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The courtyard was still divided into the front courtyard and back courtyard. The former front yard of the old house had almost doubled in size. Also, in front of the three new rooms was a courtyard with a total area of 3-4 mu, which was extravagant! The back courtyard was still close to the lake and was no smaller than the front yard. In the autumn and winter, when the lake became shallower, more fertile land would appear!

Before Yu Hai had extended the size of the courtyards, he had discussed it with the village chief and offered to pay for the extra land. This was to prevent other people from complaining later on.

Now that Yu Hai's connections far exceeded those of his, the village chief also had his own thoughts on the matter. Yu Hai was not only the relative of a general, but even the future head of the Zhou family also treated him differently. Reportedly, Princess Consort Jing, who was building a residence in the West Mountains, also liked Yu Hai's little girl. Becoming friends with such a person would only have benefits and no harm. Maybe one day, he could even use Yu Hai's help.

At first, he was unwilling to accept money Yu Hai was using to buy the land. Later, after Yu Hai explained the logic to him, he took the silver as a symbolic gesture. The price of land for residences in the village was low to begin with. In addition, the village chief also deliberately lowered the price even more, so it was almost the same as giving it away for nothing. Yu Hai said that he would remember this favor.

Time had flown by and youth is hard to keep. In an instant, the autumn harvest had gone by and winter had quietly come. Everyone in Dongshan Village began to store food and firewood for the winter. Due to the severe drought in the northeast part of the country and their inability to harvest grain, the price of grain in the northern parts were affected. The price of refined rice and white flour had kept increasing and even the price of coarse grain has increased a little compared to the previous year.

The eldest son of the village chief, who was doing business in other places, often sent back news that the drought impacted the northeast the most. Although the emperor had allocated money for disaster relief, what the common people actually received wasn't enough to support them through the bitter winter. People in the northeast with relatives elsewhere had packed up their belongings and fled. Refugees are beginning to appear everywhere too.

The situation in Dongshan Village was okay. Although there was less rain in the summer, it was more uniform and had less impact on the crops.

Unknowingly, the day for Xiaocao's youngest paternal aunt, Yu Caidie, to get married arrived. The day before the wedding, all her relatives and friends had come over to add to her dowry. Although Yu Hai hated Madam Zhang, he was still Yu Caidie's older brother after all, so he naturally wouldn't cause problems on her wedding day.

The previous day, Yu Hai had taken his youngest daughter to town. He wanted to buy a silver bracelet for his little sister, but he didn't believe in his ability to pick a good one, so he took Xiaocao with him.

Xiaocao had no ill feelings toward this weak, kind hearted, youngest paternal aunt of hers. It was said that the family her aunt was marrying into had a good situation, and Madam Zhang, whose heart was full of her youngest son, definitely wouldn't prepare a large dowry for her. When ancient women married, their dowry represented the degree of importance they attached to her. It also represented her standing in her husband's family.

In addition to a pair of dragon and phoenix bracelets, Xiaocao also chose a pair of hairpins and a pair of red coral earrings. Coral ornaments were still expensive even though Tangu Town overlooked the sea. A pair of red coral earrings were worth more than the dragon and phoenix bracelets and hairpins added together. However, spending a few dozen taels was nothing to the current Yu Family.

After thinking about it, they also went to the shop beside the previous melon shop and chose several pieces of cloth. All of them were the kind of fine cloth that farmers would be reluctant to wear. Her godmother had said that a married girl should have several pieces of cloth to store away at the bottom of one's dowry box.

While they were in Tangu Town, Yu Hai and his daughter also met some unkempt refugees. The new county magistrate had installed some simple shacks outside the town for them, and they ate porridge donated by larger households. The winters were long in the north, so Xiaocao wondered if they would survive the long winter.

Yu Hai had been standing at the refugee camp for a long time. He looked carefully at them and seem to be searching for something. Xiaocao thought her father was feeling sympathetic for the refugees, so she bought some coarse grain steamed buns and asked the steamed bun shop to deliver it over. It wasn't that she couldn't afford to buy white flour steamed buns, but she understood that giving them food that was too fancy might cause a backlash.

At this time, there weren't many refugees outside of Tanggu Town. Yu Hai handed out the steamed buns one by one to everyone and received countless words of gratitude. Xiaocao noticed her father occasionally asked about Liu Hu. Who was Liu Hu? Why did her father care so much about this person?

At home, during dinner time, Yu Hai sighed and mentioned his older sister who had been married off to the northeast. "My ill-fated elder sister hasn't sent a letter to me for many days already. I don't know what the situation in her village is like, will she be like those refugees with nowhere to go....."

Madam Liu softly comforted him, "Don't worry. Those refugees don't have relatives to take them in. Dongshan Village is your elder sister's maiden home and you are her younger brother. If she really can't make a living, she will come back."

Yu Hai slowly shook his head and said, "You know that my elder sister hates Madam Zhang to her bones. Even if she had to beg outside, she won't come home. Although I sent her a letter telling her we have separated from them, I'm afraid that she will go to other places for refuge to avoid giving me problems..."

"That shouldn't happen. If it was me, for my children to suffer less, I would choose to go to a place I was familiar with. Maybe your elder sister is already on her way over!" Oldest Sister in-law had three children, and the youngest one was only a year older than Shitou. She wouldn't ignore her children for the sake of her pride.

Xiaocao thought about it and asked, "Father, is Oldest Uncle called Liu Hu?"

Yu Hai nodded his head. She guessed right. Today in the refugee camp, her father was looking for news on her oldest paternal aunt's family.

A night without any conversation passed. The next day was the day to add to Yu Caidie's dowry. Originally, Yu Hai planned on giving them the things and going home. However, many people were only coming over to add to the dowry because of his relationship with Yu Caidie. When he saw one person, he'd chat for a minute, and when he saw another person, he'd chat a few more minutes; all of sudden he couldn't get away for a while.

Yu Caidie's handkerchief was given to the married women of the village who wanted to be nice. They all gathered around the room on the east side of the house and congratulating her. Yu Caidie's face was red, and she bashfully bowed her head, occasionally showing her shy smile.

Her dowries were in the main room, and there was a total of six chests. For a farming village, it was pretty good. Even though Madam Zhang loved money, this was still her daughter. As such, she wouldn't be stingy on the dowry. In addition to the betrothal gifts given by the man's family and the six chests of dowry, she added ten taels of silver and hid a six taels and six mace of auspicious money among the dowry.

When Yu Hai came to add to the dowry, Madam Zhang didn't go out. When the man went back into the courtyard, the maidens and married women all rushed over. Li Xiaomeng, a good friend of Yu Caidie's, joked with a smile, "Caidie, look at all the good things your second elder brother brought you. It's such a big bag!"

Another round-faced married woman said, "I'm sure it won't be bad. There are only two families in Dongshan Village that live in a brick house, and Brother Dahai's family is one of them! Their house is similar to the houses of the rich in the city; it even has cornices on its four corners! How stylish!"

Li Xiaomeng nodded and said with a smile, "Yeah! Yeah! It's said that there are several mu of land just in the courtyard. Brother Dahai has made a lot of money on the early ripening vegetables he grows in his yard. Next year, he will definitely earn more than what he made last year!"

A married woman, who was obviously jealous of their success, curled up her lips and sourly said, "Having money doesn't mean they are willing to give it up! Heh, look at that old cotton cloth wrapper, you don't even know how old the cloth is! They aren't even willing to spend money on a cloth wrapper, how good could the thing inside be?"

Madam Zhang silently stood behind the crowd without any expression on her face. All of a sudden, her expression changed into something fierce. She took a step forward and squeezed out a smile at the maidens and wives present. She loudly said, "Caidie, take a look at what good things your Second Brother brought you!!"

Her voice shook the ears of the people in the room, and even the men in the courtyard clearly heard her. Madam Zhang originally thought that because of what she did when she was younger, Yu Hai still had a deep hatred for her. So he definitely wouldn't send anything good. She wanted to let the villagers

know that Yu Hai got rich and looked down on his family. Let's see how he behaved in the village after this.

The old cloth was quickly opened by her, and the red, blue, and flowery textiles inside were exposed. There were at least five or six different ones. One of the wives exclaimed and picked up one of the fine cotton bolts with red flowers on a blue background and said, "Wow! This is chintz!"

"Let me see, let me see!!" Li Xiaomeng squeezed over and touched it with her hand. Without any envy, she said "It's real! The feel of it and this pattern... Last time, when I was in the cloth shop and saw the fine cotton cloth, the feel of it wasn't as good as this one! One foot was fifty copper coins! This piece of cloth is at least six feet long. If you are careful with it, you could make an outfit and still have a surplus."

"Tsk tsk! Six pieces of fine cotton cloth and every one of them is six feet...it's at least four or five taels. Brother Dahai is very generous!" The round faced wife gently stroked a piece of cloth and was reluctant to let go.

Yu Caidie was still looking from the side and had a smile and tears in her eyes. She turned her back to them and gently wiped the corners of her eyes with the handkerchief and thought, 'Second Brother is still the Second Brother who cares about me...'

Li Xiaomeng was looking through every piece of cloth, and suddenly an exquisite wooden box fell out of the innermost piece of cloth. With her sharp eyes and nimble hands, she quickly caught it. Looking at the beautifully carved box, she knows the things inside must be precious. If they broke she wouldn't be able to afford it!

"What is this?" The wives and maidens all gathered around, curiously looking at the box in Li Xiaomeng's hands.

"I know! Last time I went into town for the fair, I was separated from my family. Somehow, I walked to Dongcheng District, where the houses are magnificent. Among them is a jewelry shop, which was the largest and most imposing. A lady, wearing silk and satins, came out from inside and her maidservant was holding such a box. I quietly inquired about the cheapest earrings in the store and it was several taels!!" The one speaking was the youngest daughter of the village chief. She was one year younger than Caidie and has already found a household she was going to marry into next month.

Li Xiaomeng's hands holding the box trembled a bit, so close! Thankfully, it didn't fall on the ground.

"Xiaomeng, open it and take a look!" The youngest daughter of the village chief excitedly urged.

"What are you looking at? It's just a pair of earrings worth a few silvers. What's worth chatting about!" Upon seeing that Yu Hai didn't get disgraced, Madam Zhang's old face was pulled so long that it looked like a shoehorn. She reached out to pull the box out of Li Xiaomeng's hands.

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The village chief's youngest daughter swiftly grabbed the box and opened it. She cried out, "Wow! It's a pair of dragon-phoenix bracelets! Look at the details on the dragon and phoenix, they look almost real!"

Madam Zhang snatched the bracelets over and weighed them in her hands. They felt solid and decently heavy. The amount of silver used to make this pair of bracelets had to be around three to four catties worth! Such an expensive gift needed to be carefully put away to avoid other people conveniently stealing them.

Li Xiaomeng also took out a pair of silver hairpins from the jewelry box and spoke to Yu Caidie, "Look at this. This hairpin has twin lotus flowers on one stalk at the top. The flowers are opened perfectly, so it must mean 'one's married life is crowned with happiness and satisfaction'. The hairpin feels quite heavy in my hands, so it must be made of solid silver. Ai...I really envy you. I'm not as lucky as you to have such a generous Second Brother."

"This pair of earrings is quite festive. The fiery red color is perfect for the times. Caidie, tomorrow you should wear this pair at your wedding ah!" A matron with a round face placed the red coral earrings next to Yu Caidie's face to see how they looked. A new bride, dressed entirely from head to toe in red bridal clothes and veiled with the red covering, along with these red earrings, would absolutely look auspicious and lovely tomorrow!

The village head's youngest daughter curled her lip and remarked to show off her own experience and knowledge, "Wang Family's daughter-in-law, what do you know ah?! This is made from red coral. My fourth sister-in-law also has a pair of stud earrings made out of red coral, but it doesn't use as much material as these and the color is not as fine. Even those cost around ten taels ah! This pair of red coral earrings must be worth at least two times more than my sister-in-law's!"

Who would have thought that this young girl had a good pair of eyes. However, her eldest brother was wealthy while her other older brother was the county magistrate's secretary! From their influence, it could be seen that she was a lot more worldly compared to the other village girls! When Madam Zhang heard this, she hurriedly packed up all of the jewelry into the small box and held it against her chest as if she was afraid someone was going to take it from her. She spoke to her youngest daughter, "Caidie ah, this stuff is too expensive. Mother will keep these for you. Tomorrow is the day of the ceremony and we'll use these as a part of your dowry. With this jewelry, your well-off husband will also look at you in a better light!"

Although they managed to get back most of the money that was swindled from them, there were many uses for money in the future. No matter how much she loved her daughter, she couldn't give her a dozen or so taels for her dowry. The second son of the Yu Family still had a conscience and didn't forget his younger sister.

Madam Li, who had been silent in the time, secretly left the east room and pulled Yu Dashan into a secluded area of the courtyard. She quietly complained, "Why is Dahai acting like this? Is he trying to steal your thunder as the older brother? He just easily sent over gifts worth dozens of taels! To the daughter of his enemy, is he crazy or stupid?"

