

## Gold Chapter 191

### Fields of Gold Chapter 191 - Reporting a Crime

Yu Xiaocao took out the piping hot roasted chicken and the osmanthus duck, wafting out a tantalizing aroma, and placed them in front of Headmaster Yuan. Yuan Sinian was about to abandon his elegant and scholarly pretense in order to take the food into his hands when he suddenly noticed a few teachers in the vicinity out of the corner of his eye. He hurriedly reinstated his classy mask and said, "Ahem ahem, I, the headmaster, am an honest person who doesn't take presents!"

Xiaocao roasted him endlessly in her mind, 'I wonder where all of that food I brought over previously went, hm? Now he says he doesn't take gifts, he's truly a sly old man!'

Argh! Her younger brother needed to rely on this old man for his future, right? She had no choice but to continue this play, "Headmaster, I must tell the truth. I came over today because I had something to ask. Do you have time to talk with me?"

Headmaster Yuan raised his head even higher as he stroked his beard, "You're only just asking me about something, no need to bring gifts over right? What's going on? Just tell me directly! A gentleman must be magnanimous and understanding, there's nothing you can't discuss with me!!"

Psh! Still pretending, does he like to act that much? Xiaocao deliberately placed the two packets of oiled paper filled with food back into her basket as she smiled, "Headmaster Yuan is truly honest and magnanimous. So admirable!"

Although Yuan Sinian's head was angled forty-five degrees up, his eyes were still blatantly fixed at the food. When he saw that Xiaocao putting the food she was going to send him away, he immediately became anxious. However, he couldn't reveal his inner turmoil and could only use his eyes subtly to hint at her.

Yu Xiaocao deliberately pretended to not understand his unspoken plea and continued to speak in a louder voice, "Headmaster, I overheard people saying that someone could pay five hundred taels to get on the admission list for Rongxuan Academy. If that's true, you need to leave me a spot. My younger uncle is also a scholar. Although his talents are average, he tries very hard..."

The expression on Headmaster Yuan's face immediately changed. He didn't care about food anymore and looked sternly at Yu Xiaocao, "Where did you get that news from? Since the start, my Rongxuan Academy has always only cared about the aptitude of potential students and not the depth of their pockets. I, Yuan Sinian, founded this school for the sake of finding worthy talents for the imperial court

and not for getting rich! Let's not talk about just paying a paltry five hundred taels, even if someone who couldn't pass the admission examination came over with a mountain full of gold and silver, I still wouldn't let him into the school!"

Once there was a young son of a wealthy family from Jiangnan who had just missed passing the entrance exam by just a smidge. The father was willing to give the school half of his assets for the sake of his son's admission. However, they refused it. Luckily the man's son was hardworking and studied very hard for another year before he managed to pass the entrance exam.

"Headmaster Yuan, don't be angry! This is what happened. My grandmother went to the melon store and told us she wanted five hundred taels from us. From what I can tell, she wanted to use the five hundred taels to have my younger uncle enter Rongxuan Academy. So I did my best to placate her and told her that I would come to the academy to ask you if that was true!" Yu Xiaocao briefly described the situation to the older man.

Headmaster Yuan very quickly calmed down and frowned, "Let me think about this for a bit. I think there are two situations. The first is that Rongxuan Academy may have a spy who's using the admission quota for his private gain. The second is that your family encountered a swindler who is using your younger uncle's desire to enter the academy to cheat him of his money. Come with me to rest in my office for a bit, I need to talk to the head lecturer and school administrator about this..."

Xiaocao agreed with him and followed Yuan Sinian's personal assistant into the headmaster's office. This wasn't the first time she had entered this room, which was steeped in a scholarly atmosphere and was full of interesting antiques. She placed the oiled paper bag full of food onto the table and then took a book from one of the shelves to browse through.

The servant brought in a cup of fragrant tea and saw the oiled paper bag oozing oil onto the piece of paper that the headmaster had just written on. He felt his heart ache at the sight: the characters that his headmaster wrote were more valuable than gold! He then noticed Xiaocao casually flipping through the only book that was said to be written by Wang Youcheng and a feeling of nervousness bubbled up in his heart. He was afraid that the little girl wouldn't be careful and damage the book.

Yu Xiaocao, who hadn't finished middle school before she dropped out in her previous life, felt like her head was going to explode as she looked at the traditional characters in the book. Although she had spent a little time studying along with Little Shitou, so she could recognize some more commonly seen characters, most poetic verses had more obscure characters that were impossible to guess. She

managed to find a few verses she had seen previously in school and did her best to appreciate it while scratching her head.

Yuan Sinian, along with the head lecturer and administrator, entered his office and saw this exact scene in front of him. A young girl, plainly dressed, with an old book in her hands. Her large and lively eyes seemed to take in everything.

“Little girl, looks like you have read books before too!” Yuan Sinian revealed a gentle smile on his face.

Xiaocao hurriedly placed the book back in its original place on the shelf and grinned, “I only learned a few words with my younger brother. I took a book off of your shelf without asking your permission first, please accept my apologies.”

Yuan Sinian laughed, “What's wrong with liking to look at books? However, let's first talk about what you told me earlier!” Head Lecturer Liang's face was solemn and serious as he said, “Our academy doesn't have anyone here who is selling admission spots for money! Miss Yu, I'm afraid you must have encountered a swindler, right?”

The administrator had seen Xiaocao a few times before and had a good impression of her. He proposed, “I think that you should probably report this to the authorities, ok?”

Headmaster Yuan sonorously proclaimed, “We absolutely cannot tolerate a criminal who is using the school's name to defraud people!! Shishu, take my message to the county yamen. This concerns our school's reputation, we absolutely need to get to the bottom of this!!”

When Yu Xiaocao saw that what she had wanted had occurred, she said her farewells. She looked at the time and noticed that it was about time for classes to get out. That group of little fellows, who constantly cried piteously for food, must have been waiting for so long!

Naturally, Xiaocao didn't know that as soon as she left the office, the three men left in there, whose combined age was over two hundred years old, almost started fighting over the contents of the oiled paper bag. In the end, Headmaster Yuan acted as if he conveying a large favor and decided to give the other two men half of the chicken and duck.

When Yu Xiaocao arrived at Little Shitou's dormitory, four pairs of dark eyes stared piteously at the door. The table in front of the little fellows, other than the portion of green vegetables that Little Shitou

took out, only had bowls of white rice on it. Okay, looks like they were all waiting for her chicken and duck to complete the meal!

When they saw Xiaocao appear, the little fellows all immediately looked towards the basket in her hand expressionlessly. Once they saw the basket had two full oiled paper bags, they cheered and ran towards Xiaocao. Such a group of practical boys!

“Second Sister, when they heard that you were called over by the headmaster, they all became gloomy and couldn't help but wonder if they weren't going to be able to eat delicious food today!” Little Shitou stifled his giggles and watched as the other boys fought over the chicken legs. At least they had a conscience and knew to leave him some too!

Previously, the food that Xiaocao had brought over had been taken by the headmaster several times. Later, she learned to bring two portions of food along. Obviously, this time wasn't an exception either!

Xiaocao smiled as she watched the little boys eat her food with endless praises, “There's enough portions of the roasted chicken and osmanthus duck to fill everyone's bellies. Slow down and don't choke!” Little Fatty Sun gnawed on a duck leg as he opened his greasy little mouth to say, “Second Sister! I'm super happy that I got to dorm with Little Shitou. Last time when we had a break and I went home, my mother even said I got fatter! There's nothing to be done though, Second Sister's cooking is just too delicious! Second Sister, bring some oyster sauce vegetables next time. It's less greasy and I need to lose weight.”

Liu Jinye calmly split the roasted chicken and duck into four portions and placed his portion inside his large bowl. He ate slowly, so if he had to fight for his share against Fatty Sun and Monkey Situ, he would end up losing every time. Thus, he made his bowl his own territory. He always grabbed his portion early to avoid Fatty Sun taking all of the food away.

When he heard that, Liu Jinye slowly swallowed the chicken meat in his mouth and smiled, “Isn't it easy to get some green vegetables to eat? The dining hall has a lot. If you want to lose weight, it's even easier. Just eat the food from the dining hall for a whole month and I'm sure you'll lose ten catties!”

Fatty Sun frowned and a long-suffering expression appeared on his face, “Forget it! Can the boiled vegetables in the dining hall even compare with our Second Sister's skills? The food is only fit for pigs to eat, how can I possibly stomach it? If you want me to spend a whole month of eating the food in the dining hall—let me just die fat instead!”

Everyone burst into some good-natured laughter.

“Xiaocao? It's really you ah! I thought I had mistaken you for someone else!!” A familiar voice suddenly sounded from the doorway.

Everyone turned their heads around to take a look. Little Shitou immediately greeted the person, “Brother Xiaowen! Have you eaten yet? My second sister just brought some roasted chicken and duck from Zhenxiu Restaurant over, come eat some!”

Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted chicken and osmanthus duck? Rumors said that it cost five taels each and had now increased to ten taels apiece. Despite the increase, the supply still wasn't enough to meet the demand. The Yu Family had progressed as his mother had said— their life had gotten much better!

However, now the Qian Family had better days too. His family no longer had to worry about selling their ducks and even their duck eggs sold well now. They now made dozens of taels from selling their ducks to Zhenxiu Restaurant. In addition, his mother had recently hatched a flock of small ducklings and even caught a bunch of ducks in the wild to raise. Now, they had around four to five hundred ducks at home! After getting the sweet taste of profit, the Qian Family was now preparing to expand their duck business by a lot!

Qian Wen looked at Xiaocao. It had been a long time since they last saw each other, and the little girl had grown in height a bit. Her fair and clear skin looked so tender that one could almost pinch water from it, and her pair of large eyes seemed to be able to look into the depths of a person's soul...

His mother had told him that the roasted chicken and osmanthus duck at Zhenxiu Restaurant had a lot to do with this little girl. In addition, in the spring, the watermelons that the other villagers didn't see much use for had even been sold for over five hundred taels. Furthermore, that wasn't even including the Yu Family's braised food business at the docks and their seafood product wholesale business...he felt like the distance between his and her family seemed to be growing larger and larger...

However, he didn't think that was a problem! The teacher said that with his current level of schooling, he could participate in the children's examinations next year. If he could easily pass the entry level exams, then he would become the first person from Dongshan Village to pass the prefectural exams. In addition, at that time, he would only be fifteen years old. Now that his family's circumstances had improved, he planned on taking the next set of exams to become a graduate and then become someone who had passed the imperial exams! By that time...

“Brother Xiaowen, this chicken leg is for you!” A fragrant aroma coming from Little Shitou's hands suddenly interrupted his thoughts.

Qian Wen smiled at the little fellow and replied, “I've already eaten! You should eat the chicken leg instead!”

Usually Qian Wen made sure to look out for Little Shitou. The older boy studied very hard and, with his own efforts, was in the top third of the intermediate class. Little Shitou not only liked this older brother from his own village but also respected him quite a bit. The little boy persevered in trying to give some of the delicious food to Brother Xiaowen, “Even if you've already eaten, you can still have a taste of the chicken leg! It's really very good!!”

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Qian Wen could no longer refuse the little fellow's kindness and took a piece of chicken about the size of his thumb. He placed the meat into his mouth and carefully tasted it. The meat melted into his mouth and revealed a flavor that he would never be able to forget in his lifetime. Even when he passed the imperial court examinations in the future and was able to eat roasted chicken frequently as well as other delicacies, he could still never taste the flavor he once had...

Yu Xiaocao watched the little boys contently and felt immense satisfaction when she saw how happily her younger brother was eating. She couldn't resist temptation and pinched his plump face. Little Shitou puffed up his cheeks and perfunctorily resisted, “Second Sister, I'm not three anymore. I'm now a student of Rongxuan Academy, so stop pinching my face. If other people see, I'll lose face in front of them!”

“I pinch your face because I love you. It's not like I want to pinch any strange person's face ah! I now understand why there's this saying: 'when a son grows up he doesn't want his mother anymore'. You haven't even become an adult and have only gone to school, yet you don't want me, your second sister, anymore, eh? How disappointing!” Yu Xiaocao twisted her head to the side and forcefully opened her eyes wide. She let the feeling of disappointment rise in her and managed to blink out a few tears as she looked accusingly at her younger brother.

Little Shitou immediately panicked and quickly put down his rice bowl. He rushed over to his second sister and hugged her arm, lightly swinging as he said, “Second Sister, you're still my Second Sister! You will always be my good Second Sister. Don't feel sad, I was the one who was wrong. Pinch me, pinch me however much you like...”

Qian Wen had noticed Xiaocao's crafty actions and couldn't help but shake his head inwardly. Although Yu Fan was clever and quick-witted, he was truly no match for his second sister's little tricks and antics.

Xiaocao blinked her eyes, and the tears in her eyes flowed down her eyelashes onto her cheeks. A sad expression surfaced onto her face, which, when paired with the tears, made her look extremely desolate. Little Shitou almost burst into tears, and he continued with a sob in his voice, "Second Sister, don't cry. In the future, I won't do this again. Don't be upset over me..."

Little Fatty Sun butted in and shoved his round, plump little face in front of Xiaocao. He loudly proclaimed, "Second Sister, don't be sad. If Little Shitou doesn't recognize you as his sister anymore, I'll take his place! Look, you can pinch me all you want. I bet my face feels a lot better than Little Shitou's!"

Xiaocao couldn't help but let out a peal of laughter. She rubbed Little Shitou's face and ruffled Little Fatty Sun's hair as she said, "I was only scaring you guys, don't take it seriously! Quickly eat more...it's not early anymore, I still need to go back to Dongshan Village. Shitou, study well and I'll come by tomorrow to take you home." Tomorrow was when Shitou's weekly break started.

Little Shitou now knew he had been tricked again by his second sister. He sniffled a couple of times and met Xiaocao's eyes with a solemn look. He vowed, "Second Sister! Don't worry, I will always be your Little Shitou!"

