Wang picked up a toothpick impatiently and stuffed the red melon pulp into her mouth. The expression on her face immediately relaxed. She choked on the sweet juice and wanted to cough but was unwilling to spit out the juice in the mouth. Thus, her face turned bright red from suppressing her cough.

"Just look at you! Don't tell others that you know me when you go out!" Eldest Young Miss Zhuang moved to the side for fear that the girl would spray her saliva on herself.

Miss Wang finally swallowed the watermelon in her mouth and coughed a few times. She couldn't hold herself back and picked up another piece. She stuffed it into her mouth and mumbled, "So sweet! It's really sweet!! It's even sweeter than the watermelon that I ate at your house. If you don't believe, then try it!!"

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang finally stopped putting up a front and picked up a toothpick delicately with her fingers arranged in the shape of an orchid [1]. She used the handkerchief in her other hand to cover the side of her mouth, and then gently delivered the piece of watermelon into her mouth. A sweet and cool taste instantly burst inside her mouth and the watermelon juice almost flowed out along the side of her mouth. As she wiped the corner of her mouth with her handkerchief, she savored the taste of the watermelon in her mouth.

It was a kind of sweetness that was different from all other types of sweetness. Generally, something this sweet had a cloying taste. However, there was a refreshing feeling in the sweetness of this watermelon. No matter how much she ate, she wouldn't feel sick of it. This type of sweetness was exactly what Eldest Young Miss Zhuang liked!!

After savoring the sweetness in her mouth, she looked up and saw Miss Wang eating without stopping, nearly finishing the whole plate of watermelon. Eldest Young Miss Zhuang's heart exploded with anger, but she suppressed herself.

She took the fruit tray away from Miss Wang somewhat unyieldingly, glared at her fiercely, and said, "Like a cow chewing on peony! You're just wasting this plate of watermelon!!"

Seeing the fruit tray gradually move away from her, Miss Wang stretched out her hands and pitifully said, "Don't! I haven't had enough yet!"

"How much would you have to eat until it's enough for you? Can you even taste anything when you're eating so fast?" Eldest Young Miss Zhuang slowly picked up a piece of watermelon from the plate and savored it carefully. Beside her, Miss Wang was drooling as she looked on with eager eyes.

There originally wasn't many pieces of watermelon on the plate and Miss Wang had just eaten more than half of the plate, so the rest was quickly eaten by Miss Zhuang. She wiped her mouth with her handkerchief and still wanted more. She lifted her feet and walked next door unhurriedly.

“Older Sister Ah-mei, where are you going?” The tagalong, Miss Wang, followed closely behind her.

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang ignored her and arrived at the shop next door. She saw the little girl, who sent the fruit tray over earlier, directing three grown men to organize the shelves. She cleared her throat and when she saw the little girl look over, she said, “Thank you for the watermelon. It tastes really good! I came to return the tray!”

“Older Sister is being too courteous! You could have just left it next door and I would have retrieved it later!!” Seeing that her eyes seemed stuck on the watermelons on the shelves, Xiaocao knew that she was very satisfied with her family's watermelons.

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang walked into the shop like a willow tree blown by a light breeze and looked at the price on the shelves. What are 'five taels', 'four taels', and 'three taels'? Five taels per catty? Even the watermelons in the capital weren't so expensive!! But, her watermelon did seem much better than the watermelon from the capital.

“Help me weigh several of the biggest watermelons. I'll send someone to retrieve them tomorrow when you guys open for business! This is the deposit!!” Eldest Young Miss Zhuang took out a golden ingot that was worth five taels of gold [2] and handed it to Yu Xiaocao.

Gold ingot? Yu Xiaocao had dealt with silver and bank notes, but she had never seen this golden thing! Based on the size, it should be at least five taels, which meant that it was fifty taels of silver! To be so generous, she was definitely the young miss of a noble family!!

“This older sister, the watermelons in our shop are sold on a per unit basis. All the watermelons on this shelf are around twenty catties, and they cost five taels of silver each. With the amount of your deposit, you can buy ten watermelons of this size!! If there aren't that many people in your family, you can just buy two of them back to eat. In the future, we will transport fresh watermelons here every day. It's better to buy fresh ones to eat each day, and the taste will also be better!” Yu Xiaocao adhered to the true meaning of 'customers first' and sincerely advised Eldest Young Miss Zhuang.

Although Eldest Young Miss Zhuang had a proud temperament, she wasn't someone who couldn't tell good from bad. She felt slightly better about the little girl after she heard her words. She smiled faintly and said, “So it's five taels for one ah! The price is much cheaper than the ones in the capital! It really is tasty and inexpensive!! Then I'll order ten first. They're not only for my family to eat. Since it won't be considered unsightly to send them as gifts, I can also send them to friends and relatives!”

“Alright!” She was rich and imposing, and Yu Xiaocao naturally didn't mind earning more money. So, she took the little golden ingot with a radiant smile on her face and said, “This older sister, I'll give you a receipt for you...”

“No need, it's not that much money! Tomorrow, you can just give the watermelons to the servant sent from the Zhuang Family!” Eldest Young Miss Zhuang didn't really care about a mere fifty taels of silver, so it didn't matter whether there was a receipt or not.

Miss Wang wandered around the shop a few times and was overjoyed after she heard the price. She originally thought that such a delicious watermelon would surely be expensive. She had heard from Eldest Young Miss Zhuang that the watermelon that her older brother bought from the capital cost two taels per catty! A small watermelon cost several dozens taels. She was the daughter of a merchant, but even with her entire year of allowance, she still wouldn't be able to buy a watermelon.

She hadn't expected that she could buy a watermelon for five taels of silver at this watermelon shop. In this way, she could buy a watermelon every month with her monthly allowance!

“I want to order one too. I'll come to get it tomorrow myself!!” Miss Wang took out a five tael silver ingot from her embroidered purse and smiled like a little hamster who received peanuts.

Yu Xiaocao quickly wrote two receipts and handed them to the two flower-like girls. She smiled and explained to Miss Zhuang, “When we open for business tomorrow, there will be a lot of people and we'll be very busy. I'm afraid that we'll make a mistake at that time, so it's better to retrieve the watermelons with a receipt!”

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang hesitated for a moment before she took the receipt with ugly handwriting, and then looked at Xiaocao with dismay. But, when she considered her age and attire, she felt that she was being too demanding. Most of girls from ordinary families in town didn't know how to read and write. It was already pretty good that this little girl could write a few words!

Miss Wang had already picked out the biggest watermelon in the shop and giggled, “Little girl, I want this one. Help me put it away first. I'll come get it tomorrow!”

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang was displeased with Miss Wang's haggling again, but Yu Xiaocao continued to smile and said, “No problem! Uncle Li, remove the watermelon that this young lady selected from the

shelf and put it in the corner of the shop alone. This older sister, look carefully. I'll mark it for you, so remember to check tomorrow.”

Miss Wang looked at her watermelon with satisfaction. Seeing Yu Xiaocao tie it with a straw rope and stuff a sheet of paper with a strange symbol (Author's note: Arabic numerals) between the rope, she nodded unceasingly.

Eldest Young Miss Zhuang was already rendered speechless by Miss Wang. Disregarding her, she walked out of the shop first and headed to her own carriage.

The next day, with the crackling of firecrackers, Yu Xiaocao's watermelon shop had finally opened! Originally, she had wanted to set off a string of firecrackers in a low-key manner, unveil the plaque, and officially start business! But she hadn't expected to see so many familiar faces despite not notifying anybody.

County Magistrate Wu, who was dressed in regular clothes, came with his precious son and servants carrying gifts behind them. With his hands clasped together, he bobbed a greeting towards Yu Xiaocao's godfather and said, “Congratulations, congratulations! Official Fang, why didn't you notify this subordinate official of your shop's grand opening?”

Fang Zizhen guffawed, “It's my daughter's shop. She wanted to keep a low profile, so we didn't notify anyone!”

Zhou Zixu had also come with gifts. He snorted in dissatisfaction, “It's fine for others! But Xiaocao, how can you treat me like this! What's our relationship? Even if you don't invite others, can you not invite me to come celebrate the opening of your shop?”

The patriarch of the Yao Family had also personally come with a present, and behind him was the newly promoted head steward—an old acquaintance of Xiaocao. Had he not gained merit by purchasing vegetables from the Yu Family and gotten into his master's good graces, there was no way he would have gotten the position of the head steward.

Fields of Gold Chapter 173 - Sold Ou

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“Miss Yu, if it weren't for Zhenxiu Restaurant's Little Brother Qian, we wouldn't have known about the opening of your store! When our old master heard about it, he insisted on coming to congratulate you in

person! Official Fang, Miss Yu, congratulations ah!” Steward Yao cupped his hands together and grinned from ear to ear. People who didn't know might think that he was the one who was opening a store!

“Second Sister, Second Sister!!” A crisp and familiar voice passed through the crowd and entered Xiaocao's ears. A moment later, a small figure, who was dressed in a seblue colored student's robe and had a scholar ribbon tied in his hair, pushed through the crowd and plunged into Yu Xiaocao's embrace like a cannonball.

“Shitou? I thought it wasn't a break today. What are you doing here? Did you skip class?” Yu Xiaocao hugged the little guy's shoulders and asked in surprise.

Little Shitou pouted his mouth and got out of her embrace. With a wronged expression, he said, “Second Sister is falsely accusing me! Our headmaster heard about the opening of our shop, so he brought me and Senior Brother Yunxi over to congratulate the happy occasion. Then again, I'm also considered a partial owner of the shop, so why can't I come?”

Yu Xiaocao looked in the direction that her younger brother came from. Sure enough, she saw Headmaster Yuan's dashing and scholarly figure. Behind him was Yuan Yunxi, an elegant and handsome young man. The corner of Xiaocao's eyes twitched—This old man was a classic example of two-faced person. He looked normal in front of people, but he was actually a complete foodie.

“Teacher Yuan, you're here? Please come in!” Although Yu Xiaocao grumbled in her heart, she still warmly welcomed Headmaster Yuan.

Yuan Sinian stroked his beautiful beard and leisurely strolled inside. He said with a slight smile, “Xiaocao, I heard that the free fruit trays given out at Zhenxiu Restaurant uses your family's watermelons? It's sweet and juicy, and tastes very good. It's a pity that Little Brat Zhou is too stingy. Each table only gets one plate...”

Yu Xiaocao almost couldn't suppress the smile on her face. There was free watermelon to eat, but he was still dissatisfied that there wasn't enough to eat! Surely, this was something that only Headmaster Yuan would do!

“Teacher Yuan, I guarantee that there will be more than enough watermelons for you to eat today!” Yu Xiaocao told her godfather to accompany Headmaster Yuan to the inner courtyard for a little rest. She was unprepared for the arrival of these important guests. Fortunately, she had bought some good tea

for her godfather yesterday. Otherwise, it would be so embarrassing if she couldn't even provide some drinks for the guests!

'Oh right! When people come to congratulate the start of a business, it's necessary to treat them to a meal!' Yu Xiaocao greeted the guests with a smile as she moved closer to Zhou Zixu, who was helping to entertain the guests, and whispered, "Are there any private rooms available at your restaurant? I didn't know that there would be so many guests today, so I didn't prepare anything..."

Zhou Zixu also moved closer to her ear and whispered, "Rest assured! What's our relationship? Your business is my business! I have already reserved it for you, and there would be enough room no matter how many guests come!"

Fortunately, the Yu Family didn't know many people in the town. Apart from a table for the people from the yamen, who came to give Official Fang face, there was only Headmaster Yuan and several households who bought vegetables from their family. Most of those households just sent a steward over, and Patriarch Yao was the only one who personally came. Two private rooms were enough!

Headmaster Yuan and Patriarch Yao were arranged to sit at the same table as County Magistrate Wu, and Fang Zizhen would be responsible for entertaining them. As for those stewards, Li Li and Wu Yun personally entertained them.

For the opening of a small watermelon shop, they actually invited the parental official, Country Magistrate Wu, Headmaster Yuan of the renowned Rongxuan Academy, and several well-known figures in Tanggu Town. It instantly attracted a lot of people's attention.

