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After that, Princess Consort Jing and Lady Fang began to engage in small talk. Since settling at the seaside residence, she almost never left the house because of her health. She listened as Lady Fang talked about Dongshan Village, which was surrounded by the mountains and the sea. It had an amazing scenery, and from time to time, one could also encounter cute little animals. After hearing her description, she really yearned to see it within her heart.

After sending off Lady Fang and her daughter, Princess Consort Jing pondered about how this wouldn't be her youngest son's last ocean-going voyage. She knew her youngest son's character very well. Even if she tried to stop him from going, he still wouldn't change a decision that he had already made.

'Ay, I wonder who Yang'er resembles ah!' His father was courtly and refined, while she was gentle and demure. Her eldest and second son also had a relatively gentle temper. Only this youngest son of hers was different. He was still fine before the age of five, soft and adorable. But, after the age of seven or eight, he seemed to have gotten facial paralysis. He had a cold expression throughout the day, and the gaze in his eyes was getting more and more fierce.

'It's all his father's fault. Why did he get a martial arts teacher for the kids? Look at how they all turned out. One gave up being a scholar and wants to go to the borders to join the army, while the other one goes out on a voyage without any fears whatsoever...'

When going on a voyage, it wasn't like he could return in three to five months. So, how could she not worry about him? Dongshan Village was close to the sea, so she could look far into the distance of the sea when standing on the top of the mountain slope. She should be able to immediately see when Yang'er returns, right?

Thus, Princess Consort Jing made a decision to build a mountain manor on the West Mountains. Although there weren't any hot springs, good farmland, or beautiful environment at the West Mountains, it was a place that made her feel as if she was closer to her youngest son, which was all she needed! (Author's note: It's no wonder that the second son felt discontented. As a mother, she's really more biased towards her youngest son. Moreover, she's being extremely biased ah!)

Once Princess Consort Jing made a decision, it was nearly impossible to change her mind. As long as it was reasonable, most people were also unwilling to let her down. When the news reached the capital, Prince Jing readily agreed. Not to mention a small manor, even if she wanted to build three or five

mountain villas, as long as the princess consort was happy, would he, the dignified Imperial Prince Jing, be unwilling to spend the money to build them?

As a result, Prince Jing mobilized a number of landscape architects from the Ministry of Works, hired several famous residential architects in the capital, and sent them all to the small town of Tanggu along with the craftsmen. Taking advantage of his resting days, he took another ten days off and went to Tanggu Town to personally make arrangements for the initial stages of the project.

Princess Consort Jing had already decided to build the mountain manor on the hillside near Dongshan Village, which wasn't very far from Lady Fang's residence. The doctor who was accompanying Princess Consort Jing also said that it was good for the princess consort's health to climb mountains and exercise regularly.

Imperial Prince Jing naturally wouldn't disagree. He personally took the landscape architects and craftsmen, and chose a place on the West Mountains with excellent fengshui [1]. It faced the south with its back towards the north. After that, he recruited more workers from nearby villages. Within a few days, construction began in full swing.

On the way back to Tanggu Town, Prince Jing was afraid that the bumpy mountain road would make his precious princess consort uncomfortable, so he ordered a group of people to repair the road. Stonemasons were especially hired to fix the most rugged section of the mountain road. Even if they had to carve it out, they had to carve out a smooth and level road.

When a generous reward was offered, brave men were bound to come forward. Prince Jing's Estate didn't lack money, so they were able to offer a high salary. Although there was a limited construct period, it still attracted a group of people. The road construction progressed very quickly. By the time Xiaocao's family's watermelons got off the market, there was a smooth road that went directly to the town from Dongshan Village. It used to take a horse carriage over an hour to reach town, but now it took less than forty-five minutes. All the villagers in the vicinity praised Imperial Prince Jing for doing a good deed.

Speaking of Dongshan Village, when they heard that a prince was going to build a manor in their village, they felt both honored and slightly perturbed. They were afraid that the high-ranking official would take a fancy to their small plots of land and snatch it from them. Seeing that the nobleman had selected a place on the West Mountains, the villagers of Dongshan Village gradually felt relieved.

Now, the village head of Dongshan Village walked everywhere with a ramrod straight back. Their Dongshan Village must be a precious area with excellent fengshui. Otherwise, why would so many members of the imperial family like this place so much?

The village head had interacted with the steward of Prince Jing's Estate several times. He felt that the servants of Prince Jing's Estate were quite reasonable and didn't have the bad habits of the servants of other noble households.

The village head had privately sent the steward a lot of good things and asked him to put in some good words about Dongshan Village in front of his masters. As the saying goes: 'it was easier to enjoy the breeze while leaning against a big tree'. In the future, if some tactless people came to cause trouble in Dongshan Village, the people in the mountain manor wouldn't ignore it, would they?

The mountain manor of the Prince Jing's Household was busy with construction. After over a month of bustling business, the Yu Family's watermelons had finally been completely sold out. That night, when Yu Xiaocao took out the account book and added up the total, the whole family had a stunned expression on their faces.

With the mystic-stone water as a cheat, each melon field had yielded more than ten thousand catties of watermelons. Thus, the three mu of land had produced more than thirty-five thousand catties of watermelons! In addition to selling them at their own melon shop, they also sold a portion to Wang Ergou and Xiaocao's maternal uncles at the wholesale price. They had sold nearly ten thousand catties of melons as wholesale. If they calculated it based on one catty cost a hundred fifty copper coins, then it would be a total of fifteen hundred taels. The remaining twenty-five thousand catties were retailed at the watermelon store for a slightly higher price. In this way, based on Xiaocao's simple calculation, they had earned an income of nearly ten thousand taels!!

Yu Hai swallowed his saliva hard and took a deep breath. It had been very busy this past month, but he never expected that growing watermelons would be so profitable!

Xiaocao took out a stack of banknotes. Every day, she deposited the store's daily profit into the town's bank. The smallest amount of one banknote was one hundred taels, while the largest was five hundred taels. She had taken out a very thick and heavy stack of banknotes. Seeing the banknotes, the Yu Family felt a slight sense of surreal in their hearts.

Half a year ago, they were still living in poverty and didn't even have enough coarse grain to eat. Now, they had become rich people with ten thousand taels of silver! Even in town, ten thousand taels was also considered quite a large sum of money for a family to possess!

Yu Xiaocao saw the stunned expressions on her family members and said with a smile, "Father, Mother! What are you guys planning on doing with this money? Do you want to save it in the bank, or use it to purchase a house and land?"

Yu Hai thought about it and said, "Take some out to repair the old residence. As for the rest of the money... should we buy some good farmland near the town? Our family's three mu of land is too little! If we buy more land, we can plant more watermelons next year..."

With her lips pursed together, Madam Liu smiled and said, "If there are suitable stores, we can also buy a few. Xiaocao's two stores are located in a good area! It's also easy to rent out. Our melon shop has just closed, but there are already people asking if we'll rent it out. By just collecting a year of rent, we can get an income of around a thousand or so taels for one storefront. If the children have two stores each, they won't have to worry about their livelihood in the future!"

Yu Hai slowly nodded his head in agreement, "Mhm! Then let's purchase a few more stores... I think we can also buy a house in town. In the future, we will probably spend more time in town, so at that time, we will also have a place to stay. However, this is our ancestral home. Even if Little Shitou makes a name for himself through his studies, he still needs to come back to his hometown to pay homage to his ancestors!" Yu Hai was still somewhat strongly attached to the place where he was born and raised.

Yu Xiaocao said with a smile, "Let's expand the old residence in fall. However, the most important thing right now is to plow the land and grow some sweet potatoes!"

Yu Hai nodded repeatedly and said, "That's right! I was so happy that I almost forgot about it! It's early summer now, so if we plant sweet potatoes, we can harvest them before it starts to snow! In fact, it was a really good idea to plant watermelons. It doesn't affect the farming season at all!"

The next day, Yu Hang asked Xiaocao to help collect marine goods at home while he went to work on the fields with their parents. After they dug out the melon seedlings, they used a whole two days to plow their three mu of land. Xiaocao had also taken up the task of breeding the sweet potato seedlings. This was mainly because she wanted to use mystic-stone water to breed the seedlings. Thus, being responsible for this task would make it more convenient for her to use her cheat. After all, it was a little late to grow the seedlings now.

Xiaocao cultivated a piece of land near her house to grow the seedlings and asked Yu Hai to enclose the area with a bamboo fence to prevent small animals from the mountain from destroying the crops at night. She took out the carefully selected sweet potato seeds and neatly arranged them on the plowed land, and then covered them with an even layer of soil. After planting the seeds, Xiaocao immediately watered the field with water that was mixed with an appropriate amount of mystic-stone water. Fortunately, it was early summer now and the temperature was rather suitable for the germination of sweet potato seeds, so she didn't need to do anything to keep them warm.

When helping his daughter breed the seeds, Yu Hai kept nagging about how they should have thought about growing the sweet potato sprouts first, wondering whether this would delay the farming period, and so on.

Fortunately, Xiaocao had the little divine stone as her secret weapon. While it normally took people over a month to breed the seedlings, it only took a dozen or so days for her to accomplish the task. In addition to the contribution of mystic-stone water, the little divine stone had also helped out a lot. Under Xiaocao's order, it 'used its powers' on the growing sprouts every day. The strong energy accelerated the growth of the sweet potatoes.

Half a month later, when Yu Hai was urged by his daughter to gather the sweet potato sprouts and plant them in the fields, he asked in surprise, "How did the sweet potato seedlings grow so fast? Has it even been twenty days? Cao'er, your breeding method is pretty good. It saved a lot of time!"

Yu Xiaocao answered vaguely, "It's probably because we got relatively suitable temperature and rainfall recently. There's good weather for the crops, so the seedlings grew relatively faster. It looks like it's about to rain. Let's work faster and try to plant all the sweet potatoes before it starts raining!"

Yu Hai stopped thinking about the matter regarding the growth period of the sweet potato seedlings. He swiftly gathered the first batch of sweet potato seedlings, transported them to the plowed fields, and planted them. With the whole family working, they finished sowing the sweet potato seedlings in less than a day. It rained that night, so they didn't even need to water the fields.

After being nourished by the mystic-stone water, the sweet potato seedlings were not only resistant to drought and high temperature, but they were also resistant to diseases and insects. The sweet potatoes in the Yu Family's fields looked different every day and grew very well. The villagers all praised Yu Hai for being an excellent farmer.

In the following days, Xiaocao's family lived very happily. Madam Zhang still had some lingering fear, so she didn't dare to come cause trouble. Although Madam Li occasionally came over to shamelessly cotton up with Madam Liu, she was afraid to act maliciously due to the pretense of Xiaocao's godparents.

Lady Fang had basically settled down in Dongshan Village and rarely returned to the estate in town. The two families lived close by, so they were having more and more interactions with one another. When the Yu Family was busy, Lady Fang would also change out of her lavish clothing to help collect vegetables, tend the vegetable gardens, and whatnot.

After more than a month of quiet life, Lady Fang fell in love with this relaxing and comfortable lifestyle. Every day, she would climb the mountains, stroll on the beach, accompany the children to collect seafood by the sea, and then turn the seafood that she personally collected into a sumptuous meal... Lady Fang felt extremely relaxed, both physically and mentally. She was much happier than when she had to put on airs to entertain all kinds of people in the capital every day, whether she liked them or not.

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It might be due to the environment or her mood, but with the addition of the nourishing soups that her goddaughter prepared for her every day, Lady Fang, who had unwittingly stayed at Dongshan Village for three months, felt that her health had gotten a lot better. Many of the minor female health illnesses that she had in the past seemed to have disappeared since she started living in Dongshan Village.

Her skin had gotten more fair and smooth, and she appeared several years younger. Last time, the county magistrate's wife said that she didn't look like someone who was thirty-four or thirty-five but instead appeared to be under the age of thirty! Dongshan Village was seriously good place to nourish oneself ah!

Fang Zizhen firmly believed that Xiaocao was their lucky star. Ever since he ate the food cooked by Xiaocao, he felt that even the best chef in the world couldn't compare with his daughter's cooking skills. Furthermore, after his wife came, his filial daughter had begun to prepare medicinal meals for them. His daughter's medicinal meals were much more effective than the prescriptions given by those imperial physicians and famous doctors!

After being on the battlefield for many years, he had gotten many internal injuries. In the past, he would experience bone-piercing pain during cloudy days, when he caught a cold, or when he was too tired. After being nurtured by his daughter, even when he took a cold bath in the cool pond, he would only feel refreshed and didn't feel anything else at all. His daughter said if he nursed his health for a period of time, his old wounds and illnesses could be cured and perhaps... hehe, he could give her a younger brother.

Ahem! The matter of giving birth to a child depended on the heavens. Though he said that everything depended on fate, he always felt that life wasn't perfect without a child of his own. He was especially mindful of this matter because he was the reason that his wife wouldn't have any children to bury her when she died in the future, which also made it hard for him to lift his head in front of many of his colleagues.

A fortune teller had once said that he had a lot of setbacks in his life, but there was always someone to help him turn the calamities into blessings. If... his daughter could cure his unmentionable illness, she was truly his noble benefactor ah!

However, it wasn't that he didn't believe in his daughter. She had studied medicine with the village doctor for a period of time, so she should be capable of preparing medicinal meals to nourish one's health. Even the imperial physicians were unable to cure his infertility, which he had gotten after years on the battlefield. His daughter was only ten, so could she be better than those old imperial physicians whose hair and beards had gone white?