This promise of his had been engraved deeply in his heart. Even after he became the youthful top scorer in the imperial examinations and famous throughout the land, whenever he saw his second sister shamelessly acting up, he always reverted back to his usual reaction...

Before Xiaocao could feel touched, Little Fatty Sun butted in again, "Second Sister, I will always be your Little Fatty Sun too! In the future, when you make delicious food, don't forget to bring a portion for me ah!!"

Xiaocao pinched Little Fatty's face, who was slightly taller than her. She didn't know whether she should laugh or cry as she replied, "Don't worry! Even if you don't call me 'Second Sister', I'll still bring your portion along!! Alright, I'm heading out. If I leave any later, I won't be able to get home before it gets dark!!"

After waving goodbye to Little Shitou and his friends, Xiaocao went back to the melon stand. Lady Fang's carriage was already ready to go. Xiaocao's family's two carts had just enough room to hold all of the necessities of daily living that she had bought earlier.

When Madam Zhang saw the two carts full of goods, she turned green with envy. There was a large sack of white rice, a large sack of wheat flour, and also a piece of fatty pork that weighed at least five catties. In addition, there were some fine articles of daily living that she had never even seen. She suspected that the contents of these two carts had to be worth at least ten taels. Sure enough, the family members of officials were never stingy with their spending habits.

However, the fortune teller did say that her family was going to produce an official. Once her son passed the examinations, she would also be considered the mother of an official. When that happened, she could easily walk around with her pockets full of money...

Since the carts were stuffed full of goods, their speed naturally became slower. By the time they got to Dongshan Village, the moon had just peeked through the tree line. When they passed by where Madam Zhang lived, she refused to get off the cart because she still hadn't got ahold of the money she wanted.

"Grandmother, two hundred taels is a lot of money, so you must give us some time to get it all together!! It's already late tonight, if there's anything else you need to say, can't it wait until tomorrow? We can get it done then!"

Madam Zhang had been out and about since dawn and it had taken her several hours to walk into town. She also spent a lot of time waiting outside the melon stand and couldn't bear to spend a little money to eat lunch. After throwing a giant tantrum, she didn't have much energy left in her body. She thought for a bit and decided that if Yu Hai wanted to renege on his promise, she would make him pay! Realizing she wouldn't get anything today, Madam Zhang finally got off the cart and went back home.

Lady Fang watched the old lady as a feeling of resentment slowly rose within her. She sighed lightly, "Xiaocao, there's nothing wrong with spending some money to fix a problem. However, doing this will only encourage certain people to become even more shameless. In the future, they'll continue to do the same thing to get money out of you, and that will not be good!"

Yu Xiaocao had seen a golden light burst out of the multicolored stone on her wrist when Madam Zhang finally came off the cart. It had shot towards Madam Zhang's head. When she heard her godmother's worried comments, she grinned craftily and replied, "Godmother, don't worry! The money that she wants...she won't be able to get a single copper! Just wait and see what unfolds next ah!"



That night, a sneaky figure surreptitiously crept out of the east room of the old residence. A small golden colored kitten looked at the person contemptuously and proudly raised its head as it followed from behind.

[We're going out to see a nice play, not to pretend to be thieves, okay? Is it necessary to act this mysterious?] The little divine stone sniffed with disdain.

“Shhhhh—” In order to leave the east room, it was necessary to go past the main room. Yu Xiaocao had been frightened by the little divine stone's voice and subconsciously glanced towards the kang bed. Luckily, her parents' breathing pattern remained steady and stable, showing that they were still deep asleep. If she roused her parents, then that would scratch her plans for the rest of the night.

Xiaocao carefully opened up the door. The old wooden door made a 'creeeeeeeek——' noise and Xiaocao was startled like a rabbit just waiting to bounce away. She clasped her hands onto her mouth and stared at the kang bed, waiting for any reaction. Her father flipped over and continued to snore heavily.

After that false alarm was over, she quietly snuck out of the door and quickly scuttled through the courtyard. She ran towards the main gate. Yu Hang, who had woken up to go to the restroom, could see a shadowy figure that resembled one of his younger sisters. A feeling of puzzlement settled into his heart. Why would his younger sister not be sleeping in the middle of the night and instead be running around outside?

Yu Hang quickly caught up with Xiaocao and lightly tapped her shoulder. Xiaocao let out a low shriek and covered her mouth. When she saw her older brother behind her, she glared at him in annoyance——scaring someone too badly could cause them to die, okay?

Yu Hang instantly recognized his youngest sister by the look in her eyes. He questioned her somewhat suspiciously, “Why aren't you sleeping? Where are you planning on going?”

Xiaocao placed a finger to her lips to remind him to lower his voice. She then faced the main room of the house again and watched for a second before she quietly replied, “Don't ask me here, come with me instead!”

The two of them scuttled under the moonlight and arrived at the main branch's outer wall. Luckily, with her older brother along, Xiaocao was able to step on Yu Hang's shoulders and climb onto the wall. When she jumped down, the little divine stone used its spiritual power to steady her a bit and she managed to avoid face planting into the ground.

Ever since he had recovered from his injuries, Yu Hang felt like his hands had become more nimble and there was more strength in his body—the little divine stone rolled its eyes, 'This divine stone's bathing water naturally strengthens and heals the body!'

He flipped over the wall easily. Following his younger sister's lead, he crawled until he arrived under window of the main room. The weather was slowly warming up and the window to the main room hadn't been closed. With the moon providing some hazy light, he was able to see the two people in the room lying on the kang bed and hear his grandfather's thundering snoring.

Yu Xiaocao was also there, pricking up her ears to listen to the sounds coming from the main room. Yu Hang found his little sister's antics quite amusing and lowered his voice, "Little Sister, did you especially come here to listen to grandfather snore?"

"Shhh, don't say anything..." Xiaocao just finished her sentence when commotion arose within the inner room.

"Stay! Stay away from me!" A mournful screech echoed out of the room. Old Yu's noisy snores suddenly stopped and, following that, the sounds of him slipping on clothing could be heard.

"Wife, wife?" Old Yu patted his wife's arm but didn't expect her to violently shake his hand off! Madam Zhang originally had her eyes closed but now they were opened wide, filled with shock. The expression on her face made it seem like she had just seen a ghost. She rigidly stared at the roof beams in horror, as if she had seen something up there. She screamed, "Don't come over!! Stay away from me!!"

Old Yu followed his wife's line of sight and looked at the beams. He discovered there was nothing there and thought that his wife was frightened by a nightmare. Because he was afraid of startling her further, he could only quietly say, "Wife, wife..."

Madam Zhang acted as if she was stuck in her own dimension. She not only woke up but also became even more agitated and started swatting the air in front of her, "I'm not afraid of you!! You've been dead for over a decade!! Come here, I'm not afraid of you!!"

Old Yu looked again at the roof beams and the hairs on his body all raised up. It seemed like his old wife had encountered something that wasn't clean.

“Wife, who do you see right now?” Shivers ran down Old Yu's spine as he quietly inquired.

“Older cousin!! You had an illness that couldn't be cured, so living any longer wouldn't have changed anything. Your husband was so poor from trying to treat your illness that your home didn't even have an extra grain of rice. If you didn't die, your husband, who's such a good man, would have died of starvation along with you!!” The frightened expression on Madam Zhang's face had suddenly been replaced by a cruel one. She snarled as she stared at the beams on the room as if she had just seen her archenemy.

Within Madam Zhang's consciousness, a ghastly pale woman, who had blood coming out of all of her apertures, was staring at her with a gaze full of hate. The ghostly apparition continuously lamented, “I sheltered you out of the kindness of my own heart, why did you harm me? Why did you have to hurt me?”

“You had to die!! If you didn't die, your husband would have never looked twice at me!! If you died, then everything you had would become mine!!” Madam Zhang seemed to have lost her marbles under the ghost's constant questioning and suddenly screamed out the secret she had hidden inside for decades.

Old Yu was stunned by the malevolent look on Madam Zhang's face and stared at her as if he didn't know who she was. At that time, Madam Zhang, who had been married off to a village far west of them, had been abused by her husband's family. After she finally had enough, she stole a dozen copper coins from the family and left with her son, begging for food, to get to Dongshan Village. She sought shelter with his first wife—Madam Zhang's older cousin.

Fields of Gold Chapter 193 - Exposed

He remembered very clearly that, at the time, his kind first wife, Madam Liu, had a weak body and they were very poor. Despite that, she still happily received her younger cousin and her cousin's son. In the beginning, Madam Zhang rushed to do all of the work around the house and treated his son and daughter better than she treated her own son. In addition, she also did her best to take care of her older cousin, who was bedridden. He didn't say anything in regards to this and only spent long days out of the house fishing and gathering seafood to subsidize their income.

Under Madam Zhang's tender care, Madam Liu's condition started to improve and even the doctor said that after she finished the last two prescriptions she would be almost fully recovered. However, no one expected that, after she finished the two medications, Madam Liu's illness would recur.

Everything that was of value at home had been sold off, and they had already borrowed money from those who could afford it. Madam Liu continued to take medication but she never recovered again. Her body, which had originally been weak, only managed to hang on for another month or so before death came to get her.

Not long after Madam Liu passed away, he felt like that having his home lack a female figure wasn't good. During that time, Madam Zhang had been extremely hardworking and also treated his two children well. Thus, he took her as his second wife. In the beginning, she managed to be fair to everyone in the family. However, after his third son was born, Madam Zhang's heart began to change. The change was most marked when their third son left to go to school. Madam Zhang became extremely stingy and would save every copper coin in order to pay for their third son's schooling fees.

“Yes! That's right!” Madam Zhang cackled crazily as she stared fixedly at the roof beam. She acted as if she was talking to someone, “My dear sweet older cousin! I was the one who swapped out your medication and let you, who was about to recover, die in the end!! I was doing this for the good of your two children!! If you didn't die, then you guys would have had to sell them to get the money for your medication!!”

Old Yu looked at Madam Zhang, who had a malevolent expression on her face, with shock. Apparently Madam Liu's illness didn't come back, and she was actually killed by Madam Zhang...He would have never expected that the woman who he had slept in the same bed for over twenty years was actually a venomous viper.

Outside, Yu Hang and Xiaocao exchanged stupefied looks. Xiaocao clasped her hands over her mouth and remarked in disbelief, “Our biological grandmother was murdered by that old shrew!! She murdered our true grandmother and even treats our branch so cruelly. Is she not afraid our biological grandmother would come back and find her?”

Yu Hang gritted his teeth as he quietly replied, “That old shrew has done too many bad things, so the heavens will punish her! Tonight she's acting so weird. Do you think our true grandmother came back to settle the bill with her?”

“Ahhh—don't kill me! I know I was wrong!! I shouldn't have switched out your medication and shouldn't have married off your daughter to a widower who lived far away. I shouldn't have restricted your son's and grandchildren's food and expelled them out of the family during their toughest time!! I confess to everything, don't take my soul away, don't take me away—my son will pass the imperial examinations in the future and become a high-ranking official. I need to become an official's mother!! Spare me!!” The fears within Madam Zhang's heart finally bubbled up, and she didn't try to act nonchalant anymore. She sobbed bitterly as she knelt on the kang bed and kowtowed furiously towards the direction of the roof beams. A rhythmic knocking sound could be heard.

Madam Zhang saw the ghostly Madam Liu in front of her eyes. The other woman had long, messy hair that cascaded down, and she was dressed entirely in white. The apparition's eyes dripped with blood as they fixedly stared at her. Madam Zhang saw the ghost stretch out a hand with long fingernails towards her neck. She immediately felt her breath hitch in her throat and fainted back with her eyes rolling up into her head.

The old woman had her own hands around her neck, tightly squeezing. Her face had turned blue from lack of air and her tongue lolled out of her mouth. Although Old Yu was incredibly shocked inside, he couldn't watch Madam Zhang suffocate to death. He hurriedly went over and forcefully pried her hands off her neck.

Madam Zhang felt as if she was a fish who had been thrown out of the water. She truly thought she was about to die. Regrets swirled within her. At the time she had fled her previous husband's home with her son, even her own parents and older brother refused to shelter her. Only her distantly related older cousin was willing to take her in during her time of greatest need, saving her from the slow death of starvation and sickness. However, she bit the hand that fed her and switched her older cousin's medicine, causing the other woman to pass away. However, this was destiny. Why else did she fall in love with her cousin's husband? If her cousin didn't die, how could she possibly marry a man as kind as her cousin's husband and become the de facto head of the family? Thus, Madam Zhang previously only had guilt within her heart but no regrets.

When she was strangling herself, Madam Zhang put all of her strength into it. Old Yu had to use all of the strength in his body to slowly pry her hands from her neck with great difficulty.

The old woman gasped heavily for air and turned her head to faintly see Old Yu. It was as if she was trying to grasp her last lifesaver. She clutched onto his arm and whined hysterically, “Cousin, you can't blame me!! Just blame your husband for being such a good man, he's the model of a good man in my heart—good tempered, loves his family, and works hard...that's right! I blame your husband for being too good, tempting me to have bad thoughts. He's the troublemaker. You need to find him, don't go for me, stay away from me!!”

As she ranted, her eyes roved around crazily. When she saw the blanket on the kang bed she catapulted herself towards it and pulled it over her body. She hid herself underneath as she trembled from fright.

Old Yu looked at Madam Zhang with disbelief. It was said that a married couple was just a pair of separate birds, once catastrophe arrived, they would fly their separate ways. Sure enough, Madam Zhang finally revealed her true selfish side. When it came to saving her own skin or her husband's, she quickly chose her own and easily shoved her partner, who had been with her for over twenty years, to take the blame.