When the noble and prestigious Headmaster Yuan personally uncovered the red silk on the plaque, the gilded lettering on top—Tanggu Watermelon Shop—caused the corner of his lips to twitch. It was such a straightforward and easy to understand name.

There were a lot of people in the shop, and the rear courtyard was relatively simple. So Fang Zizhen took the guests, who came to congratulate them, to Zhenxiu Restaurant, which was located diagonally across from the store. The crowd of onlookers entered the shop out of curiosity. Yu Xiaocao, Li Li, and Wu Yun were so busy in the shop that they wished that they had three heads, six arms, and ten mouths!

Not many of the townspeople of the little town of Tanggu had seen watermelon before. At this time, there were a lot of people looking and asking questions, but there weren't many people actually buying the watermelons!

Yu Xiaocao had already foreseen this situation. She took out several trays full of small pieces of watermelon and put them at the entrance of the shop. She shouted loudly, "Special event for the opening of Tanggu Watermelon Shop. All the customers who enter the shop can try a piece of watermelon free of charge! Everyone, please stand in line to avoid crowding. If you think it tastes good, you're welcome to make a purchase. The bigger ones cost five taels, while the smaller ones are only three taels!"

Such a good thing like free food tasting had never happened in Tanggu Town before. Everyone in the shop just looked at one another and no one dared to be the first person to try.

"Wow! There's such a good thing like free tasting? Me, I'll do it!" Miss Wang's voice was still so energetic. Disregarding the hindrance of the embarrassed young man behind her, she took the lead and arrived in front of the free watermelon samples. She carefully picked up a piece and savored it in small mouthfuls with her eyes closed.

Wang Chenyang seriously wished that there was a crack in the ground that he could hide in. He shouldn't have listened to his mother and accompanied his quirky younger sister here. He had never imagined that his younger sister would take advantage of a free tasting opportunity in the eyes of the public.

What made him unable to lift his head was that the little girl, Wang Yanran, was still unsatisfied after finishing the piece of watermelon and asked, "Can each person only taste one piece?"

'How many pieces do you want to try? Is the whole tray enough for you?' Wang Chenyang seriously wanted to immediately block his younger sister's mouth and take the disgraceful fellow out of the watermelon shop.

After Xiaocao told her that each person could only try a piece, Little Miss Wang Yanran pouted with a disappointed expression. Suddenly, she turned to look at her older brother, who was covering his face. Her eyes lit up and she exclaimed, "Can my older brother also try one? Eldest Brother, if you're too embarrassed, then I can try it for you!" With that, she picked up the second piece with a smile.

Wang Chenyang endured all the probing gazes around him pulled his younger sister, and almost gnashed his teeth as he said, "Didn't you come to pick up the watermelon that you ordered yesterday? I still have something else to do, so let's hurry back after retrieving it!"

Yu Xiaocao took the watermelon that she tied up yesterday and carried it over with difficulty. She handed it to Young Master Wang and said with a smile, "Miss Wang, this is the watermelon that you ordered yesterday. Please take out the receipt that I gave you yesterday. Give me the receipt in exchange for the watermelon."

Wang Yanran looked at the paper on the watermelon and saw the marking that she secretly made with her nails yesterday. With a smile, she took the receipt out of her embroidered purse and loudly said, "Miss Yu, your shop's watermelons are the best watermelons that I have ever eaten. Even the watermelons from the capital aren't as good as yours! When I get my monthly allowance in a few days, I will come back to buy another one!"

Wang Chenyang came out of the watermelon shop with a heavy watermelon in one hand and his younger sister in his other hand. After getting on the horse carriage, he harshly scolded the young girl Wang Yanran. However, when the little girl thought about being able to eat the sweet watermelon at home, she wasn't annoyed even after getting scolded. Wang Chenyang felt really helpless upon seeing the happy smile on her face.

But, when he had his first bite of the watermelon, he could understand why his gluttonous younger sister was so fond of the Yu Family's watermelons. He had followed his father to do business all over the country since he was a young child. He had also eaten watermelons before, but this was the first time he had eaten such a fresh, sweet, and juicy watermelon! Moreover, it was very cheap. In the capital, even twenty taels might not be enough to buy such a large watermelon, let alone five taels.

The Wang Family consisted of a dozen or so people, which included the head of the household, his wife and concubines, and his children. The children of the legitimate wife received two slices each, while the concubines and their children only got to try one slice. No one would dislike the sweet and juicy watermelon, so everyone still wanted more after eating.

The little lady Wang Yanran, in particular, was pouting so much that she could almost hang an oil bottle on her lips. If she had known that her mother would use the watermelon that she bought to please her father, then she wouldn't have told her mother about it. She would have secretly picked it up and ate it alone, which would have definitely satisfied her cravings. Two slices of watermelons weren't even enough to fill the gaps between her teeth! Luckily, her father reimbursed her for the cost of the watermelon. 'Humph! I'm going to secretly buy one tomorrow and eat it alone!'

As for Yu Xiaocao's watermelon shop, after Wang Yanran took the lead and tried the free sample, other people began to taste it one after another. The enjoyment on their faces and their endless praises led even more people to join in on the free tasting.

The first group of people who came in were mostly shopkeepers and owners of neighboring businesses. The people who could afford to rent a shop on the street naturally had some money. After tasting the watermelon, most of these people were satisfied and willing to buy some for their families to try.

The second group were people shopping nearby. This commercial street in Tanggu Town was equivalent to the streets that sold luxury goods in the future, which was seldom visited by ordinary people. Even if they went, they wouldn't be able to afford the products. Furthermore, they also had to endure the contemptuous look of certain merchants. Who would be so thick faced to go back again?

It should also be mentioned that Yu Xiaocao had certainly selected a good location. There were very few people who left the shop empty-handed. However, there weren't many who would buy ten watermelons at once like Eldest Young Miss Zhuang. Thus, when the steward of the Zhuang Family, with several servants, handed in the receipt and moved a bunch of watermelons out of the store one by one, they helped attract more consumers for Xiaocao's watermelon shop.

Yu Xiaocao had finally experienced the painful and happy feelings of 'counting money until your hands cramp up'. Her watermelon shop was similar to the modern-day supermarkets; the consumers would personally select the goods and pay at the door. Yu Xiaocao, who sat on the tall chair at the entrance, kept receiving money and giving out change. She also had to maintain a smile on her face while sweetly saying, "Looking forward to your next visit!"

The patrons felt that the little girl, who collected the money, had a sweet smile, crisp voice, and good arithmetic skills. No matter how many watermelons they bought and the different prices of the watermelons, she could quickly calculate the total with one look, and she was never wrong.

In fact, this kind of first or second grade level math skills might be slightly difficult for the people in ancient times. However, it was absolutely a piece of cake for Xiaocao, who had learned the multiplication table.

The two carts of watermelons that they hauled to the store yesterday were completely sold out before noon. Later, people who came to the store, after hearing about the delicious and cheap watermelons at 'Tanggu Watermelon Shop', only ended up seeing empty shelves.

Fields of Gold Chapter 174

The busy Xiaocao could finally sit down and drink some water to soothe her throat. When she encountered disappointed customers, who didn't manage to buy a watermelon, she would persuade them to make an order in advance and leave a deposit. By leaving a deposit, the patrons would have their watermelons reserved for them. In this way, they wouldn't encounter the situation of not being able to purchase a watermelon due to arriving late.

Many customers left a deposit for their advanced orders, so she wrote receipts for them with her slightly immature-looking Simplified Chinese characters and Arabic numbers. Her handwriting and writing style could also be used to fend off counterfeits. This was because, on the next day, a loafer in town came with a receipt to retrieve the reserved watermelons, but Yu Xiaocao was able to identify it as a fake with one glance. That guy had wanted to argue with her, but he was left speechless in front of Yu Xiaocao's receipts, which were written in a handwriting that was 'lacking arms and legs'. He was taken to the yamen by Li Li, who was helping out at the shop.

In fact, after word of mouth, the entire Tanggu Town knew that Tanggu Watermelon Shop had relations with the yamen. This loafer had ended up being a cannon fodder, who helped the melon shop prove its prestige. After this incident, no one dared to cause trouble for the Yu Family's watermelon store.

After she hung up a wooden sign that said, 'Watermelons have been sold out. Please come earlier tomorrow', on the shop's door, Yu Xiaocao bent down to pick up the money chest. She used so much strength that even her face had turned red, but the money chest still sat firmly on the table. Li Li, who was beside her, saw this and couldn't help but burst out in laughter!

"Do you know how many watermelons were sold today? There were at least a hundred or so watermelons on the two carts. Let's just say that we sold each for three taels, then it would be over three hundred taels! Yet, you want to pick up this money box with your tiny limbs?" Li Li rolled up his sleeves to reveal his strong arms and easily lifted the box. He carried it under his arms and asked, "Tell, where are you going? I will take it over for you!"

"To the Zhenxiu Restaurant across the street. Uncle Li, after being busy for the entire afternoon, aren't you hungry? Let's go eat!" Yu Xiaocao reckoned that the feast should've started, if they went over now, then they would be just in time.

With the money chest under his arms, Li Li strode towards Zhenxiu Restaurant. Not everyone could afford to eat at Zhenxiu Restaurant whenever they wanted. Even if he didn't eat and drink for one

month, his salary still might not be enough for him to eat one decent meal at the restaurant! To have such a rare chance today, he must go all out and eat his fill.

Yu Xiaocao, together with the money chest, were taken to the room where Fang Zizhen was entertaining the wealthy and noble guests. As soon as she entered, Headmaster Yuan teased, "Oh! Our little shopkeeper has finally come! Business must be pretty good today. You definitely earned enough money for two tables of food!"

The expression of Xiaocao, who was originally immersed in the happiness of making money, suddenly changed when she heard what he said. 'That's right! It will cost at least one hundred taels to eat in Zhenxiu Restaurant's private room. If they ordered all the best dishes, then even two hundred taels won't be enough. My gosh! Then was all my hard work for today done for nothing?'

Seeing his goddaughter drooping her head and appearing pitiful, Fang Zizhen's heart ached for her as he hurriedly said, "Today, my daughter's shop has opened for business, so as her godfather, it's my rightful duty to help her receive the guests! Youngster Zhou, today's banquet is on me!"

Zhou Zixu had already seen Xiaocao's moneygrubber appearance before, so he knew that she was really distressed about losing the money that she had just gotten. He hastily said with a smile, "Lord Fang, how can I let you pay? To tell everyone the truth, Xiaocao was the one who came up with the recipes for our restaurant's most popular dishes like oyster sauce dishes, roasted chicken, and osmanthus duck. It can be said that without Xiaocao, the present Zhenxiu Restaurant wouldn't exist. Just take these two tables of food as my token of gratitude to Xiaocao. Don't mention anything about paying!"

Upon hearing that she didn't need to spend her money, the little moneygrubber Xiaocao immediately beamed with joy. Looking at the table full of delicious food, she stood up with her cup raised in her hands, and with tea in place of wine, she toasted all the honored guest who were present, "Today is the opening of my small business. I didn't expect so many distinguished guests to come congratulate me, so please forgive me for any oversight. Xiaocao will use tea in place of wine to toast everyone here today. Please——"

Among the people sitting in this room, even the youngest was older than Xiaocao's father. Seeing a pure and fair little girl holding a cup with an earnest expression and talking like an adult, they all felt that it was quite interesting. With a knowing smile, they picked up their wine cups and took a sip.

Little Shitou attentively poured wine for the guests, while Xiaocao courteously urged everyone to eat. Seeing that the two kids were able to adequately handle this situation, Old Master Yao couldn't help but

laugh, "The Yu Family is really good at teaching their children. When my grandchildren were at their age, they were still acting spoiled and crying for attention ah!"

"There's an old saying: 'children of poor families have to take care of their families earlier!' Your grandchildren all grew up in a privileged and sheltered environment, so they naturally won't have to be like us. Grandpa Yao, let me pour a cup of wine for you to thank you for the support that you have always shown us!" In her previous life, Yu Xiaocao had also engaged in some social activities, so she was able to handle this situation with ease.