Yu Dashan had also heard the activity within the room while he was in the courtyard, so he didn't feel very good and had a ball of anger boiling inside of him! When he heard Madam Li's words, he threw a heavy slap at her face, "What do you mean by 'the enemy's daughter'? She is his biological younger sister, and also my sister! You have such a nasty tongue, if you don't have anything nice to say, then don't say anything at all and sew your mouth shut!! It's none of our business what type of gifts they send to her! We haven't split from the family, so all of the money is in Mother's hands. Therefore, no one can fault us for only gifting her a silver lilac!"

Madam Li wasn't one to take a beating while sitting down, so she immediately exploded after getting slapped. She put both her hands on her fat waist and shrilly hollered, not caring about the noise she made, "Yu Dashan, you spineless coward!! If you have that much energy, then you should vent when you go out. Hitting your wife isn't the heroic thing to do!! If you feel ashamed, then go make more money! All you know how to do is to use that run-down fishing boat, yet you don't make much money. You're not even as good as our son, who's working at the docks!"

A few of the village matrons hurried over to mediate their argument, but Madam Li wasn't one to listen to the persuasions of other people. The more she screamed, the more energetic she became. It was only after Madam Zhang came out of the room and glared at her did Madam Li promptly cease. Madam Li was quite afraid of her mother-in-law, a woman who even had the guts to kill someone.

Other than that little episode, Yu Caidie's wedding the next day went quite smoothly. Her husband's family had all pretty much heard of Yu Hai's name. They all knew that he had a godparent relationship with the lord imperial envoy and also had a working relationship with the imperial merchant family, the Zhou's. Consequently, Yu Caidie's in-law's, who had previously looked down on the Yu Family arrogantly, were now very polite to them. They were especially courteous to Yu Hai as her second brother. The groom also called him "Second Brother" in a manner that was more respectful than when he was addressing his own older brothers.

Not long after Yu Caidie got married, the first snow of the year unexpectedly floated down. Lady Fang's child in her belly slowly grew larger. Living in a house halfway up the mountain with the northern snows didn't make it easy for her to traverse in and out. Thus, Xiaocao negotiated with her own parents to allow her godmother to live in their home at this time.

Presently, their family home was much more spacious. There were five rooms constructed out of bricks that were surrounded by a perimeter wall that separated the space into two courtyards: east and west. In the middle was a moon-shaped gate. The whole family lived in the east courtyard that had three rooms. The east side of that courtyard had two wings, while the west side held the kitchen and junk room. The west courtyard had two rooms that had been empty this whole time. The plan was to leave those rooms for Yu Hang when he got married and had a household of his own.

When Xiaocao proposed this idea to her parents, the two of them naturally didn't have any issues. After several months of contact, the two families were closer than most blood-related families. Fang Zizhen and his wife truly treated their youngest daughter as if she was their own blood and bone. Even though Lady Fang was now pregnant with her own child, she didn't change her treatment of Xiaocao one bit.

Every time Fang Zizhen returned from the capital, he always had a bunch of gifts for them. In fact, a lot of these gifts couldn't even be found in the prefectural city. Despite that, they weren't particularly valuable, just more novel. The reason was simple. Fang Zizhen knew that if he bought something expensive, the Yu Family wouldn't take it from him.

Naturally, the more her godfather traveled to and from the capital, prefectural city, and Dongshan Village, the more jewelry Xiaocao amassed. Her one jewelry box was now two, and, by the trend, would soon become three. There was nothing she could do though since her godfather would always think of bringing a gift back to her every time he went out. And what did little girls like? If it wasn't jewelry, then it had to be pretty material to make clothes, right?



She was pretty sure that all of the jewelry stores in the capital and the prefectural city were familiar with General Fang Zizhen. Almost every couple of months, this giant brawny man would grace a jewelry store and scare away all of the matrons and young maidens inside. Afterwards, he would ask the shop assistants to show him the newest and latest jewelry most suitable for a young girl around ten years old. Without even asking the price, he would buy all of them to take back. His two assistants had now become servants who were only there to settle the bill...

Yu Hai also pampered his daughters and had a similar mindset to Fang Zhizhen. Fortunately, Xiaocao wasn't a true young girl of ten. Otherwise, between her two fathers, one biological and the other adopted, she might have been spoiled until she didn't know right from wrong! When Fang Zizhen and his wife heard Xiaocao's idea of having them live in the courtyard next door, after thinking a bit, they both agreed. A house halfway up the mountain was truly not a good place for a pregnant woman to live during the winter, especially after snow fell as the roads would become slippery. In fact, yesterday, their daughter had stumbled in the snow. Luckily, she was dressed in thick layers and didn't hurt herself. Otherwise, Lady Fang would have blamed herself to death.

The couple also had a manor in town. However, if they moved into town, then they'd be farther away from their daughter and it wouldn't be as convenient to see her. If a blizzard came by, then carriages wouldn't be able to drive for a few days. The two right now felt that going a single day without seeing their daughter would create a feeling of loss, let alone a few days.

The couple weren't delicate flowers. After all, it was just lodging at the Yu Family's residence for a winter, that's all ah! If they were afraid of outsiders gossiping about them, then they could just broadcast that they were renting the rooms. As long as Fang Zizhen said that he wanted to rent a place to live, even the village chief would have to let him rent his own house even if he had no place else to go.

They acted on what they agreed on! The next day, the couple, along with their servants, moved into the west courtyard of the Yu Family's residence. The west courtyard had been designed to be an independent single family living space. It had two wings, a kitchen, and a storeroom. Fang Zizhen didn't have a lot of servants with him in Dongshan Village, so the servants were assigned the west wing. One room from the east wing was given to his two assistants.

Li Li and Wu Yun would occasionally come by in the afternoon to report to him about the harbor's matters. Why did they pick the afternoon? Wasn't it because they wanted to bum off the evening meal and the next morning's breakfast off of them? Fang Zizhen, his wife, and the rest of their servants were all used to these two staying over, so when they moved, they didn't forget to leave them a space either.

Wintertime was the idle season for the villages. Everyone generally stayed at home, resting during the winter. Furthermore, at this time of year, there wasn't as much business at the docks either, so all of the temporary workers left and returned home. The regular workers (the salaried ones) could also take turns going back home to rest. Having about a dozen days a month to rest at home was quite nice!

The Yu Family liked to congregate on a kang bed together during the winter. This year was also the same. They didn't do this to save on firewood, as all of the rooms had their kang bed fires going. Why did they do this in rooms that didn't have people living in them? That was because Xiaocao had her father bring more than twenty wooden chests over into the rooms and fill them all with soil. The soil filled boxes were then put on the kang beds and planted with some vegetable seeds. Some examples included: lettuce greens, Indian lettuce, romaine lettuce, garlic shoots, garlic chives and so-forth...that's right, Xiaocao was trying to grow vegetables out of season!

The Yu Family's kang beds all faced the windows, and the windows all had glass in them. Thus, the cultivated vegetables on the kang beds had plenty of sunlight. With the right temperature, enough light and Xiaocao adding some diluted mystic-stone water, the out of season vegetable sprouts grew quite well. The Yu Family never lacked green vegetables to eat during the winter, a time when other people could only become rabbits and gnaw on cabbage and daikon.

Lady Fang, who was being pampered and protected at every turn due to her pregnancy, also had lots of green vegetables to eat. Thus, she felt like winter, which usually felt long and arduous, had unconsciously slipped away.

Right after they celebrated New Years, the Yu Family started to weave straw mats before the ground had thawed. Last year they were able to sell their vegetables at a good price because they were able to bring them to market a month before other people could. This year, with experience under their belts, the Yu Family had carefully prepared the front and back courtyards in advance.

The courtyard this year was multiple times larger than last year's. The front courtyard's two spaces combined had to be around three to four mu. Naturally, the back courtyard wasn't much smaller.

Before the first breath of spring came around, Xiaocao had already sprinkled various vegetable seeds onto the ground. As for tomatoes, cucumbers, and hot peppers, she had also started to incubate them on the kang bed in one of the wings.

All of the members of the Yu Family, including Little Shitou, who was off on his winter break, had the same task every morning when there was plenty of sunlight. They had to lift up all of the straw mats and

allow the new vegetable sprouts to bathe in the warmth of the morning sun. When the sun moved towards the west and the temperature started to drop, they all had to carefully cover the sprouts under the thick straw mats again. Every time she had to do this, Xiaocao sighed in regret that this time period didn't have thin plastic films to use. Otherwise, she would build a large vegetable greenhouse, which was much easier to use compared to the straw mats!

The west courtyard's fields hardly needed any members of the Yu Family to go there. Lady Fang's two capable handmaids, along with the rest of the servants, had taken over the care of the fields there. Zhenzhu and Linglong were all born in the Xia Family, so they were very good at being personal servants. However, they had never looked after fields before. Nevertheless, they both had a fine hand at lifting and covering the straw mats. When they first saw a tiny sprout coming through the ground, the two maids were so happy that they chattered at their mistress for half a day. With every passing day, the sprouts grew taller and larger and the satisfaction within their hearts grew as well...

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By the time the warmth of spring arrived, the Yu Family's green vegetables were already ready to sell. At this time, other people hadn't even scattered vegetable seeds onto the ground. The four mu of land in the front courtyard were all planted with green vegetables that had short growing cycles. In general, most green vegetables required twenty to forty days to finish growing. However, their family's produce still only required twenty days to be ready for harvest, and this was during a time when snow had fallen twice.

As the rest of the world was recovering from the silence of winter, the whole courtyard was filled with lush and verdant green vegetables. It was a sight that comforted people's hearts. Lady Fang, who was now eight months pregnant and on the verge of childbirth, strolled in the vegetable fields every day with one hand supporting her back and the other cradling her belly. Not only was she able to get some exercise but she also felt her spirits rise whenever she looked at the growing plants.

Every morning, multiple carts came to and from the Yu Family's residence, purchasing vegetables. Most of these customers were the wealthy families in town. Last winter, Zhenxiu Restaurant made a killing off of their oyster sauce green vegetables dishes, which cost five taels a plate. Because the Yao Family had fresh vegetables last year, their reputation rose within the town. This year, some people found out early where they bought their food from and had especially signed a contract with the Yu Family well in advance. They were afraid that if they didn't come to an agreement early, there wouldn't be any spots left for them to become a customer.

The Yu Family's vegetables grew very well, and each stalk was healthy and flourishing. They looked so tender that it seemed as if one pinch could draw out water. They weren't cheap though. Other than Zhenxiu Restaurant and the Yao Family, who were given last year's prices as old customers, the rest of the new customers had to pay a third higher to obtain these vegetables.

Although each of the Yu Family's four mu of fields was able to produce around three thousand five hundred catties of vegetables, it still wasn't enough to satisfy the town's demands for fresh produce. Following the rule of 'first come first serve', the Yu Family chose the first ten families that approached them as their customers of the year. Luckily, each family didn't buy too many vegetables every day, so they were able to supply them all.

The Liu Family's eldest son, who was Xiaocao's eldest maternal uncle, had been enlightened after his business with selling watermelons, so he bought his own donkey and cart. Using his cart, he hauled a bunch of fresh vegetables every few days from his younger sister's home to the prefectural city. Because he had General Fang's help, he was able to find ready customers from the city's grocery stands. Whenever he pulled into the city with his cart full of vegetables, he no longer had to wait for customers to buy. Instead, all he had to do was arrive at a grocery store, weigh all of his vegetables, and get paid before he headed back. Although he made less profit doing this than selling at market price, it wasn't as exhausting for him.

Liu Pei wasn't someone who would take advantage of his younger sister and brother-in-law. The three of them disputed the wholesale prices for half a day and finally came to an agreed price. They would sell the vegetables to him at the same price they sold to Zhenxiu Restaurant. Originally, Liu Pei was trying to get them to sell the vegetables to him at the higher price the other eight families were paying, but Yu Hai resolutely rejected that idea. Luckily, he was the only source of such fresh vegetables in the prefectural city. Even if he sold all of it at a wholesale price to the grocery stores, the price was still much higher than what he paid for. Liu Pei was therefore able to earn dozens of taels of profit for each run he did.

As for harvesting the vegetables, the Yu Family, once again, had more work than they could deal with. Thus, they spent some money to hire some scrupulous young girls and matrons to help. Every day, they received a salary of twenty copper coins for four hours of work. In the past, twenty copper coins could only be earned by a brawny man doing hard labor for a day.

Ever since the construction of the harbor started, the need for labor steadily increased. Naturally, salaries slowly went up. An adult man in his prime could earn around thirty to fifty copper coins a day. However, these people were all doing back-breaking labor to earn this money. How could it compare to working at the Yu Family picking vegetables for four hours?

Anyone in the village who could make a connection with the Yu Family did their best to cozy up. Thus, there were many people who came around. However, the Yu Family only needed around a dozen people

to help out. Since all of the women who came over were known to them, it made Madam Liu very worried. She didn't know how to refuse any of them.