Outside the room, the two siblings, who were eavesdropping, suddenly sensed someone heavily breathing behind them. They plastered themselves against the wall and looked behind them in alarm. To their surprise, they saw their father, who was doing his best to restrain his sorrow as he gripped his hand tightly into a fist. When did their father come over? Did he also hear the old shrew's confession?

Tonight, Yu Hai had found out the truth behind his mother's death. In fact, he had called his mother's murderer 'mother' for over twenty years. That fact caused his heart to squeeze in pain, and it wasn't a type of pain that any person would be able to endure!

The tiny golden kitten, which had followed the two siblings over, had its fur standing straight up in indignant anger. It waved its claws and a tiny glittery golden light pierced through the wall and went into Madam Zhang's head.

"Ahhhh——" Madam Zhang flipped out of the blankets and a more horrified expression appeared on her face. She clutched her clothes and screeched, "Don't take me away! I admit my guilt, I confess to all of it!! Just give me one more chance, okay? My youngest son hasn't passed the prefectural exams yet and my daughter is about to get married, they can't go without a mother ah!!"

"You say your son and daughter cannot go without a mother, but what about my daughter and son who were only seven to eight years of age ah? They could go without a mother then? If I died and you took good care of my children, that'd be one thing. Wasn't it enough that you had to make my children's lives difficult? You're such a cruel woman, you even forced my son to split from the family with nothing but the clothes on his back. Now, you have the nerve to demand money from him, and you even ask for two hundred taels!" Within Madam Zhang's consciousness, her long-dead cousin was accusing her and criticizing her with every word.

"My son's entire family did their best for you, but that still wasn't enough? Why do you still have to be so stingy and greedy, do you really need to suck every last bit of blood from him ah?? Your children are

children, but does that mean my son and daughter aren't children? That's not okay, I demand that you come with me to hell tonight! Someone as evil as you, murdering people and abusing their children, deserves to go to the eighteenth level of hell!!”

When Madam Zhang saw the two deities of hell next to Madam Liu stringing the chains around her neck, she frantically struggled again, “Older Cousin, I was wrong! I was truly wrong!! I shouldn't have been so selfish and killed you!! I shouldn't have abused Dahai's entire family! I'll change, I swear I'll change in the future——give me one last chance to change. I'll never dare to be like this again...don't take me away! I don't want to go to hell!”

Rivers of sweat dripped down Madam Zhang's entire body and her white hair stuck up crazily on her head like a bunch of straw. She resembled a malaria patient who was in the throes of sweats and chills and looked like a fish that was about to die. Although Old Yu felt deep anger at the knowledge that she was the one who murdered his first wife and abused his first wife's children, she was still the wife he had lived with for over twenty years.

His youngest daughter had already delayed her marriage by three years waiting for her fiance's mourning period to be over. If Madam Zhang had something happen to her now, he wasn't sure that Yu Caidie would be able to preserve her engagement. When another three years passed and her fiance's family cancelled their agreement, then his daughter's future would be entirely ruined.

Old Yu let out a deep sigh. More than twenty years had passed, and he could no longer really remember what Madam Liu looked like anymore. Those who were living still needed to move on!

“Cuiyun ah! I know you died full of resentment, but if revenge breeds revenge, will there ever be an end to it all? I know you're a kind hearted person. You even had to help a stray injured puppy that managed to encounter you. This family temporarily can't be without Madam Zhang, please be merciful and let her off this one time!! Don't worry, I'll keep an eye over her and I will not let her harm Dahai's family ever again!! Please do this for the sake of our previous relationship, let her go!” Old Yu seemed to have aged in this short time period. His voice seemed powerless and tinged with deep emotion.

Madam Zhang also loudly promised nervously, “Older Cousin, let me go this one time. In the future, I'll live out the rest of my days atoning for my crimes——I make a vow to the heavens, I will never cause Dahai trouble again. I will treat Dahai and his family well...”

“Enough!!!” Yu Hai couldn't handle it anymore and kicked open the door. He rushed in and sneered at Madam Zhang, who was on the kang bed, kowtowing endlessly, “I don't think I can bear taking your

good will! I am not like my mother, who nurtured an ungrateful tiger in her midst and then was murdered by that thankless wretch!!”

Madam Zhang was disheveled from head to toe and was hunkering down on the corner of the kang bed. When she saw Yu Hai come in, the pupils in her eyes shrunk, 'How come Yu Hai is here? Just how much did he overhear?'

Old Yu coughed and weakly said, “Dahai, she's your elder...”

“How is she considered my elder? I don't have any elders who murdered my mother!! I truly hate, hate myself for recognizing my mother's murderess as my mother for over twenty years; hate myself for letting my wife and kids be abused without doing anything, hate myself for ignorantly giving up all of the money I earned to my mother's murderess to provide for her children~~” Yu Hai trembled as he howled out his grief!

Madam Zhang felt frightened, disappointed and distressed by the look of pure hate that was within Yu Hai's eyes. In the future, she could never use her identity as his stepmother to threaten Yu Hai to do anything for her. She had become his enemy who had slain his mother. The fact that Yu Hai didn't want to take revenge on her for killing his mother was already considered a miracle.

Fields of Gold Chapter 194 - Contract

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“Dahai, I raised you and your older sister up into adults. That took hard work. Please remember our old affections and help me plead for leniency to your mother. Don't let her take away my soul...” Madam Zhang saw Yu Hai as her last chance for survival and entreated him piteously.

Old affections? Perhaps it was guilt or something else. Before Yu Bo was born, Madam Zhang treated him and his older sister pretty well. Everything they ate and wore was about the same as Yu Dashan's. However, once Yu Bo started going to school, Madam Zhang forced Yu Hai, who was only thirteen at the time, to brave the dangers of hunting in the mountains. Not only did he have to give her all of the money, but he also had to do all of this on a half-empty stomach.

At the time, Yu Hai believed that the family was in poor financial shape, so every day he went into the mountains to catch hares and pheasants while hungry. Despite that, he couldn't bear to eat a single morsel of meat that he caught and sold them all to subsidize the family's income. Later on, he found out that the reason his whole family lived frugally was to save money for Xiaobo's school tuition. Since he was purehearted and cared about his siblings, he worked even harder to learn hunting techniques from Older Brother Zhao. Thus, he managed to catch more game and the variety also increased.



After he married, his wife and kids didn't receive preferential treatment at home despite him making the most income. Instead, the family used his unquestioning filial piety and his wife's kindheartedness to make them the overworked servants at home. They did the most work at home but ate the worst food. As the days went on, his wife's body became worse and worse and his children all became emaciated. The whole family was sickly and weak. However, Madam Zhang wasn't even willing to pay for their doctor and medicine fees and his youngest daughter almost died...

“Old affections? You're talking about familial affections with me? Wasn't I the one who earned almost all of the money that covered youngest brother's school tuition as well as his living expenses in town? Wasn't that a sign of my familial affection? Before we split from the family, my wife worked like a dog despite being sickly. Wasn't that also a sign of our familial affection? When I was seriously injured and near death, Older Brother Zhao came by with three hundred taels that were all taken by you. My whole family didn't say a single word. Wasn't that also a sign of our familial affection? Yes, you raised my older sister and me for a period of five to six years. However, I used fifteen years of hard labor and returned it all to this family. If that wasn't enough, then the three hundred taels, which should have been used to save my life, should be more than enough to return your so-called 'old affections' right?”

Every single word that came out of Yu Hai's mouth seemed to drip with blood, “In that case, I don't owe you anything! On the contrary, you're the one who owes me! You owe me my mother's life!! When will you be able to repay me for that?”

Madam Zhang had gotten used to getting her way at home and didn't expect Yu Hai, who was always the most obedient, to suddenly retort her so intensely. The fears within her suddenly evaporated and she glared fiercely at Yu Hai and shrilly shrieked, “All of the money you made wasn't spent on me! I spent all these years scraping together money and being frugal. Wasn't it all for the sake of the Yu Family? Xiaobo is your blood brother and has your Yu Family's blood. The oldest brother is like a second father, isn't it right and just that you pay for his school fees?”

When he saw that Madam Zhang wasn't a bit repentant about her actions and was trying to twist the logic around, Yu Hai remarked in a voice filled with disappointment, “You're wrong. I'm not the oldest brother of the family. The oldest brother of the family is Chen Dashan who has already changed his surname to Yu. He also crawled out of the same belly as Yu Bo. That being said, you, as their mother, are still alive and well! After doing all of these calculations, I don't think that I, as the second brother, should be the one raising them!!”

Madam Zhang continued to persist on her stance and pestered him, "I was able to provide for your older sister and you, so why can't you provide for your younger brother!! You have money now yet you're so reluctant to take out five hundred taels for your younger brother. I was truly blind for raising a person worse than a pig into an adult. I should have just sent you and your stupid mother down to hell back then..."

"Shut up!!" Old Yu slapped Madam Zhang forcefully on her face and furiously hollered, "Why do you keep saying that you're the one who raised Dahai and older sister up? Do you know how to fish or farm? Wasn't I the one who earned the money to feed and clothe Dahai and his older sister? Did I ever say a word in regards to you and that good for nothing son of yours for eating my food? Ever since our youngest son was born, how have you treated Dahai and his sister? Do you think I'm blind? How do you have the face to boast about what you did?"

Madam Zhang held her face that had just been hit and dazedly looked at Old Yu. She would have never expected that her husband, who never had a temper, would one day raise his hand towards her. In addition, he would even do it for the sake of that b\*tch's children!

Madam Zhang exploded and screeched, "Ahhhhhhhh—". She flung herself at Old Yu and used her long nails to scratch at the old man's face as she screamed, "You hit me? I did all of this for you ah? It was all for the sake of your Yu Family's future!! Yu Hai is your son, but that doesn't that mean that Xiaobo isn't your son, ah? You old bastard, if you actually had the ability, do you think I would have needed to scrimp and save so much ah?"

Under her explosive temper, Madam Zhang showed her true potential. She unexpectedly managed to push Old Yu, who had done hard labor all his life, underneath her body and clawed at him furiously. Although Old Yu protected his face, a few long scratches that dripped with blood managed to land on him.

"Enough!!" Yu Hai caught Madam Zhang's arm and pulled her off of Old Yu.

That was the straw that broke the camel's back. Madam Zhang rolled around on the kang bed and wailed, "Someone come quickly! Old Yu's family wants to kill me!! You two are ganging up on me, an old woman. You guys want my life!! You want me to die!! They're killing me!!"

Yu Dashan, who had long heard the ruckus inside, rushed into the room despite Madam Li's attempts to stop him. He forcefully pushed Yu Hai aside and placed himself in front of Madam Zhang protectively. He snarled, "Dahai! My mother is your elder, how could you treat her like this?"

Yu Caidie was standing outside the room with tears streaming down her face. She cried so hard that her body trembled. She looked at her own mother with eyes that seemed to regard a stranger. Her mother, who had always tenderly loved and taken care of her, had actually murdered her second older brother's biological mother. If Second Brother reported this to the authorities, then her mother would pay with her life!! This kind and weak girl couldn't stand this revelation. Her legs gave out under her as she fainted onto the ground.

However, the situation inside was chaotic, so no one noticed her. Yu Hai regarded Madam Zhang, who was still trying to shamelessly wriggle her way out of this situation, with a dead look in his eyes. He calmly stated, "Who's right, who's wrong, we can find out when the authorities make their decision! The price for killing someone is your own life, debts must be repaid, that is the law of the heavens!!"

Madam Zhang abruptly stopped her wails as she looked at Yu Hai in alarm. His one sentence made her feel more afraid than seeing her cousin's, Madam Liu, ghost. This case couldn't be reported. She couldn't allow her youngest son, who had a bright future ahead of him, to be stuck with a 'murderess mother'. Her youngest son was going to pass the examinations and become a high-ranking official!

"No!! Dahai, you can't do this!! You will ruin your younger brother. Xiaobo is your blood-related younger brother ah. Do you think you can watch with open eyes as you ruin his reputation by reporting this case ah?" Tears dripped down Madam Zhang's face as she rushed over to hold onto the corner of Yu Hai's jacket. She desperately hoped that Yu Hai would let go of his desire to report this case.

Yu Xiaocao couldn't stand it anymore. She stepped out and loudly proclaimed, "You're wrong! Younger Uncle wouldn't have his reputation ruined by my father. The one ruining his reputation is you, his malicious and evil mother!! Since you dared to kill someone, then you must be willing to take on the consequences. Don't try to use morality to restrain my father! My father is taking revenge for my biological grandmother. This is the responsibility of every son, so he has no wrong in this!!"

Madam Zhang could only think about her youngest son's future prospects. She sobbed piteously, "Yes, yes! It's all my fault!! However, my Xiaobo didn't do anything wrong and my Caidie also didn't do anything wrong!! My poor daughter, if she had the reputation of having a mother who killed someone, then the Mu Family will definitely break their engagement. Her future will be ruined. Xiaobo and Caidie are both your blood-related siblings ah!! Feel something for them and let me go this one time——tomorrow I'll have someone come over to fix your mother's grave and a monk to say the last rites for her. I'll place your mother's placard in the house and burn incense for her and I'll also visit her grave on the first and fifteenth day of each month. Just spare me this one time!"

When he saw Madam Zhang's expressions and thought of his younger brother and sister, Yu Hai felt his resolve waver. At this time, Old Yu came over with a hand over the cuts on his face and said, "Dahai,

Madam Zhang is truly guilty of a terrible crime. However, even if we sent her to the guillotine, we still wouldn't be able to bring your mother back to life! We need to focus on those living instead. For your pitiful younger brother and sister, please don't bring this case to the authorities, okay?"

When Yu Xiaocao saw her father wavering, she decided she needed to step in as she didn't want Madam Zhang to get off that easily. That old hag was truly someone who forgot the pain once the wound healed. If they let her off now, then, in the future, she would likely continue doing shameless things, which was just aggravating to think about!