Old Master Yao happily drank the wine Xiaocao poured for him and chuckled, "It's the vegetables from your family that is good! Since eating the vegetables your family grew, the vegetables from other families can't even match the taste. In the past, I loved to eat meat and almost never touched the vegetables. Now, I can't even eat a meal without vegetables from your family ah! Look at me right now. I'm becoming more vigorous with age. Look, it seems like all my lingering health issues from before are all gone! Haha! All better! I believe the biggest reason is the vegetables from your family..."

"What are you saying? It's not like our vegetables are magical pills, so how can they be as miraculous as you say they are? I have learned some medical knowledge from the village doctor, and thus know that eating more vegetables is beneficial for people's health! Your health wasn't good in the past because you didn't eat vegetables. Since you like to eat vegetables now, it's natural that your health has gotten better! It doesn't really have much to do with our family's vegetables!" Yu Xiaocao didn't want to let others know about the secret of their vegetables, so she hurriedly explained.

Old Master Yao still thought it was the contribution of the Yu family's vegetables and said, "Well, I'm willing to eat vegetables because the greens that your family grows are fresh and juicy, and also tastes great! In the end, it's still the credit of your family's vegetables!"

At this time, Zhou Zixu laughed and said, "Old Master Yao, Xiaocao, you two should stop already. One is giving endless praises, while the other is desperately trying to be modest. Old Master, all of the vegetables used at Zhenxiu Restaurant are supplied by Xiaocao's family. If you like them, please eat more!"

County Magistrate Wu tried the 'stir-fried lettuce with oyster sauce', while nodding his head and saying, "Zhenxiu Restaurant's oyster sauce dishes tastes absolutely amazing! I may not have the chance to eat it again in the future..."

Third Young Master Zhou hurriedly replied, "Uncle Wu, our Zhenxu Restaurant's branch restaurant in the capital has been opened for several months already. So, you don't have to worry about not being able to eat our oyster sauce dishes. What's more, our condiments store in the capital also sells oyster sauce. Now, many officials and noble lords have this condiment in their kitchens."

Old Master Yao really loved the taste of green vegetables cooked with oyster sauce, so when he heard this, he immediately responded, "Are you also selling oyster sauce in Tanggu Town? Our household's purchasing servants are too incompetent. They actually missed out on such an important item."

"Patriarch Yao, the store next to Zhenxiu Restaurant sells condiments produced by our 'Haitian'. Other than oyster sauce, we also have MSG and fermented bean curd. In the future, there will be more and more condiments available for purchase. If you need it, just send someone over to buy it. I will give you a twenty percent discount..." Zhou Zixu was really talented in doing business.

County Magistrate Wu laughed as he pointed at him and said, "You ah! You won't forget to advertise your products even when we are eating!"

"Xiaoxu, does your products even need advertising? I've heard that people line up and still can't get it!" Young Master Wu commented while gnawing on a roasted chicken wing.

Zhou Zixu modestly said, "I have to thank everyone's support and continual patronage for that."

Everyone at the table happily chatted as they ate to their hearts' content. They especially enjoyed the plate of watermelon that was served after the meal. Under the skillful hands of the chef, the watermelons had turned into an exquisite piece of art, which made people reluctant to eat them. The fresh sweetness of the watermelons received unanimous praise from everyone.

After the banquet, Xiaocao fetched the watermelons that she had saved for the honored guest and gave them two each to take home. Although Xiaocao was unprepared for today's banquet, both the host and guests had thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Xiaocao had to return to Dongshan Village in the afternoon, so Fang Zizhen stayed behind to take care of the melon shop. Fang Zizhen and his two subordinates hadn't gone to the docks for many days due to the matters of the watermelon shop. Knowing that this wouldn't work out in the long run, Xiaocao reckoned that she should hire someone to watch the watermelon shop.

Who should they hire? First of all, this person had to have a good character, quick wits, and be able to manage a store. When Xiaocao got home, she discussed this with her parents and felt that her eldest maternal aunt was the most suitable for this job.

Eldest Maternal Aunt was honest and kind. When the Yu Family was going through their hardest times, she had privately taken out her hard-earned money to support them. Madam Han also had experience with doing business at the docks. The watermelon shop couldn't always be as busy as today's grand opening day, so once business had stabilized, she should be able to manage the store alone.

After entrusting someone to send a letter over, Madam Han came over that afternoon with Xiaocao's maternal grandmother and two maternal uncles.

"This child, you should have told us earlier if you needed help! You ah, what should Mother say to you? You're always doing everything on your own." Xiaocao's maternal grandmother lovingly scolded Madam Liu as she lightly poked her forehead.

With her head bowed, Madam Liu said with a smile, "We're just a little more busy these past two days because the watermelons has ripened. As a married daughter, how can I keep inconveniencing my maiden family?"

"We're all one family, so how is it considered troubling one another?" Madam Han nimbly helped load the cart, and planned on going to town with the cart that was transporting the watermelons. She had even brought extra clothing in preparation for a long-term stay in the shop!

Xiaocao's eldest maternal uncle was discussing the matter of selling watermelons with Yu Hai and Xiaocao, "I don't think you guys can manage with just these two carts, so let's just forget about the matter of lending us the donkey cart. I don't want to hold up your business!"

Yu Xiaocao interjected, "Eldest Maternal Uncle, you don't have to worry about this! Third Young Master Zhou said that his family has an extra horse carriage that they don't normally use. So, I borrowed it from him."

"This child, you're troubling Young Master Zhou again!" Yu Hai exclaimed as he shook his head helplessly.

Yu Xiaocao made a funny face at him and said, "He willingly lent it to me! Besides, his carriage was just idling at home, so lending it to me is considered putting it to good use! Eldest Maternal Uncle, you can use the Zhou Family's carriage since it can carry more goods!"

"If there is a carriage, then things will be a lot easier! I have talked it over with your second maternal uncle. Watermelons are very valuable, so it's enough that only your shop sells them in town. We are preparing to go to the prefectural city, which has even more noble and wealthy families. So, we should be able to sell them!" Liu Pei was more daring than his second brother.

Yu Xiaocao expressed her support, "Eldest Uncle, when are you guys planning on going? My godfather will go to the prefectural city tomorrow to take care of some matters. If possible, you guys can join him on the journey tomorrow. With my godfather's support, you guys can avoid meeting hooligans, local tyrants, and so on..."

The prefectural city was different from the small town of Tanggu, which had more simple and honest people and customs. It was indeed rare to see watermelons during this time of the year, so it would inevitably attract envious eyes. However, with the support of this great lord, Fang Zizhen, the Liu brothers definitely wouldn't suffer any difficulties!

Fields of Gold Chapter 175 - A Taste of Sweetness

With this, Wang Ergou, humming off tune, happily pushed his family's wheelbarrow and soon arrived at the Yu Family's melon field.

Looking at the pile of watermelons on the ground, Wang Ergou smiled so brightly that he showed his uneven teeth and happily said, "Oh my! I thought I came early, but it seems you guys came even earlier than me! If there is anything I can help with, just tell me...By the way, this is the money I made from selling the watermelons yesterday. The total is fifty-four taels, shouldn't be wrong!"

Yu Xiaocao took the money from his hands and gave him his IOU back. Seeing that he was so happy that it looked like he couldn't find his direction, she smiled and said, "Was yesterday's business good? You look quite happy!"

Wang Ergou smiled and nodded his head, "Yesterday, I was pretty lucky. A boat that belonged to an official landed. The steward who came to pick them up basically bought twenty-some watermelons. Hehe! Just from them, I made more than thirty taels! The rest were sold out before the afternoon!"

After living for over thirty years, Wang Ergou did business for the first time in his life. His wife was anxious about it that she followed him to the pier with a slightly pregnant belly.

At first, the pier was mostly docked with cargo ships. Other than a couple of stewards who were more experienced and had seen watermelons before, the rest mostly circled around looking curiously. Upon hearing that the watermelons cost a few taels each, they dispelled their notion of buying any.

After a while, there was still no buyers. Wang Ergou was a bit worried and was about to go into town to sell the watermelons. His wife stopped him and said, "How can you do business without the determination? Take a look at Xiaolian, isn't it until noon that she gets busy? Wait a little longer. Xiaocao said, as long as you capture the opportunity there won't be any worries in the future. What you are lacking in is precisely the patience!"

Wang Ergou didn't want his wife to run around with him, so he forced himself to hold back his anxiety and shouted out to the passing travelers who were always moving, "Watermelon, big and sweet watermelons! If it's not sweet, then it's free!!"

Good things come to those who wait. Not long afterward, they began doing business! The buyer was one of the head stewards of Qingyao Trading Company, one of the four major trading companies. This head steward had traveled all over the place and had more experience. Upon seeing watermelons being sold in this season, he was surprised and immediately bought one. He opened it on the spot to try it, and the sweetness of the watermelon stunned him.

Originally, he had decided to buy all the watermelons at a lowered price, but Wang Ergou was reluctant to give up profit. The steward had also brought back a lot of goods, so he couldn't clear any space for the watermelons. He could only give up, but nevertheless, he still bought two more watermelons to take back for his master to try.

The first step was the hardest. After making his first watermelon sale, Wang Ergou held the fifteen taels in his hand and was very pleased with himself. He calculated, and, if they continued like this, then by selling ten or so watermelons, they could break even. The remaining watermelon sales would be pure profit....

Right at that moment, the ship of an official pulled onto shore. Allegedly, it was a high-ranking official returning to the capital with his family to report on his work. The Great Ming Dynasty's attitudes

towards women were less harsh. Thus, the women and children, who had been on the ship for a month, got off the boat as soon as it was ashore to walk around and breathe some fresh air.

The six-year-old daughter of the official heard Wang Ergou's shouts and went to him accompanied by her maidservant. Curiously, she examined the big round watermelons on the wheelbarrow. She pouted and said, "You're lying. Watermelons aren't that big! The watermelons I've eaten watermelons are only this big!"

The adorable little girl used her hands to show the size. She stared at him with a pair of big round eyes, looking cute and innocent. Wang Ergou couldn't help but think of the child in his wife's belly. If it was a girl, would it be as beautiful as the child in front of him? (Author's note: You're overthinking it. With your looks, if your daughter looked like you, it would be the scene of a crime!)

Wang Ergou patiently bent down, squeezed out a kind and gentle smile, and softly said, "Young Lady, the watermelons I'm selling are big watermelons! They are big and sweet, I'm definitely not lying!"

The little girl carefully thought about it and said in a clear voice, "Then I have to try it first before paying. You said it earlier If it's not sweet then. It's at no cost"

Wang Ergou scratched his head and unwillingly chose one of the smallest watermelons in the wheelbarrow. He used a clean cloth to wipe the knife he brought over before chopping the watermelon. The maidservant, upon seeing the knife was clean, didn't say anything.

The little girl took a bite of the watermelon gracefully and immediately exclaimed, "Wow! It really is really sweet! Xiaomei, pay him! You—can you help me take the watermelon over there? I want to let my mother and older brothers try too!"

"Of course!" Wang Ergou took the three taels, picked up the remaining watermelon and the leftover pieces that the little girl didn't finish, and followed behind her towards the pier.

The little girl's brothers were surprised and curious upon seeing the red pulp fruit. They all couldn't help but grab a piece to try. The watermelons, which had been irrigated by the mystic stone water, had a delicious flavor that was indescribably good. Even the members of this official's family, who had all eaten watermelons countless times, never had watermelon this good before.

The little girl's father, upon seeing his wife and children eating so delightfully, waved his hands and bought fifteen watermelons from Wang Ergou. In this season, if he were to give them as a gift, then his reputation would increase greatly.

It was in this way that half the watermelons that Wang Ergou brought were sold. Afterward, several more ships came ashore and the remaining watermelons were sold. After careful calculation, he found out that over twenty watermelons had been sold for a total of one hundred and two taels, and his profit was more than forty-two taels.

Wang Ergou has never seen so much money in his life! In the past, his wife had always pushed him to do odd jobs. After a hard and tiring day working, he would only get ten copper coins. After a month, the most he could save was one or two taels. Today, however, he just shouted a few words and it was enough to earn forty-two taels, which was previously worth several years of savings!