But, his daughter wanting to help him nurse his health was a display of her filial piety. He must support and cooperate unconditionally, and never show a look of doubt, so as to avoid making his daughter sad.

Therefore, Fang Zizhen and Lady Fang happily enjoyed the medicinal meals personally cooked by Xiaocao every day. The medicinal meals prepared by Xiaocao didn't taste like herbal medicine at all and actually tasted very good. So, they ate it very readily.

After planting the sweet potatoes in their family's fields, Xiaocao was very idle with nothing to do. The work at home had been divided among the family. Yu Hang was still responsible for collecting the marine goods for the Zhou Family's condiment factories with Third Uncle. Xiaolian went to the docks every day to sell braised food, while Madam Liu was in charge of the vegetable garden and housework. Her father, Yu Hai, either helped his wife tend the vegetable garden, or at the invitation of his close friend, Liu Shuanzhu, went out to the sea to catch some valuable fish to improve their meals and subsidize the family. Although the family no longer lacked the money that he earned from selling fish, he still really enjoyed his original profession.

In this way, Yu Xiaocao was the only one in the family with nothing to do. Therefore, when she found out that her godfather was unable to father children because of his old wounds, she focused all her attention on her godparents' health. She strived to get a younger sibling by next year.

Mhm... Little Shitou was already six years old. It wasn't a bad idea to have another soft, little bun in her family. Alright! Due to this single thought by their daughter, Yu Hai and Madam Liu were also forced to join in on drinking herbal soups every day.

Although Yu Xiaocao wasn't very confident in her own medical skills, she was full of confidence in the little divine stone. Back then, without the little divine stone, it would have been very difficult to save his life, let alone his leg. Her godfather's infertility wasn't innate, but instead it was an injury left from the battlefields. Compared to when her father got bitten by a bear, this matter was simply a piece of cake.

As a result, she eagerly devoted herself to cooking medicinal meals every day. Although she had the little divine stone as her cheat, in order to make it more effective and to pull the wool over other people's eyes, she specially went to town to discuss her godfather's pulse with the famous physician, Doctor Sun. They worked together to come up with the most helpful prescription for his body.

Doctor Sun had an extremely deep impression of the Yu Family, especially the little girl in front of him. She had been ill since she was in the womb, which was the most difficult to treat. She should have been bedridden and relying on medication for survival. Moreover, even with the best medicine, she wouldn't be able to live past the age of ten. However, look at her now. Not only did she have a healthy glow on her face and was alive and kicking, but she had also seriously studied medicine.

Next, he had to mention the little girl's father. At that time, half of his body had nearly been destroyed by the bear. Even if he severed the leg at that time, it would still be very hard to save his life. But now? Not only did he keep his life, but his leg was also fine. He traveled between Dongshan Village and the town every day in a swift and vigorous manner, looking very spirited!

There was also this little girl's mother, who had been left with a chronic illness because she didn't get to properly recuperate during her postnatal confinement period. In addition, she had suffered years of exhaustion and malnourishment, so she had been left with many health problems. The most crucial thing was that, according to his diagnosis, the wife of the Yu Family already had initial symptoms of tuberculosis. During this era, it wasn't very easy to treat tuberculosis. Moreover, it was not only contagious, but people could also die from it! But, look at her now. After recuperating for a period of time with his prescription, all her health issues were gone, and even her tuberculosis was cured! He almost thought that his medical skills weren't very good and misdiagnosed her!

Not to boast, but his, Sun Zhongqiu's, medical skills would be considered top-notch even if he entered the Imperial Hospital. Perhaps not up to ten thousand of patients, but he had definitely examined thousands of patients and had never been wrong. However, it was only for the three members of the Yu Family that all his diagnosis turned out to be wrong.

Could it be... that the Yu Family were blessed by the gods? Or was there a way to bring the dead back to life? Then again, the Yu Family were just ordinary fishermen. If they really knew some method of resuscitation, how could there be no news over the years? In this case, it could only be said that the Yu Family was probably blessed by the deity of luck, and thus they were not fated to die ah!

The ancients held more awe and reverence towards demons and gods. Although Doctor Sun was a physician, he was still unable to break away from these conventional beliefs. As a result, regarding Yu Xiaocao's consultation, he did his best to help her. During their discussion, Doctor Sun couldn't help but be astonished by Yu Xiaocao's unique views on some medical practices.

Xiaocao only had some superficial knowledge on medicine in her previous life, but there were endless methods to stay healthy online, which was something that she had also studied for a period of time. Many health care techniques of later generations were the results of thousands of years of studies. It was no wonder that even Doctor Sun, who was a famous doctor, had great admiration for her!

After a period of discussion, Doctor Sun's attitude towards Xiaocao had also changed unconsciously. Sometimes the treatment plans that Xiaocao suggested weren't quite mature enough, but it gave him a lot of inspiration. Thus, every time Xiaocao came over, Doctor Sun would personally receive her even if he was busy.

This made his disciples and their students very puzzled, 'With Teacher's (Teacher's teacher) medical skills and fame, even when noble lords and officials from the capital came, he still looked cold and indifferent. What is so special about this little girl to make Teacher (Teacher's teacher) treat her differently?'

In order to treat her godfather's old illness, Yu Xiaocao often traveled back and forth between Dongshan Village and the Tongren Medicine Hall in town. On this day, Xiaocao drove her donkey cart and galloped on the flat and broad official road. There were actually some benefits with Imperial Prince Jing constructing a mountain manor on the West Mountains because they at least made the road from Dongshan Village to town much better than before. Especially the section of mountain road that passed through the West Mountains, she no longer felt like she would puke out her guts from the bumpiness of the road.

Xiaocao had to make at least seven or eight round trips a month on this mountain road, so she had long been familiar with this road. After being raised by her, this donkey, named Little Gray, had become full of intelligence. It didn't need anyone to guide it and could reach home from town by itself.

Sitting cross-legged on the donkey cart with her head bowed, Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but laugh out loud when she thought about what Doctor Sun said about her godfather's medical case. After three months of her hard work, her godfather's body had finally been regulated to become vigorous and fierce... cough cough... Forgive her for using the wrong words! However, it was true. Doctor Sun said that her godfather's old disorder had been cured and he would have children sooner or later!

During these past three months, her godparents had treated her even better than they would treat their own biological children. Her father often grumbled sourly, "Old Fang has done everything that a father can do, and thus I, the real father, have become a mere ornament."

Her godmother took care of her in every way possible, from her clothes to her shoes and socks. She sewed them herself and never asked other people to help her. Not only was her godmother keen on dressing her up, but she would also teach her some rules and etiquettes of noble young ladies... This couple wished that they could just dig out their hearts and give them to her. The only thing that she could do for her godparents was to help them recuperate their health so that they could give birth to a blood-related child to make up for the regrets in their hearts.

Her godparents may say that they didn't have much hope, but she could clearly feel their desire and anticipation for a child. Since she said that she could cure Godfather's unmentionable illness, her godparents didn't distrust her because she was a child, but actively cooperated with her instead. They also had more vitality and liveliness in their speech and behavior than before.

Yu Xiaocao was thinking about the silly smile on her godfather's face when he heard that he could have his own children... Suddenly, Little Gray gave out a warning-like neighing. The donkey cart shook violently and Xiaocao almost rolled off of the cart.

Little Gray usually pulled the cart in a very smooth and stable manner. This had never happened before, so what was wrong today? Xiaocao raised her head and prepared to check out the situation, but a sense of danger emerged in her heart.

Two dark shadows darted out of the nearby mountain forest with gleaming long swords in their hands and rushed straight towards her. Yu Xiaocao was rather agile and quickly rolled off of the cart. The long swords slashed on the cart, leaving a two deep marks. A drop of cold sweat dripped from the corner of Xiaocao's forehead. If she had moved slightly slower, then the long swords would have landed on her small body instead of the cart. They were seriously trying to kill her ah!

Yu Xiaocao's heart beat violently and even the color on her face had changed. She looked at the clothes on her body. It was rather plain and simple ah! She had never exposed her wealth in town, so it was unlikely that they were killing her for her money!

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She forced herself to calm down, looked at the two masked men in black in front of her, and asked loudly, "Who are you people? I'm just a child of a fishing family, and I don't have any grudges with you guys. Could it be that you have mistaken me for someone else?"

The masked men looked at one another. The shorter one laughed grimly and asked, "Are you Yu Xiaocao of Dongshan Village?"

Xiaocao's heart sank. Since they were able to say her name, it was impossible that they had gotten the wrong person. After she looked around, her heart turned completely cold. This was the most remote section of the mountain road. On one side was a steep cliff, while a dense forest was on the other side. It was the best place to murder someone and then destroy the corpse!

The two masked men blocked all her routes of escape in front and behind her. The thickets of the forest next to her was even taller than her, so it was nearly impossible to quickly jump in there and hide. The cliff on the other side was even worse. If she jumped, she would definitely die without a corpse. What should she do? Was she going to die today?

Yu Xiaocao secretly took a deep breath and said in a low voice, "That's right, I am indeed Yu Xiaocao! However, I don't think that I have ever done anything ruthless and unlawful. I also don't recall having any enemies. Why are these two strong warriors attacking me with weapons without any reason?"

The taller man had a slightly sharper voice, which sounded grating on the ears, "Heh heh... Someone spent two hundred taels for your life. As for who it is—go and ask in the underworld!"

[Little Glutinous Dumpling, are you there? If you don't come out now, then your master is going to die!] Yu Xiaocao desperately called for the little divine stone within her heart. This little fellow usually jumped out when it wasn't needed, so please don't let her down at such a critical moment ah!

The little divine stone's voice slowly emerged within her mind, [Humph! Don't call me Little Glutinous Dumpling! What kind of stupid name is that? It's not impressive at all. Change it!]

[Is this the time to be worried about your name? Do you want me to die so that you can change your master ah?] Yu Xiaocao was so angry that she forgot about being scared. Her fierce expression made the two bandits look at each other again. They were very baffled in their hearts—was this little lass so scared that she had turned into a fool?

The little divine stone slowly said, [Of course I would like to change to a more powerful master, but... Ay! It's hard to bind with people who aren't in the same magnetic field ah! This Divine Stone has no other choice but to accept you as my master. There's nothing I can do ah!]

[Since you can't change your master, shouldn't you hurry up and help me?] Yu Xiaocao was about to die from anger because of it. This tactless thing, it was such a critical moment right now, yet it was still dawdling!

The little divine stone replied in a leisurely and unhurried manner, [Don't worry. My help won't be needed! You ah, you're really lucky, so there's no way you will die!]

At this moment, the bandits had already lost their patience. They raised their swords and rushed towards Yu Xiaocao. Yu Xiaocao was so scared that she immediately got under the donkey cart. The bandits missed their target and were about to bend down to stab her under the cart when the sound of horse hooves came. A clear voice shouted, "To rob and assault people in broad daylight, do you really think that there's no law in the Great Ming Dynasty?"

Her savior had finally appeared! Yu Xiaocao was so excited that she burst into tears (Author's note: Are you sure it wasn't because you were scared?). She breathed a long sigh of relief and relaxed her stiff body under the donkey cart.

The bandits looked towards the direction of the sound and saw a white horse galloping over at full speed. With the neighing of the horse, an agile figure jumped off the back of the horse and landed near the cart. The bandits were only ordinary hooligans in town. When that person approached them, they were swayed to commit a crime at the sight of money. Moreover, they had heard that the target was just a weak little girl, so they agreed to take up this job.

Although they looked savage and cruel, they were actually very nervous. They usually just engaged in some small-scale bullying of the weak, gang fights, and so on. It was actually their first time being hired as hitmen. At this time, seeing that this deed had been exposed and that the person who came seemed to know martial arts, they naturally didn't dare to fight him. Thus, they immediately picked up their swords and ran at a speed that was even faster than a rabbit.

From afar, Zhu Junxi had seen the two masked bandits in black aiming their broadswords at the little girl. Thinking that the bandits had blocked the road in order to rob her, he hastened his beloved steed and rushed over. He had prepared to fight for justice, but unexpectedly, the two cowards had run away in fear before he had even stood still.

But, since he had encountered this situation, how could he allow the bandits to get away? With a few strides, he had caught up with the bandits. He had expected a fierce battle, but who knew that they were like a pewter spearhead that shone like silver—impressive-looking but useless. They were defeated and captured in a few moves. Zhu Junxi felt unsatisfied—weren't they too easy to defeat?

Two streams of tears flowed down the bandits' faces, 'Big brother, can you not hit so hard?'

When Yu Xiaocao came out from the bottom of the cart, she saw this scene: a bandit was kicked away by a handsome guy in white, hit a big tree and bounced back. He was spitting blood while lying on the ground and unable to stand up for a long time. With his arm twisted, the other bandit was being pressed facedown on the ground. Hearing a clear 'cracking' sound, she reckoned that his arm was probably useless now!

After taking a closer look, she felt that this handsome guy in white looked rather familiar. Wasn't he one of Princess Consort Jing's sons? Anyways, he was definitely the princess consort's son! She hadn't expected that a young master of the Prince Jing's Estate would actually be skilled in martial arts.

"Oh? Aren't you General Fang's goddaughter? Who did you offend? You have actually attracted such a fatal disaster?" After getting a good look of the dirty face of the little girl who crawled out from under the cart, Zhu Junxi was surprised to realize that she was an acquaintance, so he asked.

Yu Xiaocao dusted off her body and mumbled, "I want to know, too. Who exactly wants this little life of mine?"