She thought for a bit and then said, "If you want my father to give up on reporting this case to the authorities, that could be done. However, we need to make sure that she truly regrets her actions! Since my biological grandmother came over to find her, it must be because she didn't repent and continued to bully our family. Because she couldn't stand seeing this happen, she came over to aid us, the victims."

Xiaocao paused for a second before she continued, "Grandfather, do you know what she did in town today? She threatened my father in order to have him give her five hundred taels. She wanted to use that money as a bribe to allow my younger uncle a backdoor way to enter Rongxuan Academy. If it truly could happen, that would be one thing as we could take it for younger uncle's future prospects. We would even borrow money to make that happen. However, I asked the headmaster of the academy and he told me that there was no such thing. The academy has already reported this matter to the authorities and I am confident that we will find out the ending very soon!! Grandfather, younger uncle is your son, but my father is your son too ah! Both the palm and the back of the hand are made of flesh, you can't kill one son to pave the future for another ah!! Grandfather, my father already doesn't have a mother anymore, are you trying to make it such that he doesn't even have a father who loves him anymore too?" Xiaocao looked at her grandfather with tears shining in her eyes. She was doing this for the sake of her father and her family, who had all suffered through a lot in the past.

Old Yu looked at his son, who was much taller than him. In the facial features of his second son, he could see the shadow of his first wife. This son of his had always been sensible since childhood and was the most obedient of all his children. Xiaocao was right. He couldn't continue to neglect this son just because he was sensible and obedient. That would hurt his son's feelings!

"Dahai, don't worry! In the future, Madam Zhang won't dare to cause more trouble for you guys. She doesn't have the face to find you all anymore. I'll make sure to keep an eye on her!!" Old Yu seemed as if he had suddenly aged many years at once, and he couldn't seem to straighten his back anymore.

Fields of Gold Chapter 195 - Spiri

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Yu Xiaocao walked over and pulled on her grandfather's hand. She firmly said, "Grandfather, it's not that we don't believe you! We don't believe her! Empty promises mean nothing, so let's have her draw up a written pledge!!"

Madam Zhang's eyes widened and was about to say something when Yu Hai stopped her and interjected, "How about...I still think reporting this to the authorities is better, right?"

The old woman immediately deflated like a balloon——defeated!

Yu Hang ran back home to fetch the paper and brush he usually used to practice writing. With Yu Xiaocao dictating, Yu Hang wrote down all of the wicked things Madam Zhang had done very clearly. In addition, at the end, he added Madam Zhang's promise——in the future, she would sincerely repent, fix her ways, and no longer cause trouble for Yu Hai and his family. Finally, they had Madam Zhang stamp her handprint on the paper.

Why was Yu Hang the one writing? The reason was simple. Although Xiaocao learned how to read and write the fastest out of all of them given that she had finished middle school in her previous life, she was usually too busy to practice writing. Thus, her handwriting was quite terrible and looked shoddy. Her characters also had a tendency to be missing certain strokes (that's because she was writing simplified characters, okay?). On the other hand, Yu Hang always wrote two whole pages of characters every night, no matter how tired he was or how late it was. He had some talent, and, when combined with his tireless efforts, his handwritten words already looked quite presentable.

After Yu Xiaocao solemnly put the written pledge of guilt away, she spoke indifferently to Madam Zhang, "In the future, my whole family and you should just act as if we don't know each other! We won't bother you, so we ask that you don't come over to disturb our peaceful life. This is the most that my father can endure. If you want to continue to cause trouble like in the past, then we can go see the authorities together ah!"

Yu Caidie, who had previously fainted at the door, had already woken up. When she heard her mother's crime again, she sobbed inside Madam Zhang's arms. Madam Zhang hugged her daughter tightly towards her and glanced briefly at the 'ghostly' humanoid figure floating near the roof beams. She shuddered and replied, "I've already signed my admission of guilt. Dahai, shouldn't you tell your mother to go back now?"

Yu Hai mournfully looked in the direction that Madam Zhang was facing, yet he wasn't able to see anything. When his mother died, he was only about the age that Little Shitou was now. More than twenty years had passed since then, so his memory of his mother's loving face had already started to

fade away, as if her face had been covered by a thick veil. Now he hoped he could be like Madam Zhang and be able to see his mother again. If he could, he would make sure to carve that image of her deeply within his head. However, why didn't his mother show herself to him? Did she blame him for recognizing her murderer as his mother for over twenty years? Tears of anguish slowly slid down...

Yu Xiaocao firmly held onto her father's large, rough hand with her warm little one, as if she was trying to comfort him. When she saw her father silently stare at the roof beam, shedding tears, Xiaocao silently sighed and then spoke to Madam Zhang, "As the proverb says, 'Those who don't do shameful things won't have to fear spirits knocking at night. Having a suspicious heart will cause inner demons to appear.' All of this was personally done by you. Because you committed crimes against my father and my biological grandmother, your heart was filled with darkness and you suspected everyone. As long as you abide by your promise in the future and no longer continue to harm us, I'm confident that my true grandmother will magnanimously let you go this one last time. May I give you some advice? The gods see everything you do, thus, it's better to avoid doing shameful things! Father, let's go home!"

After she finished speaking, the three of them left the courtyard with the sound of Madam Zhang's mournful cries behind them. Yu Hang and Xiaocao each walked next to Yu Hai, who was in the middle. Xiaocao's hand remained snugly within that large palm the whole time, showing her care for him. It was just like that time she faked her illness. Her father had never thought about giving up on her.

Xiaocao could tell that her father's spirits were low and felt more hate for Madam Zhang. She deliberately transmitted to the little divine stone, 'We can't let that old witch off so easily. If we don't torment her for a few more days, I won't feel right in my heart!'

[Alrighty, leave it to me!] The little divine stone cackled in anticipation as it rubbed its two paws together evilly.

Consequently, Madam Zhang had a rough time. For the next few days, she was even afraid to go to bed because every time she closed her eyes she could see her older cousin's eyes that dripped with blood glaring at her sinisterly. The ghost never moved or spoke but it continued to stare at her constantly. Under such a frightening gaze, she really couldn't fall asleep. After suffering from insomnia for a few days in a row, the usually healthy Madam Zhang quickly became wan and sallow. Within a few days, her entire head of hair had turned white and there were more wrinkles on her face. Her eye bags almost came all the way down to the corners of her mouth. It looked like she had aged more than a decade in a short period of time and it was obvious that she wasn't mentally well— but that's all for later.

"Cao'er, do you...do you think that your grandmother blames me? Otherwise, why else wouldn't she also show herself to me, ah?" Yu Hai abruptly stopped and looked towards the shadowy mountains

underneath the moonlight. The sound of his voice finally broke the dead silence between the three of them.

Xiaocao hurriedly replied, "How could that be true? I think it's more possible that grandmother blames herself. At that time, she had been tricked by that old hag, Madam Zhang, and trusted her completely. On her deathbed, she even asked Madam Zhang to take care of Eldest Aunt and you. That old witch, Madam Zhang, didn't fulfill her promise to grandmother. Madam Zhang is the one at fault here, don't blame yourself."

Yu Hai shook his head heavily and slowly remarked, "As her son, I am truly unfilial and such a disappointment. I've almost forgotten what my biological mother looks like..."

Just as he finished lamenting, a white-colored figure on the little road in front of him slowly materialized. It was a woman with a gentle smile on her face who looked as if she was just shy of thirty. Her jet black hair was bound up under a blue and white decorative head covering. She looked at Yu Hai with eyes that were filled with love and gratitude. A faint sigh reached their ears, "My dear Hai'er, it hasn't been easy for you..."

"Mother——" Yu Hai managed to choke out a reply. The faint memory of his mother in his mind slowly became more clear. This was the way his mother had looked before she fell ill. Inside his heart, his mother had always been the most beautiful, gentle, and loving woman in the world...

Yu Hai wasn't the only one who saw her; Yu Hang and Yu Xiaocao could also see her. Xiaocao's eyes opened wide as she silently praised the little divine stone in her mind, 'Little Glutinous Dumpling, you're too awesome!'

[But...I wasn't the one who did something. What other spirit is playing around here, I, this Divine Stone, will find out soon...] The little golden kitten that was next to her feet raised all of its fur on its back and its tail also went up. It looked as if it was getting ready for a battle at any time.

Yu Xiaocao hastily bent down to hold onto its tail and then held the little fellow in her arms. It didn't matter if the faint spirit in front of them was actually conjured by the little divine stone or not. It was no longer important as she could tell that the apparition had no ill will towards them. In fact, judging by her father's expression, she knew what was going on...

“Mother, Mother——your son can't make it up to you. Wahhhhh...” Yu Hai, who was almost thirty, knelt down on the small mountain road and started to weep like a child who was lost. The ghostly figure lovingly gazed at Yu Hai and the wind seemed to transmit the echoes of her voice, “No, it was Mother who didn't see clearly and made things difficult for you two siblings...”

“Mother...I'm useless. I couldn't prevent my sister from getting married off to a far away village...” Whenever he thought of his older sister, who had been married off to a widower who lived hundreds of miles away at the tender age of fourteen, Yu Hai always remembered his feelings of grief and helplessness. Tears once again crowded his eyes.

The woman seemed to be unable to contain her feelings, faced Yu Hai...and floated over. She lightly placed her transparent hand on top of his head and gently soothed, “Don't blame yourself. Although it's colder over there, your brother-in-law treats your older sister very well. Right now your older sister has a decent life...Mother only has you and your older sister left, you two need to live well!”

Yu Hai lovingly looked into his mother's gentle eyes and softly promised, “Mother, I will! Right now, my life is very good. In a few days, I plan on bringing Older Sister and her whole family over. With her closer, it'll be easier to help each other in times of need.”

The woman seemed to pause for a moment with her head lowered to think a bit before she finally nodded in agreement, “Your brother-in-law doesn't have anyone left from his side of the family there anymore, so having them come over is good. However, you still need to make sure that both your sister and brother-in-law agree to this first...Hai'er, do as what you see fit. You've always been dependable, so Mother is relieved.”

[Master, let me go! This ghost died tragically, so it wasn't able to reincarnate and has been left here on earth as a lost soul. As more time passes, it's possible that grievances may pile up and lead it to transform into a malicious spirit that harms people. I will bring her back into the cycle and let her reincarnate again. That is the right path.] When the golden kitten saw that the ghost wasn't a spirit that harmed living humans, it was no longer as against the ghost as when it first saw it. However, the stone still wanted to banish the spirit out of the living world once and for all to secure the future.

The woman seemed to be able to hear the conversation the little divine stone had with Xiaocao and looked over towards Xiaocao. Although it was the first time Xiaocao had ever encountered a ghost, the woman's gentle eyes and demeanor made it easy for her to forget that she was a spirit.

The woman lightly floated over to Xiaocao. She noticed that the little girl didn't seem the slightest bit afraid and her pure and clean eyes gazed at her calmly. The spirit smiled gently. Following that, a voice



appeared within Xiaocao's mind, 'Child, I don't care who you are or where you came from. I hope you continue to have a kind heart and good intentions and live in place of my poor departed granddaughter!'

Xiaocao was suddenly startled and stared flabbergastedly at the ghostly woman with some alarm—she, she somehow knew that she wasn't the true Xiaocao?!

The woman lightly sighed, 'Don't worry child! I haven't strayed far from here all these years and I know everything that has happened in this family. When my poor granddaughter bashed her forehead on the ground, I personally observed her soul being guided to the underworld by the spiritual guides. I also clearly saw you, a soul from a different world, being reborn in my granddaughter's body. Your soul was a pure white color and didn't have any malice emanating from it, so that was the reason why I didn't try to stop you. I'm glad that I didn't try to interfere at the time. Thank you for everything you have done for this family...'

[That's right, we're lucky that she didn't try to interfere. Otherwise, Master, your soul would have been scattered away. At that time, I wasn't powerful at all and only had enough spiritual energy to bring you into this world. If she tried to stop us, I don't know if I could have won!] The little divine stone suddenly felt a shiver run through its body.

When Yu Hai saw his mother's ghost stop in front of his daughter, he noticed that his daughter had a somewhat frightened look in her eyes. He, as the epitome of the perfect father, hurriedly came over and hugged his daughter's small and weak-looking shoulders in an attempt to comfort her. He reassured her, "Cao'er, don't be scared. She's your grandmother, your true grandmother! She won't hurt you!"

That woman's voice continued to sound within her mind, 'Your father is right. Since fate has brought you here and you were reborn in my granddaughter's body, then I am considered your grandmother. At that time, I didn't try to stop you, so now I naturally won't try to do anything to you.'

The woman then used a voice that all three of them could hear to say, "Xiaocao, you're a good child. Grandmother wants to thank you..."

Yu Hai hastily interjected, "Mother, that's right! If it wasn't for Xiaocao, our family would still be in a lot of trouble ah! Xiaocao is a child who has personally been instructed by the God of Wealth ah!"

The woman smiled and nodded her head. The sound of her voice once again surfaced within Xiaocao's mind, 'That godly item you have has the ability to let me reincarnate. I've already fulfilled my desires in this earthly realm, so it's about time that I leave...'

Fields of Gold Chapter 196 - Bailiffs

In Yu Xiaocao's consciousness, the little divine stone could communicate with the woman, [Saving a person's life is more meritorious than building a seven-floor pagoda. Don't worry, I will help you. Do you want to leave tonight, or...]

"Cui... Cuiyun!" The little divine stone's words were interrupted by an aged and trembling voice. The three people and one ghost all looked towards the sound of the voice and saw the figure of Old Yu appear under the moonlight. After tonight, Old Yu seemed to have suddenly gotten a lot older.

The woman in white looked at Old Yu with a gaze that no longer had any warmth inside. With a faint gaze, she said, "Yu Liqiu, our marital affection had already been completely wiped out when you remained silent about Madam Zhang's actions. To tell you the truth, I'm really disappointed in you! People often say: 'With a stepmother, one will also have a stepfather.' It turned out to be true ah!"