“Wife, wife! Quick, pinch me, am I dreaming?” Wang Ergou was so excited that tears had welled up in his eyes. With shaking hands he carefully took the money and put it away in his chest pocket. He then pulled on his wife's hand and placed it on his arm.

Ergou's wife's heart was also pounding. With tears in her eyes, she gently patted the man next to her and caressed her inconspicuous pregnant belly. With this source of income, they wouldn't have to worry about not being able to raise their children in the future.

Ergou's wife was from a poor family. Otherwise, she wouldn't have married a man like Ergou. Being hungry was a shadow from her childhood. She had eight siblings, but only she and her two older brothers survived.

After her marriage, although her husband wasn't outstanding, he dearly loved his wife. Although their days were a bit rough, it was much better than her maiden home. Originally she thought that such bitter and rough days would never end, but unexpectedly they met Yu Hai's family, who helped them out many times and even gave them a chance to earn money.

Her child wouldn't have to be like her when she was young. When she was hungry, she used to drink water and hope it would pass, and when she was sick she could only suffer through it.

“Wife! I'm going to go buy half a catty of meat to supplement your body!” With money in his hands, Wang Ergou's back was straighter than before.

Wang Ergou's wife glared at him, confiscated all the money, and softly rebuked, “We still owe Brother Hai money for his melons! The rest isn't enough for tomorrow's batch of melons! Could it be that you have the conscience to put it on credit again tomorrow?”

Wang Ergou laughed and said, “I planned to push over more watermelons tomorrow. I'm afraid that the rest of the money isn't enough to pay for the melons...how about we put it on credit once more?”

Ergou's wife shook her head and said, “Today, we met a customer that bought a lot. Otherwise, I don't know how long it would've taken us to sell all of these watermelons. In my opinion, how about you buy the number of watermelons you can afford with the money earned today? Earning less is ok!”

Wang Ergou knew the 'you eat rice bite by bite, and make money little by little' philosophy. Listening to his wife, he said, “Brother Dahai, I will take forty taels worth of watermelons today. I want to spend twenty taels on the big ones, ten taels on the medium and small ones...”

“Okay!” Yu Hai helped by handing him the already weighed watermelons. When he saw Ergou handing over the money, he smiled and whispered, “Hey! Yesterday's business must've been pretty good, you earned quite a bit!”

“Hehe! It's only forty-some taels. It's nothing compared to Brother Hai! You pulled two carts full of watermelon over yesterday!” Wang Ergou hid his pride but he couldn't stop his smile from appearing.

Liu Pei, who was helping load the wheelbarrow, upon seeing that a wheelbarrow full of watermelon could earn a profit forty-two taels, realized that if they took one cart full to the prefectural city, then wouldn't they earn more than 100 taels? His heart raced at such a figure.

At that moment, the carriage that Xiaocao borrowed from the Zhou's was brought over. After talking it over, Liu Pei and Liu Han decided to immediately depart and transport the watermelon to the prefectural city overnight.

Xiaocao also felt that a cart transporting watermelons wouldn't be faster than her godfather galloping quickly down the road. So, she let her two uncles depart first after setting a meeting point with her godfather tomorrow.

With multiple people helping, the watermelon cart was quickly filled up. They first had to take the cart to Tanggu Town, and then take the imperial highway before they could get to the prefectural city. If they set off now, then it would still be hard for them to arrive at the prefectural city before they closed the city gates.

Xiaocao prepared rations, water and warm clothing for her two uncles. Even though it was near the end of spring, the nights were still chilly in the north. Her uncles might be sleeping out in the open, how could they stand the cold?

Xiaocao's family's two carts set off with the Liu Pei brothers. Xiaocao took the donkey cart and Yu Hai took the cart that they had bought a few days ago. Thankfully, the horse chosen by Third Young Master Zhou had a good temperament, so even a stranger could control him.

Yu Hai had stayed back in the fields yesterday, so he missed the melon store's first raucous open day of business. When Xiaocao told them what had happened, he wanted to see the scene. He regretted not being able to see it with his own eyes. Today, no matter what, he had to go to town with her.

No matter what, he was still the father of the store owner, so didn't that make him at least half an owner? Besides, if he didn't help his daughter, he would feel bad. As such, Madam Liu stayed behind to watch the field in the morning and he was going to take over in the evening.

There were two other people who came along with them. One of them was Eldest Aunt, Madam Han, who came along to help. The other was Xiaocao's maternal grandmother, Madam Yao, who was fooled by Xiaocao into coming to widen her knowledge.

When they arrived in town, they found that the melon shop was surrounded by people and thought something had happened! After the store closed yesterday, Li Li was left alone to keep an eye on it. Fang Zizhen and Wu Yun had gone to the pier and Xiaocao had gone back to Dongshan Village. Was yesterday's business so good that it caught the attention of some people so they came today to look for trouble?

Fields of Gold Chapter 176 - The Princess Consort

"They're here, they're here!" When the crowd saw the horse cart and donkey cart piled high with watermelons, they immediately became excited and automatically backed away to allow a space for the carts to move.

Li Li, whose head was dripping with sweat, finally managed to push through the people. He squeezed himself in front of the donkey cart and wiped off the perspiration that was pooled on his forehead. He exclaimed in a somewhat exaggerated manner, "My little lady ah, you're finally here! If the watermelons didn't get here soon, then all of the people here would rip me apart!"

Another familiar figure also managed to push his way to the front. It was the Yao Family's steward. Yesterday, he had eaten a meal with Li Li and commented in a familiar tone, "Who would dare to cause difficulties for Lord Li?! Everyone knows that the imperial envoy highly values Lord Li!"

"Highly valued? I've been delegated here to sell watermelons. I'm definitely not someone highly valued ah!" Li Li made fun of himself in a way that he thought was humorous.

However, Yu Xiaocao merely raised an eyebrow in response, "Oh? I only had you help us for two days and you're already complaining and whining? I see, I see ah! In the future, I'll just prepare a smaller portion of food for godfather to bring the docks..."

"No! Please don't! Other than your family's braised food, the rest of the food available at the docks is not worth it. However, I can't guarantee that I'll be able to buy a portion when I line up. Without the food you send, how will I be able to eat in the future ah?! Xiaocao, my little lady, just pretend that I didn't say anything earlier, okay? Being able to help my little lady, it is truly the blessing of three lifetimes..." Compared to Wu Yun, Li Li's personality was a bit more lively. Thus, he was able to say some more comical things and perform more hilarious expressions without seeming out of place.

"Don't just stand there and chat ah! Hurry up, we're all waiting to buy watermelons!" They weren't sure who was complaining loudly but it was obvious that the person didn't know the power behind the melon stand. A customer next to the guy kindly whispered into his ears and explained. Immediately, the man deflated and hunkered down to avoid being spotted by Li Li's sharp eyes.

There were a decent number of people who came with the carts and Li Li was also there to help. Thus, the two carts full of watermelon were quickly unloaded into the store. The previously empty and bare shelves were now full of round and plump watermelons.

The people, who had been waiting for a very long time in front of the store, could now finally buy some watermelon. The store, which wasn't large in the first place, was soon squeezed full of customers.

After Steward Yao finished helping them unload the watermelons, he smiled at Xiaocao, “Do you remember the two watermelons that you gifted to us yesterday? That afternoon, two of our old master's friends came over to visit, so he couldn't help but show off a bit and took them out. Unexpectedly, his two friends pestered him into giving the watermelons away! In a fit of pique, our old master ordered me to line up at dawn today and told me to buy a lot. He's planning on hosting a 'watermelon tasting event' at noon...”

When Yu Xiaocao heard this, she couldn't help but laugh a bit. There was a common saying among the people: An old child, an old child!! Sure enough, when people got older, they tended to act more like children. Old Yao's two old friends could even forcefully take their host's watermelons. On the other hand, Old Yao, in order to show off, had to host a 'watermelon tasting event'. This was truly too funny!

Xiaocao personally picked out over a dozen first-rate watermelons for Steward Yao. Perhaps it was because she spent every day in close proximity with the little divine stone, but she was starting to be able to sense spiritual energy. For example, she could faintly feel the spiritual energy that was found in the little divine stone's 'bathing water'. As for these watermelons, their ripeness and sweetness was dependent on the amount of spiritual energy they had absorbed from the mystic-stone water. Therefore, she could faintly tell which ones had a higher concentration of energy and would likely taste better.

After Steward Yao paid for his goods, it was as if the floodgates had opened. Following that, Yu Xiaocao could only sit next to the cash box and had no opportunities to leave. This was truly an experience of receiving so much money that her hands hurt ah!

The watermelons displayed on the shelves quickly sold out. Eldest Maternal Aunt, Madam Han, continuously moved watermelons from the rear courtyard onto the shelves. After one shelf became empty, she would swiftly replenish it with more watermelons. There was more work than she could handle by herself, so Grandmother Yao also helped out.

The two men, Yu Hai and Li Li, quickly drove the two carts back to Dongshan Village. They planned on hauling another two carts full of watermelon to the store that afternoon so they would have more to sell the next day.

The wealthy and rich people in town usually interacted closely with each other. Many families that bought watermelons yesterday had also invited friends and family over to taste them. Every single person who tasted the Yu Family's watermelons immediately became fans of the fruit. Because they weren't able to eat enough at their relatives' or friends' homes to satisfy their cravings, they all either

sent servants over or came themselves to stand in line. Thus, the frenetic scene of people scrambling to buy watermelon once again occurred at the Yu Family's watermelon stand.

“Eh? What sort of store is over there; it's so lively!” A subdued yet luxurious horse carriage stopped not far from 'Tanggu's Watermelon Shop'. A pair of pale, delicate hands lightly opened the carriage's window curtains and the person peered over.

Next to the horse cart was a handsome young man riding a large horse. He glanced at the melon store and bent over to softly speak to the person in the carriage, “Mother, that should be a watermelon stand...”

The person who the handsome youth called 'mother' was a matron who had once been beautiful. Her face was full of pallor and seemed quite thin. Every movement she made seemed to be weak and lacking but she still had a hint of innate grace. The matron lightly coughed twice and took the proffered cup from a maid. She moistened her throat and replied in a gentle and delicate voice, “Watermelon stand? Aren't watermelons only available in the summer? Are you telling me that the watermelons in Tanggu Town ripen earlier than the ones in the capital?”

The good-looking young man also seemed a bit perplexed, “I'm not sure! We've just reached the end of spring, so how can there be watermelons for sale? Little Zhuozi, our farm also planted watermelons, right?”

The person called 'Little Zhuozi' was a youth who looked somewhat gentle and reserved. When he heard his master asking him a question, he bowed while on horseback, “This servant went to the farm a few days ago. The watermelons on the farm aren't bigger than the size of a fist and are probably around a month away from becoming ripe!”

The matron became interested in the watermelon stand and gently yet firmly declared, “Xiaoer [1], go buy a watermelon and bring it over. Let's try it and see how it tastes.”

“Mother, watermelon is a cold type of food. Recently you haven't been feeling well, so let's not buy any watermelons now, okay?” The handsome youth frowned deeply and replied in a worried tone.

The beautiful lady's long and large eyes faintly glanced at him. Her willow-shaped eyebrows knitted briefly as she worriedly said, “Ah...most of my body's issues stem from too much stress and worry. It's

not like you don't know this! You even said that you're accompanying me out here to help me relax. It's with great difficulty that I even have an appetite to eat some fruit, yet you have all kinds of excuses to not buy any...aiyo, my chest hurts..."

Here we go again! A helpless expression appeared on the handsome youth's face. Although his mother was almost forty, she still had the personality and temper of a young maiden. She always needed to have someone compliment and protect her. However, she wasn't grateful at all and always complained that this or that hurt all the time...Ah! This was all caused by his father spoiling her!! Who in the capital didn't know that his imperial highness, Prince Jing, was one hundred percent a wife-pampering maniac?

"Mother! Before you left, what did you promise Father? You had personally promised that you would always listen to my ideas regarding food and lodgings! We've only traveled out of the capital for a couple of days, so how could you forget about this?" The handsome youth, Zhu Junxi, was the second son of Prince Jing, and was currently unhappily trying to persuade his mother.