Zhu Junxi frowned slightly and pondered for a moment, "You come from an ordinary family, so if it was for money, they wouldn't have chosen you. Little girl, think carefully, who have you offended recently? Or who has a grudge against your family?"

Yu Xiaocao scratched her own face with her index finger, leaving several gray marks on it. She furrowed her brows and wondered, 'If it's someone who hates them, then Madam Zhang can be considered one. However, Madam Zhang is only a village woman, so she isn't bold enough to hire a hitman. Moreover, with Madam Zhang's stingy character, there's no way that she would be willing to spend money to hire a hitman. As for other people who has a grudge against us... I really can't think of anyone.'

Seeing that the little girl had turned her own face into a dirty little kitten, and with a troubled expression, she still couldn't think of anything for a long time, Zhu Junxi decided to give up and said, "Forget it. I reckon we should just take these two to the yamen. After getting flogged, I'm sure they will honestly tell the truth!"

"This hero, please spare our lives ah! Please have mercy on us!" Upon hearing that they would be sent to the yamen, the bandits panicked. They would get beheaded for the crime of murdering someone for money!

The taller bandit sobbed loudly, "This lowly one deserves to die. I have been momentary led astray by the money and accepted this job. This lowly one swears that this was my first time doing this. This lowly one doesn't dare to do this again. This hero, please show mercy and let this lowly one go!"

The shorter bandit quickly kowtowed and said, "That's right, that's right! This lowly one will definitely turn over a new leaf. Please be merciful and forgive this lowly one this time!"

Yu Xiaocao snorted and kicked the bandits, who were tied together like a sticky rice dumpling, fiercely. Then she shouted angrily, "Let you guys go? If it wasn't for Young Master Zhu's timely arrival, would you have spared me? Speak, who ordered you to come?"

Zhu Junxi looked at the little girl in front of him with slight admiration. Had it been another young girl who experienced the dangerous situation earlier, she would have already burst into tears due to fright. There was no way that she would be able to face the bandits directly and interrogate them calmly.

The taller bandit quickly cried, "The person who approached us was a young girl who appeared like a maidservant. She offered us two hundred taels and told us to ambush you here. If we can throw you and the cart off the cliff and make it seem like an accident, then the two hundred taels will be ours! Little lady, please show mercy and don't send us to the yamen! This lowly one doesn't dare to do this again!"

"Make it seem like I accidentally fell off the cliff? You guys were holding broadswords and flinging them at me as if you wished you can cut me into pieces. That doesn't seem to match with what you're saying ah?" Yu Xiaocao calmly looked at the bandits, who had ugly and cunning appearances without their masks, and asked.

The taller bandit hastily shook his head and said, "The broadsword is just used to frighten people. The edge of the blade isn't sharpened! After thinking about it, we thought that, little lady, you're just an inexperienced little girl, so it would be easier to act after you faint from being scared. Thus..."

Yu Xiaocao picked up the broadsword and looked at it. It really hadn't been sharpened. The bandits wanted to commit murder on the road with unsharpened swords. How ridiculous! It was no wonder that they immediately ran away when Young Master Zhu appeared!

"Speak up! Who sent you guys? Leniency towards those who confess their crimes and severe punishment to those who refuse to do so. If you come clean, perhaps this lady's heart will soften and let you guys go?" Yu Xiaocao just wanted to know who would be so cruel and want her life.

With a panic-stricken expression, the taller bandit repeated, "It was really a maidservant who came to look for us. This lowly one also doesn't know who she is ah! But, based on her attire, she should be the servant of a rich family."

Maidservant of a wealthy family? She only knew a few wealthy households in town. However, she seldom came in contact with them, let alone have any grudges against each other. So, who would hire someone to kill her?

The shorter bandit was obviously a cunning man. His eyes darted around, and then he asked, "Are you really going to let us go if we tell you who hired us?"

Yu Xiaocao's eyes lit up and asked, "You know?"

The shorter bandit nodded and said, "At that time, that maidservant only gave us half of the money and said that she will give us the rest after the deed. This lowly one was more cautious and afraid that she would stand us up after we completed the job, so I secretly tailed the maidservant. She walked around town several times, and then entered an estate..."

"Entered an estate? Whose estate?" Yu Xiaocao's heart tightened and asked.

A trace of slyness appeared in the shorter bandit's eyes and he bargained, "It's natural that I will tell you if you let us go!"

"Let you guys go? If you're lying and don't actually know who hired you guys, then who should I look for after releasing you two?" Yu Xiaocao wasn't stupid, so of course, she wouldn't be deceived by him. However, she promised, "Don't worry. As long as I can find the mastermind, I promise that I won't send you guys to the yamen, nor will I kill you!"

The shorter bandit was also just taking a gamble. He looked at Young Master Zhu, and after he received his guarantee, he said, "That maidservant went inside through a side door and it seemed like there was someone helping her. There was no sign on the small door, so this lowly one went around to the front entrance and saw the two big characters written on top..."

Fields of Gold Chapter 204

"Stop trying to create suspense and just say it! Whose residence did she enter?" Yu Xiaocao's voice was fierce, but she had a petite figure and was staring at them with her adorably big eyes, so it didn't seem intimidating at all.

The shorter bandit continued to haggle, "You have to promise to let me go after I say it! Otherwise, I won't tell you even if you beat me to death..."

Yu Xiaocao was so angry that she started to smile. She sneered, "Still refuse to say? Alright! Young Master Zhu, please accompany me to the county yamen. This kind of ferocious bandit needs to be sent to the yamen! With the methods used by the people of the yamen, I'm sure that they will be able to make you talk!!"

"Don't! Please don't!!" The shorter bandit saw that the little girl's face had turned red from anger. If she really sent him to the yamen, then he would definitely be killed! He might still have a chance to stay alive in this young girl and her family's hands, so he hastily said, "I'll tell you!"

Under Yu Xiaocao's watchful eyes, the shorter bandit obediently explained, "The maidservant entered a residence called 'Fang Estate'. It looked quite impressive, so it should be a very wealthy household. At that time, I regretted that I didn't ask for more money!"

Fang Estate? In town, besides her godfather's residence, there probably wasn't another family called 'Fang Estate', right? A maidservant from her godfather's household wanted to kill her? Other than that girl Xia Furong, there probably wasn't anyone else, right?

With her brows wrinkled tightly together, Yu Xiaocao had to reevaluate that girl Xia Furong in her heart. She knew that Xia Furong had always disliked her. However, she had never taken her godmother's niece too seriously. She felt that it was just the jealousy of a young girl who couldn't obtain the favor of her elders. She hadn't expected a little girl under the age of ten to be so cruel and want her life!

Zhu Junxi asked in surprise, "Fang Estate? Isn't that General Fang's residence in town? Isn't General Fang your godfather? I heard from my mother that your godparents dote on you down to their bones. How can they allow a maidservant of their own household to harm you? This guy is definitely lying!"

"Young Master, please spare our lives ah! This lowly one swears to the heavens that the maidservant really did enter a house called 'Fang Estate' ah!" The shorter bandit hastily defended himself.

After Yu Xiaocao carefully inquired about the figure and appearance of the maidservant, she felt even more certain within her heart. For this trip, Xia Furong had only brought along one second-rank maidservant from the capital, whose name was Zixiang. She had been serving Xia Furong since she was still living with the Xia Family, so she could be considered one of her most trusted servants. Most of the servants in the residence in Tanggu Town were older servant who had transferred over from the General's Estate in the capital. Thus, Zixiang was the only one she could use.

"Whether it's the truth or not, we'll know after my godfather finds that person and ask. Young Master Zhu, please help me put them on my donkey. By this time, my godfather should have returned to Dongshan Village already." Yu Xiaocao felt that it was necessary to teach Xia Furong a lesson.

This Xia Furong was so insidious at such a young age. She paid someone to murder her just because her godparents treated her slightly better. In the future, if her godmother got pregnant and this vicious girl did something to harm her godmother, then even crying would be useless at that time!

Young Master Zhu was worried about leaving an eight or nine year old girl alone with two vicious bandits. Thus, he decided to be a good person to the end by escorting the little girl back to Dongshan Village and handing her over to General Fang before returning to town.

After this hold up, the sky had already darkened. Fortunately, it was a smooth official road all the way, which she was familiar with, and the speed of the little donkey didn't decrease at all. When they were close to arriving at the entrance of the village, they heard the sound of horse's hooves rushing over. The tall figure on the horse shouted, "Is it Xiaocao?"

Xiaocao quickly replied, "Godfather, it's me!!"

A moment later, the figure of Fang Zizhen riding on a tall steed appeared clearly in the dimming night. He came to Xiaocao's side and looked her up and down for a long time before he finally relaxed and chided her, "Why did you come back so late? Don't you know that your family will worry?"

Yu Xiaocao felt wronged inwardly, but before she got to speak, Zhu Junxi had quickly cupped his hands in a greeting and said, "General Fang, your daughter encountered bandits on her way back and suffered a fright, so you should stop scolding her!"

"What? What kind of bandits would be so bold as to rob my, Fang Zizhen's, daughter in broad daylight? I reckon that they want to die earlier!!" Upon hearing his words, Fang Zizhen instantly erupted in fury. His voice, which sounded like a large bell, vibrated throughout the mountain forest and caused all the night birds to fly away in panic.

"Godfather..." Yu Xiaocao had never experienced such a dangerous situation before. Seeing her godfather being genuinely worried about her, her eyes were sour, and her voice trembled as if she was crying.

Fang Zizhen hastily got down from his horse and hugged his daughter in his arms, feeling heartbroken. He said, "Daughter, don't be scared. Godfather is here! Godfather will skin that damned bandit and avenge you!"

The corner of Zhu Junxi's mouth twitched, 'Was it really alright to say such a gruesome thing in front of an eight or nine year old little girl?'

He looked at the originally strong girl crying in General Fang's embrace, and sighed in his heart, 'She is a young girl after all. No matter how calm and strong she appeared, she would also show her weak side in front of her family ah!'

Seeing the little girl was crying so much that she started hiccupping, he told General Fang about how the bandits had said, and then said, "If the bandit isn't lying, then there's a rat in your household. General Fang should make a thorough investigation to prevent these incidents from occurring again in the future."

When Fang Zizhen, who was busy wiping his daughter's tears, heard this, he stopped the movement of his hands, stood up straight to look directly at Zhu Junxi, and solemnly said, "Thank you very much for your help today, Second Young Master Zhu. Mingzhe will personally visit you on another day to express my gratitude. I will definitely investigate this matter thoroughly, and I will never allow the pest who wants to harm my daughter get away with it!"

Zhu Junxi politely exchanged a few words with him, and then quickly bid his farewells to return to town.

When they got back to Dongshan Village, Fang Zizhen was full of murderous intent as he picked up a bandit in each hand and threw them on the ground harshly. He stepped on one of the bandit's legs, making the sound of bones cracking. The taller bandit, whose bone had been fractured after being trampled on, screeched as if he was a pig being slaughtered.

Seeing Fang Zizhen's face, which looked ferocious and was full of stubbles, the shorter bandit's face turned ghastly pale due to fright. He kowtowed repeatedly until his head started bleeding. He repeatedly begged for mercy, "My Lord, please spare my life! My Lord, please spare my life ah!"

With his large pair of bell-like eyes, Fang Zizhen suddenly glared at him and shouted, "Speak! Who ordered you guys? If you want to harm my, Fang Zizhen's, daughter, then you'll have to consider whether your life can bear it!!"

The shorter bandit quickly said, "It was a young girl from the Fang Estate. She gave us money and asked us to throw this little lady off the cliff and make it seem like an accident. She said that she will give us the other half of the money after we finish the deed..." After saying that, he honestly and thoroughly described the young girl's appearance again.

Lady Fang, who had come out after hearing the movements, still had lingering fears as she held Xiaocao in her arms and gently placated her. There was a burst of fear within her heart: Such a clever and sensible daughter, she almost couldn't see her anymore... Lady Fang hugged Xiaocao even tighter.

Linglong, who was beside Lady Fang, heard the bandit's description of the maidservant and exclaimed in surprise, "There's a red mole, about the size of a grain of rice, on the corner of the mouth? Isn't that Zixiang who serves Miss Xia..."

Beside her, Zhenzhu gently pulled on her sleeve. Seeing the expression on her madam's face, Linglong quickly stopped talking! Miss Xia usually didn't get along with Miss Cao'er, but she wouldn't go as far as to want her life, would she?

Lady Fang had a grim expression, and a violent storm was raging within her heart. 'I never expected this ah! I have raised a cruel and savage wolf beside me ah!' In the past, when she was childless, she wanted to a niece from her maiden family as company. At that time, the seven or eight year old Xia Furong appeared sensible and lovely, so she was chosen. She knew that the little girl usually had some little ideas in her mind. In an environment like the Xia Family's, those without even a little bit of a scheming heart wouldn't even know how they ended up dead.

She also knew that lass didn't like her goddaughter. She had originally thought that it was just the jealousy among young girls and that it wouldn't be anything serious. However, she never expected that the little girl had such a sinister heart and actually wanted to take her daughter's life...

"Older Cousin's maidservant? I have no enmity with her. Why would a little maidservant want to kill me? Where did she get so much money to hire a hitman?" Yu Xiaocao feigned a confused expression and weakly asked.

Fang Zizhen clutched his hands so tightly that there was a cracking sound. He picked up the front collar of the shorter bandit's clothes, as if he was holding a dead dog in his hands, and shouted, "When did the maidservant go look for you guys? What time did you guys agree on to get the rest of the money?"