Xiaobao knew her mother's personality well, so she gave her a couple of presents and had her mother go back to her maternal family for a couple of days. Ever since she married over to the Yu Family, she never went back to her maternal family as she was afraid that Madam Zhang would be unhappy. After they separated from the family, they were so busy that there was no time to even rest, so she had very few opportunities to go back. Now, using this opportunity, Xiaobao had her mother go back to her home to rest for a few days and enjoy the time with her parents.

As for the sticky job of hiring people, that was left to her godmother's two handmaids. Those who were able to become the primary handmaids of the managing lady of the residence definitely weren't simple. These two maids knew when to be careful and when to reveal their shrewish sides for the benefit of their mistress. In addition, they also had the support of the general and his wife. Even if the women asking for a job got rejected, they couldn't do or say anything.

The two maids were also quite clever. They wrote down the details of every person who came by asking for the position into a small book. By doing that, they were able to analyze the connections and relationships that each prospective candidate had. Using that knowledge, they chose a dozen from the bunch. After dispatching the messages to everyone, they instructed the new workers arrive at five in the morning sharp every day. Those who were late naturally had their salary deducted. As for the other people who came by, the two handmaids looked at them with calm expressions and merely stated, "In the future, when there is more work, we will first consider you" before sending them off.

The workers included the following people: Shuanzhu's wife, Ergou's wife, Xiaobao's two paternal aunts (Yu Xi and Yu Jiang's wives), Xiaobao's older female cousin (Yu Xi's eldest daughter), Zhou Shanhu who was trying to earn some pocket money, and some other women who had decent relationships with the Yu Family. All of these people knew that Zhenzhu and Linglong chose them because they were good friends with the Yu Family, so they worked especially hard.

All of them were used doing work in the village, so the task of picking vegetables wasn't considered hard. Every day, they were able to finish four hours of work in two. Furthermore, there wasn't even a speck of dirt on the vegetables and they were all stacked neatly. All of the servants who came over to buy vegetables praised them for being hardworking and nimble.

There wasn't much work left to be done at home, so Xiaobao wanted to rest a bit. Before two days passed, Xiaolian called her over to the docks to help. Xiaolian's business at the docks had continued to

grow. Now that it was spring, the docks, which had been more quiet over the winter, were now becoming more and more busy.

The docks had workers, which meant that there were also people selling food. The mornings and evenings were a bit chilly in the early spring, so they had stopped selling starch jelly last autumn. Xiaolian and Eldest Maternal Aunt were now busy with their noodles and braised food stand. There was so much work that they couldn't keep up.

The noodle stand now had more variety than when Old Liu ran it. Old Liu used to sell noodles that were boiled in water. Xiaocao added zhajiang noodles, noodles mixed with scallions and oil, noodles mixed with salted vegetables and shredded meat, and braised meat noodles to the menu. All of these were taught to Xiaolian and Eldest Maternal Aunt in an effort to make the noodle stand seem fresh. In addition, she also made a batch of noodles for the purpose of making noodles stir fried with eggs and noodles stir fried with shredded meat. These two dishes were more heavily seasoned and suited the tastes of northerners. Thus, although the price of the stir-fried noodles was higher than the offerings, they were still a popular dish.

As for the braised food, Xiaolian didn't have to do the labor-intensive work of wrapping a portion of braised meat in oiled paper bags anymore. Instead, she brought over a batch of the braising sauce from home and a bag of spices that Xiaocao had crafted with her secret recipe. At the docks, she was now able to braise food right there. The stove at the stand was at just the right height and reached Xiaolian's waist. Charcoal burned merrily inside the stove, which caused the braising marinade to bubble incessantly as the ingredients simmered in the pot. Snow white steam wafted out of the pot and a dense, fragrant smell of braised food permeated the surroundings. The smell invaded people's noses. If there was a good wind around, that strong enticing smell could almost envelop the entire docks.

A bowl of plain noodles and two copper coins' worth of braised food was enough to satisfy an adult. Every day at mealtime, the Yu Family's noodle stand was crowded with bunches of people. There weren't enough seats at the tables, so some people had to squat on the ground as they ate. Despite that, those people never went to the other areas to eat.

All of the other food vendors at the docks could only watch helplessly as the Yu Family raked in money. Among them included the lady at a different noodle stand who had long ago shooed Xiaocao and her sister away when they wanted to first sell their braised food next to her. Her business had slowed down until it was hard to break even. That woman now deeply regretted her previous actions. If she hadn't made a bad decision in the past, it was possible that her noodle stand would be the one with people lining up without end!

Today, Xiaocao had been dragged along by Xiaolian to be a free laborer. She didn't have to do any of the 'hard work', such as rolling out the dough, boiling the noodles, and slicing the braised food. Instead, she was in charge of serving the customers when the food was ready. Even with the easy job, she was so busy that she didn't have time to take a breath to rest.

Right after the busy time of the day finished, Xiaocao was about to sit down and rest when she suddenly heard a bunch of commotion at the docks, 'Eh? What's going on? Why are there so many strange people at the docks now? Is someone here to cause trouble? Don't tell me some hooligans are coming to smash this place Or is it because someone is jealous of Brother Six's achievements at the docks and wants him to stumble?'

Xiaocao squirmed her way towards the docks out of curiosity and discovered that there were a large group of people there. They didn't look like an unruly mob. On the contrary, they resembled members of a well-disciplined family. She couldn't help but feel a bit worried for Brother Six—these fellows didn't look easy to deal with!

Brother Six was someone who was worldly. He had been at the docks for all these years, so what type of person hadn't he seen before? When he saw the group of people in front of him, he calmly went up to greet them. He headed towards the person who seemed to be in charge of everyone and bowed, "Please excuse me, but may I ask what brings you here to the Tanggu Docks?"

Although the supposed leader of the group was dressed casually, it couldn't hide his lordly bearing. He faintly glanced at Brother Six and asked, "Are you the one in charge of the docks here?"

"That I am! Lord, are you trying to load cargo or unload it? Please come to our business office and register. I will make sure to give you priority!" Brother Six didn't feel any malice coming off this stranger so he carefully sounded him out.

The man hinted at Brother Six and brought him to a relatively secluded place. He lowered his voice and said, "I am the commander of the imperial bodyguards from the capital and I carry with me a secret decree from the emperor. We are here to welcome the young royal prince who is coming home from his seafaring journey. Royal Prince Yang has already informed us in advance that he has almost a hundred cargo ships that need to dock. All of them carry precious goods from the southeast seas and the western hemisphere. Therefore...you need to prepare in advance!"

When Royal Prince Yang left on his journey last year, it caused a sensation. Even if Brother Six wanted to forget that event, he couldn't. A year and a half had passed and the royal prince hadn't even come

home. Thus, it was necessary to make it grand and ostentatious. This so-called commander of the imperial bodyguards had brought over at least fifty to sixty soldiers with him. From this, it looked like he planned on firmly guarding the docks.

There was nothing wrong with that. It was said that before the current emperor ascended the throne, he also heavily recommended exploring distant seas to find novel species, especially high-yielding crops. In fact, after the sweet potato was introduced to the country, it benefited thousands among thousands of Great Ming commoners. The current emperor had even said this in his throne room, "When we ascended the throne, we set our ten year goal to this: we want the common people of the Great Ming Dynasty to all have food on their plate and all to be able to eat their fill!"

For the sake of finding more high-yielding crops, this emperor, who loved his people, sent Royal Prince Yang, who had just reached the age of fifteen, on an important mission. He had to travel to the western hemisphere. This time, Royal Prince Yang was coming back victoriously. Naturally, the emperor regarded him with great importance.

Brother Six knew that something as big as this required careful planning. A small misstep could cause him to lose his life. However, if he did everything well and was able to show himself in front of Royal Prince Yang, then, in the future, his footing at the docks would be stable. Should other people try to take his position, they would first have to consider his backing. The construction of the harbor would be finished within the next two years. If the whole harbor was in his hands, then he, Brother Six, would truly be a person of note in Tangu Town!

There was no such thing as a free meal. He had to take this particular piece of business!!

Fields of Gold Chapter 224

At sea, the azure sky seemed endless as clouds drifted by slowly. A few seagulls circled idly in the air at sea level. On the horizon, a grandiose fleet of ships sped forward. The ship in the lead was an enormous three floor passenger ship. Although it was simply designed, it seemed quite lofty and majestic. Immense sails billowed in the wind and pushed the ship forward. At the top was a golden colored flag with a coiling dragon embroidered on it. This flag was bestowed by the emperor and seeing the flag was the same as seeing the emperor himself. All officials were required to kowtow when they saw it.

At the bow of the ship was a youth with an impressive bearing. He was dressed in simple dark purple brocade robes. Cinched around his waist was a silver colored cloth that was embroidered with cinnabar and golden threads. His hair was bound up and, under the sea breezes' caress, a few strands of unruly pieces escaped from their confines and plastered his cheek. He had a pair of clear and powerful eyes that seemed to emit coldness. His eyes were so fierce that other people trembled at the thought of



looking at them. The youth's figure was tall and straight, as if he was a sharp sword that was about to be unsheathed.

As he saw the distant Tanggu Docks quickly getting closer, Zhu Junyang's cold expression slightly softened. He was finally back! He had triumphantly completed his first long seafaring journey and was about to come home. His year and a half journey out at sea had given him many experiences and things to think about.

The journey to and back was not completely peaceful. They had encountered pirates trying to plunder them and sneak attacks from sudden storms. However, with the thousand or so people working hard together on the ships, they were finally safely back home. He was convinced that these hard earned experiences would become his treasures in his life. They would mold him to become a better person and become his future glory!

Although this youth was almost sixteen and had a youthful looking face, his eyes glowed with a mature and wise light. His handsome and cold face hadn't changed in the past year and a half. However, his figure had become even more imposing, as if he was cloaked with a manner that made people understand his power.

"I, Zhu Junyang...am back!" The youth lightly sighed these few words.

Behind him was a white-haired man who came forward a step. He used his somewhat shrill voice to say, "Royal Prince Yang, this time our journey from the west could be considered quite smooth. We've succeeded in bringing back seeds of all of the crops that the emperor mentioned. I just don't know if our Great Ming Dynasty will be able to successfully grow these plants."

Zhu Junyang coldly surveyed the dry land that was getting closer to him. His originally eager mood slowly calmed down. He slowly replied, "That is the concern of the Ministry of Revenue. What does it have to do with me?"

Head Steward Liu Fusheng revealed a smile that covered his entire face as the corners of his eyes lifted up until there were wrinkles, "Young Royal Prince, don't tell me that you don't want to personally plant the seeds that you went through so much trouble to get, see them germinate, grow leaves, blossom, and bear fruit..."

The expression on Zhu Junyang's face darkened and became cold as he looked at Liu Fusheng, which immediately made the steward feel an immense pressure. Liu Fusheng could be considered one of the top experts within the country, yet his master's intimidating composure caused him to drip buckets of cold sweat. He promptly knelt on the ground and apologized, "This old servant had a slip of the tongue, please punish me Royal Prince Yang!"

The not yet sixteen Zhu Junyang, after experiencing this long sea voyage, felt that he was a man now, capable of supporting both the heaven and earth. Thus, he prohibited other people from addressing him with 'young royal prince' or other similar names. The last time an imperial bodyguard made that mistake, the hapless soldier was thrown into the sea to feed the sharks by a furious Royal Prince Yang. After that, the thousands of people accompanying him all knew that the name 'young royal prince' was a taboo that could not be touched.

Liu Fusheng's heart raced as he secretly raised his eyes to peep at his master's frosty expression. From the day that Royal Prince Yang was born, Liu Fusheng had been by his side. The head steward had witnessed his adorable toddler years and also watched as the cute boy slowly grew into a handsome and lofty youth. Prince Yang had learned most of his martial arts from him. After more than a decade of companionship, the two of them had established a master-disciple relationship, a true friendship, as well as a master-servant relationship. However, masters and servants still had a gap between them. Even he had a line that he couldn't cross with the prince.

Zhu Junyang stared expressionlessly at Steward Liu, who had his head lowered in apology. They had been with each other for over a decade. A person would have sentiments about a small creature in that time frame, let alone a person. He couldn't treat Steward Liu as a disposable creature. Doing so would only cause other people's hearts to cool. If he wanted his servants' loyalty, he needed to know when to reward and when to reprimand. This was the rule that Steward Liu had taught him himself.

"Since you know your mistake, when we get back to the capital you can punish yourself!" Zhu Junyang's previous good mood had apparently been abruptly interrupted by this little episode. Frosty coldness, once again, appeared in his eyes. The imperial bodyguard behind him glanced at Steward Liu, who was stealthily using his sleeve to wipe his cold sweat. In his opinion, the less spoken the less likely one would make a mistake, so he kept his mouth shut as he pretended to be one of the masts on the ship.

"They're here! They're here!" When the people on the docks saw the majestic fleet of over a hundred ships approaching them, they immediately bustled around. The entire area had been locked down by martial law under the orders of the imperial bodyguards, who were the personal guards of the emperor himself. The commander of the Yulin soldiers, who were in charge of protecting of Prince Yang, was around the same rank as the commander of the imperial bodyguards. The emperor clearly favored this young royal prince as he had assigned a portion of his own bodyguards to welcome the returning youth.