It was uncertain whether it was due to nostalgia or guilt, but Old Yu's face was covered with tears. He said in a trembling voice, "I'm sorry that I didn't take good care of our children. I have let you down ah!"

There wasn't any emotion within the woman's voice as she said, "There's no need to say these unnecessary words. I don't feel like listening to them anymore. I don't need your repentance and atonement. The best way to atone for your wrongdoings is to stop causing so much trouble for Hai'er's family in the future."

After that, she looked at Yu Hai with reluctance and said in a soft voice, "Hai'er, I need to go! Reincarnation is the best ending for me. Don't be sad. You have to stay well..."

She looked at the kitten in Xiaocao's arms. The little divine stone understood her meaning. A golden light burst out of the woman's body, and her figure gradually faded away...

"Mother——" Yu Hai cried out, which sounded even more tragic and mournful in the quiet mountain forest. However, he also knew that reincarnation was the best option for his mother. Although he was reluctant to let her go, it was impossible to let her stay.

Old Yu burst into tears, crying bitterly as he muttered, “She still blames me ah, still blames me... She's unwilling to forgive me! Cuiyun, Cuiyun...I have let you down ah!!”

One knelt on the mountain road, while the other stood with his back bent. Yu Hai and Old Yu both looked in the direction of the scattered figure for a long time. A cool mountain breeze blew, and Yu Xiaocao sneezed loudly.

This sneeze released Yu Hai from his feelings of sorrow. Yu Hai rubbed the corner of his eyes and stood up. He took off his outer jacket and wrapped it around his daughter's body, and then said with a slightly hoarse voice, “Cao'er, quickly wear this. Don't catch a cold—Father, you should also go back.”

“She still blames me. She still blames me ah...” As if he had gotten possessed, Old Yu kept repeating this sentence.

Yu Hai sighed and gently said, “Father, I don't blame you, and Mother wouldn't either!! Madam Zhang is right about something: Younger Brother and Youngest Sister are also descendants of the Yu Family. There is flesh on both the palm of one's hand and the back of one's hand. They're young, so there's nothing wrong with you being partial towards them. Don't think too much and quickly go back!”

Old Yu raised his head and looked at his son, who was the one that he was the least worried about since childhood, with eyes blurred by tears. If he had paid more attention to his son, would Madam Zhang have second thoughts about her actions? Would his son have suffered less? Would Cuiyun not blame him? There weren't so many 'what-ifs' in life. People must take responsibility for their own actions!

“Dahai! You have already separated from family, so you don't have to worry about the matters in the family. In the future... just live a good life!!” Old Yu turned around and walked back along the rugged mountain road. His footsteps appeared very heavy!

Yu Hai looked at his father's back, which was no longer tall and straight. He opened his mouth and finally shouted, “Even if I left the family, you're still my father! I will not give you any less of the filial respect that I shall provide you...” But, for the things that he didn't need to give, he wouldn't even take out a single copper coin!

The father and daughter returned to the old residence while supporting each other. Looking at the three tottering mudbrick buildings, Yu Hai suddenly said, “After the autumn harvest, let's rebuild our house!

Let's knock down the old building and buy the land next to us, so we can build a spacious five-room, tile-roofed house. We can expand both the front and rear yards! We have to live a prosperous life so that your grandmother can reincarnate without any concern..."

Although Yu Xiaocao preferred to buy a house and land in town, she had to nod her head in support of him after hearing his words, "Mhm! If we're going to build a house, then we'll have to build the best house in the village. We should also get glass windows like the ones in Brother Han's house. This can brighten up the house as well as keep warm."

"Okay! Let's get glass windows!" Yu Hai deeply exhaled, releasing the stuffiness in his chest. Anyone who found out that their mother was murdered by someone would feel uncomfortable within their hearts. Fortunately, his mother had appeared today and told him that she didn't blame him. She also told him to live a good life... 'Mother, you can rest assured. I will definitely live a prosperous life!'

The next day, Yu Xiaocao stayed at home and had some rare leisure time. The watermelon shop's business was already on track, so Eldest Maternal Aunt could handle the store by herself. Thus, she didn't need to help out and could have a good rest.

Around noon, Xiaocao's younger uncle, Yu Bo, returned in a dazed state with several bailiffs behind him.

As soon as the bailiffs entered the Yu Family's main gates, Madam Zhang, who hadn't slept all night, acted like a mouse that saw a cat and immediately hid on her kang bed, afraid to go out. Madam Li had also timidly shrunk into a ball and said in a low voice, "Dahai is seriously being too unreasonable. Didn't he say that he wasn't going to report it? Mother, you should quickly hide. A life for a life. If you get caught, you will get beheaded!"

After what happened last night, there wasn't anyone in the Yu Family who didn't know what Madam Zhang had done. Madam Li felt ashamed of her mother-in-law within her heart, but she didn't have even the slightest impression of her father-in-law's first wife and Madam Zhang was her husband's birth mother, so she naturally wouldn't do anything out of the line.

Madam Zhang had been harassed by the 'ghost' for an entire night, so she was on the verge of having a mental breakdown. When she heard Madam Li's words, she walked around in the room and didn't know where to hide...

“Mother! We have been deceived! We were deceived ah!!” As soon as Yu Bo entered the door, he saw Madam Zhang with disheveled hair and a pale complexion. He was stunned at first, and then he continued to cry.

Hearing her younger son's crying voice, Madam Zhang was stunned for a moment and then she stood up with a loud cry, “Xiaobo, what did you say? That person who said that he would help you enter Rongxuan Academy is a swindler? Then... the three hundred taels that I gave you? Did you give them to him?”

Without even a shred of scholarly aura, Yu Bo had a sullen face as he crouched on the ground and held his head, “That person came to me the day before yesterday and asked me for some money to pull some social connection, so I gave him all of the three hundred taels. This morning, the bailiffs came over and said that he was a swindler, and that they had already caught him. Tomorrow, we will need to confront him in court.”

“Then... the bailiffs didn't come to arrest me?” Madam Zhang looked out into the courtyard and asked in a low voice.

Yu Bo looked at her strangely and asked, “Arrest you? For what? They're just going through the regular procedure and coming to summon you to be questioned in court tomorrow. We just got scammed. It's not like we did anything illegal.”

‘You didn't, but I did ah!!’ Madam Zhang couldn't express her distressed feelings. Last night, after Yu Hai left, the family had a family meeting and decided to take her disgraceful past to their graves. In particular, they couldn't let Yu Bo know so as to not affect his mood for studying.

Seeing that his mother was still dazed, Yu Bo hastily reminded her, “Mother, the bailiffs have traveled so far, so we should give them something to drink first. We can't let them work on an empty stomach, so we must take care of their lunch! Second Sister-in-law and Xiaocao are good cooks, should we ask them to come help us prepare a table of dishes?”

Madam Zhang's heart was even more bitter than a Chinese goldthread ah! Last night, she had just signed a contract and promised that she would never disturb the second branch again. If she went to ask them to help cook today, wouldn't she be slapping herself in the face? Yu Hai had evidence of her crime in his hands. With how much that fellow loved his wife, if he found out that she went to order his wife to work right after vowing to leave them alone, he would definitely report her crime to the county magistrate.

Madam Zhang hesitated for a moment, and then said, "Your second brother's family is so busy that they wish that each person can work like two people. So, how can we bother them right now? Zhang Quan's wife is also a good cook, so let's just ask for her help!"

Yu Bo felt even more surprised in his heart, 'When did Mother learn to be so considerate of Second Brother's family? Did the sun rise from the west today?' But, he had also heard in town that Second Brother's watermelon shop was really busy. His mother was right, did it really matter who they asked to help cook?

Madam Zhang sent Madam Li to invite Zhang Quan's wife over, and then she went to the courtyard and politely greeted the bailiffs. After that, she went to the chicken pen, caught a big chicken, and killed it. She really treasured the few chickens that they raised at home. She wasn't even willing to kill one for the New Year, so she had really gone all out today!

She took out several eggs, but put them back after thinking about it. She waved her hands to call over her younger son, "Xiaobo, do you think that we can get the money that was scammed back?"

Yu Bo had a troubled expression as he said, "Logically speaking, I just give him the money the day before yesterday, so it has only been a day. Thus, that guy surely wouldn't have enough time to spend them all. But..."

He looked outside and whispered, "People often say: 'The entrance of the yamen is shaped like the character eight. Even if one has reason, they should not go inside without money.' I reckon that even if the three hundred taels are found, they will most likely be confiscated..."

Madam Zhang's heart was dripping with blood ah! Three hundred taels wasn't a small sum of money ah! It was more than half of the family savings. Without the money that Yu Hai got from catching the bear, there was no way that their family would be able to get three hundred taels in this lifetime. She covered her heart as her legs turned limp and she sat down on the ground.

"Mother! Mother, what's wrong? Don't scare me ah!!" Yu Bo watched as Madam Zhang clutched her chest and looked as if she had trouble breathing, and he was immediately at a loss.

Madam Zhang deeply inhaled several times, and then sat on the ground, crying silently. She recalled the words that Xiaocao said that day. What kind of place was Rongxuan Academy? It was a place that all

those high-ranking officials and wealthy businessmen fought to send their sons into!! Not to mention five hundred taels, even if five thousand taels or fifty thousand taels was what they needed to get into the school, there would still be people vying for that chance. Such a good thing, how could commoner like them be able to get this chance? Why was she foolish and actually believed that fraudster's wheedling words?

“Mother, do you feel a little better now? It's all my fault! If it wasn't for me, our family wouldn't have lost such a large sum of money. You also wouldn't have to be so worried!” Yu Bo also deeply regretted it at this time. Had it not been for the fact that he was so eager to attend the school, how could he be targeted and scammed?

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In fact, Yu Bo only gave the swindler two hundred taels. He planned on waiting until his mother had collected enough money so that he could give that person the remaining one hundred along with the rest of the money all at once. Unexpectedly, that swindler was arrested in just a day.

He reckoned that they wouldn't be able to retrieve the money that he gave out, so he didn't give the one hundred taels back to his mother and kept it as his own private savings. In terms of money, his mother had always been very generous towards him, but it was more convenient to have some money in his own hands.

Madam Zhang fixed the disheveled hair around her temples. Her troubled expression made her look somewhat ferocious. After thinking about it, she still couldn't accept the fact that they had lost the three hundred taels just like that. She told Madam Li to help Zhang Quan's wife, and then she went out and walked towards the direction of the old elm tree at the entrance of the village.

At that side, Old Yu was crouching under the elm tree and quietly listening to the village head and his eldest brother's conversation. Yu Lichun noticed that his third brother's face didn't look very good, so he asked after him in concern. However, he didn't get a reply, which made him feel even more perplexed.

The village head and Yu Lichun turned the topic of this year's harvest over to his youngest son, Yu Jiang, "I heard that Dajiang is helping with the seafood acquisition and the business is doing very well ah! Is he really simply helping, or does he get paid?"

Thinking of the bonus that his youngest son brought home every day, Yu Lichun smiled like a blossomed chrysanthemum flower, "Dahai is a kind and upright child. He isn't stingy about sharing his profits and also thinks of his brothers when he has money-making opportunities. This seafood acquisition business

with the Zhou Family is an opportunity that Dahai gave us, so it's considered a collaboration between our families. As for the income, it's alright..."

Yu Lichun understood the principle of 'one shall refrain from exposing their own wealth in public'. If he foolishly told others about the income that Yu Jiang received these past few days, it might lead to envious people causing trouble for them. It was still better to keep a low profile. However, he couldn't control the expression on his face, which didn't look like the face of someone who wasn't making money.

The village head stroked his beard and jokingly scolded, "This guy, you won't even tell me the truth ah! Would I steal your business opportunities?"

Yu Lichun chuckled and said, "It really isn't much. It's just a little more than the wage one gets from working at the docks for a day. It can't be compared to your youngest son, who works with officials!"

The village head's youngest son was the secretary of the neighboring county's county magistrate. He didn't get a high salary, but he considered to be a 'civil servant'. The village chief had always been proud of his youngest son!

The two were chatting ardently when Madam Zhang came out of the village. She politely greeted the village chief and her eldest brother-in-law with a nod, and then she said to Old Yu, who deliberately ignored her, "Xiaobo's father, bailiffs from the yamen came to our house and said that they're investigating the case of Xiaobo being scammed. No matter what you're still the head of the household, so come home to help entertain the guests!"

Old Yu hummed and hawed, and didn't say anything for a long time. In the end, he sighed heavily, slowly got up with his hands clasped behind his back, and walked towards his home.

Madam Zhang quickly followed behind him on her bound feet and the two remained silent the whole way. When they were about to reach home, Madam Zhang finally broke the silence, "Husband, I know that you're blaming me! But it's something that has already happened, and we can't go back to redo it. We still need to continue living our lives. Xiaobo is someone with a promising future. It's just that he has bad luck this year. Didn't the fortune teller say that there will be a high-ranking official in our family in the future? Xiaobo is your son, so you can't disregard his affairs ah!"



"Help? How am I supposed to help? When you two, this pair of mother and son, discussed behind my back about buying your way into the academy, why didn't you think about discussing it with me, the father? Now that you guys have encountered a problem, you suddenly remember that Xiaobo has a father?" Old Yu spoke in a muffled voice. Had it been in the past, Madam Zhang would have already started arguing with him.

But, after what happened last night, she no longer had the right to be so bold and confident. Madam Zhang thought about it and said, "Let's put everything aside for now. Xiaobo said that the swindler has been caught already and they just need us, the victims, to be questioned in court before they can convict him. But, the three hundred taels... we might not be able to get back. That's Xiaobo's travel expense for when he goes to take the imperial examination in the capital in the future ah!!"