Princess Consort Jing's large eyes flickered. She decided to continue her shameless behavior and covered her chest with her hands. Cries of pain and annoyance poured out of her as she continued to complain, "Didn't you promise your father that you would go with what I said when it was right and reasonable to avoid making me angry ah? I currently don't have much of an appetite and want to eat some fruit. That's not unreasonable!"

In front of Princess Consort Jing's shameless acts, her two personal maidservants, Meixiang and Lanxiang, both lowered their heads and continued to do their regular tasks. They had seen this kind of scene occur many times before. The princess consort was constantly pampered by the prince and also had three sons to protect her. Every time she wanted her way, she would always shamelessly act sick. Both the old and young masters loved her dearly, so she always won in the end.

Zhu Junxi silently sighed and attempted to struggle one last time. He softly tried to persuade her, "Mother, do you still remember why you've traveled to Tanggu? If you eat watermelon, which is a cold food, and end up becoming sicker, then when Third Younger Brother comes home, he'll blame himself!"

Why did Princess Consort Jing appear in a small town like Tanggu? She had ample reasons——her third son, Zhu Junyang, had already been out at sea for more than half a year. Since he left, there hadn't been a message sent home. She constantly thought and worried about him until she became ill. Thus, she absolutely had to come over here to inquire about any news.

The seas were full of danger. Rough winds and water would often appear at a moment's notice. In fact, had her third son's luck not been good enough, then he might have drowned in the ocean during the

previous test voyage. How could she not be worried after he had been gone for over half a year? Tanggu was the town that had the closest harbor to the open ocean. Coming here was like becoming slightly closer to her youngest son. By doing that, her fretful heart could finally calm down a bit.

Prince Jing had also seen his beloved wife slowly wasting away day by day due to missing her son. That was the reason why he allowed his second son to bring her out and relieve her worries. Had he not been busy recently, he would have personally accompanied her too.

When the topic of her youngest son came out, Princess Consort Jing's eyes immediately dimmed. Earlier, she had been mostly faking her distress, but now she was truly upset. All of her worry and anxiety over her youngest son poured into her heart and almost made it hard for her to breathe.

Her youngest son had long been interested in traveling by ship. Since he was young, he had always stuck around his older cousin—the current emperor—and looked avidly at the models of ships slowly being created by his cousin's hands. The little guy, who was only around three to four years of age at the time, had set down an ambitious goal that day—that when he became older, he would become an adventurer of the distant seas and bring back rare and strange objects from far away lands back home to relieve his mother's boredom!

She had previously dismissed it as a child's dreams and never expected that, ten years later, that her youngest son truly went on a long journey in the seas to find distant, unknown lands. However, he had been gone for more than half a year. How could she, as his mother, not be constantly worried about him?

“Princess Consort, are you feeling ill again? Lanxiang, where are Her Highness's pills? Quickly take out one and help Her Highness take it!” Meixiang could sense that her mistress wasn't feeling well and hurriedly poured a glass of lukewarm water. She then took out a lengxiang pill and helped her mistress take it.

Zhu Junxi could tell that he had said the wrong thing and caused his mother to become anxious again. He quickly dismounted, lifted the carriage's curtain, and asked with concern, “Mother, please don't worry. The crew on the ship are all experienced sailors who have previously sailed with the emperor. I believe Third Younger Brother will soon come home safe and sound.”

After she took her medicine, Princess Consort Jing felt a little better. She smiled weakly at her son, “It's the old illness again. I'm fine, don't worry.”

When Zhu Junxi saw that his mother's complexion had improved a little, he relaxed slightly. He commented with a bit of blame in his voice, "With the parents here, one shouldn't travel far away! Third Younger Brother is truly too impudent. He knew Mother has problems with her heart yet he still persisted on leaving..."

"Don't talk anymore!" Not a hint of a smile could be seen on Princess Consort Jing's beautiful face. Her weak and delicate eyes immediately became more spirited, "Xiaoer, stop thinking those thoughts! Prince Jing's family absolutely cannot have the tragedy of brothers fighting and scheming in the dark!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 177 - Scheme

Princess Consort Jing seemed to realize that she was being a bit too severe and lightly sighed, "I know that you haven't had it easy. Your eldest brother is the heir of Prince Jing's household and he had been personally taught by your father. Third son is the youngest at home and had a weak body after being born, so he received a bit more care from me and your father. You are the second son sandwiched between an older and younger brother, so it would be hard for Mother and Father to avoid somewhat neglecting you. However, Second Son, you must remember that you, Li'er, and Yang'er are all my flesh and blood. You are all are incredibly important to me!"

Everyone in the capital knew that Prince Jing and his wife were a couple that loved each other very much and that Prince Jing pampered his wife beyond expectation! The prince's residence not only didn't have any concubines living in it but he also got rid of any maidservants who had other ideas.

That's right, you're not crazy, it was Prince Jing himself! He managed to resist the alluring temptations and only loved his wife. It had been like this for the past ten years. There wasn't a single married woman or noble maiden in the capital who didn't envy Princess Consort Jing for having a good life.

The princess consort had been married for twenty-five years and had given birth to three sons and one daughter. The eldest son, Zhu Junli, had been designated the heir since he was born. Prince Jing thought it would be too tiring for his wife to undertake his education, so once his eldest son just started to learn how to talk, he personally educated him himself. In addition, he imbued his son with the necessity of protecting and respecting his mother.

Second Son Zhu Junxi had a difficult birth and the princess consort had a lot of postpartum bleeding. She was nursed for a long time before she was out of danger. At that time, Prince Jing didn't even go to court anymore. He personally served his wife at her bedside and refused to let other people take over. Although the princess consort was ultimately able to retain her life, her body was no longer the same as before. Whenever the wind blew on her, she would get a headache and pain in her heart. This made Prince Jing very worried. Naturally, he was not very happy with his second son for causing his wife's problems and didn't like him very much.

Their third child, Zhu Miaoke, was a daughter. She had two older brothers and was very adorable. It wasn't surprising that both her mother and father doted upon her, especially Prince Jing. He pampered the little girl who resembled his wife to the skies.

When the princess consort was pregnant with her third son, Zhu Junyang, they had to use medications to hasten his birth prematurely due to her body's condition. After he was born, the imperial physician said that this son might be too premature and may not survive to adulthood. Princess Consort Jing felt very remorseful and focused all of her energy towards raising her youngest son. In order to not let his wife fret too much, Prince Jing brought over all of the famous doctors to treat his son and was finally able to preserve his life. By the time their third son was around three to four years of age, he was no different than any other child in his age group.

Thus, Second Son Zhu Junxi was the one who got the short end of the stick. His father snubbed him while his mother was too busy to take care of him. When he was young, Zhu Junxi was clever and sensible, and he even knew how to help his mother take care of his brother, who was younger than him by five years.

However, as he slowly got older, a seed of jealousy started to grow within his heart. In addition, some unscrupulous people also deliberately tried to incite disharmony. Slowly, resentment accumulated inside him. The year when his younger brother, who was only fifteen years old, was personally given the title of royal prince by the emperor after he finished a seafaring trip, Zhu Junxi felt even more resentful. Why was eldest brother titled the heir as soon as he was born? Why did his youngest brother, who didn't do much, get to be entitled? Why was he, who was also a legitimate son of Prince Jing, always neglected by everyone...

However, he naturally had a kind heart and couldn't cruelly murder his own kin and blood. The most he could do was to occasionally try to say bad things about his brothers in front of their parents.

Although Princess Consort Jing had been pampered and protected for most of her life, she was clever and had a good understanding of people's hearts. She was well aware of the inner struggle that often occurred both overtly and covertly within wealthy and prestigious families. She had previously believed that her household was simple. There weren't any concubines vying for favor, and no concubine-born children around to cause trouble. Thus, her family shouldn't have any shameful secrets or fighting. However, she never expected that her usually sensible and respectful second son, the one she never had to worry about, had an unsatisfied heart.

Zhu Junxi, who had just received a scolding, had a stubborn expression his face. Seeing that, Princess Consort Jing stopped trying to feign an illness and sat up straight in her seat. She lovingly caressed her son's handsome face and gently said, "Second Son, I and your father have neglected you all these years. I deeply apologize for hurting you. However, this cannot be the reason why you hate your brothers. If you want to hate, hate me, your mother, instead! If it weren't for my body disappointing me at the time, how could I neglect you..."

Zhu Junxi's eyes dimmed as he quietly replied, "Mother, I don't hate anyone. I just feel that it's somewhat unfair. Eldest Brother and Younger Brother can all make you proud, only I...Mother, I want to enlist in the army!"

"Enlist?" Princess Consort Jing stared at her second son with an obvious look of surprise on her face. She quietly commented, "Although our current emperor is a wise ruler, your father has a high rank with many responsibilities. If you enlist and gain military power, I'm afraid the imperial family might become afraid..."

"Mother, I've already thought of everything you just mentioned! I want to conceal my identity and start from the lowest ranks to see how far I can climb using my own abilities. Mother, I want to prove to myself that I'm not mediocre. That way, I can also be like Eldest and Youngest Brother and make you proud..." Zhu Junxi also knew that his current attitude wasn't good. If he continued to stay at home, he was afraid that the feeling of injustice in his heart would evolve into true hate and cause a conflict at home.

Princess Consort Jing tightly held onto her second son's hand and remarked reluctantly, "You want to start from the lowest ranks? Swords have no eyes and the battlefield is cruel and merciless. If you end up in an accident, how could I, your mother, live anymore?"

Zhu Junxi squeezed his mother's hand and comforted her, "Mother, father has hired a famous master since we were young. The master taught us both literary arts and martial arts. Although I am not as good at literary arts as eldest and youngest brother, my martial arts are no joke. I'm not boasting, but neither of my brothers would be able to win against me, even if they worked together. Don't worry about me, Mother!"

When the princess consort saw her second son's steady gaze and decisive expression, she knew that he spent a lot of time thinking about this. If she tried to force him to stay at home, then her son would truly become worthless in the future! She weakly leaned back on the cushions in the carriage and somewhat resentfully complained, "All of you have ideas and plans! One has to go out to sea despite all our

attempts to stop him, while another wants to rush into the battlefield to prove himself. Have any of thought about my feelings about this?"

"Mother, please forgive your son for being unfilial! If I had to stay at home any longer, I...I don't know what I might turn into! I don't want to do something that hurts you, so please allow me to be selfish for once!" Zhu Junxi fell to his knees and forcefully kowtowed to his mother three times.

Princess Consort Jing hurriedly raised her second son back up. Her eyes filled with tears as she slowly nodded her suddenly heavy head. She gently replied, "Second Son! You must achieve your goals and prove to yourself. Mother will not block you. However, you must remember that every strand of hair and piece of flesh on your body came from your parents, so you must take very good care of yourself..."

"Mother..." Zhu Junxi noticed that his mother's eyes were full of tears, so he could only choke out one word before his emotions overwhelmed him. He solemnly nodded his head, "I...I'm going to buy some watermelon..."

If he didn't step off the carriage now, he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to hold back his own tears. He didn't want his mother to see such a weak side of him.

"Young Master Zhu, my aunt wants to ask, does the princess consort know where she wants to lodge tonight?" Right after Zhu Junxi came down from the carriage, he saw a pretty young maiden dressed in pink clothes who was looking at him bashfully.

Prince Jing had a noble rank and was trusted by the emperor. Many of the high-ranking officials at court wanted to use marriage with his family as a way to consolidate their own positions at court. In addition, Prince Jing's three legitimate sons all had good reputations and handsome looks. Thus, many young ladies in the capital silently admired them. A marriage with one of Prince Jing's sons was their secret desire...

A similar shy and retiring expression of the young girl in front of him had been seen by Zhu Junxi too many times in the past. The amiable and kind manner he had in front of the princess consort disappeared when he confronted outside people. He frowned and a hint of impatience entered his eyes, "Such a question could have easily been asked by a maidservant. Is there a point in having you, Miss Xia, personally coming over?"

"I..." Xia Furong opened her eyes widely, and her lip slightly trembled as she slightly sobbed. She looked pitifully at Zhu Junxi.

Zhu Junxi became even more impatient and lightly waved his arm. He decidedly said, "If you have any other questions, then just ask my mother! I have other things to do!"