Steward Liu looked in the distance at the docks and saw the arrangements. He remarked with gratitude, "Master, the emperor sent people to welcome you! Looks like...they are the personal soldiers of the emperor."

The commander of the Yulin soldiers had spotted his 'archenemy', Bao Qinming, in one glance. His lips twitched as he agreed, "They truly are the personal soldiers of the emperor! That fellow, Bao Qinming, has also come along!!"

Zhu Junyang's expression remained tranquil as if the hoard of people on the shore had nothing to do with him. He stayed silent for a bit before he abruptly asked, "My lady mother...is she also in Tanggu Town right now?"

Steward Liu immediately replied, "Yes, that's right! We received a letter that said Princess Consort Jing is having a good time in Tanggu Town. At the beginning of autumn, his highness personally escorted her back to the capital. Now that it's spring and the weather is warming, her highness has graced her presence again in Tanggu Town and is currently living in the courtyard that is normally for Magistrate Wu's youngest son."

Zhu Junyang frowned, "Lady mother is being stubborn again! It gets chilly in spring and Tanggu Town is next to the ocean, which also makes it humid. This is not a good climate for her body."

"The letter also said that ever since she's been in Tanggu Town, her royal highness has been spending a lot of time with Lady Fang. Lady Fang's adopted daughter is very good at cooking medicinal cuisine and miraculously cured General Fang's old illness. I believe Lady Fang will be birthing her child next month. Her royal highness occasionally sees that little girl and has eaten her medicinal cuisine several times. Since then, she hasn't gotten ill at all in the past three seasons."

"What nonsense! The imperial physicians are taking care of lady mother's body. How could they allow a little girl to mess around? If something happened...who's going to take responsibility? Lady mother is truly too much. How could she just blindly trust a random person?" Out of the three brothers, Zhu Junyang had the closest connection with their mother. He couldn't help but furrow his brows when heard this news and a hint of worry flashed through his cold eyes.

Steward Liu hurriedly tried to comfort him, "Master isn't wrong for being worried! However, that little girl's medicinal cuisine had all been approved by the accompanying imperial physician. He made sure

that none of the food would cause problems for her highness's body. Furthermore, when the food was being made, every single step was strictly observed by someone. Her highness's constitution has truly improved after eating it. Please don't worry, Royal Prince!"

After hearing this, Zhu Junyang's tight expression finally relaxed a bit. He thought for a bit before he said, "From what you're telling me, this little girl does have some skill! Why don't we bring her along when we head back to the capital? Nourishing the body is not something that can happen in a short period of time!"

Steward Liu bowed and explained, "That little girl lives in Dongshan Village and her parents don't want her to leave them at such a young age. The princess consort has a benevolent heart and can't bear to separate them. That being said, the little girl is also the adopted daughter of General Fang. For the sake of the general and his wife's dignity, it's not really a good idea to force them, right?"

Dongshan Village? When he heard this name, Zhu Junyang frowned again. He didn't have any good memories of that village. His most humiliating and difficult situation had occurred at Dongshan Village. Images of being surrounded by seawater, struggling in desperation, choking on water, and being rescued in a half-conscious state once again appeared in front of his bewitching eyes...He had previously thought that he had long forgotten those memories but they were crystal clear again.

"Oh right! Master, you've previously met this little girl!" Steward Liu surreptitiously raised his eyes to glance at the young royal prince before he continued, "It could be said that she's considered one of your life-saving benefactors!"

'A benefactor who had saved my life? It truly was her!' Zhu Junyang wasn't quite sure how he felt about this. That ultra skinny and small little girl, who unexpectedly had a pair of lively eyes, not only saved his life but also helped his mother recover from her illness...He vaguely remembered that before he left on his journey, he had given that little girl a bag of silver in gratitude. Cough cough...apparently, now he was the one being rude and impetuous.

As he was lost in his thoughts, the fleet of ships had almost reached shore. The imperial ships had precedence, so all of the other ships in the area avoided them. Consequently, other than this fleet of ships, there were no other vessels to be seen at the docks.

After they docked the ship at the wharf, Zhu Junyang took the lead in getting off. After floating in the ocean for more than a year, he truly didn't want to spend another second on the boat. The feeling of having his feet planted firmly on the ground truly felt too good!

Commander Bao quickly welcomed them as he and the hundreds of men under him bowed to Royal Prince Yang. The sight of that power was truly spectacular.

Yu Xiaocao watched all of the proceedings from afar as she sighed in her heart, 'This society is rigidly bound by class! Having power is truly a good thing! Look at this guy's battle array, everyone's eyes are on him ah!'

Although martial law was currently imposed on the docks, the soldiers hadn't driven away any of the peddlers in the area. After undergoing a strict interrogation, the Yu Family's noodles and braised food stand was allowed to continue doing business. It was obvious that such an enormous fleet of ships would take a long time to unload. If the docks didn't have anyone selling food, then those dockworkers would have to work on an empty stomach.

During all of this, a little break occurred. Commander Bao of the imperial bodyguards had been enticed by the smell of Xiaocao's braised food and ordered a bowl of zhajiang noodles and a plate of braised pig head meat. He ate with great relish. Commander Bao was good friends with the emperor emeritus's personal bodyguards, so he had long heard his good friends waxing eloquently about the Yu Family's famous braised food. The emperor emeritus always had to eat their food every time he visited Tanggu Town. It was a meal that none of his friends could ever forget.

Commander Bao was from a prominent general's family and had tried every delicacy there was to be had. How could a crude eatery, selling food for one copper coin a portion, be so amazing to catch the emperor emeritus's discerning eye as well as be engraved in his good friends' memories? Thus, when he received this mission, he decided that he needed to try the braised food from the docks while he was there. He needed to find out if his friends were just exaggerating.

A hundred words could not describe one bite. The pig's head meat was soft and flavorful, fatty without being greasy, and delicious without being overwhelming! To a manly soldier, who loved to drink lots of alcohol and eat lots of meat, this braised meat paired with a mouthful of noodles was truly to his liking! Originally, Commander Bao wasn't very hungry. However, he shoved down two large bowls of noodles and a giant plate of braised meat before he finally had to leave with a bulging stomach. He decided right then and there that before he had to leave this town, he needed to pack a large to-go bag of this braised food. His grandfather would definitely love it!

Fields of Gold Chapter 225

The sun set gently on the horizon, dyeing the waters a glowing red. The land seemed to have been draped with a dark red brocade robe. Usually at this time of the day, the docks would be becoming more

quiet. However, at this moment, it was still bustling with activity. The dockworkers came to and fro, hauling cargo on their shoulders and backs. Carts among carts were stacked high with goods from the seagoing ships.

A bunch of brawny men dressed entirely in black patrolled the perimeter of the docks. All of their eyes were alert and they attentively observed the surroundings. In the cargo holds of the hundred or so ships, there were the seeds of unfamiliar crops as well as some precious goods from the western hemisphere and southern seas.

The rarer something is, the greater its value. Silks and porcelain, which were commonly seen items for the Great Ming Dynasty, could be sold for ten times, even a hundred times their value in the west. On the flip side, goods that were considered commonplace in the west were worth more their weight in gold in the Great Ming Dynasty. The emperor had previously said that all of the goods from the voyage, other than the ones he listed, were the property of Royal Prince Yang. From the spoils of this trip, Prince Yang would definitely increase his wealth by a hundredfold! There were so many valuable items, so they naturally had to prevent unscrupulous people from seeing them.

Royal Prince Yang also regarded these goods with a lot of importance and refused Commander Bao's proposal of being escorted into town first. He sat inside the simple business office at the docks and watched as the bags of goods got loaded onto the horse carts. The expression on his face was tranquil and his mouth was pressed into its customary line. His eyes glowed with a cool light and emitted an aura that made people hesitant to approach him.

"Grumble..." The four people sitting in silence suddenly heard a slight noise. It sounded distinctly clear and made it hard for people to ignore it.

Commander Bao stealthily looked out of the corner of his eye to peep at Prince Yang. The prince's expression stayed the same as if the obvious sound of his stomach growling had nothing to do with him.

Steward Liu astutely detected Commander Bao's line of sight and lightly coughed to call the other man's attention. He then hugged his stomach and quietly confessed, "Master, please forgive me. This old servant didn't have a good appetite this morning on the ship. It's not even dinner time, yet my belly is complaining for food."

Prince Yang naturally knew that his head steward was taking the fall for him. However, did Steward Liu really think he was still that childish? The world was vast, but eating was an important thing, what was

awkward about being hungry? His bright eyes whirled a bit and he looked Steward Liu in the eye before he faintly remarked, "Commander Bao, is there anywhere we can go to get some food on these docks?"

This question made Commander Bao feel a bit uneasy. The Tanggu Docks were very simple, so the only people selling food were the nearby villagers, who were all peasant farmers. The food was quite crude and no one knew how hygienic it was either. It was said that Royal Prince Yang was a bit of a germaphobe, would he be able to stomach eating the food here?

When Prince Yang noticed that Commander Bao had stayed silent a bit with an awkward expression on his face, he followed up in a slightly raspy and gloomy voice, "What? Is Commander Bao in a bind right now?"

Very few people knew that Zhu Junyang had a bout of illness when he was very young. In fact, due to anemia, he had fainted in the past. His body had slowly strengthened as he got older and with the treatment of the imperial physicians. After he started practicing martial arts, almost no one knew about this particular past. However, because of this previous illness, Zhu Junyang could not stand being hungry. As soon as he felt the pangs, his mood would become irritable and flustered. Consequently, the tone he used to speak to Commander Bao had also held some impatience.

Commander Bao hurriedly got off the stool and kneeled down with his hands cupped and head lowered, "Royal Prince Yang, the environment at the docks is too crude and plain. I'm afraid...I'm afraid you might not be able to tolerate the food here!"

"How could I not tolerate the food here? I've even eaten raw fish and drank rainwater on the ship. If that's not considered crude, what could be?" The emptiness in his stomach was making Zhu Junyang feel irritable and agitated. His last sentence even held a hint of rebuke within it.

The person who understood the young royal prince the most had to be Steward Liu, who had watched him grow up. He knew that the young royal prince was ravenous. If he didn't get some food now, someone was going to have to suffer. Steward Liu hastily spoke to Commander Bao, "Commander Bao, find some food that is edible at the docks and bring it back. This old servant is almost about to faint from hunger!"

Commander Bao could tell that Prince Yang's eyes were flicking with a bit of impatience. He also knew that the prince, despite being young, was not someone who had a lenient and soft-hearted personality. Thus, he hurriedly got up and said, "I have to say that the only food that is slightly palatable here is from the noodle stand run by the Yu Family's sisters. Royal Prince, please wait a moment!"

As soon as Prince Yang impatiently waved his hand at him with a stony expression, Commander Bao scurried over to Yu Xiaocao's noodle stand. At this moment, all of the dockworkers were busy doing work, so there wasn't a single soul at the stand. Madam Han was currently simmering the delicious zhajiang paste. Other than fermented soybean paste, the sauce also had stir-fried diced meat and very firm tofu mixed in, which made the flavor quite delicious.

Usually, at this time of day, the Yu sisters would have already cleaned up the stall and gone back home. However, because there was a special circumstance today, they worked the same overtime hours as the dockworkers at the request of Brother Six. Yu Xiaocao was currently bored to death as she sat on a wooden stool. She idly played with her hands. When she raised her eyes, she saw Commander Bao rushing over as if the hellhounds from the underworld were chasing him.

"Sir, you must be tired! Come sit down. Do you want a portion of zhajiang noodles or some scallion noodles?" Yu Xiaocao remembered that this gentleman really enjoyed both of these noodles. She wasn't sure if he wanted to eat the same thing or try something new this time.

Commander Bao plopped down on a nearby seat and bawled out an order before he could catch his breath, "Whatever types of noodles you have, give me three bowls, it needs to come out quickly! Also give me a plate of pig head meat, pig ears in chili oil, stir-fried intestines, and some seaweed with dried tofu as well! Quickly! This order needs to be rushed!!"

At noon, this man had eaten until he was bloated. If he was the one eating this food, he wouldn't be in such a hurry. Judging by his obvious nervousness and anxiety, he must be ordering this food for the young royal prince, who had just finished his seafaring journey. Only someone who was born with a royal background could cause his servants to run about until their legs fell off!

Yu Xiaocao silently cursed the arrogance of these influential people, yet kept an earnest look on her face as she replied, "The quickest noodle dish has to be zhajiang noodles. The sauce was just done, so as soon as the noodles finish cooking we can just pour the sauce on top and it'll be ready to eat! Just wait a moment, everything will be ready shortly!"

Xiaocao raised her voice to call her Eldest Maternal Aunt, "Aunt, give me three bowls of zhajiang noodles! Make sure to sterilize the bowls and chopsticks with some boiling water first!"



Commander Bao looked at the slightly built girl in front of him with admiration. She was truly a clever little kid to be able to tell from his words and demeanor that he was ordering food for a noble. She even had her aunt especially sterilize the bowls and chopsticks. She had an eye for details!