"Things that don't belong to you, even if you get it, you still won't be able to keep it! The three hundred taels was supposed to be used to save Dahai's life, don't you feel guilty for taking the money at all? Ay—It serves you right that you can't get it back!" Old Yu remembered the time when his second son was lying in bed and on the verge of death, and how they urgently needed this money after separating from the family. However, they had confiscated the money... He felt a mixed sense of shame and remorse within his heart.

Madam Zhang had to suppress her emotions in order to not argue with Old Yu. She continued to patiently say, "Husband! If there really isn't any way to get the money back, then I will give up on this idea. However, we have a chance to get some of the money back. If we don't make some efforts, Xiaobo wouldn't have any traveling expenses when he goes to take the imperial examination in the future. As his parents, wouldn't we regret for a lifetime?"

Old Yu frowned and said, "Didn't the money get swindled away by the fraudster? We can still get it back?"

"Didn't the swindler get caught? The local authorities can definitely get the money back, or at least get a portion of the money back. But, I don't know if they will give the money back to us..." Madam Zhang was thinking about how to get Old Yu to go to the old residence and ask for their help.

With furrowed brows, Old Yu brows puzzledly asked, "If the local authorities don't want to give it to us, what can we, common folks, do?"

Madam Zhang took this opportunity and said, "We can't do anything, but isn't Xiaocao's godfather..."

Old Yu glared angrily at Madam Zhang and snorted, "You just made a promise last night. You wouldn't have forgotten about it already, right?!! At that time, we all agreed to go our separate ways and not disturb one another. It hasn't even been a day, yet you have already forgotten the pain after your scars have healed?"

Madam Zhang's eyes darted around, and then she squeezed out a few tears and started sobbing, "Old Man, I know that I have gone overboard in the past. I have harmed Older Cousin and I have also wronged Dahai's family. But, no matter what, Dahai is your biological son and blood brothers with Xiaobo ah. Can they really not be in contact with each other for the rest of their lives? If he helps us with this now, wouldn't Xiaobo also take care of his second brother in the future, when he makes a name for himself?"

By this time, they had already arrived in front of their own house. Yu Bo, who had walked out of the courtyard listlessly, looked as if he had found his pillar of support when he saw Old Yu. He choked up as he said, "Father... Son is unfilial. I have made the two of you worry about me!"

Looking at his youngest son, who appeared to have gotten a size thinner and looked haggard, Old Yu thought of Madam Zhang's words and his heart had somewhat softened. He sighed heavily and said, "You have to remember this lesson ah! People shouldn't think of doing dishonest practices. You should focus on studying these days, and then try again during Rongxuan Academy's fall enrollment examination. If you don't pass the first time, then try a second time, a third time... You will eventually get in."

Yu Bo listened to his father's teachings dejectedly and nodded repeatedly. However, he didn't have any hope in his heart. After this incident, Rongxuan Academy had probably placed him on the blacklist, so he would never have a chance to enter Rongxuan Academy again in his life. After all, other than talent, Rongxuan Academy attached great importance on one's moral character as their standard for accepting students.

When Old Yu saw his youngest son looking downcast, he patted his shoulder and said, "Alright, it's already a thing of the past, so stop thinking about it. I... I'll go to your second brother's house and ask if we can get the money back?"

Yu Bo's eyes flickered, and he suddenly remembered that his niece's godfather was an imperial envoy sent from the capital, which was a position that was even higher than the county magistrate. If he put in

a word, the people of the yamen certainly wouldn't dare to take his family's money for themselves. But, wouldn't that expose the fact that he kept a private saving?

"Father, this has to do with my reputation, so it's better if less people know about it..." Yu Bo muttered.

With shifty eyes, Madam Zhang said, "Son, your second brother isn't an outsider. Moreover, when I went to town to borrow money from him, that girl Xiaocao had already guessed that this was a scam. If she hadn't gone to Rongxuan Academy to make a confirmation, we may get deceived even more. Xiaocao's godfather has a close relation with the county magistrate, so we should be able to get the money back."

Yu Bo wrung his hands in indignation and said, "So, it was Xiaocao who reported it to Rongxuan Academy ah! I was wondering why the academy would report the case—Mother, you're destroying your son's future ah!!"

Madam Zhang looked at him, confused, "I did it for your good ah. How did I ruin your future?"

"Just think about it. To let the administrators of Rongxuan Academy know about this matter, which originally wasn't some honorable thing, would I, your son, still have face to study in Rongxuan Academy in the future?" Yu Bo sighed and groaned.

Madam Zhang stomped her feet angrily and said, "It's all that damned brat Xiaocao's fault! I was wondering why she was being so kind, so it turned out that she was trying to spoil my son's good opportunity ah! That wicked girl has such a malicious heart. Why didn't the heavens take her away at that time..."

"Enough! You're still blaming others for your own mistakes! I reckon that all the books that you have read over the years have rotted in a dog's stomach!! If you're going to continue to be like this, then I think you should stop studying and just come back to learn how to fish!" Old Yu tossed his sleeves and stormed towards the direction of the old residence.

Yu Bo looked at his father's departing figure and felt wronged in his heart, 'I didn't say anything ah! In the end, it was Mother who couldn't accomplish anything and caused trouble instead. It's fine to go borrow money, but why did she have to talk about my matters?'

Madam Zhang's whole body was trembling in anger. She pointed at Old Yu's gradually fading figure and shouted, "Look, just look at him! Does he even think of you as his son?!! In his heart, he only cares about the two children that his dead wife left behind!! Second Son's family are just farming and doing a little business, what good future would they have? Won't they still have to rely on you in order to live a leisurely life in the future?"

"Mother, don't be angry! I, your son, will definitely study hard so that, in the future, those people will regret that they looked down on us!" Yu Bo was very confident in himself. He was just unlucky this year. Next year, he would pass the examination to become a county official and let his father see him in a new light!

Old Yu paced back and forth in front of the old residence for a while before Yu Hang saw him. After being invited into the yard, he saw Xiaocao working in the garden. He slightly hesitated, and then went up to help her.

"Xiaocao, your vegetables have grown really well. Other families' bok choy and spinach have already gone bad and are inedible, but your family's greens are still so fresh and tender." Old Yu was slightly surprised by the vegetables in the courtyard, which were obviously out of season.

Xiaocao smiled and said, "It might be because there's not much wind in the yard, so they're able to last longer. Grandfather come by the old residence more often when you're free. Little Shitou misses you a lot!"

Old Yu wanted to force out a slight trace of a smile, but he didn't succeed. He didn't know how to ask for her help. They had just agreed to live separate lives last night, yet he had come to trouble them today. Wasn't he just slapping himself in the face?

Seeing that he seemed to have a lot on his mind and was hesitating to speak, Xiaocao asked, "Grandfather, you...do you need something?"

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Old Yu gritted his teeth and quickly stated the intention of his visit. As he spoke, he didn't dare to look at Xiaocao's big eyes, which were so clear that it seemed they could see through one's heart.

Since the two families were related by blood, it was impossible for them to completely break ties. Xiaocao was very clear about this point. Looking at Old Yu, who had come here for help for the first

time, Xiaocao sighed heavily in her heart. Just like the old saying: 'Both sides of the hand were made of flesh'. For the sake of his younger son, her grandfather was prepared to disregard his own face.

Xiaocao looked at her grandfather, who immersed himself in the field work and didn't dare to have eye contact with her. She deliberately said in a relaxed tone, "Earlier, an uncle from the yamen came over and told me that I need to testify in court this afternoon. I'm really nervous since it's my first time going to court. I'll ask my godfather or godmother to accompany me at that time."

Today, her godfather should return from the prefectural city. Her godmother took Xia Furong, who had gotten sick, to the medicine hall in town early this morning. She heard that the little lass had eaten too much red-braised pork last night and had a stomachache for the entire night. Ay! She was a girl from the capital, yet she had become so gluttonous after just eating several meals of vegetarian dishes!

After Old Yu heard Xiaocao's reply, his tense heart felt much more relieved and he also weeded in a more relaxed manner. The vegetable garden in Xiaocao's family's courtyard wasn't very big, so they finished weeding very quickly. After asking, Old Yu learned that there wasn't any more work to do, so he got up and said goodbye.

"Grandfather, our Dongshan Village is located in a remote area. It isn't easy for uncles from the yamen to come here, so you must serve them well. Our family has planted a vast variety of produce. I'll go gather some for you to take back." Despite Old Yu's objections, Xiaocao went to the rear courtyard and picked out some cucumbers, tomatoes, string beans, eggplants, and so on. She thought about it, and then got some five-spice duck eggs and century eggs from the west room. She put them all in a basket and told Old Yu to take them back.

Old Yu looked at the muddy eggs in the basket and asked hesitantly, "How do you eat this thing?"

With a smile, Xiaocao took one of the century eggs and broke the outer mud shell. She said with a smile, "Like this, first peel the outer shell and take the century egg out. After that, cut it into pieces and mix it with minced garlic... Forget it, I'll just go with you. Grandfather, wait for a moment. I'll go get some vermicelli."

With Madam Zhang's stingy nature, they probably seldom got the chance to eat vegetables cooked with oil, let alone meat. Since she was already helping them, Yu Xiaocao decided that she might as well be a good person until the end! After all, that Yu Bo was her father's biological younger brother ah! Not only did she get vermicelli, but she also cut off a portion of the pork belly that was hanging in the well in the backyard. She also took some oil, salt, soy sauce, and vinegar from the kitchen.

Old Yu looked at the bundles of ingredients and condiments in his granddaughter's hands and felt too ashamed to lift up his head. Looking at the streaky pork, which weighed more than a catty, he said, "You don't need to bring the meat. Your grandmother... Ahem! Madam Zhang has already slaughtered a chicken..."

Xiaocao smiled and said, "I heard that there were several uncle bailiffs here, so it's always good to prepare more meat dishes! Let's go, we still need to go to town after eating lunch!"

When they reached the Yu Family's house, Xiaocao greeted the bailiffs with a cheery smile. The young girl originally had a very joyous face and sweet smile, so coupled with her sweetly calling them 'uncles', she quickly left a favorable impression on the bailiffs.

In the kitchen, Madam Zhang, Madam Li, and Zhang Quan's wife were very busy. When Xiaocao entered the kitchen with the basket of ingredients, she ignored Madam Zhang and Madam Li and greeted Zhang Quan's wife with a smile, "Auntie, I have long heard of your good cooking skills. I must take this chance to learn from you today ah!"

Zhang Quan's wife was an observant person. When she saw the weird expression on Madam Zhang's face and Xiaocao ignoring them, she knew that there was definitely something going on. However, she wasn't someone who liked to dig into other people's private matters. With a smile on her pale and chubby face, she said, "Just listen to what you're saying. Why would you need to learn cooking from this Auntie? Your mother has much better cooking skills than me... Oh, what's this? It looks very novel!"

Xiaocao peeled the century eggs and cut all of them into four pieces. Then, she poured a sauce, which consisted of minced garlic, sesame oil, and soy sauce, on top of them. She had brought over around ten century eggs, so it was enough to fill up an entire plate. She took a piece and held it in front of Zhang Quan's wife's mouth. With an expression that looked as if she wanted to be praised, she said, "Taste this century eggs salad that I made and let me know what you think."

Zhang Quan's wife was too embarrassed to open her mouth, so she gently shook her head and said, "I came to help, so I can't steal food right in front of the host..."

"How is this considered stealing food? Even the head chef of Zhenxiu Restaurant needs someone to taste his food! Auntie, quickly try it and give me some feedback."

After hearing her words, Zhang Quan's wife finally opened her mouth and ate the piece of century egg. The soft century egg had a chewy mouthfeel when eaten. The yolk inside wasn't completely solidified and emitted a faint fragrance. With the rich flavor of the seasoning, it tasted really delicious. Zhang Quan's wife praised it repeatedly after tasting it.

Xiaocao deliberately showed a proud expression. If it hadn't been for the oil in her hands, Zhang Quan's wife would have hugged her fondly. Seeing the soft tofu on the kitchen table, Yu Xiaocao rinse the tofu under water, cut up the remaining two century eggs, and put them on top of the tofu. After that, she poured a sauce on top and completed the dish 'century eggs and tofu'.

Zhang Quan's wife made the dish 'chicken stewed with mushroom' and some wheat flatbread. It was the last stock of wheat flour that the Yu Family had, so it caused Madam Zhang to have a burst of heartache.

On the other stove, Xiaocao made 'pork stewed with vermicelli', which was a dish the northerners liked to eat. She also cooked several vegetable dishes with oyster sauce. Since the Zhou Family's factories started production, Xiaocao, as a shareholder, had never lacked condiments such as oyster sauce and MSG. She could also get an unlimited amount of vermicelli and century eggs whenever she wanted. It was said that the money would be deducted from the dividend, but Third Young Master Zhou had always been generous towards her, so he wouldn't really care about such a trivial matter.

The bailiffs were very satisfied with this meal and repeated praised that the food was delicious. In particular, Head Bailiff Yue, who had eaten at Zhenxiu Restaurant before, had even said, "I didn't expect that there would be such an excellent chef in this remote village! This culinary skill is almost as good as the head chef of Zhenxiu Restaurant! It's nearly impossible to eat the dishes 'century eggs and tofu' and 'pork stewed with vermicelli' outside of Zhenxiu Restaurant. I never expected that your Yu Family has such connections and are able to buy vermicelli and century eggs, which aren't available on the market..."

Yu Bo, who was beside them, hastily said, "What connections would my family have? It's just that my second brother has a good relationship with the owner of Zhenxiu Restaurant, so he's able to get these vermicelli and century eggs. In order to entertain our honored guest, we have cooked all of them."

"Your second brother indeed has some connections. Zhenxiu Restaurant's oyster sauce dishes is a secret recipe, yet he also got to learn it? Your second brother's relationship with the owner of Zhenxiu Restaurant must be really close ah!" Head Bailiff Yue put aside his contempt in his heart and revealed a trace of smile on his face.