Being held by the collar, the shorter bandit's eyes had directly rolled to the back of his head as he stammered, "It was... it was yesterday afternoon! She said that this little lady would go to town alone today and return in the evening, which would be a good time to act. We agreed to collect the money on the day after tomorrow. She said that she needed to confirm that we have accomplished the task before giving us the money... cough cough!!"

The bandit was about to be strangled to death when Fang Zizhen finally loosened his hands. He fell heavily on the ground and coughed violently.

Fang Zizhen looked at Lady Fang, and after a brief deliberation, he asked, "When did your niece go to town?"

Lady Fang looked at him gloomily and replied with an expressionless face, "Yesterday morning, she said that she wasn't feeling well and wanted to see a doctor in town, and then she went to town with that maidservant Zixiang. I offered to go with her, but she declined..."

Yu Xiaocao knew that her godmother must feel extremely bad in her heart, so she quickly grabbed her hand and looked at her with concern. Lady Fang looked down at her daughter's eyes, which were as pure as the clear night sky, and forced out a faint smile to show that she was fine.

Yes, to be born from such a family, although she was protected by the matriarch, it wasn't like she didn't know anything about these dirty matters. Lady Fang was accustomed to seeing people of the inner courtyards killing others by underhanded means, so she swiftly adjusted her state of mind. Her goddaughter had just suffered a fright, yet she still wanted to comfort her and was worried about her mood—she didn't adopt her in vain ah!

"It won't be Older Cousin, right? Older Cousin is still so young, so how can she do such a sinister thing? Godfather, Godmother, perhaps we have wrongly accused her?" Yu Xiaocao widened her eyes and feigned a doubtful expression.

Fang Zizhen furrowed his brows and sneered, "Whether it's her or not, we'll know with a test. Cao'er, don't go back tonight. I'll act out a scene with your father..."

That night, the entire Dongshan Village had been alerted! Why? Yu Hai's daughter went to town, but still hadn't return when the sky had completely darkened.

Fields of Gold Chapter 205 - To Flush Out the Culpri

t

All the men of the village held torches and searched along the official road that led to town. Halfway on the road, they discovered the remains of the donkey cart hanging on the cliff and the shoe of a young girl... Ay! What a pity! She was such a lively and cute little girl ah! She had lost her life at such a young age...

Many of the villagers silently educated their children in private: In the future, when traveling on that section of the mountain road, one had to be extra careful so as to not fall all the way down the cliff like the daughter of the Yu Family.

On the second day, a tiny 'corpse' covered by a white cloth was placed in the Yu Family's courtyard. The entire Yu Family was shrouded in a 'grieving' atmosphere. When the news traveled to the Yu Residence, Madam Zhang lifted her brow and nearly laughed out loud, 'She deserved it! That unfilial wretch always went against me! It seems like even the heavens finally couldn't stand it anymore, right?'

Old Yu, on the other hand, hastily walked towards the old residence with unsteady steps. When he entered the yard and saw the figure covered by a white cloth on a wooden bed, he muttered, "What happened? The road has already been fixed, so why did she still fall off the cliff? My granddaughter ah, why do you have such a pitiful life ah?"

With his head lowered, Yu Hai squatted beside the wooden bed motionlessly, as if he was a sculpture. He didn't dare look up for fear that others could see through him. Under the white cloth was the haystack that he made with grass last night. Old Fang said that he had to feign a sorrowful expression, but how was he supposed to pretend ah...

Yu Hang, who stood on the side, rubbed his eyes hard until they turned red before he lifted his head and called Old Yu, "Grandfather..."

Xiaolian was really crying. She thought of how she had this lingering sense of fear yesterday that something was going to happen. Sure enough, Xiaocao had encountered bandits and nearly lost her life. Her younger sister was so clever, lovely, and capable ah! Yet that vile person actually wanted to harm her younger sister. When they found the real culprit, they should also let her get a taste of being thrown off a cliff!!

Little Shitou sobbed loudly, "Second Sister ah, Second Sister... Little Shitou won't let you go. Second Sister, please open your eyes and look at Little Shitou again..." Uh, he was howling without tears!

As for Madam Liu, since she didn't know how to act, the family was afraid that she would slip up and they wouldn't be able to find the real culprit. Thus, they told her to hide in the room, and to the public, they said that she was so sad that she had fainted from crying!

Fang Zizhen and Lady Fang also stayed beside the tiny body. One was filled with righteous indignation and vowed to avenge his daughter, while the other silently wept and fell beside the bed several times. As someone from a big, noble family, who wouldn't have a little bit of acting skills? Lady Fang's crying was so genuine that several women in the village also wept unceasingly and repeatedly comforted her.

Seeing this mournful scene in front of him, Old Yu deeply sighed and squatted on the ground holding his head silently. Although he usually didn't take much notice of this younger granddaughter of his, if she really died, he still felt very sad in his heart.

At noon, the people who came to help had mostly left. A familiar horse carriage stopped in front of the Yu Family's house, and a slender and delicate figure came down from the carriage. She stumbled into the house and cried sadly, "Younger Cousin! Why did you suddenly leave like this?"

Lady Fang raised her head and looked at her niece with her reddened eyes. Her gaze was deep and calm, "Furong, you came back? Are you feeling better now? Also, how did you know about your younger cousin's accident?"

Xia Furong's whimper paused briefly before she swiftly recovered and sadly said, "Aunt, don't be too mournful ah! As soon as I entered the village, I heard someone talking about Younger Cousin's matter... It's such a pity for Younger Cousin to encounter such a disaster at a young age... Younger Cousin, how can you bear to let Aunt see her child die before herself ah!"

She was truly a great actress; tears kept seeping out of her eyes as if they were free. Xiaocao, who was hiding in the storage room, watched Xia Furong's series of performances with great admiration. Sure enough, none of the people who had experienced the infighting of the inner courts of ancient times were easy to deal with!

Since 'the deceased' was underage and a girl, she couldn't be buried in the village's ancestral grave, nor could they make any grand arrangements for her funeral. They could only select an area in the common grave at the south side of the mountain, roll her body up in a straw mat, and bury her in a pit. Xia Furong took part in the whole process. After she personally saw the 'corpse' being buried, she made an excuse early in the morning the next day and quickly rushed to town.

Fang Zizhen and the Yu Family took the two bandits and followed Xia Furong to town. The two bandits, who had been arranged to hide in the dark at the Yu Residence by Fang Zizhen, had confirmed that Zixiang, who was beside Xia Furong, was the person who made the deal with them.

To catch a thief, one must find the evidence first. In order to prevent Xia Furong from quibbling, Fang Zizhen and the Yu Family caught them red-handed as Zixiang gave the rest of the money to the bandits.

When the Fang Zizhen couple, Yu Xiaocao, and the rest of the Yu Family brought the two bandits and Zixiang in front of Xia Furong, this young girl, who was only thirteen, had actually wanted to continue making excuses.

She looked at Zixiang with deep pain and scolded in a tone as if she hated the iron from not becoming steel, “Zixiang, you have done wrong ah! Although we're as close as sisters, I never expected you to avenge me in this way! Younger Cousin didn't get along with me and stole a lot of things that originally belonged to me, but... I really never thought about taking her life ah!!”

Lady Fang looked at her silently, sneered, and said, “Furong, you said Xiaocao stole the things that originally belonged to you? I want to ask you what exactly did she take from you? When did our Fang Family's properties become the Xia's?”

Xia Furong could still calmly change her words at this time, “Aunt, it's Niece's mistake! This happened because Zixiang saw that Younger Cousin has taken all of Aunt's dotting love and felt angry for me, so she ended up doing something wrong. Please Aunt, for the sake of Niece, let her die painlessly!”

Zixiang opened her eyes wide and had an astonished expression on her face as she looked at her selfish young miss speaking. The young miss was planning on putting all the blame on her ah. She was being wronged!! When Young Miss ordered her to do it, she had tried to persuade her against it. But at that time, Young Miss's heart had already been blinded by hatred and jealousy, so she wouldn't listen to anyone. She didn't know how the young miss found the two ruffians in town. She took out her savings and instructed her to hire the two ruffians as hitmen. How did she ended up being the mastermind now, while the young miss turned into an innocent person?

She had wanted to defend herself, but she noticed the young miss's warning gaze. Zixiang felt a burst of coldness in her heart. She was the child of servants of the Xia Household. Her parents and younger brothers were all in the hands of the Xia Family. If she told the truth, not to mention whether she could avoid being punished for her crime, but it would also implicate her family...

Zixiang's heart was like dead ashes—utterly dissipated. Her legs went limp and she fell to the ground. She trembled and said, “This lowly... this lowly servant deserves to die. This lowly servant couldn't bear to see the young miss being wronged, and this committed this hideous crime. This lowly servant deserves to die...”

“Wronged? My Fang Family provides you with good food and drinks. Every season, you received the same amount of clothes and jewelry as the family of officials. When did I, your aunt, ever treat you unfairly?”

As if she didn't hear Zixiang 'pleading guilty', Lady Fang stared fixedly at Xia Furong and felt a sense of coldness in her heart. After being exposed for doing something wrong, she could still calmly push it off to others and let a maidservant, who was as close as sisters with her, become her scapegoat, yet she didn't even feel a sense of guilt and shame at all. She had raised an ungrateful and vicious person ah! These years, she had treated this niece of hers too well and raised this thirteen year old girl to become too ambitious and greedy!

Xia Furong hastily said, “Although Aunt and I don't have a mother and daughter relationship, we have feelings that are akin to a pair of mother and daughter. Niece has always been grateful within my heart...”

With a voice that was like heavy water, Lady Fang interjected, “You're right about that. After all, we're not mother and daughter. Your surname is Xia, not Fang! Everything that belongs to the Fang Family has nothing to do with you in the future! You have to be clear about this!”

There was finally a change in Xia Furong's complexion. With a pale face, she stammered, “Why did Aunt say that? Niece has never dared to have such wishful thinking...”

“It's good that you know it's wishful thinking!! Xiaocao is the goddaughter that I recognized. If the Fang Family doesn't have any descendants in the future, all of the Fang Family's properties will belong to her! As for you, you're merely a relative from the Xia Family who's temporarily staying at the Fang Family's house, and that's all! What rights do you have to compare with Xiaocao?” Lady Fang was obviously very familiar with the infighting of the inner courts; she directly attacked the vulnerability of the opponent.

After all, Xia Furong was just a teenage girl. She couldn't control the anger in her heart anymore. The expression on her face became ferocious, “Why! Aunt, I have accompanied you for so many years. Am I not better than a peasant girl who you have only known for less than half a year? Aunt, think about it. Who was the one beside you when you were lonely during these past few years? Who was the one by your side when you were sick? Who was the one who acted silly to cheer you up when you were sad? What's so good about this stupid girl of humble origin? Why are all of you treating her so well and doing so much for her? I can't accept this!! How is she better than me??”

After her niece revealed her true colors, Lady Fang still looked calm and indifferent. The indifference in her eyes gradually stopped Xia Furong's clamor.

Lady Fang sighed and said, "Furong, you seem to have forgotten what your parents said when I brought you over. You are only a 'pastime' they gave me. If you didn't do the things you just mentioned, do you think that there's still any value in you staying in the Fang Household?"

"Older... Older Aunt!" Xia Furong's face was full of disbelief. She never thought that her aunt, who had loved and doted on her, would say such hurtful words.

With a face of remorse, Lady Fang continued, "Perhaps, over the years, I have been so kind to you that you have forgotten your duty and identity. Did you always wanted to become the young miss of the Fang Family? Think about it. If I wanted to accept you as my daughter, I would have fulfilled your wish many years ago! Why would I wait until now?"

The bubble of hope within Xia Furong's heart had been burst, and her heart was filled with despair. She rushed towards Xiaocao like a crazy woman, but got pushed away by Fang Zizhen and fell heavily on the ground. She cried in despair, "Why? Why!! How am I inferior to her? What exactly is so good about her..."

Lady Fang looked at her with pity and slowly said, "She may not be as beautiful as you, nor does she have your elegance and poise... but there's one thing that you can never compare with her. Because she is purer and more genuine than you! Her heart is cleaner than yours!!"

Xia Furong crawled over, clung onto Lady Fang's leg, and shouted, "Aunt, it's all Zixiang's idea. It has nothing to do with me ah, Aunt!!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 206 - Diving

Lady Fang looked down at her and slowly shook her head, "Furong, you really disappoint me! It seems like, after bringing you up for all these years, I still wasn't able to get rid of the things that you have learned from the Xia Family... I shouldn't have let you go back to the Xia Family so often. At the Xia Residence, your parents frequently inculcated the idea that 'everything in the Fang Family will be yours in the future', right? As a result, you want to remove all the obstacles that is obstructing your path to achieve your goal, right?"

"Auntie..." Xia Furong was still trying to put up a last-ditch fight.

Lady Fang blocked her with one sentence, "Furong, do you think Aunt is stupid? The maidservant merely receives a few hundred copper coins in a month, how would she be able to take out two hundred taels of silver to help her master vent her anger?"

Xia Furong's voice stopped abruptly and her complexion was gray with defeat. Xia Furong naturally ended up being sent back to the oppressive Xia Family. Since she was abandoned, she naturally wouldn't be able to live well. After she reached adulthood, she was married off to a high-ranking official's stupid son. She was unhappy in that marriage and died before she reached the age of thirty.