Yu Xiaocao attentively washed her hands and then used some boiling water to wash the chopping board and knives. Only after she did that did she carefully cut some braised food to make a plate. She used some chili oil to season some ribbons of pig ear and also placed some garlic paste and chopped scallions on the plate. By doing this, the nobles could pick and choose if they wanted strong flavors on their food. After that, she swiftly cooked the stir-fried pig intestines. Once it was all done, Madam Han had also finished cooking the zhajiang noodles.

Madam Han had originally been a good hand at cooking. After getting some directions from Xiaocao, she knew how to make every noodle dish on the menu very well. Her best dish was zhajiang noodles. The student had truly surpassed the master; Madam Han was better at controlling the heat when cooking the sauce than Xiaocao.

Three huge, heaping bowls full of zhajiang noodles with four plates of the Yu Family's signature braised foods was considered quite a luxurious feast at the docks. As for the taste, it was obvious that there absolutely wasn't another vendor on the docks that could surpass the Yu Family's braised food and zhajiang noodles!

The four plates of braised food were carefully arranged into a basket. Commander Bao took the lead and snatched the basket as he urged Xiaocao and Madam Han, "Quickly! Bring the noodles and come with me!!"

Xiaocao grimaced a bit as she complained silently, 'You clearly know which job is easier. The noodles have just come out of the pot, so those bowls are hot enough to scald a person's hands. You're such a tough guy with callused hands, yet you make a woman and a kid carry over the bowls of noodles. This guy has no shame!'

Luckily, they didn't go far before Commander Bao sent a few of his subordinates to carry the bowls of noodles. He then dismissed them after throwing a piece of silver as payment.

Those three bodyguards had been busy the entire afternoon. Their stomachs had long been complaining for food. As the tantalizing aroma of the zhajiang noodles hit their nostrils, they swallowed their saliva and looked at each other before quietly speaking to Xiaocao, "Keep the change as a reward from our

commander...little girl, we'll be patrolling over there. In a moment, can you send a few bowls of noodles over? You won't be disappointed!"

The three soldiers were well aware of their responsibilities. As long as they didn't leave a gap in patrolling, they could eat a bowl of noodles in-between their shifts. These noodles were quite amazing to smell so delicious. Even the capital's best restaurant's dragon's beard noodles with chicken feet didn't have such a tantalizing aroma!

The three bodyguards were assigned to guard the most raucous and bustling area of the docks. That area was close to the ocean and one could easily see the rows of imposing looking ships. The dockworkers all bustled around, trembling with fear, as the imperial bodyguards observed them.

In order to make sure this important task went smoothly, Brother Six had pulled out all the stops. There were a lot of regular staff on his team and he even had his subordinates call over all of the day-to-day workers over to help. All in all, it came out to several hundred people working together to unload the ships at an inhuman speed. Within one afternoon, more than half of all of the cargo had been moved from the ships and stacked into horse carts to be moved into town...

Yu Xiaocao used a wooden slab as a salver and carefully delivered the three bowls of zhajiang noodles with great effort. She slowly stepped on the shifting sands of the beach and gave the three soldiers the noodles they had ordered. Each squadron had ten people and among them included a low-ranking captain.

When the men smelled the strong scent of the noodles, they couldn't help but come over to look at the food. The three soldiers recognized Yu Xiaocao, so they notified their captain before they gleefully welcomed Xiaocao over. As if they were afraid someone was going to steal their food, they all grabbed a bowl, ignored the scalding heat burning their hands, and slipped away to slurp the noodles.

After the little captain re-arranged the shifts, he came by and grinned, "You guys are seriously too much! Sneaking away to eat on your own! Tell me, how should I punish you all?"

One of the soldiers was a very tall and brawny fellow. He flashed a smile as he spoke his thoughts in a straightforward manner, "Okay! We'll accept punishment! I'll treat all of you to eat noodles! Who would have thought that these small docks could be hiding such a jewel. These noodles are better than any noodles I've ever had in the capital. No restaurant there can compare!"

The other imperial bodyguards all thought that he thought the noodles tasted very good because he was too hungry. But once they had a taste of the zhajiang noodles, they found out that it was truly delicious!

After Yu Xiaocao delivered these men their food, she stood quietly on the side to take their empty bowls and chopsticks when they were done. Her large, inquisitive eyes were opened wide as she observed the imposingly large ships. She silently mused at this fellow transmigrator's influence on this world. She was pretty sure that her fellow friend had been a shipbuilding major before he came over! He unexpectedly was able to design and build ships that had both sails and steam power so they could traverse distant seas! At this time, Xiaocao didn't realize that she had inadvertently bumped into the truth!

Xiaocao, who was in the midst of enjoying this scenery, suddenly saw her Eldest Maternal Uncle at the docks doing work. Her uncle was truly a hard worker! He ran back and forth delivering vegetables to the prefectural city and probably made a decent amount of money already, yet he still didn't want to renounce his dock work either.

Wait...what was that? The bag on her eldest uncle's back had somehow gotten a small hole. A golden looking seed suddenly dropped down, wasn't that...corn?

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The few kernels of golden corn quietly lay on the sand that had been churned around from the activity. Suddenly, a large foot that was shod in straw sandals started going towards the golden colored seeds. Yu Xiaocao's mouth opened and closed but the words to stop the person didn't come out. The giant foot had already pressed the seeds into the sand.

Yu Xiaocao no longer cared that the docks were under martial law and rushed over. She squatted down by the large footprint. Old Hao, who was coming up from behind her with a giant bag, almost couldn't change his direction in time and narrowly avoided tripping over her.

How dangerous! If Old Hao had fallen over, a man who weighed around eighty kilograms and also had a bag that was around a hundred kilograms of weight, he might have killed her on impact or at least injured her severely. Old Hao staggered a couple of steps and then caught his footing. Just as he was about to yell at the offender, he saw who the tiny person in front of him was. He swallowed down the profanities that were about to bubble up and stated with concern, "Little girl Xiaocao, this is not a safe place for you to play around. Hurry up and leave!"

The man behind Old Hao had almost crashed into him as well. The worker raised his head to look at Old Hao and then circled around the two of them to walk past. The other workers behind them also followed his footsteps, working hard to carry the cargo on their shoulders.

Today, the boss had told them that after they finished unloading everything from the ships, they would get double the pay. Although they would be going home later than usual, this job was worth it!

Yu Xiaocao raised her head and smiled at Old Hao. She continued to use her small hands to push away the sand in the footprint until a few kernels of corn appeared! Xiaocao was incredibly excited, 'Corn is a high-yielding crop! Unlike sweet potato, which causes heartburn when a person eats too much, corn can truly be a staple food to be eaten daily!' Childhood memories of eating golden and crispy baked corn cakes and tender and delicious corn porridge passed through her thoughts...Yu Xiaocao suddenly had to swallow down her saliva.

Despite Old Hao's warning, she followed along her eldest maternal uncle's tracks and looked for the corn. The hole in the burlap bag must have been very small. She had to go several steps before she could find the other kernels of corn.

After drinking mystic-stone water every day, Yu Xiaocao's five senses had become very keen. Even though the color of the corn kernels were pretty much the same as the grains of sand, she was still able to find most of the kernels on the ground. Occasionally she would bypass one, but the little divine stone would remind her.

The little divine stone's thoughts were linked with its master's. Thus, it also knew just how important these kernels of corn were to Xiaocao.

When the squadron of imperial bodyguards had finished eating the delectable zhajiang noodles and braised pig head meat, they wanted to return the bowls and utensils. However, the little girl had left and they didn't know where she went. The bodyguards weren't nervous about her disappearance. All of the merchants on the docks had their backgrounds examined earlier and all of them were innocent people making a living. That being said, how much trouble could a little girl, who hadn't reached the age of ten and didn't even have the strength to truss a chicken, cause?

Yu Xiaocao continued her on her journey to find corn with her head bowed down. Suddenly, her eyes lit up. In the front, not far from her, were four to five kernels of corn! If she added those to the ones in her hand, she already had around twenty or so seeds. The weather was getting better, so she could start planting the corn in the rear courtyard to get a good supply of seeds. By next year, she would have enough to plant around two to three mu of corn fields. If another two years went by, then she would become a corn tycoon! Yup! For the sake of growing corn, she needed to buy a few more fields of fertile land!

Her pale and delicate little hands hurriedly reached towards those few kernels of corn. Suddenly, a foot that was shod in black boots crafted of brocade with cloud patterns stepped on the corn on the ground. Before Xiaocao could think things through, her tiny hand had already grasped that foot to lift it out of the way and left a conspicuous sandy print on those black boots.

Zhu Junyang grimaced as he looked at that irksome dirty print on his foot. The atmosphere immediately became awkward. Both Steward Liu and Commander Fang, who were behind the prince, felt as if there were stormy clouds rushing towards them! However, that small and slightly-built figure crouching on the ground didn't detect this change at all. She was still trying to move the young royal prince's foot with all of her might.

"You—Do you know what you're doing?" Zhu Junyang squeezed out a question. His voice held an obvious gloomy undertone as if he was grinding his teeth anger.

Yu Xiaocao didn't even raise her head as she replied, "How annoying, please raise your precious foot, you're stepping on my stuff!"

No matter how much force she tried to use, Zhu Junyang's foot remained firmly planted on the ground. The youth apparently was so angry that he wanted to laugh. His handsome face, which originally had a frosty expression on it, revealed a faint smile. Commander Fang felt the hairs on the back of his arms rise straight up when he saw the abnormal looking smile on Royal Prince Yang's face. He immediately had a desire to be far, far away from this man.

"I would like to know why these seeds, which I, this prince, had traveled the oceans for, are suddenly yours, hmm?" Zhu Junyang crossed his arms across his chest and tilted his head at a forty-five degree angle to look at the little kid who hadn't even turned around to interact with him. This was the first time in his life that someone had the guts to treat him so impolitely. Zhu Junyang felt a desire to play a cat chasing a mouse at this moment.

'This prince? Don't tell me that the person talking to me is the young royal prince who had just gotten home from his seafaring journey? I can't be that unlucky, right?' Yu Xiaocao's grubby little hand abruptly stopped moving on the black boot in front of her. 'Ah! Judging by the material of these boots, even though I don't know much about boot materials, I can tell that it is quite expensive. What kind of ordinary person would be able to afford using something like this to make shoes with? I'm screwed. I was too focused on picking up corn kernels and I didn't notice this. What am I to do? The princess consort had mentioned that her son's temper isn't very good. Am I about to be flogged with wooden

planks? That won't do, my body is so weak and small, I definitely won't be able to endure that torture. I need to find a way to draw this out long enough for my godfather to find me to go home...'

She pasted on what she thought was her most innocent-looking smile and opened her large eyes wide before she slowly raised her head up to stare at the person who was the owner of the black boots.

'It's her?!' Zhu Junyang's ballooning impatience and anger had suddenly been popped by something. He felt his temper slowly cooling down. The pair of large, innocent eyes in front of him overlapped with the round eyes that haunted his dreams.

'So it was her! She's the little girl who had discovered me at my lowest point and had gotten her father to save me.' His memories of his rescue were quite vague now. The only thing he remembered with crystal clarity, even after almost two years had passed, were that pair of eyes that seemed to be able to see into the depths of a person's soul.

The smile that she had used hundreds of times to get out of trouble didn't seem to be working today! Yu Xiaocao looked at the expressionless handsome face in front of her and rubbed her nose out of embarrassment. However, right now she was only a little girl who was pretending to be innocent. Although the royal prince's temperament was cold, he didn't seem like a vicious person. He wouldn't lower himself to the level of a child...right?

"Ah...this commoner greets the young royal prince. May the young royal prince have an auspicious life!" Yu Xiaocao hurriedly scrambled up from the ground and haphazardly bowed.

Steward Liu Fusheng had also recognized this little girl's identity and he couldn't help but feel a shiver run through his heart for the child. Earlier, on the ship, he had accidentally said 'young royal prince' and had been given the lightest punishment of being flogged twenty times as a 'reward'. This little girl had not only dirtied the shoe of the royal prince, who was a germaphobe, but also called him 'young royal prince'! If his master accidentally executed this little girl in a fit of pique, wouldn't the masses accuse him of 'biting the hand that fed him'?

Just as Steward Liu Fusheng was contemplating whether he should plead leniency for the little girl, his master finally replied, "Wipe that disgusting smile off your face! How hypocritical!! Tell me, why are the seeds that I, this prince, brought back now yours?"

Although his master's voice was just as chilly as usual, Steward Liu had a feeling, 'It looks like my master isn't that angry! Looks like people truly can change!'

"Ah..." Was her smile really disgusting? Didn't everyone tell her that her smiles were sweet and beautiful and were able to make a person feel happy ah? The young royal prince truly stood out from the masses as his tastes were different from common people. However, now wasn't the time to discuss whether her smile was disgusting-looking or sweet, she needed to get out of this mess as fast as possible!

"Then...this lowly commoner didn't know that the things on the ground were yours, young royal prince. I thought that things that fell on the ground didn't have an owner. Since there's no owner, then it becomes finders keepers!" Yu Xiaocao explained using a child's reasoning.