Seeing that the bailiffs were eating happily, Yu Bo became even more enthusiastic. People often said: 'It's easy to see the King of Hell, but it's difficult to please the little goblins.' These bailiffs often used their status to act like a tyrant. Today, it was thanks to his younger niece that they were able to please these fellows. In the afternoon, they wouldn't cause too much trouble for them at court.

After eating lunch, Yu Hai, who found out that his daughter was summoned to court this afternoon, quickly loaded the two carts of watermelons and followed his daughter and the bailiffs to town. On the road to town, there were also Madam Zhang and her son, as well as Old Yu, who followed them because he was worried.

They had specially loaded fewer watermelons on the Yu Family's horse carriage so that the bailiffs could sit on it. Xiaocao skillfully sat on the shaft of the donkey cart. When the bailiffs came, they had walked until their feet hurt. Since they were able to get a free ride on a horse carriage on their way back, their originally frustrated feelings had gotten slightly better. So, they didn't make things difficult for them.

When they arrived in town, Xiaocao, Madam Zhang, and Yu Bo were taken directly to the yamen. Yu Hai, who was worried about his daughter, didn't have time to care about his carts of watermelon and rushed to Fang Zizhen's residence in town.

It just so happened that he ran into Fang Zizhen, who had just returned from the prefectural city and hadn't even had time to dismount from his horse, in front of the entrance of the Fang Estate. This guy was even more of a fool for his daughter than Yu Hai. As soon as he heard that his precious daughter was summoned to court, he promptly turned his horse around and dashed towards the yamen. He was afraid that his daughter would be frightened by the guys in the yamen if he got there too late.

The gatekeeper of Fang Estate saw that his master had directly rushed to the yamen without even getting off his horse, so he hastily reported it to the head steward. The head steward naturally knew how important Miss Yu was in his master's heart, but he still needed to inform the madam of the master's return.

At this time, Lady Fang was in her sick niece's room. When she heard that her daughter was taken to the yamen by bailiffs, she immediately left behind her niece, who had just taken her medication, changed into the attire of a third-rank noble madam, and went to the yamen in a carriage. When she thought about how scared the delicate and weak Xiaocao might be in front of the cruel and harsh bailiffs of the yamen, Lady Fang repeatedly urged the coachman to drive faster.



On the other hand, Yu Xiaocao, the object of her parents' worries, was currently curiously looking around the county yamen like it was some tourist attraction. There was a row of bailiffs standing on each side of the court hall with a wooden rod in their hands, while a wooden desk was placed right across from the entrance. On top of the wooden desk, there was a judge's gavel and a bamboo tube with several wooden sticks inside. Behind the wooden desk, the four grand and imposing characters of 'be honest and upright' were written and hung on top.

Head Bailiff Yue saw that the little girl had no fear in her big, round eyes, but she had an obvious look of curiosity instead. He couldn't help but cough and remind her to kneel down in a low voice. Xiaocao finally noticed that Madam Zhang and her son had already knelt down in front of the court hall and were trembling in fear.

She scratched her nose, knelt down reluctantly, and muttered, "Wicked ways of the old society..."

Before transmigrating, except for being punished to kneel by her mom for misbehaving when she was a child, Xiaocao had never really kneel in front of anyone before. Ever since she had transmigrated, her poor, little knees had to suffer. During the New Year, she had to kneel in front of her elders for New Year greetings. When acknowledging her godparents, she had to kneel down and kowtow. When she accidentally offended the young royal prince, she had to kneel and apologize. She also had to kneel down when she carelessly said the wrong thing in front of Fifth Lord... Ay! She touched her own poor, little knees. Would this cause calluses?

Just as she was complaining, she got startled by the shouting of 'the court trial shall begin—'. When County Magistrate Wu came out from the rear hall, he saw a small, thin figure widening her eyes in shock and sitting on her own legs. She looked just like a frightened little squirrel. He almost didn't maintain his dignified appearance and laughed out loud, but he looked at Xiaocao with a gaze that was filled with smiles.

With her big, round eyes, Yu Xiaocao stared at County Magistrate Wu, who was dressed in an official's robe, as he walked out of the rear hall in big strides. His appearance really gave off the feeling of someone who sang Chinese opera. She blinked her eyes, shifted into a more comfortable sitting position, and waited for the show to begin... uh, no, for the trial to begin.

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"Bring out the plaintiff and the defendant!" A refined-looking old man, who looked like the magistrate's secretary, shouted.

Plaintiff? Defendant? Did she really not go to the wrong place, and went to the courtroom instead? It must have been the work of her senior transmigrator. Yu Xiaocao stared at the goatee under the magistrate's secretary's jaw and started spacing out. The old man glanced at the little girl, who was dazedly sat in front of the court hall, and thought that she had been frightened.

Shortly afterwards, Rongxuan Academy's Headmaster Yuan and Head Lecturer Liang strolled in leisurely. Seeing the two people, County Magistrate Wu stood up before the desk and politely greeted them with his hands clasped together. Headmaster Yuan and Head Lecturer Liang also politely exchanged greetings with him.

Upon hearing the familiar voice, Yu Xiaocao turned her head to look at Headmaster Yuan and winked at him. Headmaster Yuan was stunned at first, and then he slightly nodded at her with a smile. His placating gaze seemed to say, 'It's alright. Don't be afraid!' But, when he looked at that lass Xiaocao again, she was curiously looking around and didn't seem to be scared.

After that, a pretentious-looking young man, who was dressed in a scholar's robe and had a scholarly cap on his head, was dragged in by two bailiffs.

"Might——" The bailiffs on both sides hit the wooden rods in their hands on the ground and said at the same time in a resonant voice. Madam Zhang and Yu Bo, who had never seen such a scene before, were so scared that their faces had turned pale and they shuddered as they crouched on the ground.

"Daughter, don't be scared! Godfather is here!" A loud holler, like that of a large bell, sounded from the crowd outside of the county yamen. Shifting her gaze from the bailiffs to the direction of the voice, Yu Xiaocao saw her godfather pushing through the crowd and coming over in a gallant and spirited manner.

County Magistrate Wu was dumbfounded as he watched the imperial envoy walk in imposingly and picked up the witness (Yu Xiaocao), as if he was holding a little chick. After that, he took the secretary's seat and sat down uninhibitedly.

"Cough, cough! Lord Imperial Envoy, this subordinate official is in the middle of a court trial right now. Can you please..." County Magistrate Wu implicitly reminded him: 'Lord Imperial Envoy, I'm handling a case right now. Can you please not cause trouble for me!'

Fang Zizhen touched the side of his cheeks, which had grown some stubble since he hadn't shaved for three days. He said in a justified and confident manner, "You can continue with your trial. This official won't interfere and will only listen on the side!"

The fifty-something secretary of the magistrate, who was beside him, had a distressed face and grumbled in his heart, 'My dear Lord Imperial Envoy, you stole my seat, so how am I supposed to take notes on the trial?'

County Magistrate Wu looked at Xiaocao, whose hand was being held by Fang Zizhen and standing beside him, and thought in his heart, 'You have already taken the witness, yet you're still saying that you won't interfere?' Everyone said that the imperial envoy pampered his new goddaughter to the bones. Sure enough, the rumors were right ah!

When faced with Fang Zizhen's nearly shameless behavior, County Magistrate Wu couldn't really criticize and reason with him. In front of the imperial envoy, who was originally a military general, he was a scholar who had encountered a soldier—he was unable to reason with him ah! With no other choice, County Magistrate Wu ordered a bailiff to bring a wooden armchair for the imperial envoy and put it close to his desk. As for Yu Xiaocao, she was just a witness, so he decided that it was fine for her to stand instead of kneeling.

As a result, in addition to Headmaster Yuan and Head Lecturer Liang, who both had scholarly honors, Yu Xiaocao was also permitted to stand in court.

During the course of the trial, there wasn't any exciting and interesting battle of wits like Xiaocao had imagined. The swindler only had a little bit of guts, and at the beginning, he had wanted to argue against the accusations. However, after the bailiffs glared at him and knocked the wooden rod on the ground, he honestly stated the truth.

It wasn't the swindler's first time committing fraud. He took advantage of the 'eager for success' mindset of the people who had failed the examination. He vaguely revealed to the students, whose families had decent financial situations and wasn't of any special social status, that he had a method to enter Rongxuan Academy and that there was only one vacancy. However, they had to pay a little fee.

Yu Bo was one of the people he had targeted. Why would Yu Bo, who had come from a fishing village, be one of his targets? The answer was very simple. Before the examination, Madam Zhang had transformed her son's entire appearance from head to toe, for fear that he would be looked down upon by others. She had also given him two hundred taels as travel expenses. In order to appear well-off in

front of his classmates, Yu Bo had treated them to several meals at famous restaurants and lived in a good inn... The swindler naturally viewed him, who acted like a nouveau riche, as a foolish spendthrift. It would be weird if he didn't scam him!

After hearing the swindler's 'explanation', Madam Zhang and Yu Bo lowered their heads in regret. One felt that she loved her son so much that she had brought disaster to him, while the other one felt that he had acted overly pretentious and caused unnecessary trouble. The two most important people in Rongxuan Academy shook their heads incessantly as they looked at the pair of stupid mother and son: With this kind of moral character, he still wanted to enter Rongxuan Academy? Dream on!

Xiaocao was practically unneeded during the whole process of the trial. She only had to answer a few simple questions, and then just stand there to watch the show. The performance of the 'legend of ancient court trial' was over in less than two hours. The bad guy was beaten with a wooden plank and charged for his crime, while Madam Zhang and her son had both learned a lesson.

However, they encountered a small problem when trying to get their money back. Madam Zhang insisted that he scammed three hundred taels from them, but the swindler swore to the heavens that he only received two hundred taels. So, the two argued ceaselessly in court. With his keen eyes, County Magistrate Wu noticed that there was something wrong with Yu Bo's expression. After a brief interrogation, Yu Bo obediently admitted that he had secretly kept the one hundred taels for himself.

Headmaster Yuan looked at the ashamed student in front of him with an indifferent gaze. He had seen this student with Yu Fan several times before, but he had only thought that he was overly ambitious at that time. He didn't expect that this person would be so unethical. Not only did he want to enter Rongxuan Academy through a crooked method, but he also didn't cherish the money that his mother worked hard to save up and secretly kept it without his mother's knowledge. Such a unfilial and dishonest man, even if he achieved a scholarly honor in the future, he would just be a horse that brings trouble to its herd! With a toss of his sleeves, Headmaster Yuan went out of the yamen.

Fang Zizhen exchanged a few words with the county magistrate, and then left the yamen with his daughter. Yu Hai, who was waiting outside the yamen, pulled on his younger daughter's hands and asked about her well-being. He also stroked his daughter's hair and told her not to be afraid... Lady Fang, who was waiting in the horse carriage, instructed Linglong to go call them over. Upon seeing his wife's handmaid, Fang Zizhen finally realized that his wife had come. He couldn't help but show a slightly silly smile on his face.

Yu Xiaocao rode her godmother's horse carriage and arrived at the Fang Estate. She walked over a fire brazier and took a bath with Chinese mugwort to wash away the bad luck. In her heart, Xiaocao felt that

these were unnecessary since she wasn't the one who caused a lawsuit. She was merely a little witness who was dispensable. But she understood and was very touched by Lady Fang's love for her daughter. So she cooperated and did everything that her godmother instructed.

When Xia Furong, who had been left in the guest room, heard the report from her little maidservant, she almost tore up the handkerchief in her hands. 'It's that wretch again! For the sake of that damned girl, my aunt has left me, who is sick, all alone! She is only a vulgar peasant girl, yet she has stolen all of my aunt's love and attention. I won't accept this!'

But, what could she do even if she didn't like this situation? She was also only a pitiful girl who was living under someone else's roof. When she thought of her own circumstances, Xia Furong couldn't help but cry. She thought bitterly, 'If something happened to that damned wretch, then there won't be anyone to steal my aunt away from me, right?' A sinister glint flashed over Xia Furong's eyes and she bit hard on her lower lip!

Yu Xiaocao's godparents firmly believed that she had been 'frightened', so they called for a doctor, who took her pulse and prescribed a calming medication for her. After being forced to drink the bitter medicine, she was told to stay at the Fang Estate in town for a day in order to 'observe her condition'.

The Fang Family's residence in town was a large estate with three entrances and exits. Allegedly, it used to be the residence of a waning imperial merchant of the former dynasty. It just so happened that it got bought by Fang Zizhen and he directly moved in after hanging the inscription board with 'Fang Estate' written on it at the main entrance. However, he usually stayed at the simple and crude house in Dongshan Village. After all, it was the place that his master had once lived in and it was also closer to his daughter...

There was a beautiful, big garden in the inner courtyard of the Fang Estate. With a winding corridor running through it, there was a pavilion beside the pond and a small bridge above the flowing water. There was a sense of elegance within its extravagance. There were five exquisite compounds in the inner courtyard. The biggest one was the main compound, which was where Fang Zizhen and his wife currently live in. Next to the main compound was a small and unique compound that had wisteria flowers blooming beautifully on the walls of the compound. There was only a moon-shaped door separating it from the main compound, so it was very convenient to go back and forth.

Xia Furong had taken a liking to the compound once she saw it, but Lady Fang rejected her with the reason that she had already made arrangements for the compound. When she found out that her aunt had given the compound to Yu Xiaocao, her jealousy and hatred for Xiaocao deepened even more.

This lass Xia Furong still hadn't gotten a clear understanding of her own identity ah! She had been arranged to stay in the guest compound, which clearly showed that, in Lady Fang's heart, she was just a guest from her maiden family and Xiaocao was the actual young miss of the Fang Family!