When she was in despair, she would often recall back to the mistake she had made that night, and her heart would always be full of deep remorse. If she wasn't muddle-headed by jealousy, then she would've still been the niece that her aunt doted on. As long as she was well-behaved, her aunt would've arranged a good marriage for her and prepared a considerable amount of dowry. She would've a husband who loved her and respected her. She would give birth to a group of cute babies... At the time of her death, Xia Furong seemed to have seen a different life...

When Yu Xiaocao reappeared in front of the villagers of Dongshan Village after the case was over, the villagers looked as if they had seen a ghost. Wasn't the Yu Family's second daughter buried in a mass grave? How could she still be alive? Could it be that she still has a grudge, so that her deceased soul has not yet dispersed?

After she scared another group of little girls in the village to tears, Yu Hai and Fang Zizhen had no choice but to go to each and every family to explain the situation to them. They explained that Xiaocao had encountered bandits and was rescued by the second son of Prince Jing's Estate. In order to draw out the people from behind the scene, she had feigned death...

After the villagers understood the matter, they all sighed and were very happy that Xiaocao was alright. Only Madam Zhang secretly cursed in her heart, saying that Xiaocao was a scourge who wouldn't die in a thousands of years...

The days passed by one by one, and it was already midsummer. There weren't many children in the fishing village who didn't know how to swim. When the tide was low, one could always see a few heads bobbing up and down in the water, just like a nimble little dolphin.

Yu Xiaocao learned to swim in her previous life. There was a large pond in the village, and in the summer, children liked to jump into the pond and play while the adults watched over them. After a while, everyone liked to dog paddle a few times in the pond. Sometimes, the adults also liked to swim back and forth inside the pond, or they would give their children some pointers in regards to swimming. In her previous life, Xiaocao's father was one of the best swimmers when he was young. Xiaocao and her younger siblings had learned their swimming skills from him.

Unconsciously, it had already been a year since she transmigrated. Everything in her past life was gradually fading from Xiaocao's heart, only an everlasting imprint was left behind deep within her heart. The most important thing was to cherish her current life. She should live in the moment and cherish the things in front of her.

“Xiaolian, Xiaocao! Let's go diving in the sea to catch abalone. We would be able to receive a few taels of silver if we catch a high-quality abalone!” Zhou Shanhu bounced in from outside and opened her outer garment mysteriously, showing Xiaocao and her sister the diving suit she was wearing.

The Great Ming Dynasty had greatly improved the status of women which had also impacted the small fishing village of Dongshan Village. No one would say anything if a young girl went to the sea wearing a tight diving suit before she reached adulthood. Thus, it was common for a little girl like Zhou Shanhu to have her own diving suit.

The diving suit was similar to the one-piece wetsuit in her previous life. It was usually made of sea fish skin, jellyfish skin, or shark skin. It was waterproof and warm in the sea. However, the method to making them had been lost in later generations. Xiaocao was very interested in the diving suit, so she touched it again and again.

Zhou Shanhu proudly said, “My father just bought me this diving suit this year. The diving suits made from sea fish skin is only worth barely a few taels of silver. I wonder how many taels of silver would be needed to make one from jellyfish or shark skin? Xiaocao, your father is the best at hunting sharks, why don't you ask him to make you one?”

Xiaolian smiled and said, “Younger Sister, Father secretly made me a sharkskin diving suit for me last year. If you like, you can try it on.”

As the weather got warmer, it was harder to preserve meat dishes, so they stopped selling braised food. As a result, Xiaolian had been home doing nothing for the past two days, which was something that she wasn't used to. She had been thinking about asking Xiaocao to help her come up with another business, so that she would be able to earn some money to spend.

In order to cultivate his children's independence, Yu Hai decided to allow his children to run their own business. All the money they earn would belong to themselves. For example, all the money Yu Hang earned from collecting seafood and Xiaolian earned from selling braised dishes all belong to them. Although they may still be young, they both have a considerable amount of money saved up!

However, the two of them were used to giving their younger sister the money they earned. So Xiaocao helped them open a bank account. When she received a hundred taels from them, she would deposit it into their bank account. Whenever the siblings got together to talk about their savings, Little Shitou would noisily complain that everyone was earning money, and that only he had money going out but not in. He was very frustrated and believed that he was the most useless one of his siblings!

Yu Xiaocao comforted him, "Shitou, you are the one with the most prospect in our family. In the future, the one earning the most will be you! Think about it, no matter how much money we make, we're still little ants that can be easily crushed in the eyes of those influential officials. If you study hard and become a big official in the future, wouldn't you be able to shelter your older brother and sisters? You are now at the investment stage, so you will receive the returns in the future!"

Her reasoning allowed Little Shitou to stop thinking about running a small business after school. In order to not make Little Shitou feel left out, Xiaocao also helped him open a bank account and would deposit ten taels of silver into his bank account each month. Little Shitou knew that his second sister was the richest person in the family. She received dividends from Zhenxiu Restaurant and Zhou Family's factories, and she also received rent from two of the shops in town. She was a wealthy little lady, so he didn't refuse it.

After Xiaocao heard that there was a sharkskin diving suit at home, her heart felt itchy and she urged Xiaolian to take it out for her to try. Although Xiaocao had grown in the past year, her current height wasn't much different from Xiaolian's height last year. Xiaolian's diving suit from last year was a perfect fit for her.

Xiaolian watched as her younger sister put the diving suit over her undergarments and then put her outer garment over it. Seeing how eager she was, she quickly tugged her and said, "Younger Sister, you haven't learned to swim yet. Just stand by the edge of the water, don't enter the water!"

Xiaocao smiled and said, "What's so difficult about swimming? I'm so smart, so how can such a trifling matter stop me? You'll see."

Xiaolian didn't feel relieved at all. After she bid her mother goodbye, she followed behind Xiaocao and Shanhu as the two of them chattered. The three of them arrived at a secluded place by the sea.

Zhou Shanhu looked around and saw that there was no one else around, so she took off her outer garment, plunged into the sea, and swam far away. Her swimming skills was not bad. After she wiped away the water on her face she waved her hand towards Xiaocao and shouted, "Xiaocao, don't be afraid! The water isn't deep here, you can descend into the water bit by bit!"

Yu Xiaocao took off her outer garment and stuffed it in Xiaolian's hands. She smiled and said, "There won't be any problems. You can watch over me by the shore. If something goes wrong, you can come in and fish me up!"

Xiaolian reluctantly sat by the reef on the shore as she watched her younger sister slowly descend into the sea. The sea right now was very gentle, and there were clear ripples on the surface of the blue sea. Although it was morning, the two girls didn't feel cold at all while wearing their diving suits.

"Younger Sister, don't go further in, you don't know how to swim..." When Xiaolian saw that only Xiaocao's head appeared on the surface of the water, she quickly stood up and shouted loudly towards Xiaocao. However, her voice came to an abrupt stop and her eyes widened in surprise when she saw Xiaocao's adept swimming style. Was her younger sister a genius? How was she able to learn without a teacher?

After having already swam a circle, Zhou Shanhu swam closer Xiaocao's side for fear that an accident might occur since this was her first time in the water. But after she saw Xiaocao's skilled dog-paddle, she smiled and said, "Xiaolian said that you don't know how to swim. She's worrying over nothing! Aren't you pretty good at swimming? There aren't many people here, so I think we should be able to find some abalone at the bottom of the sea. Let's swim a little further before diving!"

Yu Xiaocao followed Zhou Shanhu as they swam further into the sea. Suddenly, Zhou Shanhu plunged into the sea and there wasn't any movement from her after a long time. Xiaocao panicked and busily buried her head into the sea to figure out where Zhou Shanhu was. Although she could swim, she didn't know how to dive. After fluttering about for a while, she still couldn't dive in.

"Hahaha..." A burst of laughter could be heard, Xiaocao quickly lifted her head up. Zhou Shanhu had appeared not far from where she was. One of her hand was holding a dark sea cucumber, while she used her other hand to point her finger at her, laughing until tears was about to come out.

Yu Xiaocao swam to her side and splashed some seawater at her face. She angrily said, "What's so funny? I just don't know how to dive, teach me quickly!"

"Your appearance from before looked exactly like a drowning duck as you fluttered about. It was so funny! Haha..." Zhou Shanhu let out another burst of laughter.

Yu Xiaocao waited for her to finished laughing before she modestly asked her to teach her how to dive. Zhou Shanhu had good diving skills, and she was also a competent little teacher. Yu Xiaocao was also a fast learner, and soon mastered the trick to diving. With one plunge, she was able to reach all the way to the bottom of the sea.

Zhou Shanhu looked as if she had suffered a blow, "It's true that 'once a disciple has learned, the master will starve'! If you pick a high-quality abalone later, don't forget to give me a bonus!" After she finished speaking, she held her breath and plunged into the water. The little girl's diving skill was pretty good. This time, she went down for two to three minutes before she resurfaced again.

Yu Xiaocao waved her hand at Xiaolian, who was on the shore, and then she took a deep breath and dived down. The sea was clear and transparent and the reefs at the bottom of the sea was clearly visible. Occasionally, a multicolored fish would swim pass the reef, and a small sea crab was startled by her that it drilled itself into the sand. Xiaocao was amazed by this interesting scene. She lingered at the bottom of the water until she couldn't hold her breath anymore. Then, she would push herself up and rush to the surface of the sea.

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Zhou Shanhu's small head appeared after it collapsed for a while. She shouted towards Xiaocao, "How is it? Did you harvest anything?"

Xiaocao shook her head and disappointingly said, "There's nothing!"

Zhou Shanhu smiled and comforted her, "Maybe it's because we're too close to the sea, so there's nothing good around here. Other people are professional divers, so they can submerge underwater for several minutes. Do you want to look further in?"

Xiaolian continued to gather goose barnacles by the shore when she saw that her younger sister's swimming skills were very good, and that Zhou Shanhu was looking after her too. Younger Sister seemed to like to eat goose barnacles with soup. After their family separated from the main branch, she didn't

have any time to gather seafood, so she rarely had the chance to eat the seafood soup made by her younger sister! Xiaolian put her younger sister's outer garment on the dry reef to dry, then she stooped over and busied herself.

Xiaocao had gradually swam into the depths of the sea, but her ability to hold her breath wasn't that great. She often had to come up to take a breath when she had just reached the seafloor. She felt very discouraged because she had busied herself for a long time, yet she still didn't get any harvest.

The little divine stone's mocking voice suddenly appeared in her mind, [I reckon that even if you dawdled until dusk like this, you probably still won't get any harvest. Do you want this Divine Stone to help you out?]

Xiaocao was somewhat exhausted as she treaded water and asked impatiently, "No kidding! If you were able to help, why didn't you say so earlier rather than watching me from the sidelines?"

[What's with your attitude? This Divine Stone is unhappy, I'm not helping anymore!] The little divine stone proudly and lovably snorted, giving off an unhappy appearance.

"If you don't want to help me, then don't! I don't care!" Xiaocao didn't try to please its temper! Who was the master in this relationship? She took a deep breath in and dove underwater again.

The little divine stone was speechless for a long time by her words, it really wanted to just wash its hands of her and ignore her. However, it had reached a bottleneck at a critical point right now. If the little divine stone helped its master, then it could absorb the spiritual powers from heaven and earth, recovering its full power!

Although the little divine stone was still angry, it still helped Xiaocao. The little divine stone condensed a protective screen of spiritual power around Xiaocao's body. It seemed as if she was wrapped in a transparent bubble, the seawater couldn't get close to her and the pressure from the surrounding water disappeared instantly.

Xiaocao held her breath and looked at the magical scene happening in front of her, it seemed as if she had entered a fantasy world. The transparent bubble slowly sank down, the cute little fish in the surrounding curiously swam toward her. They gently touched the spiritual barrier with their mouth, but it seemed as if they had touched a transparent film, they could see it but could not enter it.

Xiaocao was so entranced at that moment that she forgot to breathe, and her face turned red. She thought that she should hurriedly go up and to take a breath when the little divine stone's annoying voice appeared again, [You're so stupid! You can breathe freely in my spiritual barrier. Alas... why do I have such a stupid master? Forget it, go and suffocate to death!]

Xiaocao rolled her eyes in her mind and tentatively breathed in. Sure enough, fresh air filled her lungs and her stuffy chest. She extended her hand out of the bubble-shaped spiritual barrier and discovered that she wasn't obstructed by the barrier. She looked around and tried using her mind to control the bubble to float toward where a fat sea cucumber was. Just as she thought, she had quickly arrived next to the sea cucumber. As soon as she reached out, she caught the squirming sea cucumber.

"The size of this sea cucumber is pretty big, so the grade of this product should be good. We finally got some harvest." Xiaocao put the sea cucumber into the bamboo basket tied around her waist and advanced further into the depth of the ocean.

However, in order not to worry Xiaolian who was at the shore, she would occasionally emerge from the sea to breathe and then descend into the sea again. Thanks to the little divine stone's spiritual barrier, her speed was no longer hindered by the sea, so she was much more agile now.

The little divine stone had nothing to do, so it guided Xiaocao to capture the more valuable seafood like sea cucumbers, abalone, and armored lobsters...these all became goods in Xiaocao's basket.

The seafloor was like a big treasure field that had yet to be exploited by humans as it completely presented itself in front of Yu Xiaocao. The bamboo basket on Xiaocao's waist was relatively small, so it couldn't hold much. She began picking and choosing on the ocean floor. One moment she disliked this sea cucumber for being too small and another moment she disliked this lobster for not being fat enough. She specially picked only the best quality seafood. If other people knew that the things they've wished for but couldn't get was being discarded like trash, Xiaocao likely would have received a multitude of glares!