"Finders keepers? Hm? Who taught you this reasoning? Was it General Fang eh?" Zhu Junyang had received quite a bit of information during the short period of time he had been on land. However, he himself wasn't quite sure why he remembered this particular piece of information. It must be because it was related to General Fang, it must be!

The size of Yu Xiaocao's eyes when compared to the size of her pointed face were a bit large, especially when they were opened wide. It truly made her resemble a little flying squirrel as most of the space on her face seemed to be taken up by those two eyes. She pouted pitifully, "Why do you have to blame my godfather for my mistakes? I noticed that the seeds fell down on the ground. If I didn't pick them up, then they would be buried by the sand. It would be such a shame!"

Zhu Junwang watched her silently. Although the expression on his face was mild, it still made her scalp feel numb. She had trouble keeping a smile on her face.

The young royal prince seemed to have sensed her discomfort. He stooped over and dug up the kernels of corn from underneath his feet and mercifully broke the silence, "You...if you're able to tell me the name of these seeds, then I, this prince, will pardon you from the crime of being rude."

"Really?" Glee rushed through Xiaocao's heart and a brilliant smile blossomed on her face. She almost blurted out the word 'corn'. However, at the last second, she managed to reign in her composure. This crop had just been brought back from the distant seas. If she was able to say its name, then it would truly be astonishing.

She pretended to ponder for a bit before she cautiously replied, "Young Royal Prince, these seeds resemble pebbles of jade, I think they should be called 'corn' [1], what do you think?"

Corn? It was the same term that the emperor had used for this crop. From the little girl's earlier expression, Zhu Junyang was certain that this wasn't a name that was fabricated out of thin air. Instead...she already knew what this plant was!!

However, how could a rural farmer's daughter recognize a plant that grew in the far-away west hemisphere? Zhu Junyang regarded this slightly-built girl in front of him with an inscrutable expression as the doubts in his heart piled up. Apparently, this little girl had a secret that no one else knew about!

"Corn?" Zhu Junyang roughly sounded out this word, as if he was hearing it for the first time. He slowly nodded his head and continued, "This name is not bad. When I submit my report to the emperor, I will also use this name..."

Yu Xiaocao panicked and hurriedly raised her voice to stop him, "Don't do it!!"

She was already quite certain that the current emperor was also a transmigrator like her. In her past life, she had read plenty of novels. In some of those, the people who had transmigrated into high positions would trap other transmigrators in order to not blow their own secret. It was hard to say if something like would also happen to her!

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Her fellow transmigrator was the current emperor, so her life would be over if he just randomly charged her for any crime! That wouldn't do. If the emperor heard the name 'corn', her identity would be exposed! No, she definitely couldn't let that happen!

"Uh..." Under the young royal prince's doubtful gaze and everyone's scared expressions, Xiaocao muttered, "Young Royal Prince, this commoner is just a fisherman's daughter from the mountains. How can I be qualified to name the new species of crop that you, this royal prince, has brought back? Aren't you thinking too highly of me? Young Royal Prince, this commoner reckons that such a valuable crop should be named by the emperor or you!"

Zhu Junyang saw clearly the action and expression of the young girl racking her brains to think of a reason. He felt that the young girl in front of him was very similar to a small animal—an alert, sensitive,



and interesting little squirrel. Unbeknownst to him, the indifference in his eyes gradually faded, and an unfamiliar emotion emerged within him.

Head Steward, Liu Fusheng, noticed the slight change in his master. While he felt surprised, he also felt that he should put in a word for his master's savior, "Master, the young lady's words are reasonable. Let's discuss the matter of naming the new crop when we get back to the capital! Master, if you leave the noodles for too long, they will muddle together!"

However, Zhu Junyang didn't want to let go of this young girl who was like a little squirrel. Based on his intuition, this young girl definitely knew how to grow corn. Before he went on the voyage, the emperor had once told him that it would be best if he could also bring back someone who knew how to grow corn. Unfortunately, those natives all felt inseparable from their homeland. As a result, he was unable to fully accomplish the task that the emperor entrusted to him. But, perhaps the young girl in front of him could give him a different surprise!

When Liu Fusheng saw that his master seemed to have taken in his words, he turned around and walked to their temporary lodging. After walking a couple steps, Zhu Junyang stopped again and turned back to look at the young girl, who secretly breathed a sigh of relief and was currently patting her own chest. Seeing this, he almost couldn't refrain himself from laughing. Why did this little lass have so many expressions? Compared to those noble ladies in the capital, who were either delicate or dull, she was simply a weirdo, a cute little weirdo.

He took in a deep breath inwardly, kept a calm expression on his face, and then said to Xiaocao, who had instantly resumed an innocent expression, "If... I give you the seeds, can you guarantee that you can grow them?"

Liu Fusheng peeped at his master and felt surprised inwardly, 'Master has really changed today. Not only is he taking the initiative to speak with others, but they're also chatting very happily (Yu Xiaocao: With which eye do you see us chatting happily?). I wonder what expression Princess Consort Jing would have if she found out about this?'

It should be noted that it was always Princess Consort Jing pestering his master. She had even pretended to be sick to gain sympathy from him so that he would say a few more words with her. Princess Consort Jing was always worried about whether her youngest son would lose his ability to speak. It seemed like Princess Consort Jing's concern was unnecessary.

Yu Xiaocao noticed that the crisis had been resolved, so she quickly put on a flattering smile and said, "Of course! Young Royal Prince, you can go ask around. My family members are experts in farming. During this season, besides families with hot spring resorts, only my family can grow fresh vegetables! There're also watermelons, which my family has already started breeding. In a little over two months, if you can come to Tanggu Town again, you will be able to eat my family's watermelons... I can say for certain that if my family can't grow the seeds, then there isn't anyone else who can!"

Zhu Junyang watched as the young girl patted her chest and vowed with confidence, yet he didn't detect any sense of boasting at all. It seemed like this young girl was really confident in her family's farming skills. Perhaps... he could believe in her this one time. If she could really grow the crop of the seed that he brought back, then that could make up for his regrets from this voyage.

"Head Steward Liu, go make the arrangements to get fifty catties of corn and fifty catties of potato seeds for the little lass." After thinking about it briefly, Zhu Junyang decided to give a portion of the seeds from the two crops that he brought back the largest quantity of and let the young girl try growing them. Even if she failed, it wouldn't be a big problem.

Yu Xiaocao was extremely delighted about this. Fifty catties of corn seeds were enough for at least ten mu of land! But, there didn't seem to be enough potato seeds. She looked at the young prince with bright eyes and weakly asked, "Young Royal Prince, can you give me a little more of the potato seeds?"

Zhu Junyang looked at Yu Xiaocao with a 'so you really do know what a potato is' expression. Yu Xiaocao decided to just go-for-broke and continued to stare directly at the young prince's intimidating gaze with expectant eyes.

"How much do you want?" Zhu Junyang stopped trying to find out where the little girl had heard about corn and potatoes. Since she had heard about them, it meant that there was an even higher probability that she would be able to grow them.

Yu Xiaocao thought about it and answered, "At least a hundred catties? That's enough for half a mu of land..."

"I'll give you two hundred catties! Do you dare to make a military writ that you will definitely be able to grow the potatoes?" Zhu Junyang's intuition became even clearer—this young girl might be able to create a miracle! His intuition had never been wrong since he was a child!

"Yes!" Yu Xiaocao replied firmly without any hesitation.

Head Steward Liu Fusheng coughed on the side and tried to give the little girl some room for leeway. He explained softly, "Young maiden of the Yu Family, do you know that if you can't fulfill a military writ, you will be beheaded?"

Zhu Junyang swept a sharp glare at him, but he didn't blame him for being talkative. Liu Fusheng secretly wiped the sweat on his forehead, 'Master, isn't this old servant just thinking about this little girl's kindness to you?' It's so hard to be someone's servant ah!

Yu Xiaocao's eyes shifted slightly, and then she continued, "I will definitely be able to grow them, as long as there aren't any natural or manmade disasters!"

Natural or manmade disasters? Zhu Junyang secretly praised the young girl's carefulness in his heart. He couldn't control natural disasters. As for manmade disasters, wouldn't that be taken care of with just one word from him?

"Rest assured! This prince will ask the county magistrate to tell your village head to fully cooperate with planting. As for natural disasters, it's not someone that can be controlled by humans, so it will not be considered within the scope of the military writ!" Zhu Junyang's decisions were quite humane, so Xiaocao was very satisfied.

Seeing that the little girl was full of confidence, Liu Fusheng stopped persuading her. He took his order and led several imperial bodyguards to retrieve the corn and potato seeds from the carriage nearby.

Yu Xiaocao, on the other hand, followed the young prince to his temporary lodging nearby. She saw that there was a bowl of bean sauce noodles, which had already lumped together, on the table, as well as her family's braised food. She slightly hesitated and said, "Young Royal Prince, the noodles won't taste good if it's cold. Should this commoner bring you another bowl?"

Zhu Junyang glanced at the noodles that he had just eaten a few bites of. It was quite tasty. As for the braised food, before he had the chance to taste it, he saw this little lass walking behind the dockworkers with her waist bent and bending down from time to time to pick up something from the ground. After eating some noodles, he no longer felt so uncomfortable in his heart. Prompted by his curiosity, he walked over to see what she was picking up. Unexpectedly, he had found a treasure due to his curiosity!

Zhu Junyang ordered a little eunuch to buy the noodles at the noodle stall. He instructed someone to bring the four scholarly essentials, and then he wrote down the military writ with exquisite calligraphy. He was afraid that the little girl couldn't read, so he read the contents to her.

Yu Xiaocao saw that there wasn't anything difficult to achieve within the military writ. Not to mention that she had grown corn and potatoes in her past life, but even if she had never planted them before, she still had the mystic-stone water as cheat. She could even revive a dead plant, so what would she be afraid of! Without any hesitation, she picked up the brush and signed her name. After practicing her writing with her younger brother for a period of time, she could write her own name pretty well.

Could daughters of peasant families also read and write now? Zhu Junyang didn't show the confusion in his heart and handed the dried military writ to Head Steward Liu, who just came back with the seeds. After that, he sat down uninhibitedly, picked up his chopsticks, and grabbed the bright red 'pig ear strips in chili oil'. The pig ear strip was crispy, slightly spicy, and very appetizing.

By the time the piping hot bean sauce noodles was brought, he had already eaten half the plate of pig ear strips. Xiaocao pointed at the sautéed pig intestines and said, "Young Royal Prince, this has gotten somewhat cold. You can put it in the noodles and heat it up before eating it, or you can take it back to our stall to heat it up...."

When Zhu Junyang heard her addressing him as 'Young Royal Prince', he paused briefly. But he didn't say anything and just waved his hands at Yu Xiaocao. Head Steward Liu quickly went forward and whispered, "Miss Yu, the prince asked you to leave! Come, I will send the seeds over for you!"

After sending away the necessary people, Zhu Junyang looked at the plate of sautéed pig intestines. He thought about it and placed two pieces into the piping hot noodles. After a while, he picked it out and placed it into his mouth. He savored the taste as he carefully chewed it. 'Sautéed pig intestines' was Xiaocao's best dish. When it just came out of the pot, it had a golden color, and it was crispy on the outside and tender on the inside. With a savory and fragrant taste, it was suitable for all ages and people would never get tired of eating it.

Zhu Junyang, who was born in the imperial family, had never tried food like innards. If he hadn't experienced the hardships of ocean voyage, he probably wouldn't even touch the food in front of him. However, after eating a piece of intestine, Zhu Junyang thought that it tasted rather good, and put a few more pieces into the noodles.

Commander Fang, who had been waiting on the side in silence, watched as Royal Prince Yang ate one piece after another of the sautéed intestines. He was extremely curious about this kind of food—when it was time to change shift, he had to go buy a portion to try!

When Xiaocao returned to her stall, she thanked Head Steward Liu and happily accepted the corn and potato seeds. She planned on eating the delicious roasted corn on the cob and stir-frying a plate of sour and spicy shredded potatoes, which she really missed, in autumn... That would be such a happy feeling!!

When Imperial Envoy Fang came over, the stall was serving the small peak of dinner time. Seeing that his daughter was so busy that she didn't even have time to rest, Lord Fang couldn't just sit down anymore and took up the position of a waiter. All of the dockworkers knew who he was. The imperial envoy was straightforward and unassuming, so the dockworkers all liked him very much. So they joked, "It's really the blessing of three lifetimes to be able to eat the noodles personally served by the Lord Imperial Envoy ah!"

Fang Zizhen guffawed and said, "Eat more! You will have more strength to work when you're full!! In the future, when the harbor construction is completed, would you guys still have to worry about not getting any benefits?"

Most of these workers were regular employees of the management office. The new port, which was not too far away from the old wharf, was starting to take shape and it was more than twice the size of the old docks. There was a commercial street not too far from the harbor. Although the shops weren't built yet, the layouts of the shops could already be seen. Lord Fang was right. With such a large harbor, would they still have to worry about not being able to find work? The salary of dockers had doubled compared to the past and it would only be better in the future!

