

Fields of Gold Chapter 18

"Meat buns? Second sister, second sister, are those the large buns? The ones stuffed with ground meat and made with white wheat flour?" Little Shitou's eyes opened wide when he saw the pastries in his sister's hands. Saliva started to pool in his mouth as he stared pitifully at his sister.

Xiaocao grinned and pinched the little boy's cheek. "What? Do you think there are other types of meat buns? Relax, I also bought some for you!"

True to her word, she split the remaining seven stuffed meat buns between her mother and two siblings. Madam Liu received three, while her sister and brother got two each.

Little Shitou carefully wiped his hands on his clothes before he received the pastries from his older sister. He opened his mouth wide and took a giant bite. The slightly sweet bread combined with the dense and fatty taste of the meat harmonized together. In his eagerness to wolf the food down, the little boy almost choked while trying to swallow his large mouthful.

Madam Liu tenderly patted her youngest son's back. Instead of eating, she began to scold her oldest son and second daughter. "How could you two just disappear without a word and go to town by yourselves? Especially you, Xiaosha! You know your sister has a weak body, how could you make her walk so far? What would you have done if she had collapsed from exhaustion?"

Yu Xiaocao interjected to defend her brother, "Mother, we went with Uncle Ma from the neighboring village. We took his donkey cart into town. Don't worry about me, I'm not tired at all. Please start eating now. If you let the stuffed buns sit for too long, they won't taste good anymore!"

"Where did you get the money to ride the cart and to buy these pastries?" Madam Liu asked sternly as she stared at her youngest daughter.

Xiaolian, who was eating a meat bun in tiny, small bites, quietly replied, "Mother, I gave the money to her so she could take the donkey cart. Earlier I had picked some herbal medicine and sold them. Because it was only a few copper coins, I didn't hand the money over to the main house."

Madam Liu persisted, "Then where did the money for these pastries come from?" The meat buns left for her remained untouched.

"I know, I know!" exclaimed Little Shitou as he waved a small fist in excitement. He had already devoured one of his large meat-filled buns. "Yesterday we went to the sea and caught some abalone. Second Sister hid them, so she must have sold them for money!"

Yu Xiaocao grasped the little boy's cheeks with both hands and pulled gently. She grinned, "Our Little Shitou is so smart! You guessed right! Mother, please don't worry and eat now. The money I used to buy them is clean."

Madam Liu had not realized the shenanigans her children had gotten into yesterday. She sighed, "You little imp, you're quite daring, huh? But...is it right to hide something like this from your grandmother?"

"What's wrong with it? Mother, you and father are too obedient. Just look at Eldest Uncle and Younger Uncle, they're both so selfish. Younger Uncle lives in a rented house in town and eats white rice every day! His wife even bought a servant girl to do housework!" The hot-tempered Yu Xiaolian complained as she continued to eat her savory pastry.

"Also, look at Eldest Aunt and Brother Heizi. Both of them spend the entire day hiding in their rooms eating their own snacks. Look at their figures and then look at yours and little sister's...They always claim that the food they eat is from Eldest Aunt's maiden home, but it's not like she doesn't have any brothers. Why would they give so much to a daughter who's already married? Such a bad lie!"

Liu Muyun looked at her children's thin faces and stick-like figures after being prompted by her oldest daughter. She sighed deeply and carefully used the oiled paper in her hands to wrap her share up.

"Mother, why aren't you eating them?" asked Little Shitou. He had already started on his second meat bun. After stuffing himself with the first one, he was able to savor and enjoy his second one more easily. "The meat buns are really tasty! They have a lot of meat in them! If I could eat some every day, I'd be the happiest boy on earth!!"

Yu Xiaocao felt her heart ache after hearing her little brother's declaration. The little guy was too easily satisfied! His vision of heaven was being able to eat meat-stuffed pastries every day. In her previous life, there were too many spoiled brats who could eat meat every day yet were still very picky. When compared to the elementary school aged Yu Hang and Yu Xiaolian, their lives were too different! Ah, children who grew up in up poor families truly matured faster.