Just as the bamboo basket she brought could no longer hold anymore, a distant group of huge, dark shadows swam towards her. Xiaocao was shocked and thought that she had encountered a group of sharks. She was about to run away when she was teased by the little divine stone: [Why are you running? You really are a coward! It's a pod of dolphins, they are very docile, and they won't hurt people!]

Dolphins? She had only watched dolphin performances on television before and knew that they were adorable sea creatures. She floated quietly at the bottom of the sea as she looked at the shadows in the distance. Sure enough, when the group of black shadows approached, she finally saw their appearance: their bodies were glossy and bright with a graceful physique, their movements were light and quick, and their snouts were bent into a curve like they were smiling.

The dolphins seemed to be very interested in her, and they swam around her. There was a cute little blue dolphin that lightly bumped its head against her just like a child asking for a caress.

Yu Xiaocao smiled lightly and reached out to touch the little dolphin who wasn't afraid of people. The little creature didn't dodge away from her touch, and it gently pecked her palm with its mouth. The ticklish feeling made Xiaocao smile.

Xiaocao changed the shape of the spiritual barrier so that it clung onto her body like a second skin, while allowing it to supply her with oxygen. She wrapped her arm around the little dolphin's body, and the little dolphin brought her along to travel freely around the seafloor. The scenery at the bottom of the sea was unobstructed through the transparent barrier.

There were various kinds of corals on the seabed reef. Some of them looked like red antlers, some looked like pink flowers, and others looked like purple cactuses... there were all kinds of colors and shapes that one would've never imagined. The sight of the coral dazzled Xiaocao's eyes.

All kinds of small fishes shuttled around Xiaocao. Some of the fishes were covered in multicolored stripes, some were wearing a red hat, some looked like military flags in Beijing operas, and some looked like a round hedgehog... they all surrounded her, refusing to leave.

With the help of the little dolphin, she became a guest of the sea. As she enjoyed the scenery around the seafloor, she had picked up many high-quality abalones and now had a large harvest.

Xiaocao was playing happily with the dolphin and she forgot the time. After Xiaolian dug a lot of goose barnacles and was prepared to head home for lunch, she looked at the sea. Besides Zhou Shanhu occasionally floating to the surface of the sea, there was no movement from her younger sister for a long time.

The wicker basket in Xiaolian's hand fell onto the ground and she threw herself into the sea without wearing a diving suit; she crazily swam in the sea. Xiaolian's swimming skills were pretty good, so in a short time, she reached Zhou Shanhu. When Zhou Shanhu revealed herself from the water, she was caught by Xiaolian.

"Did you see my younger sister? When was the last time you saw her?" Xiaolian's voice was trembling as she urgently asked.

Zhou Shanhu was alarmed; she looked around and saw that the sea was calm. She thought about it and said, "I think the last time I saw her was about half an hour ago. When I surfaced from the water, I thought that we had just missed each other, so I didn't pay much attention..."

Xiaolian's complexion was deathly white and said in a sobbing tone, "I looked around for a quarter of an hour and I didn't see my younger sister surface from the water. She... something must've happened to her! I deserve to die; I shouldn't have been digging for goose barnacles. This is the first time that my younger sister went into the sea, I should've been watching attentively over her the entire time so that if anything went wrong, I could immediately search for her in the sea. What should I do now? I don't even know when the accident happened... no, I have to look for her..."

Zhou Shanhu also lost her head. The sea was so big, and they didn't know where and when the accident happened, how could they find her? Each year, it was not known how many people had been swallowed up by the sea.

"Xiaolian, don't be too anxious. Maybe Xiaocao had just swum to someplace further... look! There is a shadow that looks like a person, let's go see if it's Xiaocao!" Zhou Shanhu was pleasantly surprised when she found a small head popping up from the water in the distance. After a moment, it dived into the water again.

A spark of hope was ignited in Xiaolian's heart. She tried to calm herself down; she couldn't panic because her younger sister was still waiting for her to find her!

The two worked hard and swam in the direction of the place where the shadow had surfaced.

"Huh? Aren't you the little girl from Dongshan Village that sells braised food? Why didn't you wear a diving suit before you entered the sea?" Xiaolian was disappointed to find that it was a teenager with dark skin and a handsome appearance.

Xiaolian burst into tears, "Younger Sister! Something must've happened to my younger sister. If something happened to her, then I don't want to live either! Wah..."

The youth looked at Xiaolian as he was at a loss as to what to do. Could it be that he said something wrong and made this little girl cry?

"You... don't cry! Do you need me to help with anything?" The young man asked with concern while frowning.

Zhou Shanhu was sobbing beside her, "Her younger sister had been diving with me, but she has yet to surface from the water for a long time. Have you seen a little girl that looks a lot like her?"

The suntanned youth's expression became solemn. He slowly shook his head and said, "This place is relatively remote, so there are only a few people who come here. I didn't see anyone else besides the two of you. But... don't cry, I'll help you look for her. Maybe she had swam to someplace further away!"

"My younger sister... this is her first time diving. She had never learned how to swim before... I deserve to die. Why didn't I stay beside her and watch over her? Wu wu..." Xiaolian gasped for breath as she cried.

The suntanned youth's heart sank even further. If it was her first time diving, then she definitely wouldn't have swum too far. It wasn't a good sign if she hadn't surfaced from the water for a while. But seeing the two crying little girls in front of him, the young man still comforted them, "Don't cry anymore. I'll look around nearby, maybe I'll find something. You... can just wait here..."

The little girl had cried until her eyes were swollen. If she dove into the water like this, it was hard to guarantee that an accident wouldn't happen. Only after he let the other little girl watch over her did he begin swimming into the distance. He dove again and again into the water, looking for the little girl.

It was already half an hour later when Yu Xiaocao realized that she had stayed underwater for too long. The little dolphin seemed to have perceived her intentions, using its back to help her float to the surface. It let out an "ahh—" sound, it seemed as if it was urging her to stay.

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Xiaocao discovered that she had already drifted far away from her original position. She grinned at her new friend and said, "Xiaobu, can you carry me along?" 'Xiaobu' was the name that she had given to the little dolphin.

With the little divine stone providing the directions and the little dolphin speeding her along, Xiaocao appeared in the line of Xiaolian's sight just as the other girl was going to collapse from shock.

"Look! What's that? It's not a shark, right?" Zhou Shanhu shouted with surprise. She was the first to spot a dark shadow cruising along in the distance.

The extremely tan youth, Zhuang Xiaomo, gazed in that direction as he squinted his eyes to carefully look. He shook his head and replied, "That doesn't look like a shark. In the water, sharks have a triangular shaped fin that pops out. That shadow...it looks like a person to me, however...the speed and the positioning of that shadow doesn't resemble a person swimming. It's quite strange!!"

Zhou Shanhu felt as if her mind was exploding as she exclaimed, "Then what you're saying...could it be a mermaid? Don't the legends all say that mermaids swim very fast in the ocean?"

Zhuang Xiaomo looked at her as if she was a crazy person and scoffed, "The legends also say that mermaids only appear in the moonlight, sing tantalizing songs to tempt people, and fog their minds..."

"Little...Little Sister!!" The sound of Yu Xiaolian's gleeful shout suddenly interrupted the dispute between the two. They both looked over with astonishment at the figure that was speeding over. Sure enough, it was Yu Xiaocao, who had been missing for the past hour. She was still quite a distance away, so they couldn't tell just what exactly she was lying on. However, the object was swimming quite quickly.

"Xiaolian! Shanhu—" The sound of her voice echoed from the distance. Yu Xiaocao had one arm around the little dolphin's dorsal fin while the other arm was forcefully waving in the air.

Zhou Shanhu swam forward a few strokes and screamed in excitement, "Ah! Xiaocao is riding a fish!! Xiaolian, are you sure that your younger sister isn't the daughter of the Dragon King of the ocean? Otherwise, how could a fish listen to her commands?"

Zhuang Xiaomo looked at the little girl, who was riding a dolphin through the choppy waves in the distance. He couldn't help but be a bit stunned by the sight. Goodness gracious! This little girl absolutely wasn't an ordinary little girl. Otherwise, how could she manage to tame a free and unconstrained dolphin?

Tears of gratitude pooled within Yu Xiaolian's eyes. She swam forward towards her younger sister's direction with great effort. The little dolphin's speed was quite astonishing and, within moments, it arrived in front of the other three children. The creature was a bit timid and stopped outside touching distance of them as it opened its mouth to make a few whistling noises.

Yu Xiaocao softly stroked its slippery head and soothed, "Don't be afraid, they won't hurt you. Thank you, Xiaobu!"

She slid off the dolphin's back and swam over to Xiaolian. Her sister firmly knocked a fist on her head. The other girl reprimanded her, "Who told you to swim so far? If something happened to you, how was I supposed to inform our parents and your godparents ah? In my opinion, bringing you along to swim in the ocean was the worst idea I've ever had!!"

When Yu Xiaocao noticed Xiaolian's eyes were red with emotion and seemed quite angry, she hurriedly placated her sister, "Xiaolian, don't be angry. In the future, I won't dare to do this again. I was so busy having fun with Xiaobu that I lost track of time. I promise I won't do this again. Just forgive me this one time ah!"

Zhou Shanhu glanced at the little dolphin again, who was gleefully swimming back and forth nearby. Her eyes glistened with excitement as she remarked somewhat enviously, "Xiaocao, is Xiaobu the name of that little dolphin? It's so cute ah! You're too amazing, you even know how to tame a small dolphin! Quickly teach me, just how did you manage to do it?"

Yu Xiaocao ignored her as she continued to soothe Xiaolian's ruffled feathers. Finally, she managed to tease her sister into laughing. Xiaocao secretly wiped the invisible sweat that was on her forehead. Normally, Xiaolian also had a temper, but she usually never revealed it around her.

Zhou Shanhu continued to pester her in an attempt to get the secrets to taming a little dolphin. Yu Xiaocao opened her eyes wide and looked at the other girl innocently. She vaguely replied, "What? We have to tame them? Ah, but Xiaobu came over itself to play with me. Xiaobu is a dolphin that likes humans, it's very obedient and sweet!"

Zhuang Xiaomo and Zhou Shanhu both had a 'you're trying to trick us' expression on their faces. Although dolphins had mild personalities, they were quite cautious and only watched ships in the sea from far away. Naturally, the older generation had once told stories of dolphins saving drowning people but they hadn't heard of anyone actually having an encounter with them.

"If you don't believe me, that's okay! Xiaobu come over and greet everyone." Yu Xiaocao waved her hand and the little dolphin, who was drifting about on the side, cheerfully swam over towards her. It used its snout to gently touch her wrist. As if it could understand what she was saying, it straightened up in the water and waved one flipper towards Zhou Shanhu and the others.

"Wow! Xiaobu is too cute!! I almost want to raise one for a pet!!" Zhou Shanhu carefully came closer to the dolphin and, when she saw that the creature didn't reject her presence, she tried to gently use her hand to pet its back. The little dolphin cleverly stayed next to Xiaocao and allowed the other kids to touch it.

Yu Xiaocao gently rubbed the little fellow's head with the hand that had the mystic stone and a bit of spiritual power slowly poured into the animal's body. The little dolphin's eyes lit up and became even more close with Xiaocao.

Xiaolian watched the interactions between her younger sister and the dolphin and felt even more certain that her younger sister wasn't an ordinary person. Could it be...possible that she was the reincarnation of a little immortal girl?

Zhuang Xiaomo also came up to touch the dolphin. As he felt the animal's glossy skin, he spoke to Zhou Shanhu, "Dolphins are considered creatures of the ocean, so they can only live freely in the deep waters. Keeping a dolphin as a pet isn't necessarily a good thing for the animal..."

Xiaocao gave the tanned youngster a look of approval as she asked hesitantly, "Xiaolian, he is..."

Zhou Shanhu interjected talkatively, "He ah! His name is Zhuang Xiaomo and he lives in Wuliu Village. He's one of the diving experts I was talking about earlier. He can hold his breath underwater for around seven to eight minutes and is quite famous in the nearby villages."

Zhuang Xiaomo grinned at her honestly and replied, "I know of you two sisters. At the docks, your braised food is very famous. I haven't seen you at the docks these past couple of days, are you not doing the business anymore?"

Whenever she spoke about her own business, Xiaolian couldn't help but reveal a proud smile, "The weather's gotten hot, so it's hard to keep meat from spoiling. After the hottest day of the year passes, then we'll decide! My little sister and I are both discussing whether there are any other opportunities we can take in the summer. Ideally we'd sell something that fills the stomach while cooling a person off..."

When Xiaocao noticed that there was a bit of exhaustion on Xiaolian's face, she hurriedly smiled and said, "If there's anything we need to talk about, we can do it on shore. What's the point in bringing ourselves any longer in the water?"

The little dolphin lingered behind her reluctantly. Xiaocao turned her head around and waved a hand at it, "Xiaobu, go back home! In the future, I'll frequently go into the water to find you!!"

The little dolphin rubbed its head on her a few times, flicked its tail, and swiftly swam back toward deeper waters. That little human girl had a smell on her that was just too irresistible. It really wanted to stay next to her forever. It was a pity that humans had to live on land and it couldn't leave the water, so sad...

When they arrived on the nearby reef, Xiaolian's clothes were completely wet and clung to her body. Zhuang Xiaomo turned around with a red face. Xiaocao pulled Xiaolian into a nearby area that was a bit more hidden and had her sister change into her clothes. She then wrung Xiaolian's clothes dry and draped them over her swimsuit.