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Usually, before the setting sun disappeared behind the West Mountains, the Yu sisters would have already reached home. Today, the sky was already dark, but there was still no sign of them. Yu Hai couldn't sit still anymore and led a horse out of the stable. After putting the saddle on the horse, he rode it out of the village.

Halfway on the road, he ran into the three coming back from the docks. Fang Zizhen, who rode on a high steed, held a torch and led the way in front, while the sisters sat on the donkey cart in the back.

Seeing that the sisters were safe, Yu Hai was relieved and asked with concern, "Why did you guys come back so late today?"

Xiaolian excitedly chattered, "Father! Royal Prince Yang, who sailed to the west, has returned. He brought back a lot of things that we didn't have in the Great Ming Dynasty. He also gave Younger Sister some seeds and asked Younger Sister to help him grow them!"

The Yu Family and the Fang Family lived close by, so they usually ate dinner together. Lady Fang was close with Princess Consort Jing, so they naturally knew how much Princess Consort Jing hoped for her youngest son's safe return. When Yu Hai heard that, he nodded and said, "It's good that he returned safely! Princess Consort Jing don't have to worry anymore! What does the young prince returning have to do with you guys coming back late? Also... the young prince gave Cao'er seeds and asked her to help him plant them? What kind of seeds? Will we be able to grow them?"

Xiaolian had glanced at Royal Prince Yang from the distance, and she was still immersed in the excitement of being able to see royalty in person. Hearing the questions, she replied, "Royal Prince Yang brought back too many goods from the west, so the dockworkers didn't finish unloading until very late. In order to save time, they rotated to eat dinner. How would they be able to work without eating? We waited until the last batch of workers finished eating before closing our stall."

After taking a breath, Xiaolian continued, "Royal Prince Yang gave Younger Sister seeds that we've never seen in the Great Ming Dynasty before. The one that is shiny like a golden bean is called 'corn'. The round one is called 'potato', which is similar to sweet potatoes! Younger Sister can grow green vegetables that were ready two months in advance, so what else can't she grow?"

A new kind of crop that didn't exist in the Great Ming Dynasty was something that even the emperor attached great importance to. It wouldn't be a small matter if his daughter failed to grow them. Yu Hai was slightly worried and asked, "Cao'er, what do you think? Do you think you can grow them?"

Yu Xiaocao nonchalantly said, "Don't worry. As soon as I saw these seeds, their planting methods appeared in my mind. It's the same as the usual methods! There definitely won't be any problem! But, Father! The young prince gave me around ten mu of seeds. Our family doesn't have that much land ah!"

"Not enough land? Then buy some ah! I heard that there are several families in the village who want to sell their farmland... However, the land around our village are sandy soil, which isn't very fertile. I don't know if they would be suitable for farming these precious seeds! If we buy them in town, then the far distance would make it inconvenient to take care of..." As he spoke, Yu Hai frowned, feeling somewhat troubled.

Xiaocao thought about it and said, "Let's first buy the land in the village and see how it is. It's best if the land is connected, or else it would be hard to take care of them. As for buying land in town, let's also ask someone to keep an eye out for it. If there's a suitable place, then let's buy it. Even if we don't farm on it ourselves, we can rent it out to others! Both of these crops are high-yielding crops, moreover, they are suitable to be grown on all sorts of land. After the autumn harvest, we can cultivate them in a large area next year!"

Hearing his younger daughter's firm tone, Yu Hai didn't hesitate anymore. She was able to do business and farm; it didn't seem like there was anything that his younger daughter couldn't do. His family had never grown watermelons before, but didn't they turn out pretty good?

The next day, Yu Hai went to find two of the families, who were selling land. He asked the village chief to be his guarantor and spent thirty-six taels to buy the two families' twelve mu of farmland. Dongshan Village mostly had barren, sandy soil, so except for cheap crops like sweet potato, there was a low harvest of other grain. As a result, the price for land was very cheap. It was already very generous of Yu Hai to pay them three taels per mu!

The two pieces of land was only separated by Wang Ergou's farmland. When Wang Ergou heard about Yu Hai buying land, he came over and grinned cheekily, "Brother Dahai, are you expanding the cultivation of watermelons? Your family doesn't have enough land? If you need more land, my family can lend ours to you for free! But... heh heh, you have to give me priority for this year's watermelons... I need to earn more family property for my son!"

Wang Ergou's wife had given birth to a chubby son in January, which he was overjoyed about. In the past, he would go drinking and waste some money with several of his bad friends in the village. However, ever since he got a son, he had become an extremely dutiful father and stayed around his wife and child every day. He also came to the Yu Residence many times to ask for advice on how to make meals to be eaten during the postnatal confinement period. He even personally served his wife during confinement period, nurturing her to become fair and plump. Since she had plenty of breast milk, the little guy ate until his tummy was bloated every day.

Yu Xiaocao teased him, "Why don't you also sell your family's farmland to us?!"

"No, I can't sell it!! I'm leaving this land to my son!" Wang Ergou waved his hands and firmly refused.

Yu Xiaocao continued, "Would your son care about that mere two mu of farmland? It's better to earn more money this year, and then buy some good, fertile land for your son in the surrounding villages. If you want to farm on it yourself, then do it. If you don't want to, then rent it out and collect rent!"

With an enlightened expression on his face, Wang Ergou slapped his thigh and said, "That's right! Why didn't I think of that? My wife's village has a lot of good farmland. I wonder if there's anyone selling them. I should ask my younger brother-in-law to help me ask around..."

Both of Wang Ergou's parents had died and he was the only one left in his family. His wife was the eldest child in the family and had four younger siblings, who were all brought up by her. Her younger sisters had all gotten married. One of her younger brothers worked at the docks, while the other one stayed at home to farm and take care of their elderly parents. Looking at Ergou's wife's strong character, one could tell that her family, though poor, were people with integrity. After Ergou changed for the better, his in-laws had changed their perspective on him and treated him like half of a son. Wang Ergou felt the warmth of family from his in-laws, so he would always think of his in-laws when there was something good.

"Brother Dahai, I'll go back and discuss it with my wife. If she agrees, then we'll sell them to you! Brother Dahai, if you need help, then just let me know. Don't be courteous with me!" After being taught by his wife, Wang Ergou was no longer the inconsiderate person he used to be.

Yu Hai stopped being courteous with him and said, "Alright! The land has been thawed these past two days, so I was planning on plowing the fields! If Brother Ergou is free, then come help hold the plow!" There were livestock at home, so they naturally didn't have to plow by hand.

Wang Ergou cheerfully answered, "Okay! I'll come over early tomorrow!"

Over the next few days, Yu Hai and Wang Ergou plowed the seventeen mu of land, which included land that Wang Ergou sold to them. Yu Xiaocao also stopped helping out at the docks because she needed to plant watermelon, corn, and potatoes. Even if it got too busy at the docks, Madam Han and her younger daughter would help serve the food and wash the dishes every day.

The days passed by, and it was soon the spring season. Standing on the hillside, one could see people busily working everywhere. The villagers of Dongshan Village mostly grew sweet potatoes. The Yu Family's over a dozen mu of land would attract curious gazes from time to time.



The reason was very simple. The country magistrate personally met the village head of Dongshan Village and solemnly informed him that the Yu Family was helping Royal Prince Yang experiment with the cultivation of new crops. Thus, they must actively cooperate, assist them with guarding the crops, and firmly stop any hint of theft.

When village head returned home, he solemnly held a village-wide meeting. He made the protection of the 'experimental field' as the top priority of the whole village, which was firmly implemented. The village head was still worried, so he also threatened, "If anything goes wrong with the crops in the Yu Family's fields, and thus delayed the royal prince's affairs, then even the lives of the entire village wouldn't be enough as compensation!"

Got it! Since this was something that concerning the lives of the entire village, it was no wonder that villagers were so concerned. However, they only looked from afar for fear of affecting the cultivation of the Yu Family's crops. In order to prevent the crops from being damaged, the villagers had formed a night patrol team. At night, they would guard the Yu Family's fields so securely that even a mosquito might not be able to fly in. In this way, it made things much easier for the Yu Family.

This year, the Yu Family had doubled their melon field. Besides the eleven mu of land used as an 'experimental field', watermelon was planted in all the other fields. It was quite easy to grow watermelon, which only required burying the seeds into the soil. In order to improve the emergence rate, Xiaocao soaked the seeds in mystic-stone water before planting them. For six mu of watermelon, the Yu Family and a free laborer—Wang Ergou—finally finished sowing after working busily for two days.

The method of presoaking the seeds was also used for the cultivation of corn. When growing corn, it was important to pay attention to the distance between the crops. If planted too densely, it would be stuffy and lack sunlight, and the corn wouldn't be able to grow properly. If planted too loosely, the yield would decrease. Fortunately, Xiaocao had experience with growing corn in her previous life.

The field had been plowed and fertilized. Xiaocao took a hoe and dug shallow pits in the soil, while Madam Liu followed behind her. She put a seed in each pit, and then used her feet to cover the pits with soil. Yu Hai carried a bucket of water and watered the pits... The three family members cooperated very well.

Since the three family members were responsible for the ten mu of land, then it would take them several days to finish sowing. It was their first time trying to grow corn, so the whole family did everything themselves. The job of digging the pits looked simple, but in fact, it was actually hard work. Her waist always had to be bent, and she had to clench the hoe in her hand tightly. After a day, Xiaocao

was so tired that she couldn't even stand straight. She also got some blisters on her palms. The pain of popping the blisters made her scream incessantly.

Madam Liu used a needle, which had been sterilized with fire, and carefully popped the blisters on her younger daughter's hands. On the side, Yu Hai's heart ached so much that he gasped unceasingly. Fang Zizhen got the best wound medicine and applied a thin layer for his goddaughter. He also wrapped Xiaocao hand like a pig's hoof with gauze. When eating dinner in the evening, like a seriously injured person, she had to be fed by Zhenzhu.

Madam Liu looked at her delicate younger daughter and could help but say, "Mother remembers the distance between the pits. Cao'er, you don't need to work in the fields tomorrow. Stay at home and rest!"

Yu Xiaocao shook her head repeatedly and said, "No! With just you and Father, when would we be able to harvest all the corn ah?! My hand is just not used to doing hard labor. It will be fine in a few days!"

Fang Zizhen disagreed and said, "The blisters on your hand has just been popped. If they get scraped again tomorrow, a layer of skin will surely be peeled off. I might as well just take two days off and help out in the fields!"

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"No! The port construction is at a crucial stage, so there can't be any problems. Godfather, you need to go and look over it! Moreover, you have never farmed before, so you will probably be a hindrance if you came!" Yu Xiaocao rejected her godfather's suggestion, and then said, "Maybe... Tomorrow, Mother can dig the pits in front while I scatter the seeds. Is that okay?"

Fang Zizhen continued to refuse, "Your hand is injured. What if it got dirty and caused an infection? At that time, you wouldn't be helping out, but causing more problems!"

Xiaolian and Yu Hang rushed to say, "Tomorrow, I won't go to the docks (I won't collect seafood) and will go help out in the fields instead!"

"Alright! Everyone stop talking!! It's merely ten or so mu of land, yet you're all fretting so much. In the future, if we buy a hundred or so mu of good farmland, wouldn't you guys worry so much that you can't even sleep at night? It's decided. Tomorrow, your mother and I, along with Cao'er, will continue to work in the fields. Cao'er will watch on the side to ensure that nothing goes wrong and won't need to do

anything at all! Everyone else should do what you need to do!" At this time, Yu Hai brought forth his weight as the head of the household and made the final decision.

Before sleeping, Xiaocao went to the west courtyard next door as usual, and took her godmother's pulse with her bandaged little hand. Although her godmother was pregnant, with a proper diet and the nourishment of the mystic-stone water, her health was much better than when she first came to Tanggu Town. Yu Xiaocao took off her hand, feeling relieved.

Lady Fang gently grabbed her small hand, which was wrapped like a pig's hoof. Her heart slightly ached as she teased her, "Oh! Our Eldest Young Miss has just worked for a day, yet your little hand has already turned out like this ah?"

Yu Xiaocao pouted and grumbled, "It's just Godfather making a fuss over a small matter. I merely got a few blisters, but he wrapped my hand as if it was fractured."

Fang Zizhen came in and touched his wife's belly. He looked at Xiaocao's hand and said to Lady Fang, "You didn't see it. On her fair and tender palm, there were several peanut sized blisters. It bled quite a lot after being popped. Ay! It's just ten or so mu of land. It's not like we can't afford to hire people! If worst comes to worst, we can pick out a few strong ones among the refugees and hire them. Why do you need to do everything yourself?"

Yu Xiaocao laughed, "We're already attracting too much attention in the village. We just bought over ten mu of farmland, if we also hire people to work in the fields, wouldn't people talk about us behind our backs?"

"Just let them talk. If they have the ability, they can also buy land and hire workers!" Fang Zizhen said angrily.

Yu Xiaocao knew that her godfather was worried about her, so she smiled and changed the topic, "Godfather, Godmother will probably go into labor next month at the latest. The conditions in the countryside aren't very good and the midwives aren't very professional. I reckon that she should go back to the town tomorrow and wait for delivery?"