Their mother rubbed her youngest son's head and smiled gently. The hair on his head was brittle and dry. "Your mother isn't hungry. I'll leave these buns for you and your second sister for tonight, one for each of you..."

Yu Xiaocao hurriedly interrupted, "Mom! Brother Heizi somehow always knows when there's food around! He's like a dog, always sniffing around for something to eat. If you bring these buns back, he'll definitely find them. And if he finds them, grandmother will find

out. And if grandmother finds out and asks where we got the money to buy the meat buns, how would you reply?"

After thinking for a bit, Madam Liu had to admit her daughter was right. She unwrapped her share of the food and handed one towards Xiaocao. "Your mother can't eat this much food. Cao'er, come eat another one."

Xiaocao laughed and patted her bulging belly. "These buns are too big for me! I already ate two earlier, and I also had a bowl of egg soup. If I eat any more, I think I'll end up exploding. Older brother and I already ate, so you should hurry and eat. Make sure no one sees you!"

Yu Xiaolian had originally planned on leaving her second pastry behind, so she could give it to her little sister at dinner. However, when she heard what Xiaocao told their mother, she started gnawing on her other stuffed bun without any more hesitation. 'Hmph! That shameless fatty, Yu Heizi, absolutely can't get a piece of this!'

Shortly after the whole family finished the meat buns, an unfamiliar male voice sounded from a nearby stand of trees. "Eh? Auntie Liu, Xiaosha, Xiaolian, and Little Shitou, why are all of you here?" The stranger sounded youthful and had a clear-pitched voice.

All of them immediately turned their heads around to look. A young man dressed in a neat and casual set of clothes strolled out of gloomy shadows of the trees. A hunting bow was slung on his back. The youth had thick brows and a pair of clear, dark eyes. His nose was straight, and he had a square jawline. Although he was wearing plain, homespun clothing, it didn't detract from his heroic figure one bit.

'Whoa! The ancients truly did have flower boys! The novels weren't pulling my leg! The young man who almost drowned, the town's handsome and youthful restaurant owner, and this hot and rugged

teenage boy are all perfect specimens of good-looking men. Now that I think about it, my own two brothers would be quite handsome if they weren't so thin.'

Yu Hang threw the piece of firewood from his hand in excitement and eagerly stepped forward. "Brother Han, are you here to check on your traps?"

Zhao Han looked at Xiaocao inquisitively before he smiled and nodded, "I didn't have time earlier this morning to stop by. Now that I have some free time, I decided to take a walk in the mountains. Is this little girl...your second younger sister?"

"Yes, this is my youngest sister. Her name is Xiaocao. When she was first born, she was weaker than a kitten so my dad decided to give her a name that would help her grow. He hoped that she would be able to grow as quickly as grass and as tenacious as a weed! Little sister, this is Uncle Zhao's son, Brother Han. Go greet him now!" Yu Hang caressed her head as if he was petting a puppy.

Yu Xiaocao ducked away from her brother's hand and silently grumbled. 'Can you stop embarrassing me in front of strangers? Isn't it bad enough I have such an...unique...name? Did you really have to explain the reasoning too?'

'Uncle Zhao's son, who is Uncle Zhao? Oh right, he must be the son of Hunter Zhao, the village's best hunter. I think father learned how to hunt from this guy, so I probably should treat his son well.'

Xiaocao pasted a polite smile on her face and sweetly said, "Older Brother Zhao!"

Zhao Han guffawed. "Uncle Dahai calls my dad 'Older Brother Zhao', now you also are calling me 'Older Brother Zhao'. Who are we referring to now? Xiaocao, just follow Little Shitou's lead. Call me 'Brother Han' instead!"

"Brother Han! Second Sister, if you follow Brother Han, then you will be able to eat meat!" The little foodie, Little Shitou, licked his lips greedily.

Outnumbered, Yu Xiaocao could only follow their example. "Brother Han...." The sound of her voice was soft and weak. If Zhao Han didn't have good hearing, he wouldn't have been able to hear her greeting.

Zhao Han copied Yu Hang and ruffled her hair affectionately. "Are you not fully recovered? You still seem pretty weak... If there's any game caught in the traps, your Brother Han will roast some meat for you!"