"Eh? What's this?" Yu Xiaocao noticed that there was a lot of red-purple vegetation floating in the nearby water by the reefs. To her, it somewhat resembled a type of seaweed she had eaten in her previous life at a restaurant. But that couldn't be right, wasn't this type of seaweed only found growing on rocks deep in the ocean? How did it end up floating all the way up to the surface?

Xiaolian bent over to scoop some up and looked at it herself. She shook her head, "I don't know what this is but I'm sure it's some type of sea vegetation. Not sure if it's edible or not..."

They didn't know when Zhuang Xiaomo came over to look but he also looked at the vegetation and said, "That should be red marine algae. It's edible! You can season it with some salt and vinegar, and it tastes pretty good that way! However, you rarely see it in shallow waters. Having so much here is a bit weird!"

Yu Xiaocao was already definitively sure that this dark purple seaweed was *Gelidium amansii*, also known as red marine algae. Her eyes lit up and an idea immediately popped into her head. In her previous life, she had sold starch jelly in her shop and had especially looked for recipes online to make it from scratch.

Among all of the recipes she found, there was one type that used red marine algae as its raw ingredient. The process was quite simple. The algae had to be simmered over low heat for a few hours until all of the seaweed melted into a liquid. After it cooled, the mixture would solidify into a semi-transparent jelly consistency. However, red marine algae only grew in the deep sea, and it was quite troublesome to harvest. Thus, it commanded a high price at the markets, so she ended up renouncing her idea to make marine starch jelly and decided to use sweet potato starch and mung bean starch as the raw ingredients instead.

She also felt that it was somewhat strange to see so much red marine algae out on the open water. It grew in deep waters, so how could so much appear near the shoreline? In the past, she had also never seen such a phenomenon either. In the end, it didn't matter. All of this was the raw ingredients for her to make a lot of money, and it was all free. If she didn't take advantage of it, she'd be silly!

"Xiaolian, I have a use for this red marine algae. Let's gather as much as we can before we go home ah! Shanhu, could you help us get a few baskets?" Yu Xiaocao's eyes sparkled as she stared at the red marine algae.

Zhou Shanhu readily agreed and bolted off quickly. Since Xiaocao said that there was a use for the red marine algae, then she absolutely had thought of another method to create something new to eat. If she helped Xiaocao to harvest more, then Xiaocao would definitely treat her fairly as she had a generous personality. Once the thought of eating a new delicacy surfaced in her mind, Zhou Shanhu ran even faster.

Harvesting red marine algae wasn't difficult at all. That was because in the shallow waters, it was quite easy to recognize and all they needed to do was to bend down and pick it up. The red marine algae had

a deep purple color and glistened gently in the light. Although it was a 'vegetable', it looked more like a shiny, beautiful coral specimen instead. It also resembled a shrunken version of tree canopies as the tiny branches intertwined with each other. The resulting pattern didn't look at all messy and instead resembled a mane of beautiful hair.

Once someone grabbed a handful, it seemed to shimmer gently in the air. The algae was flexible yet strong. If you cut off a 'branch' it felt very tender and soft, as if you could probably hear it 'tinkle' as it fractured. A careful look at the cut part would reveal that the inside was a milky white color. The nutritious colloids of red marine algae were all hidden within the pure milky centers.

When Zhou Shanhu came back with a few baskets, Fang Zizhen and Yu Hang had also followed her from behind. Fang Zizhen had come back from the docks earlier and noticed that his goddaughter wasn't at home at noon. He was just about to go out and find her when he ran into Shanhu, who was carrying a few baskets from home. For Yu Hang, noon was also the most leisurely time of the seafood wholesale business, so he also came over to bring the baskets to his sister.

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By the time the rest of them arrived, the twin sisters and Zhuang Xiaomo, who was free labor, had already picked up a large pile of red marine algae.

Fang Zizhen and Yu Hang always followed Xiaocao's commands without any hesitation. The two of them placed the gathered seaweed into their baskets and hauled it back home. They then ran back to help the children gather more algae. Yu Xiaocao was so excited from picking up seaweed that she had even forgotten to eat lunch.

Today's harvest was quite good! Satisfaction bloomed within Xiaocao's heart as she looked at the bamboo baskets bursting full of seaweed that were neatly lined up in the courtyard. If only red marine algae could be harvested on a regular basis, then she would really make bank!

Fang Zizhen was busy shoving the delicious and satisfying red marine algae salad into his mouth. He looked at the baskets full of seaweed and asked, "Daughter, this red marine algae tastes quite good but I don't think we can use all that's been gathered ah! Even if we ate it every day for every meal for the next couple of months, we still wouldn't be able to finish all that is here!"

Xiaocao had already entered the kitchen to stoke the fire. She peeked her tiny head out of the room and smiled mysteriously at Fang Zizhen, "Godfather, save some room in your tummy. In a bit, there will be something delicious coming out!"

Fang Zizhen rubbed at his belly and grinned, "Godfather's stomach can stretch and shrink as needed. Even when it's full, I can still eat a couple more bowls. Don't worry, I will be able to taste your new food."

In fact, the process for making starch jelly was quite simple. The important part was to have a good control of the stove's heat to allow the ingredients to simmer slowly for at least four hours. Following that, once the red marine algae completely melted into a liquid, all you needed to do was to filter any residue out and let it solidify into translucent starch jelly. Starch jelly made from algae was more clear and felt more cool than jelly made from sweet potato starch or mung bean starch. It was very similar to agar jelly. After the marine starch jelly was made, Xiaocao was planning on dressing it with garlic paste, hot chili oil, minced pickled mustard, sesame oil and some other spices. The resulting combination would definitely stoke a person's appetite.

Yu Xiaocao was not only going to try to make marine starch jelly, but she was also going to try to make a batch of sweet potato starch jelly and mung bean starch jelly while the seaweed was simmering on the stove.

Using mung bean starch was a bit inconvenient. First of all, the mung beans had to be soaked in water until they swelled. After soaking, they needed to be ground into a thick mung bean slurry and filtered to allow the starch to settle out. Although these steps seem easy, putting them into practice was another matter. Filtering the slurry had to be done a dozen times before you could let the starch settle. Afterwards, you also had to carefully pour out as much liquid as possible before you dried the mung bean starch under the sun. Only when the starch was completely dry could it be used.

Making mung bean starch jelly required using the correct proportion of starch to water. The water needed to be warmed up until it was tepid and then the starch could be added in until it was thick and viscous. A pot of clean water had to be boiled and then the sticky starch mixture had to be dropped in before agitating vigorously to prevent it from sticking to the pot and burning. Once the starch became cooked, the thick mixture had to be poured into molds similar to those used in tofu making. Then it had to cool undisturbed until solidified into its final shape.

Most of the work involved in making mung bean starch jelly was from the consecutive filtering steps required to produce the mung bean starch. Thus, sweet potato starch jelly was much easier to make. After all, they already had a supply of ready-made sweet potato starch, whether it was in Xiaocao's home or the Zhou Family's vermicelli factory. With sweet potato starch on hand, the rest of steps to make starch jelly was pretty much the same as the ones used to make mung bean starch jelly.

Sweet potato starch jelly had a slight red color while being translucent, resembling sparkling and icy red jadeite. Mung bean starch jelly, on the other hand, had a bright white color and was as soft as gelatin. No matter what type of starch jelly it was, they were all tender and tasty and were very effective in cooling down someone and quenching thirst.

With Xiaocao's secret dressing on top of the sparkling and translucent starch jelly, someone eating a bowl of it in the heat of summer would feel incredibly refreshed. The taste was so addictive that people wanted to eat some continuously. That evening, everyone in the Yu Family ate a bowl of the tender starch jelly. With the slightly moist sea breeze billowing around them, they felt quite satisfied and pleased.

Xiaolian refilled her bowl again and poured the seasoning on top while smiling, "Little Sister, this starch jelly is really very suitable to eat during summer! Tomorrow, let's bring some to the docks to sell. I'm sure it'll be very popular!"

Fang Zizhen didn't end up eating dinner as his belly was so stuffed that it bulged. He commented, "Daughter, what's in that little head of yours ah? Just where do all of these odd ideas of yours come from? I never would have expected that sweet potato starch and seaweed picked up from the beach could be used to make something so delicious! Haha, I must have done many good deeds in my past life in order to have such a good goddaughter like you! You really make me proud...Wife, tomorrow, when you go into town, bring some over to Princess Consort Jing and her second son. They should also get to try our daughter's food!"

Fang Zizhen had always been a rough person. Under the influence of the atmosphere in Dongshan Village, he no longer used genteel forms of address to speak to Lady Fang. Instead, he used the exact same terms that Yu Hai and the other villagers used, such as 'wife'! However, after getting used to it, it sounded quite amiable and intimate.

Starch jelly was quite delicious, so Lady Fang ended up eating two large bowls despite her attempts to restrain herself. She reluctantly set down the ladle and lightly laughed, "You ah! Aren't you just trying to show off that you have a good daughter in front of Princess Consort Jing? I know your ways."

Fang Zizhen chuckled and didn't even bother to hide his true goal. What was the point in trying to hide the fact that he had a talented and capable daughter? He wanted everyone to know that he, Fang Zizhen, had a clever daughter who was godly at cooking!

Xiaocao smiled brilliantly at her godfather and then continued to discuss the business of selling starch jelly with Xiaolian.

Since they were planning on selling starch jelly, they also needed to prepare bowls and spoons for the customers. Naturally, they also needed to get a couple tables and stools as they couldn't let their customers squat on the ground to eat the food! Thus, they also needed to get a tent. It was the height of summer now and there wasn't any shade at the docks. Who would ever want to eat food under the blazing sun?!

Yu Hai, who was quietly listening to his daughters' discussion, decided to interject at this time, "Tomorrow, I'll bring the materials over and I'll craft a grass shack. As for the chopsticks, bowls, and spoons, there are shops at the docks that sell those. It's only the tables and stools that might be difficult to get on short notice!"

Xiaolian suddenly thought of something and clapped her hands, "That's right! Grandpa Liu mentioned that his son had made a bunch of money from doing business and was planning on having him move in so he could provide for his old father! They need to sell their noodles stand to someone. If we take it over, wouldn't that solve our tables and stools problem?"

Xiaocao thought for a bit and then nodded, "Okay! Other than starch jelly, we can also sell cold noodles. I know a couple methods to make cold noodles, and they should taste pretty good. Tomorrow, Father can first build the awning. Grandpa Liu's grass shack doesn't let in the wind, which is fine in the winter, but in the summer, it gets a bit stuffy."

"Okay! The sun is still up right now so I'll go chop down some bamboo." Yu Hai was the type of person to do what he said, so he promptly stood up.

Yu Hang followed him from behind and said, "I'll go cut some long grass!"

With another way to make money, Yu Xiaolian became much more exhilarated and exclaimed in excitement, "Tomorrow, let's take everything we need to the docks and shoot for an opening before noon!! That's right! Tomorrow, we should go to the docks earlier. I need to buy bowls, chopsticks, and spoons from a store and you can start making the starch jelly! Since this business is a collaboration between us two, let's split the money fifty-fifty. Is that okay?"

Naturally, Xiaocao wouldn't refuse the proposition. However, it was likely that she and Xiaolian wouldn't be able to handle making both the starch jelly and cold noodles. It might not be a bad idea to bring in their Eldest Maternal Aunt into the mix. Ever since the melon store closed, their eldest maternal aunt wasn't able to find a suitable job, so she would only occasionally go to the docks and sell some food.

However, now her family had a bit more breathing room. When she was helping with the melon store for over a month, she found out she had more work than she could handle, so she also brought her oldest daughter over. Once it ended, Xiaocao simply stuffed fifty taels into her hand to show her gratitude in helping with such a tough job.

A healthy man in his prime doing hard labor in town wouldn't be able to earn one tael for a month's work. Madam Han felt that she didn't have a difficult job working in the melon shop. All she had to do was move the melons to the shelves and man the cash box. When Xiaocao gave her fifty taels for her work, she was scared and astonished. How could she possibly take that much money?

That being said, Xiaocao's Eldest Maternal Uncle also made a lot of money from selling watermelons in the prefectural city. All of this was a result of Xiaocao's kindness and benevolence. As her family's circumstances became better, she never forgot to help them either. Liu Pei and his brother had gone back and forth to the prefectural city at least ten times in the past month.

The first time they went to the prefectural city, they almost had an evil tyrant bully them out of their goods. Luckily, Fang Zizhen had quickly arrived to save them and caught the bully and his minions. The criminals were given to the authorities and Fang Zizhen also brought the two brothers to meet the prefectural magistrate. News traveled quickly, whether intentionally or not, among the wealthy and powerful families of the prefectural city. All of them soon knew that the Liu Brothers, who sold watermelons, were under the protection of the imperial envoy, General Fang. Naturally, from then on, no one tried to bully the two brothers with their wealth or status.

There were a lot more people with money in the prefectural city! As soon as a wagon full of watermelons arrived at the gates of the prefectural city, all of the melons were quickly sold out to the servants of these wealthy families. Even though the watermelons cost two times more than the ones sold in Tanggu Town, their sales never slowed down.

Within a month, the two brothers earned seven to eight hundred taels each. Prior to this, the Liu Family often didn't even have seven to eight taels to take out, let alone seven to eight hundred taels. Now that they had a 'monstrous sum' of money on their hands, neither of them really knew what to do with it.