Xia Furong watched as Zhu Junxi ruthlessly left and then wiped the pitiful expression from her face. Her eyes glinted with shrewdness. Her father was only a fifth-ranked minor official at court. In the capital, one could hit dozens of fifth-ranked officials just by randomly throwing a stick.

She had many sisters at home and also had a stepmother suppressing her. She had no option but to try to scheme on her own. Her paternal aunt was childless and was also a third-ranked noblewoman. Although her uncle was a bit uncouth, he was still a third-ranked official who was regarded highly by the emperor. She had also asked about her aunt's personality and deliberately changed her own behavior to fit the woman's tastes. In front of her, she pretended to be innocent and sweet as well a bit silly and delicate. Thus, she was able to win her paternal aunt's affections.

After inquiring around, she discovered that her uncle had an old injury and would have difficulty fathering a child in the future. Thus, an idea sprouted. She needed to curry their favor by being obedient and see if they might adopt her as her paternal aunt's daughter. In the future, that would mean she had become a major third-ranked official's legitimate daughter. With her uncle's network, how could she not find an ideal husband in the future?

However, she never would have expected, never would have thought, that her uncle would adopt a little farmgirl when he was sent as an imperial envoy to the insignificant town of Tanggu. Every time he talked about that lowly farmgirl, he praised her to the skies. A lowly peasant girl, who knew how to cook a few dishes, had been raised so high in a second. In addition, that little brat even took away what should have been hers? Dream on!!

Therefore, when her paternal aunt packed her luggage a few days ago in preparation for travelling to Tanggu Town to give her uncle a nice surprise, Xia Furong managed to persuade her aunt with great difficulty to let her come too. She wanted to see just what sort of base person wanted to seize what was hers!

However, she never would have expected that, on the way there, they would encounter the prestigious Princess Consort Jing and the lofty and handsome second son of Prince Jing. Although it was rumored that the second son wasn't very favored at home, he was still a son of an imperial prince. Today, she could tell from a glance that the rumors were true: he had an attractive appearance and elegant

bearing. Every movement he made spoke of his noble birth. He was absolutely someone who was hard to find, a man who would be an ideal husband!

Once the two families figured out the identities of the people within the carriages, they decided to travel as a group. For the rest of the journey, Xia Furong would always inadvertently appear in front of Zhu Junxi and try to become closer to him. She always used what she considered to be her best angle, act shy and timid, and sweetly gaze at Prince Jing's second son.

Xia Furong believed that, among her numerous sisters, she had the best appearance. She was convinced that, with her good looks and clever plans, she would be able to make Prince Jing's second son look favorably upon her.

Unfortunately, the situation was the opposite to what she had wanted. Zhu Junxi always turned a blind eye to her coquettish actions. Because of society's expectations of what men and women should do, she couldn't be too forward in fear that she might make the second young master and the princess consort disgusted with her. Thus, despite trying for three days straight, she could never find the chance to privately speak with him.

Xia Furong wasn't discouraged and always silently observed Zhu Junxi's every movement. At last, just earlier, she found her opportunity to talk to Second Young Master Zhu. However, he didn't even treat her politely. Was it because her charm wasn't strong enough? Or was it because he wasn't in a good mood today?

Xia Furong twisted her handkerchief into knots as she bit her lip in frustration. She watched silently as his imposing figure disappeared into the watermelon store. Her eyes became dark and it was obvious that she was still scheming inside...

Fields of Gold Chapter 178 - Godmother

"Miss Xia, do you need something?" Princess Consort Jing observed the bevy of expressions that crossed Xia Furong's face. She had been aware of the young maiden's schemes throughout the whole journey. Luckily, her second son completely disdained her, which made her relax quite a bit.

A preteen girl who was only interested in seducing men was definitely someone who would cause trouble later on. How could she let such a person become someone who was linked to her son for a lifetime?

Xia Furong quickly fixed her expression and pasted on an innocent smile. She replied sweetly, "Princess Consort, Aunt wanted me to ask you if you already have a place to stay tonight. If not, Aunt says that she

has a small residence here in Tanggu Town. Although it's a bit crude, it should still suffice as a resting place..."

"No need, County Magistrate Wu's wife is a close childhood friend of mine. Before I left, I had written a letter to her to let her know that I was going to bother her for two days!" Although Princess Consort Jing had a good impression of Zhaoyong General Fang Zizhen's wife, she didn't want her son to have any more exposure to this young girl who had such obvious ulterior motives. Thus, she resolutely refused the offer.

Xia Furong's pair of dark, lively eyes instantly became dim from disappointment. She turned around and stared at that tall and manly figure in the melon stand. Not resigned in the least, her eyes flickered a bit and the corners of her mouth slightly curved up. However, she still politely said her farewells to the princess consort.

When Xia Furong returned back to the Fang Family's horse carriage that was behind Prince Jing's carriage, she smiled sweetly at her aunt. She cheerfully reported, "Aunt, the princess consort said that she had already made plans with the county magistrate's wife and will be staying over there...oh right, there's a family selling watermelons over there. They say that the melons are tasty and the price is reasonable. Niece will go right now to buy one to let aunt try some!"

Her expression and tone didn't betray the fact that she had just been soundly rejected by Zhu Junxi. It was as if she was just another young maiden without a care in the world.

Lady Fang lovingly smiled at her niece and waved a hand, "Let a maidservant go over. After traveling for so many days, you must also feel tired."

"Aunt, Niece isn't tired! After sitting in the carriage for a few days, walking around is also good!" Xia Furong's eyes, which resembled Lady Fang's, gleamed with a dazzling light.

Among her numerous nieces, Lady Fang had chosen Xia Furong not only because of her temperament but also because she thought this niece resembled herself the most. She patted Xia Furong's hand and nodded, "You are right. It's good to step down and walk around for a bit. Aunt will also accompany you to go there to look!"

Lady Fang looked through the window and saw a young cute girl with a glittering smile in front of the watermelon store that wasn't far from them. She looked to be around eight to nine years of age and had gleaming, pale skin. Although she couldn't be considered to be astoundingly beautiful, she was still quite adorable. Her large and dark eyes were especially charming and seemed to be full of liveliness.

Although Lady Fang had never seen the adopted daughter that her husband had taken in, she had pieced together an image of an odd little girl who was amazingly talented at cooking from his stories and letters about her. His most recent letter said that his adopted daughter had planted watermelons that had ripened astoundingly early. In addition, these watermelons were tastier and sweeter than the ones he had before. He even had someone bring two of them over to the capital so she could try them. She had never tried watermelon that was so big and so sweet before!

Within Tanggu Town, only the Yu Family had enough courage to try planting watermelon. Then, did that mean that this watermelon store was linked in countless ways with her husband's adopted daughter? Was that lively little girl in the watermelon stand the adopted daughter that her husband praised constantly?

At this moment, her niece wanted to go look at the watermelon stand which met her interest too. With the help of her personal maidservants, Linglong and Zhenzhu, Lady Fang stepped off the carriage. She gently stretched out her legs and idly strolled towards the melon stand.

Although Lady Fang was content, Xia Furong wasn't actually happy about her decision. The young maiden was originally planning on finding an opportunity in the watermelon store to talk to Prince Jing's second son again. Now, her perfect plan had been ruined. She stared at her aunt's back and resentment filled her heart.

By this time, the craze for buying watermelons had mostly died down. Within the store, there were only two to three matrons who were dressed in dignified attire. They were carefully selecting some watermelons from the remaining stock on the shelves. Yu Xiaocao, who could finally take a breather, sat on the tall stool and kicked her feet playfully underneath her skirts. Her heart felt cheerful as she rocked the cash box full of ingots on the counter.

At this moment, she saw a figure come in from the corner of her eyes. She promptly smiled sweetly at the new customer and trumpeted out a greeting, "Welcome, feel free to choose what you would like!"

As she raised her head, she saw a handsome face that seemed to have been finely carved with a knife. The young man was wearing a blue robe that was embroidered with black bamboo. There was a white

belt cinched around his waist and his feet were shod with a pair of white deerskin boots——he was a perfect example of an alluringly attractive man from ancient times! Yu Xiaocao gazed at the handsome guy's nice figure with obvious interest.

Zhu Junxi seemed to sense Xiaocao's eyes on him and faintly glanced at her. He suddenly discovered that the little girl had a pair of eyes that glittered brightly that stared at him appreciatively. Although her eyes stopped for a long time on his handsome face, her gaze seemed pure and didn't make him feel disgusted.

After he looked at her for a bit longer, he discovered that the owner of the eyes was actually a lively little girl who hadn't reached the age of ten. Zhu Junxi couldn't help but let out an amused laugh. How would such a little girl know of the propriety between men and women? No wonder she didn't try to hide her obvious stares!

Zhu Junxi smiled at the little girl and unexpectedly found that little girl seemed to be a bit stunned by his grin. This young girl was quite interesting. Was it really okay for her to reveal such an obvious appreciative glance at a man?

Zhu Junxi couldn't help but want to tease this little girl, so he walked up to her and deliberately frowned, “What are you looking at me for?”

Zhu Junxi had a tall figure and practiced martial arts all year round. Thus, it was natural that he would have an intimidating aura. Whenever he frowned, he actually frightened the people around him. Yu Xiaocao blinked a couple of times. She could tell from the expression in his eyes that he wasn't actually angry, so she revealed a charming smile, “Ah? If you weren't looking at me, how would you know I was looking at you? I'm staring at you, you're staring at me, I think we can consider ourselves even right now!”

“I definitely wasn't looking at you the same way you were staring at me! Doesn't that mean that I'm the one at a disadvantage here?” Zhu Junxi furrowed his brows and had a somewhat fierce expression on his face.

Yu Xiaocao suppressed a grin, “Having someone look at you doesn't cause you to become injured, so how could it be considered you're at a disadvantage? Young master looks like a handsome gentlemen who wouldn't be someone so petty to haggle over every ounce.”

“And what if I was?” The mirth in his eyes became much more apparent yet his face seemed even more fierce.

Yu Xiaocao merely shrugged and fanned out her arms, “Then I made an error of judgement ah! If you feel like you're at a disadvantage here, then I still can't give you a melon for free to compensate you. If you want to make a fuss, just go ahead!”

Seeing that the little girl was being a little rascal, Zhu Junxi didn't feel disgusted and instead thought she was quite cute. His younger sister, when she was around eight to nine years of age, would also act shamelessly in front of him. Once she got older, she became gentle and refined and was no longer as adorable as she was when she was young.

“Second Young Master, have you picked out a watermelon already? Do you need someone to help you?” Xia Furong, who had followed her aunt, had noticed that Zhu Junxi had been in the store for a while yet his hands were still empty. She couldn't just stay next to her aunt anymore and instead used her large and watery eyes to look at him shyly while she took the initiative to talk to him.

Uh oh! Handsome and refined guys would always have many people admiring them. Was it possible that women in ancient times also sometimes took the initiative too? This young girl's eyes seemed as if they were stuck on this good-looking guy's body. Was this truly okay? Yu Xiaocao propped her cheek on a hand as she avidly watched the handsome guy and pretty girl's interactions.

The mirth within Zhu Junxi's eyes slowly dimmed away and he directly ignored Xia Furong's earnest gaze. Instead, he greeted Lady Fang, “Lady Fang, if you want to eat some watermelon, just tell someone. There's no need for you to personally come here.”

Lady Fang had also noticed that her niece had been staring conspicuously at Zhu Junxi and felt a bit displeased. She frowned a bit but she couldn't say anything right now while Prince Jing's second son was in front of her. Once she heard his greeting, she slightly smiled, “After sitting in the carriage for a few days, I wanted to immediately get off and exercise my legs and feet!”

“Lady Fang, please continue with what you were doing then. I'm going to select watermelons now to avoid...avoid having my mother wait for too long!” Zhu Junxi didn't look at Xia Furong even once while he was talking. After he finished, he entered the store to look at the shelves.

Falling flowers had plans yet flowing water was ruthless ah! Yu Xiaocao could tell exactly what had happened from start to finish. However, it seemed like even after the little flower fell, it didn't become discouraged!

"Aunt, let's also go pick a watermelon too!" Xia Furong's voice became a bit more eager and polite. However, she continued to stare at that figure clothed in blue that was in the store.