Such a gorgeous and complex courtyard, Xiaocao had only seen it on television in her past life. Now that she was seeing it in real life, she really had the feeling that she had arrived at a garden of ancient times. Seeing that she was lingering in the garden and busily looking around with interest, Lady Fang thought of her daughter's family background and a sense of tender affection emerged in her eyes. She saw that Xiaocao seemed to be quite spirited, so she told Linglong to take Xiaocao to tour around all the compounds.

"Wife, when did you come over? Why didn't you let me know beforehand?" Seeing that his daughter and the maidservants had all left, Fang Zizhen immediately hugged his wife and gave her a big kiss on her cheeks.

Lady Fang glared at him coquettishly. She made a token resistance, and then chided him, "To act so recklessly in the daytime, be careful that our daughter will see it!"

"It's alright. Even if our daughter saw it, she would just pretend that she didn't see anything! My good wife, why did you come?" Fang Zizhen kissed his wife a few more times. His stubble pricked Madam Xia's delicate face and caused it to turn red.

Lady Fang pushed his face away and glared at him again. She said in a soft voice, "Wasn't I just trying to give you a surprise? But, who would have known that you had gone to the prefectural city and I ended up not seeing you! If I hadn't encountered our daughter at the melon shop, I wouldn't even know where our residence was and I would have no choice but to stay at an inn."

Fang Zizhen's heart ached for her and said, "My good wife, it must have been hard for you! Come, let me massage your shoulders!" As he spoke, he skillfully kneaded Madam Xia's shoulders. With one look, it was obvious that it wasn't his first time doing this.

Lady Fang narrowed her eyes in comfort. Before she married Fang Zizhen, the sisters and female cousins of the Xia Family all spoke ill of him to her. They said that he was an uncouth fellow who looked like Zhang Fei [1]. He had killed countless people in the battlefield and definitely had a fiery temper. They

also said that he might hit people when his temper flared up. With his physique and martial art skills, he could probably knock someone half dead with one punch, and so on!

Fortunately, she didn't get frightened by her so-called sisters at that time. After she got married, Fang Zizhen appeared scary but he was very considerate. Moreover, he really pampered and loved his wife. Some of her sisters in her family seemed to have married well, but they had to serve their in-laws and get distressed by their husband's concubines. They had to fight and compete with different people every day. She felt tired from just looking at them!

In comparison, she was so much happier ah! Her man didn't have any parents and siblings, let alone troublesome relatives. He was also someone with self-control and integrity. He had never accepted any of the beautiful young woman and concubines that his colleagues sent over. For the past twenty years, he only had her. Although they didn't have any children and there would be times when she felt lonely, her husband continued to love and dote on her as he always had. To have such a husband, there was nothing else that she would ask for...

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After a moment of affection, Fang Zizhen and his wife started talking about their goddaughter, Yu Xiaocao.

"Chuxue, what do you think about our daughter?" Fang Zizhen intimately called his wife's name and asked with slight unease.

Lady Fang, who was resting on her husband's sturdy arm, smiled and said, "You have good eyes. She's a lovely and interesting girl."

Fang Zizhen finally felt relieved in his heart. He had a silly smile on his face as he proudly said, "Of course, how can there be anything wrong with our daughter? I was thinking, after I complete my assignment here, we should take our daughter back to the capital and raise her to become a noble young lady. Then, we can find a son-in-law to marry into our family and they can give birth to a cute and clever grandson. I have already come up with a name, which is Fang Wulue [1]—to possess both civil and military skills. My, Fang Zizhen's, grandson will definitely be a general in the future..."

Lady Fang tried her best to not laugh out loud. She rolled her eyes at him and said, "Well, it seems like you have it all planned out already. You have even thought of our grandson's name ah! But, have you considered the fact that our daughter, Cao'er, isn't someone who would allow others to control her? The little lass is a very independent person who makes her own decisions! Based on what I have seen

during these past two days, Xiaocao makes most of the decisions in the Yu Family! I'm afraid that she won't accept the path that you arranged for her!"

Fang Zizhen suddenly looked like a deflated balloon as he sighed and said, "You're right! When I first took her in as our daughter, I have already thought about taking her back to the capital to accompany you, but I was firmly rejected by her. No matter how good Dongshan Village is, there's no way that it can be better than the capital, right? She doesn't want to be a noble young lady in the capital, but instead prefers to stay in this remote and barren place to be an ordinary, little peasant girl!"

Lady Fang laughed and said, "This is exactly what's so special about our daughter. She is not shaken by poverty, nor is she corrupted by wealth and honors. With her own intelligence and hands, she has made a life for herself. Even I, her godmother, really admire her. Who knows, maybe our daughter will become the second successful career woman of our Great Ming Dynasty ah!"

Listening to his wife's high praise for Xiaocao, Fang Zizhen felt even happier than when he had won in a battle. He began endlessly praising his daughter again.

Lady Fang quietly listened to her husband talk like he was Old Wang selling melons—praising his own products. Hearing him praise their daughter to the skies, a gentle smile appeared at the corners of her mouth. She suddenly remembered the invitation on the table and whispered, "Mingzhe, Princess Consort Jing invited me to go over for a chat. Do you think it's alright for me to bring Xiaocao along?"

"Princess Consort Jing? Isn't she in the capital?" Fang Zizhen sat up with slight surprise as he looked at his wife's beautiful face and asked.

Lady Fang summarized to her husband about meeting Princess Consort Jing's entourage, who were traveling incognito, on the road, and thus they decided to travel to Tanggu Town together. Fang Zizhen nodded slightly and said, "I reckon Prince Jing was afraid that Princess Jing would become ill from staying at home all day, so he told his second son to take her out to relax! After all, Princess Consort Jing's most beloved youngest son had set out on a voyage. So, she must be very worried about him!"

Lady Fang pulled on the blanket and watched as her husband lay down again, and then said, "That's right! The young royal prince has been gone for half a year. If it was me, I would also be too worried to eat and sleep properly..."



Seeing his wife's downcast gaze, Fang Zizhen knew that she had thought about her own situation of being childless again. He patted her shoulder gently, took her into his embrace, and said in a gentle voice, "It's getting late. Let's sleep..."

The night passed by quietly. Xiaocao's biological clock prompted her to wake up early.

"Young Miss, this servant will help you put on your clothes." Seeing the movement on the bed in the inner room, Zhenzhu hastily came over to pull open the bed curtains and smiled happily at Miss Xiaocao, who was dazedly sitting on the bed with the quilt in her arms. Lady Fang was afraid that her daughter wouldn't be used to staying at an unfamiliar place, so she sent her handmaid over to wait upon her. It was apparent that her madam attached great importance to Miss Xiaocao!

Xiaocao was about to politely decline her, but when she saw Zhenzhu holding a set of clothing with complicated patterns that was made of a gorgeous fabric, she couldn't help but frown, "I need to go to the watermelon shop later, so won't it be inconvenient for me to wear this?"

Zhenzhu quickly explained with a smile, "Madam said that she will take you to visit a distinguished guest later, so you will need to dress more formally. These are all clothes personally made by our madam. If you continue to refuse, our madam will be very sad."

Yu Xiaocao didn't say anything else. With the help of Zhenzhu, she put on the dress that represented the feelings of a loving mother. Hanfu [2] seemed to be the most popular attire in the Great Ming Dynasty. The dress that Xiaocao wore was a lavender chest-strapped dress with cloud and butterfly patterns. It was paired with a light-yellow shawl jacket on the outside and tied with a band on the chest. The soft colors and fine gauze texture, paired with Xiaocao's fair and delicate face, did somewhat give off the feeling of a noble young lady. With her skillful hands, Zhenzhu styled Xiaocao's hair into lovely twin buns and adorned it with a plum blossom golden-wired hairpin with pearl inlays, which showed a sense of nobility within its simplicity.

A hint of happiness flashed over Xiaocao's heart as she stared at the adorable and slightly playful-looking noble young miss through the hazy bronze mirror. Everyone had a love for beauty, and Xiaocao was no exception.

When the well-dressed Xiaocao appeared in front of Fang Zizhen and his wife, there was a trace of surprise within their eyes. This was exactly how they imagined their daughter would look like ah! Lady Fang held Xiaocao in her arms and couldn't stop looking at her. They were staring so much that Xiaocao started feeling embarrassed.

After eating breakfast, Lady Fang took her daughter to the county magistrate's wife's seaside residence, where Princess Consort Jing currently stayed. Xia Furong didn't want to miss any of the chances to meet Second Young Master Zhu, so she also wanted to go with them. However, she was rejected by Lady Fang with the reason that she was still sick.

Xia Furong felt even more wronged in her heart: In the past, her aunt would take her along whenever she was visiting someone. Now, she had been robbed of this opportunity by a wretch of a peasant family. How could she not feel hatred?

The county magistrate's wife's seaside residence was located between Tanggu Town and the docks. Fang Zizhen rode on his horse and escorted his wife and daughter. He felt incomparably contented in his heart and the smile on his face never faded. It wasn't until Lady Fang and Xiaocao was invited inside the estate by the servants that he reluctantly left for the harbor.

Right now, with freshly prepared tea and snacks, Princess Consort Jing was enjoying the scenery in the garden. At this time, Meixiang had an excited expression on her face as she hurriedly sprinted over while holding her muslin dress.

"Acting so flustered. Where are your manners?" Lanxiang, who was slightly older than her, quickly chided her in a soft voice.

Meixiang grinned at her, and then said to the princess consort with a slightly trembling voice, "Your Highness, the young royal prince... the young prince... he..." She ran over so fast that she was gasping for her breath as she spoke.

As soon as she heard news about her youngest son, Princess Consort Jing, who was originally half-reclining on the chaise lounge, immediately sat up and asked with a nervous expression, "Yang'er... What happened to Yang'er?"

Meixiang took in a deep breath and finally managed to catch her breath. The big smile on her face eased Princess Consort Jing's anxious and tense feelings.

"Princess Consort, the young royal prince has sent a letter!" Meixiang's voice was full of joy.

"Yang'er sent a letter? Quick, quick! Bring it over!!" Princess Consort Jing impatiently urged. Meixiang hastily walked over and nearly tripped on her skirt. Before she had even stopped, Princess Consort Jing had already grabbed the letter in her hands.

The letter was sent from Quan Prefecture to the capital, and then delivered here at top speed. Seeing the familiar handwriting, Princess Consort Jing's eyes welled up with tears. She blinked away the tears in her eyes and read the contents of the letter avidly.

In Zhu Junyang's letter, he wrote about his life on the ship and some interesting happenings at the sea. He emphasized that he had hunted a shark by himself and made the fins into dried shark fins, which he had sent back to his mother along with the letter.

After reading up to here, Meixiang and Lanxiang both jested the young royal prince was so filial that he didn't even forget to bring some good things back for the princess consort. Feeling very happy, Princess Consort Jing ordered, "At noon, make a soup with the shark fin that my son personally caught. It will definitely be thousands of times better than the ones on the market." The two handmaids agreed one after another.

Zhu Junyang also said, "By the time Mother receives this letter, this child should have almost arrived at the southern seas [3]. I heard that the local customs and practices are quite different from the Central Plains. There's no winter there, so one wouldn't be able to see snow. The people there have dark skin, high foreheads and broad noses. So, they look slightly different than the people of the Central Plains [4]. \*\*\*Some people may be uncomfortable with the next sentence, so please skip to the next paragraph if it might offend you.\*\*\* I heard that, on the other side of the boundless sea, there is a race of people who have glistening black skin and looks like a chimpanzee. If there's a chance, this child really wants to go take a look and personally draw some portraits for Mother to see."

And lastly, he said, "With parents around, one shouldn't travel faraway. Please forgive this child for being unfilial and unable to stay with you and Father. Mother, in the Great Ming Dynasty, there are still many people who are dressed in rags and have little food to eat. The emperor said that there is an easily grown and high-yielding crop in the West—corn—that can be eaten as a staple food. This time, my task is to bring back the corn seeds and try to plant them. I believe that the introduction and cultivation of corn will certainly benefit the common folks. At that time, there won't be famine in the Great Ming Dynasty anymore, and everyone will be able to live a prosperous and contented life..."

Princess Consort Jing started weeping as she read the letter, "It has been nearly half a year, yet he had just reached the southern seas. Moreover, he also wants to go to the West... When will my Yang'er come back ah?!"

Lanxiang quickly comforted her, "Princess Consort, don't be like this. Young Royal Prince wrote this letter back because he wants you to rest assured. If he knew that his letter has caused you to be sad, with how filial the young prince is, he will surely blame himself. Think about it, the young prince has already reached the southern seas, so it definitely won't be long before he reaches the West. Perhaps, within a few months, the young royal prince will appear in front of you and give you a surprise!"

Princess Consort Jing gently wiped the tears from the corner of her eyes with her handkerchief, nodded, and said, "Yes, my son will definitely come back as soon as possible. After finding corn, no matter what, I won't let him travel so far anymore. I miss him so much!"

"Your Highness, the wife of Zhaoyong General has arrived with her daughter." The senior servant, who was in charge of the outer courtyard, hurriedly came over to report.

Princess Consort Jing finally remembered that she had invited Lady Fang over, so she hastily said, "Quickly bring her in."

The gifts that Lady Fang and Xiaocao brought over weren't rare and precious goods, but instead, they had brought over a gift box set of Zhenxiu Restaurant's limited roasted chicken and osmanthus duck. This was Yu Xiaocao's idea.

In Xiaocao's opinion, what valuable goods had the princess consort not seen before? When sending a gift, it was better to choose the right one rather than the expensive one. Last time, when they ate together, the princess consort seemed to have a special liking for the osmanthus duck. So there definitely wouldn't be anything wrong with gifting this! Besides, not everyone could purchase Zhenxiu Restaurant's gift box set. The gift box was beautifully designed, so it was quite presentable as a gift.

Sure enough, when Princess Consort Jing received the gift, she was extremely pleased and said that she was very lucky to be able to eat good food today. Upon knowing that it was chosen by Xiaocao, Princess Consort Jing highly commended the little girl.