Later on, Xiaocao gave them some financial advice. The two brothers then decided to use their money to invest in the shops that were going to be built at the new harbor. Currently, more and more people were traveling through the presently crude docks. Once construction was finished on the new harbor, then real estate prices would definitely skyrocket!

With Xiaocao's godfather around, they also didn't need to fret about whether they'd be able to buy the shops in good locations. Originally, Xiaocao wanted to ask Third Young Master Zhou for help in buying the stores but she suddenly remembered she could give this task to her godfather. Her thought process was simple, 'With my current income, buying ten shops wouldn't be a problem now!'

Anyway, back to the topic! Thus, Xiaocao combined her money with the rest of her family's and the next day Yu Hai took his two daughters along with two carts to the docks! Fang Zizhen rode his horse leisurely behind them. Yu Hai sat on the cart's handle as he drove the horse cart that was piled high with the construction materials needed to build a shack. Xiaocao and her sister were on the donkey cart, which was piled up with pots, bowls, ladles, and basins. Baskets full of seaweed were also balanced on the cart.

That's right, they were planning on making marine starch jelly first. After all, they didn't have to spend any money on the raw ingredients. When they finished their supply of seaweed, they could consider making sweet potato starch jelly then. Mung bean starch jelly was deemed too difficult to produce on a mass scale and it was also the most expensive method too. Thus, the two sisters decided not to use mung beans!

Before they headed out this morning, Xiaocao especially visited the Zhou Family to have Zhou Shanhu help them pass the word along to the village children that the Yu Family was buying red marine algae in bulk for the long term. They set the price of one copper coin per catty of seaweed and there was no limit on how much you could sell to them. Yesterday they were able to gather a dozen or so baskets full of seaweed from that one place, so it was likely other stretches of beach also had more.

In this season, the village children usually had nothing to do. If they worked hard at gathering seaweed, even a half-grown child could gather more than a dozen catties of seaweed in a day. Nowadays, the people in Dongshan Village were no longer as poor as church mice, needing to scrimp and save every copper. Thus, the adults were now able to allow their kids to have a stash of a dozen or so copper coins for pocket money. Naturally, the village children were even more enthused at the prospect of gathering seaweed for more personal money!

Fields of Gold Chapter 210

"Eh? Xiaocao, Xiaolian, you guys brought so much random stuff over, what are you trying to do?" Brother Six leisurely strolled over when he saw the two sisters bustling around. He was dressed in light summer robes and continuously fanned himself with his sleeve.

After getting some pointers from Xiaocao, his business office at the docks was already in its beginning stages. He had almost a hundred dockworkers under his supervision and nearly all of the business on the docks had been dominated by him. Foreman Sun was his right-hand man. A few other friends of his, who had been with him in the past, had also been promoted to management positions. Now, the only thing Brother Six needed to do was oversee the overall situation. There was no need for him to be involved in every little thing. Thus, the person who had the most free time on the docks had to be him!

Xiaocao had already made a batch of starch jelly at home and had also prepared all of the condiments. When she saw Brother Six come over, she decided to make him her first guinea pig. She filled one of her numerous crude-looking porcelain bowls with the hot and sour starch jelly and handed it over to him with a smile.

Brother Six naturally took it over and looked down at the bowl filled with translucent starch jelly. The clear white jelly contrasted quite nicely with green slivers of cucumber and bright red chili oil. It was a scene that roused a person's appetites.

After silently swallowing down a mouthful of saliva, Brother Six scooped up a bit of starch jelly with a spoon and impatiently delivered it into his mouth. The spicy and sour taste combined with the tender and fresh texture provoked his taste buds. He had been feeling a bit listless and out of sorts from the scorching hot weather. Unexpectedly, this one spoonful of starch jelly revived his appetite.

After gobbling down a large bowl of starch jelly, Brother Six still desired to eat more. He let out a long sigh and grinned, "Xiaocao, are you planning on selling this at the docks? Pretty good. It whets the appetite and is a perfect food for the summer! In fact, if you were able to use some fresh cold well water with it, it would taste even more refreshing!"

This year, the summer heat had been particularly fierce and hot. They had just passed early summer, yet the temperature was as hot as if they were by an active volcano. The cruel rays of the sun made the sand on the beaches uncomfortably warm. Even the sea breeze that blew over was also tepid and sticky.

These circumstances made life difficult for the dockworkers. Under the burning sun, the workers labored tiredly with sweat dripping down their bodies like rain. Those who had slightly weaker bodies couldn't persist and often fainted from the heat. Naturally, everyone's appetites were affected by the heat. Very few people lined up to buy some piping hot noodle soup at noon, and the peddlers of steamed rolls and appetizers didn't have many customers either. None of the food at the docks could rouse a worker's appetites.

Every day there were some people asking for a day off out of the men working under Brother Six. Naturally, this affected their office's work. Now, with something here to raise people's appetites and also cool them down, it was absolutely a good thing for them!

Cool water from a well? The docks were on land not suitable for digging a well. Anyone who needed fresh water needed to haul it over from afar, so where could she get an easy supply of well water? However, this difficulty wasn't going to stump Yu Xiaocao. Her eyes flickered as she calculated—she decided to go the oyster sauce factory, which was right next to the docks, to visit. She needed to borrow some saltpeter. Although there wasn't a supply of well water at the docks, she did have the method to make ice cubes! Starch jelly mixed with ice cubes would be even more cooling and refreshing than well water!

In actuality, Brother Six was well aware of the circumstances at the docks. He was only mentioning the idea without much thought. However, he wouldn't have expected that his one sentence would enlighten Xiaocao and allow all of the dock workers the opportunity to eat iced starch jelly.

At the docks, the workers nearby were all dripping with sweat as they transported cargo from the ships. In order to finish the preparations in time for lunchtime, Xiaocao's family bustled around.

Xiaolian drove the donkey cart to the market at the docks to buy bowls, spoons, chopsticks and other necessities using the money from her private purse. Meanwhile, Yu Hai was nervously building the straw shack. Currently, all they needed was an awning that could provide some shade, so it was quite simple to construct. He just needed to anchor the bamboo poles in the corners, craft the canopy, and the structure would be ready to use. After Fang Zizhen finished his patrol at the docks, he came over to help Yu Hai build the shack.

Yu Xiaocao exploited her godfather's beloved steed and rode it into the direction of the condiment factory. Third Young Master Zhou had recently went to the capital and was busy organizing the opening of the second branch of Zhenxiu Restaurant as well as the condiment shop. Currently, the person in charge of the factory was Head Steward Zhou.

Steward Zhou was well aware of Xiaocao's relationship with his master, so when he found out she needed some saltpeter, he naturally didn't say another word and gave her enough to last more than a month. Xiaocao politely thanked him with a couple of sentences to express her gratitude and then swiftly rode the horse back to the docks.

With Fang Zizhen and his two subordinates helping, the awning was almost completely finished. The awning was constructed right next to Old Liu's noodle shack. Today was Old Liu's last day at the docks. He was planning on terminating his business at the docks, whether or not he was able to transfer his noodle stand.

In the summer, it was the off season for the noodle stand's business. Furthermore, his son was urging him to leave and live together. Thus, when Yu Hai proposed buying the store from him, Old Liu easily sold it at a low price and only asked for enough money to cover the remaining ingredients and silverware.

By the time Xiaocao got back to the docks, she saw that the ownership of their neighboring noodle stand had already been transferred over. Thus, she set up all of the tables and stools and moved the starch noodles and condiments over to a suitable place. Next to the noodle stand, Old Liu had a giant jar that held the water he used to make his pasta. The jar was still partly filled whatever water was leftover from the past two days.

Xiaocao added the correct proportion of saltpeter to the jar of water. Before long, a layer of thin ice gradually started to form. Xiaocao hurriedly placed a steel bucket she brought from home, which held starch jelly, into the vat. Steel conducted the chill quickly, so the starch jelly became iced rapidly.

The two men, Fang Zizhen and Yu Hai, had just finished building the shack, and they wiped the sweat off their faces before they took the proffered iced jelly from their daughter's hands. Eating something so cold really cooled them down from head to toe! It was very refreshing on such a day!!

When Yu Xiaocao saw that the supply starch jelly she brought was dwindling, she had Yu Hai light the fire at the noodle stand's stove and simmered another pot of seaweed. The dockworkers had to do hard labor under the blazing sun and she thought that they didn't have it easy. Thus, she added a couple drops of mystic-stone water into the water. Don't look down on those couple drops, it was enough to hydrate a hard working laborer and strengthen his body. In addition, the mystic-stone water had an unexpected effect on the simmering seaweed. Originally, making starch jelly with the algae took around four hours. However, after adding the mystic-stone water, the seaweed seemed to melt more easily and dissolved before two hours were up. Starch jelly could be made much faster.

When Yu Xiaocao saw that it was still early, she had her godfather take the rest of the flour from the noodle stand and mix it into a large batch of dough. Yu Hai was very good at rolling out noodles as he was a man who was used to doing hard labor. He had a lot of strength in his hands, so the noodles he made were even more springy than usual. Xiaocao's two fathers were revolving around her orders in delight. Even the sweat rolling down their bodies didn't dampen their happiness a bit.

Before long, a pot full of noodles were done cooking! Xiaocao took out a basin of ice water from the water jar and plunged the finished noodles into the icy water.

At this time, Xiaolian had rushed back with the donkey cart full of utensils that she bought at the markets. Everyone from the Yu Family busily started washing all of the bowls and other utensils. This attracted a bunch of visitors over.

The first to arrive was Old Hao, who had already been promoted into a foreman. He found a spot to rest under the awning and used the lapel of his inner clothing to wipe his sweat. He smiled at Xiaocao, "Xiaolian, what delicious food did you bring over today? Let's forget about the braised pig head meat. It's a bit too greasy for this type of weather and I have no appetite!"

Xiaocao smiled sweetly at him and replied, "Uncle Hao, you recognized the wrong person! I'm not Xiaolian...Uncle Hao, today we didn't bring braised food as it's too hot right now to safely let dishes with meat sit out for too long. However, today we made starch jelly and cold noodles. Both are perfect foods for whetting the appetite in the summer. Do you want to try a bowl?"

Old Hao was Xiaocao's very first customer from the start, so he had a firm belief in Xiaocao's culinary skills. He nodded and grinned, "Oh it's Xiaocao ah! Look at me, I can never tell apart you two sisters apart! What did you say? You have food that'll stir the appetite? Give Uncle Hao a bowl then...these past few days have been so damn hot a person could roast to death ah!"

Xiaolian, who had just finished scrubbing the bowls and utensils clean, hurriedly went to the large vat. She stepped on a stool and retrieved a block of starch jelly. With quick movements, she sliced the jelly into small rectangles and placed the pieces into a bowl. Xiaolian then sprinkled some cucumber slivers on top and seasoned the bowl with Xiaocao's pre-made sauces. After that, she personally placed the bowl of starch jelly in front of Old Hao and smiled, "Uncle Hao, take a bite and see how it is. If you prefer a stronger taste, there's some more vinegar and chili oil on the table and you can add them yourself."

Old Hao was astounded to find that the starch jelly in front of him seemed to faintly give off cool air. Unexpectedly, his previous listlessness and dizziness suddenly disappeared. He couldn't bother to use the spoon and instead slurped a large gulp from the side of the bowl. A comfortable chill slowly spread down his throat and into his body.

The older man acted as if he was Zhu Bajie [1] eating a ginseng fruit. Within a few large mouthfuls, he was able to clean out the entire bowl of starch jelly. Following that, he slowly let out a long breath. It felt as if all of his pores had opened again and a cooling feeling settled into his body. That taste was seriously too refreshing!!

"Xiaolian, give your Uncle Hao another bowl!" When the other people under the awning saw Old Hao eating with delight, they all asked for the price. One after another ordered a bowl for themselves. Old Hao hurriedly flagged down the suddenly busy Xiaolian to order another one.

Xiaolian acknowledged his request and swiftly prepared several bowls of starch jelly with seasoning. She passed the finished bowls over to her father. Yu Hai and Fang Zizhen had suddenly been demoted into waiters. However, there was nothing to be done. Their business was just doing better and better every day! The two fathers bustled around busily as they both happily thought, 'My daughter is truly too awesome. No matter what she does, she always manages to make a hit!'

Xiaocao's cold noodles had also started making rounds. Compared to the fresh and tasty starch jelly, cold noodles were superior in one way: they quelled hunger better. As for the taste, with Xiaocao making it, of course it would be good! She mixed the noodles cooled with ice with some crispy cucumber slivers, thin slices of scallions, minced garlic, aromatic vinegar, and chili oil. The combination truly stirred the appetite! However, compared to starch jelly, which was new and novel, the cold noodles had much fewer customers.

However, the first batch of starch jelly quickly sold out before second pot of simmering starch jelly was finished. Thus, the cold noodles became the dockworkers' new favorite, even in the scalding hot weather. Despite the lack of appetite around, after eating a bowl of refreshing cold noodles, everyone felt much more energized and lively.

The blazingly popular business made the Yu Family run around without stopping. Yu Hai continuously kneaded noodle dough while Xiaocao stood next to the stove. Sweat dripped off her body as she cooked the noodles, ladled them up and iced them. Xiaolian serviced customer after customer that lined up.

Luckily, the dockworkers had staggered the times of their lunch breaks. Otherwise, the few of them wouldn't have been able to keep up even if all of them grew two extra heads and four extra arms. The workers all rushed in-between shiploads to snatch some time to eat a meal. Through the grapevine, the whole docks soon knew that the Yu Family's two sisters had come out with a new novel dish. This food not only tasted delicious but also relieved the heat!