The smile on Lady Fang's face disappeared and she mildly said, "Us two women only know how to eat watermelon, so how would we know how to select the right one? Little girl, please help us choose two melons!"

'Oh, oh, oh! This little flower absolutely has no more luck as her parent doesn't agree with this! Tsk tsk, this little flower is quite courageous to even make sheep eyes at this man in front of her parent. What a pity that this man is just ignoring her.'

She had been watching the scene unfold in front of her quite avidly, so when Lady Fang suddenly called on her, she paused for a couple of seconds before she immediately revealed a warm smile, "Madam, please don't worry. I promise that I'll pick watermelons that are sweet and juicy to satisfy you!"

The sight of such a bright and dazzling smile dispersed some of the gloom within Lady Fang's heart. She sized up the clever little girl in front of her: she was dressed in a lotus-cyan colored attire. The edges of her skirt and sleeves were embroidered with small purple cape jasmine flowers. Her hair was swept up into adorable twin buns with a hairpin with purple flowers made of pearls inserted in. She had a small face, not much bigger than the size of someone's palm, that was clear and clean, and a pair of lively eyes that seemed to speak volumes. Her rosy red lips seemed to be faintly curved up permanently making her seem very cute. Sure enough, this was a likeable and adorable child!

Originally, Lady Fang had been worried that her husband, who she understood like the back of her hand, had been fooled by a sinister person. Now, she could finally relax. A little girl who had eyes as clear and pure as spring water could not be someone who had a malicious heart.

Under Lady Fang's bright gaze, Yu Xiaocao chose a couple of watermelons cheerfully despite the amount of pressure she was under. This graceful and resolute lady had been staring at her continuously ever since she had entered the store. Why was that? Was it because she was too cute and made it hard for other people to move their gaze? Xiaocao suddenly became a little narcissistic...

Oh wait, what did that handsome guy in the blue robe call this lady? Lady Fang? Oh my god, could she possibly be the godmother she had never met who had decided to come over today to inspect her? Godfather really was something to not give her a hint prior—Fang Zizhen protested his innocence: He also didn't know that his wife would also surprisingly appear, okay ah?

Yu Xiaocao pretended to select watermelons as she tried very hard to remember her conduct from earlier. Was there anything shameful that occurred? A feeling of nervousness settled within her heart: would Godmother be hard to get along with? Would her godmother be unhappy with her?

Lady Fang watched as the little girl pretended to be busy. She had also noticed that, from time to time, this little girl would glance at her and knew that the little girl had guessed her identity—this was truly a clever and bright little girl! Within her heart, she added a few more points for Xiaocao.

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Out of the remaining watermelons in the store, Xiaocao chose the two that had the highest concentration of spiritual energy within them. She carefully took them off of the shelf and personally brought them over to the counter. She needed to make a good impression on her godmother. Lady Fang, on the other hand, felt bad having such a small and fragile little girl moving the watermelon and commanded her maidservants, "Linglong, Zhenzhu, why aren't you two going over to help?"

Yu Xiaocao was a bit embarrassed in front of Lady Fang and had a bashful smile on her face when she raised it up to look at the woman. She was usually chirpy and talkative but she didn't quite know what to say to the woman in front of her.

Lady Fang lowered her head and gently looked at the shyly smiling little girl. She used the handkerchief in her hand to lightly clean a bit of dust that had inadvertently been smudged onto that cute little face. She then stroked the little girl's glossy and dark hair. The little girl's eyes, which had previously been a bit anxious, immediately brightened and looked as dazzling as a bunch of stars. It made her somewhat common looking face become lively and energetic.

"Little girl, how much would it be for these two watermelons?" After seeing the young girl's sincerely smiling face, Lady Fang surreptitiously glanced at her niece's gloomy expression and became much more cheerful. The older woman's expression and mood clearly showed that she was trying to tease Xiaocao!

Yu Xiaocao came closer to the woman again as she kneaded at the corner of her clothes with a blush on her face. She quietly said, "We're all family, there's no need to talk about payment for the watermelons, right? I'm giving these two watermelons to you, Godmother, to show my filial respect to you."

"Oh? You can't just make an assumption that anyone is your godmother. Aren't you afraid that you might have mistaken her identity?" Lady Fang teased the little girl as if she was the Perisan cat at home. Her expression and tone all held a hint of laughter.

Yu Xiaocao deliberately used an uncertain tone and hesitated before she asked, "May I ask...are you a part of the Fang Family?"

Lady Fang seemed to be smiling as she slowly replied, "There are many people surnamed Fang in this world, are you telling me that every Lady Fang is your godmother?"

"My godfather told me that my godmother is beautiful, magnanimous and has a sweet-tempered personality while being resolute. She's kind but also courageous. Godfather also said that we are like two kindred spirits and would get along splendidly. At first glance I could tell that you are an amiable lady and my intuition told me that you are my godmother!" Yu Xiaocao cleverly flattered the older woman as she tried to please her.

Xia Furong, whose attention was still on Prince Jing's second son, suddenly became alert after hearing Xiaocao say, "You are my godmother". Her almond shaped eyes opened wide and she glared fiercely at Xiaocao. She instantly noticed that the little girl was dressed plainly, had an average looking appearance, and a shy manner that bespoke of her lowly birth.

She sneered and remarked drily, "Can you call anyone your godmother? Little girl, you already know how to try to climb the ladder at such a young age. You are truly too unscrupulous ah!"

Her aunt disliked people who schemed the most. If she could lead her aunt down the wrong line of thinking with her words, then it didn't matter if her uncle recognized the little girl as his adopted daughter. The mistress of the General's Estate was still her own blood aunt!

Yu Xiaocao could sense the pretty young maiden's hostility towards her. She felt a bit puzzled inside, 'We're total strangers to each other, so why is she deliberately trying to discredit me?'

Lady Fang had never seen the harsh side of her niece before. Usually, her niece always seemed innocent, cheerful, and had a good understanding of others. The words she said today, why did they

seem so mean? She started to recall that her niece often tried to please her and that the young girl also insinuated that she saw the general's residence as her second home...

Lady Fang was familiar with inner yard politics and had also personally experienced the infighting and scheming of the Xia Family's wife and concubines. Within a wink, she grasped what her niece was trying to do and immediately became unhappy. Apparently the simple and innocent appearance of her niece was a special act especially crafted for her ah!

Lady Fang's gaze at Xia Furong became stricter and she mildly said, "Furong, this is the adopted daughter that your uncle personally recognized himself. Her name is Yu Xiaocao and she's not quite ten this year. Yet, she can already support her family all on her own. Hasn't our current emperor extolled that women should strive for self-improvement and independence? I believe Xiaocao is a shining example of that!"

When Yu Xiaocao heard her godmother supporting her and even complimenting her at such a high degree, she hurriedly interjected humbly, "Godmother, you praise me too much! Without the help of my parents and siblings, I wouldn't be able to do anything! Godfather also helps me very much. For example, this store has such a good location. If it wasn't for the previous owner regarding godfather so highly, we absolutely wouldn't have been able to buy it..."

"What?!" Xia Furong raised her voice and a jealous expression twisted her face, "Uncle bought this store for you? Aunt, a store in such a good location must be at least a thousand taels! How could a country bumpkin like her possibly have enough money to buy something so expensive? When Uncle took up the imperial envoy post, he only took a couple thousand taels along with him. Is it possible that she took bribes from other people to pay for this?"

Xia Furong had accompanied her aunt for a full two years and naturally knew that her aunt hated officials who took bribes. She even constantly warned her uncle that he shouldn't take small benefits and end up losing the emperor's trust. If something like that truly occurred, this little panting dog would never be able to be liked by her aunt. Thus, wouldn't she be one step closer to her dream of becoming a young lady of a general's household?

However, Yu Xiaocao wasn't actually a true nine year old little girl. She could clearly tell that the delicate young maiden had a boatload of schemes swimming behind her eyes. She couldn't help but frown a bit, 'I'm pretty sure I didn't offend her ah, so why is she trying to trip me up? What is she up to?'

She exclaimed, "Older sister! What you said is incorrect! What do you mean I'm just a country bumpkin? You clearly are discriminating against farmers! Out of the four classes of people, farmers are only second

to scholars. Without farmers working hard day in and day out, older sister can become an immortal instead——"

Yu Xiaocao absolutely couldn't allow this girl to discredit her, right? If her godmother believed this girl's lies, what was she to do? She didn't rely on the Fang Family for sustenance or shelter, so why did she have to take this beating lying down? In any case, this godfather of hers just showed up. If he wanted to treat her well, that was definitely good but she never had to force him to do any of this. Thus, she could easily and confidently defend herself without any qualms.

When Lady Fang saw the little child in front of her defend herself, with a straight back and large eyes, she thought the girl resembled a proud and spirited little rooster. It was quite a rare sight!

"What did you mean by what you just said?" Lady Fang thought that the term 'immortal' wasn't necessarily a compliment in this case.

"In legends, immortals only need to sup from the wind and drink dew, so they have no need for the mundane food of mortals! Without farmers who till the land, we wouldn't have any crops. Without crops, what would people eat then? Drink the northwest wind?" Yu Xiaocao slanted her eyes at Xia Furong and looked incredibly adorable.

However, Xia Furong didn't think she was cute at all because this lowly farmer's daughter made her lose face in front of her aunt. She immediately flew into a rage and shrieked, "Do you dare to say that this store wasn't bought from you by Uncle? A few thousand taels isn't a small number. You're so young, yet you have such a scheming mind, what will happen when you get older?"

Zhu Junxi had just finished picking out his watermelon and was suddenly shocked by Xia Furong's shrill voice and malevolent expression. He never would have thought that a young maiden from a noble family could also have such a shrewish side too. The vast majority of gently-raised maidens would protest injustice at his assumption...

"Enough!!" Lady Fang had naturally noticed the surprised expression that flickered on Prince Jing's second son's face. She had even less patience towards her niece now, "Furong, your uncle had already explained the matter with the store to me in his letter! The money to buy the store came from Xiaocao, who earned it all herself. The store was originally owned by County Magistrate Wu. Your uncle would never take a bribe, and he only helped with contacting the seller..."

"Aunt!" Xia Furong had also seen Zhu Junxi's expression and quickly controlled herself. She somewhat impatiently tried to explain, "Don't be deceived by this crafty peasant! An ordinary farmer's daughter, even if she had a lot ability, still wouldn't have enough skill to make enough money to buy this store. That's not a small number ah, a thousand or so taels! From my perspective, let's not even talk about earning, I bet she would have a hard time even seeing that much money!"

All she could think about was what her life would be like if she was adopted into her aunt's family. All of the glory, splendor and wealth associated with the general's residence would be considered hers alone, including the thousand or so taels used to buy the store...In the Xia Family, she was only a daughter who wasn't favored. Her monthly pocket money wasn't much more than what a head maidservant could earn. How many clothes and jewelry could she buy with a thousand taels? The more she thought about it, the more bitter she became.

When Lady Fang saw that her niece was going to continue to harp about this topic, her face darkened and she remarked, "Why couldn't she earn it herself? Xiaocao is very talented at cooking. Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken, osmanthus duck, braised food, and oyster sauce vegetables were all recipes created by her. She earned several thousand taels in the past two months from her share of the profits from the osmanthus duck alone! In addition, Xiaocao also has shares in the capital's newest 'Haitian' brand of seasonings too! Having enough money to buy this store isn't something difficult for her."

"Oh? Osmanthus duck was created by this little girl? My roy...mother really likes it. However, every time we buy it we need to stand in line and we still may not be able to get any!" Zhu Junxi inspected the skinny and tiny little girl in front of him with great interest. He had never thought that the capital's most popular dishes were all created by her ah! It was truly an example of not judging a book by its cover!

When Xia Furong saw Prince Jing's second son, who had never given her a second glance, smiling at that lowly girl, her last hold on logic and reasoning snapped, "Nonsense!! Aunt, you can't believe everything she says! She's a poor and petty little farmer's girl. How often can she eat chicken in a year? Can she afford to buy duck? Are menus and recipes that easy to come up with and are famous chefs crowding the streets?"

"Older sister, we are total strangers to each other, so why are you always targeting me? You claim that I didn't come up with roasted chicken, osmanthus duck or any of the other recipes. So who do you think came up with them? If you haven't investigated properly, then you don't have the right to make claims. Do you really think it's okay for you to smear my reputation so easily?" Since this girl was her godmother's niece, Yu Xiaocao couldn't say things more bluntly. However, she still had to defend herself. Did that girl think she was easy to push around and bully?

She didn't wait for Xia Furong to retort and turned over toward that handsome youth and reminded him, "Although osmanthus duck is delicious, able to reduce swelling and aging and strengthen the blood vessels, it's still a food with cold properties. Women shouldn't eat it too frequently. Instead, they should only have some every few days or so."

Zhu Junxi didn't expect that a little girl who didn't even reach his chest would be able to describe osmanthus duck's properties so well. Thus, he somewhat believed Lady Fang's claims. He smiled, "Thank you for your kind reminder. I will make sure to tell my mother about this. Let me pay for the watermelon now, to avoid having my mother wait for too long!"

"Altogether, it comes out to ten taels." Yu Xiaocao swiftly took the money and warmly said, "Thank you for your business, hope you come back again next time——"

Xia Furong felt incensed and resentful that the youth she liked completely ignored her. She blurted out, "It's obvious you're a farmer's brat, so petty! Second Young Master is also like aunt's nephew, so how can you take his money so easily?"

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Zhu Junxi's cold gaze swept over the surroundings. The impatience simmering inside him transformed into anger. He didn't really care what Xia Furong was trying to do but when she involved him, he couldn't let her continue, "Miss Xia's words are incorrect! This little girl is running a business and I'm buying what she's selling. That's a fair deal, so why shouldn't she take my money? Or does Miss Xia believe that my Zhu Family can't afford to spend ten taels on watermelon?"

"No! That wasn't what I was implying..." Second Young Master Zhu had finally paid attention to her, but the look in his eyes was filled with loathing. Xia Furong freaked out. In front of Young Master Zhu, she needed to be more patient. She immediately regretted getting angered by that lowly peasant girl and letting Second Young Master Zhu see her bad side——it was all that lowly peasant girl's fault!

Xia Furong was the one originally at fault yet she still pushed all the blame on her victim. This type of person was truly too laughable!

Zhu Junxi carried the watermelon in his arms as he walked out. Xia Furong stared at him as if there was a magnet attracting her eyes to him. She glanced longingly at that imposing figure for a long time before she reluctantly looked away.

Yu Xiaocao felt embarrassed for this girl. Was it really okay for her to be that obviously lovesick in front of her elders?

“Furong! Don't let me regret bringing you along!” Lady Fang didn't disguise her disappointment towards Xia Furong and her tone of voice became much more serious.

Xia Furong reluctantly brought her attention back and angrily glared at Xiaocao, who was delightfully watching the show. Anger bubbled within her heart, 'It's all the fault of this devious brat! She stole all of my aunt's love and favor. In the past, Aunt never could bear to scold me!' Once again, Yu Xiaocao became her scapegoat.

“Come here, Furong! Let me introduce you. This is the adopted daughter that your uncle recognized, so she is also your younger cousin. You're a little bit older than her, so you must treat your younger sister well.” Lady Fang could tell that her niece had a bit of hostility towards Xiaocao, so she deliberately warned Xia Furong.

“Godmother, your niece is naturally my older sister, so don't worry, we'll definitely get along well.” Yu Xiaocao pulled at Xia Furong's hand in an intimate manner and lightly swayed. “Older sister, there's a lot to do here! We can climb up hills to dig up wild vegetables, catch pheasants, and also go down to the beach to gather shellfish and seafood...that's right! Tomorrow I'll bring you along to dig up some sandworms ah! The sandworms here are long and plump. They're thicker than my fingers, very long, and soft. When you touch them, they feel squishy, kind of like a large earthworm...”

This little brat knew that Xia Furong was pampered maiden from a wealthy family, so she wouldn't like insects. Xiaocao deliberately described the appearance of the sandworm very vividly. As expected, Xia Furong turned pale after hearing her description and forcefully shook off Xiaocao's hand. She even pushed Xiaocao a little and screeched, “Go away! You're such a dirty peasant!!”

Xiaocao reeled from her push and her back crashed into the doorframe, making a very loud sound. Tears came to the corners of her eyes (Author's note: She's not faking it, it really hurt.) and she raised her little face. She cried pitifully and innocently, “Godmother, I feel like Older Cousin doesn't like me...even so, she can't just swear at me! We are all human and have parents. I am also my parents' treasure, so how can I be dirty and lowly?”

Lady Fang's patience had almost been worn away by her niece's behavior today. She looked at Xia Furong, who had an expression of disgust on her face that she didn't bother to disguise. The older woman thought of her niece's previous sensible and sincere personality...haha, apparently that was all an act to worm into her good graces ah! Now that her niece knew that the Fang Family had adopted a daughter, her previous hopes had been dashed. Did she think it was no longer necessary to hide her true nature now?

"Xiaocao, come here, let Godmother see if you got injured or not?" Lady Fang pulled on Xiaocao's hand and lightly touched her back, which had been hurt.

"Godmother, it hurts..." Xiaocao had a feeling that there was a bruise on her back now. She didn't expect that a young maiden, who looked delicate and weak, could have so much strength. Did she provoke the other girl too much?

Lady Fang recalled the noise that sounded when her adopted daughter collided with the doorframe. She knew that Xiaocao wasn't faking it and comforted the young girl, "Xiaocao, let's go to the inner courtyard. Godmother will help you rub some medicinal oil on your injury and it will stop hurting very soon."

As she talked, she took hold of Xiaocao's small hand and walked along with her two maidservants through the store in the direction of the inner courtyard. When she passed by Xia Furong, she didn't even bother giving the other girl a glance.

When Lady Fang was a young maiden, she was the legitimate daughter of the main branch, so she had grown up by the matriarch's side. Although the Xia Family's relationships were quite complicated, the matriarch's compound was as peaceful as a heavenly garden. Thus, Lady Fang grew up to be an open-minded and candid young lady who firmly knew what she liked and disliked. If she liked you, she would make sure to give her best to you. However, if she didn't like you, she would immediately ignore you as if you weren't there.

The Xia Family's inner courtyard relationships were not peaceful and there was a lot of scheming and infighting. Naturally, Lady Fang was aware of this. She had originally believed that her niece, Xia Furong, was like her—the only pure lotus flower to grow out of a dirty and muddy Xia Family. However, she didn't expect that her niece had been pretending in order to fool her. To people who tried to pull the wool over her eyes, Lady Fang would dislike them as much as she had originally liked them.

Xia Furong had accompanied her aunt for almost two years at the Fang Family and naturally understood her aunt's personality. When she saw Lady Fang walk by and ignore her, she immediately panicked. She

promptly tried to explain, "Aunt, earlier I was...scared by Younger Cousin. You also know that niece is afraid of bugs. At that moment, I wasn't thinking straight and I accidentally hurt Younger Cousin. I want to apologize to her now..."

Even until now, she didn't know what her biggest mistake was, eh? Argh, she truly didn't judge correctly this time...Lady Fang paused for a second but didn't even turn her head around before she continued forward.

Yu Xiaocao gently took her hand out of the older woman's hand and turned around, "Older Cousin, I often run around in the mountains, so it's hard to avoid getting hurt. Therefore, I'm not angry because you accidentally injured me. I'm angry because you used such hurtful words to insult me! You not only hurt my feelings but you also had such a scary expression on your face! Although I was born in a farmer's family, I also know what the phrase, 'to insult someone is to invite six months of cold', means—in my village, only shrewish women would insult people in public!"

When Xia Furong heard what Xiaocao said, her face twisted into another ugly expression, 'This stupid brat must be destined to not see eye to eye with me! Not only did she steal aunt's love away from me but she also always found a way to sneakily slander me in front of Aunt! That won't do, I need to let Aunt see Yu Xiaocao's true colors!'

"Aunt, I said the wrong thing when I wasn't in the right mindset. However, Younger Cousin just compared me to her village's shrewish women, Aunt..." Xia Furong took out her handkerchief and wiped the corner of her eyes. She lowered her head, as if she was the one being bullied.

Lady Fang lightly sighed, "In a couple of days, I'll have someone send you back to the capital. Tanggu Town is too small, so you won't be accustomed to living in this place."

"Aunt, don't drive me away! I'll get used to living here, I swear!" Xia Furong started to panic. Go back to the capital? There wasn't anyone home at the General's Estate, so she knew she wouldn't be going back there. Instead, she would be sent back to the Xia Family's residence. She was already thirteen years old. If she was sent back to the Xia Family, then she would likely be sent to a high-ranking official's residence to become a concubine to give the Xia Family some benefits. After the matriarch passed away, the Xia Family had become even more chaotic and muddy...

When Lady Fang saw that her niece had been taken down a peg, she hoped that she might change for the better. She mildly replied, "If you don't want to leave, then prepare yourself for difficulties in the

future. You need to remember that I'm not here to live comfortably. Instead, I'm here to help your uncle so he can work without any worries!”

“I'll remember, aunt!” Xia Furong seemed quite emotional and that wasn't feigned. She was truly afraid now.

“Godmother, you didn't let Godfather know ahead of time that you were coming over right?” When Yu Xiaocao saw Xia Furong getting lectured, she hurriedly pulled on Lady Fang's hand, lightly swayed a bit, and interjected.

Lady Fang gently caressed her head and led her into the inner courtyard. She talked as they walked, “That's right! Originally, I wanted to give you and your godfather a nice surprise. How did you know that I didn't tell him in advance?”

“Godfather went into the prefectural city today! If he had known you were coming today, he absolutely wouldn't be able to abandon you here...” Yu Xiaocao cheerfully raised her head and looked up. Her gaze was open and magnanimous, and there wasn't a hint that she wanted to curry favor or test the waters.

She acted as if she regarded Lady Fang as her closest relative. No matter what she said or did, she knew that her closest kin wouldn't truly get angry at her. At last, Lady Fang truly understood why she always felt a slight separation between her and Xia Furong, there was a reason...

Lady Fang lightly tapped Xiaocao's head and pretended to get angry, “You're such a gutsy little girl! You even dare to tease your godmother!! When your godfather gets back, I will tell on you!”

Yu Xiaocao exposed a slightly scared expression on her face, as if she was a frightened little girl and deliberately used a voice that trembled to reply, “Don't do that ah! If Godfather found out that I offended you, Godmother, then he'll definitely break my leg in two...Godmother, please spare me ah~~~~”

Lady Fang felt that her little act was quite hilarious and couldn't keep a straight face anymore. She finally burst out into laughter. The older woman bent down and pulled Xiaocao's thin and soft body into her arms. She remarked in a voice full of mirth, “You're such a bizarre little girl, how can you be so interesting? No wonder your godfather praises you without end!”

Xia Furong, who was following from behind, almost tore up the handkerchief in her hands. Aunt had never treated her so intimately before. No matter how hard she tried to mold herself into her aunt's liking, her aunt always had a bit of separation from her. Why?! Why did this lowly brat get to obtain her aunt's unconditional love at first sight?

Unfortunately, Yu Xiaocao was unable to enjoy her godmother's hug. She yelped a few times, "Hurts, hurts! Godmother, my back hurts!"

Lady Fang remembered that the little girl had injured her back. She quickly picked her up like a little child and stepped swiftly into the room.

Yu Xiaocao's butt was in the crook of her godmother's arm, and she looped her arms around the woman's neck. She felt a bit awkward inside, 'I'm almost ten years old, but she treats me as if I was a three year old instead. If other people see this, that would be so embarrassing! But, I never would have expected Godmother, who looks so weak and delicate, to actually be quite strong. Is it because Godfather knows martial arts so Godmother became strong too?'

"Madam, let me hold her instead!" Lady Fang's competent maidservant, Linglong, hurriedly came over to take Yu Xiaocao off her mistress's hands.

"No need, it's not a far distance, I can hold her!" Lady Fang didn't want to let go of the soft and sweet little girl in her arms. If she had birthed a daughter, would she also be this cute and sweet?