Speaking of the unborn child, Fang Zizhen immediately revealed a silly smile and giggled, "I have already discussed this matter with your godmother. We'll go back to town when your family's corn and potatoes are planted."

Fang Zizhen now firmly believed in his goddaughter's medical skills. His wife wasn't young anymore, and this was her first child, so they didn't have any experience whatsoever. Without his goddaughter around, he would feel uneasy! However, his daughter had signed a military writ with Royal Prince Yang for the cultivation of corn and potatoes. So it couldn't be delayed. Fortunately, there were still a couple of months before his wife's due date. He had learned the term 'due date' from Xiaocao!

Looked at her madam's big, round tummy, Linglong thought that it was more safe to return to town earlier. She said in a low voice, "Madam, let Zhenzhu accompany you at home tomorrow. This servant will go help out in the field. With an extra worker, things will get done faster!"

Lady Fang looked up with smiling eyes and glanced at her most trusted handmaid. She smiled at Fang Zizhen and said, "These two maidservants, Linglong and Zhenzhu, have suffered a lot since we arrived in Tanggu Town! Usually, handmaids like them are like daughters of a humble family, who won't need to do any chores. They all have several maidservants who work under them. However, since coming to Dongshan Village, they have to make a fire for cooking, plant vegetables, and gather vegetables. It really has been hard on them ah!"

Zhenzhu hurriedly said, "Madam, you're overpraising us! Madam is tolerant, magnanimous, kind, and benevolent. When this servant went back to the Xia Household, my sisters all envied me for having such a good master!"

Linglong gently massaged Lady Fang's shoulders and said with a faint smile, "That's right! There are advantages to living in the capital, but there are also advantages in staying in Dongshan Village. Our Dongshan Village has a picturesque scenery that relaxes one's mood just by looking at it. We can eat delicacies from the land and the sea every day. This servant's face has gotten rounder ah. In my opinion, although the capital is big, it's more comfortable living in Dongshan Village!"

Lady Fang patted Linglong's hand and said with a smile, "You two are both clever and lovely. I, your madam, knows this very clearly! Alright, tomorrow, Linglong will take Wangfu and his wife to see if there's anything you guys can help with in the fields."

Early in the morning of the next day, the three members of the Yu Family went to the fields with Linglong and two servants of the Fang Household. After working for the entire day yesterday, they had

already planted nearly two mu of land. Madam Liu had nearly mastered the technique of digging the pits. Under Xiaocao's guidance, she swiftly got the hang of it.

Wangfu had come over from the estate in town. Before selling himself into the Fang Estate, he was also an experienced farmer. When doing farm work, the Wangfu couple was even faster than the Yu Hai couple. As if it had a life, the hoe in his hands dug quickly and well. Wangfu's wife followed behind her husband and skillfully scattered the seeds and buried them with soil. The two worked very well together.

As a child of servants of the Xia Family, Linglong had grown up the estate of a wealthy family, so she had never done farm work before. Fortunately, dibbling wasn't hard. At the beginning, she was still relatively unfamiliar with how to do it, but she gradually learned how to do it.

Yu Hai carried a bucket of water and followed behind them and sprinkled some water on the buried seed. There couldn't be too much water because the seed might go bad from being soaked in too much water. But there couldn't be too little water either because that might reduce the rate of germination. However, seeds that had been washed by mystic-stone water didn't have these concerns.

With three extra people, who were skilled workers, they worked much more efficiently today! By evening, there were only about two mu of land that needed to be worked on from the remaining eight mu of land.

On the way back, Madam Liu said with a smile, "We should be able to finish planting all the corn by tomorrow. Many thanks to Linglong, Older Brother Wangfu, and Older Brother Wangfu's wife, otherwise, we would have to work a few more days."

Wangfu smiled in a good-natured manner, while his wife said quick-wittedly, "We don't deserve to be called in that way by Madam Yu. Madam Yu is a relative of our general, so you're considered half of a master for us servants. You're already giving us servants face by directly calling our names!"

Linglong saw that Madam Liu still wanted to say something, so she quickly changed the topic, "Tomorrow, we will be able to finish planting the corn in the morning. When are we going to plant the remaining one mu of potatoes?"

Yu Xiaocao replied, "The potato seeds has already sprouted. It can be planted by the day after tomorrow. Older Sister Linglong, you must be exhausted today, right? When you get back, take a hot bath and have a good rest. My hand should be better tomorrow, so it's fine with just me and my parents!"

Seeing that Linglong wanted to say something, she continued, "It has been a long time since anyone has lived in the estate in town. Several servants stayed back to guard the house, but if you guys are moving back, it's better to have people properly clean the place. Also, you guys should find a midwife in advance...Sister Linglong, you're someone who serves Godmother. Now that Godmother is pregnant, you must stay by her side ah!"

In a slightly flattering manner, Wangfu's wife said, "Miss Linglong don't have to come tomorrow. My husband and I will come over to help, so it should be fine!"

After thinking about it, Linglong felt that Miss Cao'er was right. Tomorrow, she should go to town and make sure everything was going smoothly. Madam and her unborn child were the most important!

In this way, they worked busily for another two days and finally finished planting on the Yu Family's over ten mu of land. Without a chance to rest, Xiaocao was taken to town by Fang Zizhen and his wife. Linglong was also a very capable person. In two days, she had straightened out everything in the Fang Estate. She had also invited the two famous midwives in town to the estate, serving them with good food and drinks.

These two midwives mostly helped wealthy families in town to deliver babies, so the highest ranking official they had seen were low-ranked officials like the head bailiff of the county yamen and the magistrate's secretary. Their legs had gone limp as soon as they heard about the lord imperial envoy's invitation. They didn't even dare to fart and obediently followed the servant of the Fang Estate over.

After staying in the estate for a day, they gradually recovered their strength and a burst of joy emerged in their hearts: It was their first time delivering the child of the imperial envoy's wife ah! If everything went smoothly, not only would they become famous, but they would also get rich! They had heard that the imperial envoy had gotten a child at an old age, so he would definitely give them a lot of money at that time!

When Xiaocao arrived in town, she didn't idle around. After some inquiry, she found a broker with a decent reputation in town, Li Da.

Li Da felt slightly uneasy as he was taken to the Fang Estate. With his social connections, how could he not know about the residence of the imperial envoy? Why was the imperial envoy looking for him? Could it be that he wanted to buy more servants?

It was a little girl under the age of ten who came to receive him. Although she was dressed plainly, she appeared comfortable and exquisite in all respects. Such a young girl probably wasn't a handmaid in the estate. Perhaps... she was the imperial envoy's goddaughter?

Li Da didn't dare slight her and solemnly went forward to greet her. Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, "Broker Li doesn't need to be so courteous. Let sit down and talk!"

Being influenced by Lady Fang, who had come from a noble family, Yu Xiaocao already had a somewhat imposing manner in the way she dealt with people. She waited for Li Da to sit down, and with a gentle smile, she said in a soft voice, "Broker Li, I heard that you have grasped most of Tanggu Town's middleman businesses in your hands! Is there a large piece of farmland nearby for sale?"

Li Da quickly straightened his body and thought for a moment before asking, "In reply to Young Miss, do you want to buy a plantation or just farmland?"

"Plantation? Are there plantations for sale?" Yu Xiaocao had learned that plantations were generally owned by rich people. Not only did they have a large piece of fertile farmland, but it was also sold together with the tenant farmers. If she could buy a plantation, it would save her a lot of work!

Li Da quickly said, "In town, there is a wealthy family with the surname Ma who had failed in their business and are in an urgent need for money. Thus, the Ma Family have decided to sell one of their plantations, which has sixty mu of superior farmland, thirty mu of average farmland, and eighty mu of inferior farmland. This plantation is located east of town, and it is less than ten kilometers away from town."

A total of one hundred and seventy mu, and it was located in between Tanggu Town and Dongshan Village. This was exactly what Xiaocao wanted. If the price wasn't too outrageous, Xiaocao was prepared to buy it!

"May I ask the price..."

## Fields of Gold Chapter 230 - Fleeing from Calamity

Li Da naturally didn't dare to give false number to the imperial envoy's goddaughter, "That family urgently needs the money, so the price isn't very high. If you buy them separately, the superior farmland cost twelve taels per mu, the average farmland cost ten taels per mu, and the inferior farmland is seven taels per mu. If you buy them together, it cost a thousand five hundred taels."

The price was quite reasonable, so Yu Xiaocao bought it on the spot. The next day, the head steward of the Fang Estate and Broker Li went to the yamen to go through the formalities.

At this time, it was the time of spring plowing. Since the Ma Family was in a hurry to sell the plantation, they didn't rent the fields to the tenant farmers. Thus, the tenant farmers at the plantation all felt very anxious.

The tenant farmers generally didn't have any farmland and relied on farming on rented farmland to make a living. At the beginning of autumn, at least half of the grain produced in the fields should be handed to the master's family. If they had a harsher master, who charged them sixty percent or more for rent, and they had an average harvest, the tenant farmers might not even have enough to fill their stomachs. However, these tenant farmers, who had no other skills except farming, had no other choice but to rent land. If they didn't farm, was the whole family just going to wait to drink the northwest wind?

In this plantation of the Ma Family, the tenants were waiting for the arrival of the new owner with an uneasy mood. The Ma Family were considered kind masters, who only took fifty percent rent. They were worried about what kind of person the new owner was. Would the rent increase? Would they not rent the land to them? There were more than a dozen families in the plantation who relied on these fields to make a living ah!

Yu Hai wore a dark blue muslin robe with exquisite embroidery on the waist, collar, and cuffs. He had never worn such a formal attire before, so he felt very out of place. For the convenience of work, Yu Hai had always worn light work clothes, which was light and comfortable. Being wrapped in a robe, he felt as if he couldn't even walk properly.

Yu Xiaocao looked at her father's uneasy expression and said with a smile, "Father, you look very handsome dressed like this! You look more dignified than those skinny and short lords! It's our first time inspecting our plantation, so we definitely have to show the imposing manner of owners lest we get bullied by the servants!"



After being praised by his daughter, Yu Hai straightened his chest. He was originally tall with good features and healthy tan skin. Thus, he really did have the charisma of a wealthy nobleman.

The person who drove their horse carriage was the head steward of the Fang Family. Since they were going to show their force as owners, how could they not have someone running errands for them? Thus, Lady Fang sent the head steward over to help them.

The horse carriage soon arrived at the plantation. The tenant farmers, who had long received the news, had already been waiting for them. In the past, the Ma Family usually came late in the morning. The tenant farmers weren't familiar with their new master's habits, so they wanted to leave a good impression on them by coming earlier. Originally, they had thought that they would have to wait for a long time, but they hadn't expected that the horse carriage had already arrived at the plantation at seven in the morning. The tenant farmers looked at one another and were glad to have come early!

The head steward stopped the horse carriage. Yu Hai nimbly jumped down from the carriage, and then turned around to carry his younger daughter down the carriage. When Yu Xiaocao saw the farmers waiting respectfully, she felt rather satisfied in her heart.

Could the tenant farmers not be respectful? Since last autumn, there had been group after group of refugees coming to Tanggu Town. Although a group of refugees had settled at the docks, there were still a lot of refugees looking for jobs. There would be refugees coming to slightly bigger plantations to recommend themselves as tenant farmers. The position of the original tenant farmers at the plantation were being threatened. If they didn't work hard, wouldn't they just be waiting for their masters to replace them? This wasn't something that hadn't happened before. Didn't several tenant farmers get changed at the Zhou Family's ritual fields next door?

Yu Hai stood in front of the tenant farmers. He had never spoken under the anticipating gazes of so many people, so his hands that were behind his back slightly trembled. Seeing this, Xiaocao quickly extended her hand and held her father's hand, giving him support.

The future of the Yu Family would certainly be even more than this, so as the head of the household, Yu Hai must be able to support it! Yu Hai secretly took a deep breath, swept over the dozen or so tenants with a dignified gaze, and said in a loud voice, "This year's spring plowing is just around the corner. In order to not delay farming, everything will stay the same! Who is the supervisor of the tenant farmers? Come and introduce the situation of the plantation!"

Hearing that everything would be the same as before, the tenant farmers were apparently relieved, and there was a glow of joy within everyone's eyes. A vigorous old man in his fifties stepped forward and said, "In reply to Master, this old man, Wang Maocai, is the supervisor of the plantation!"

Seeing that the old man was about the same age as his father, Yu Hai's face showed some kindness. He said, "What's the situation at this plantation? Tell me about it!"

Wang Maocai didn't change just because the master was kind to him. He respectfully answered, "In reply to Master, there are a total of sixteen families in the plantation. Among them, there are forty-three young, strong workers. In the previous years, the plantation's fields were distributed according to the number of laborers in the family."

Divided based on number of adult workers? Yu Xiaocao thought about it and asked, "This elder, does the so-called laborer refer to adult male labor force?"

Wang Maocai didn't slight her due to her young age and quickly replied, "In reply to Young Miss, that's right!"

"Then... what if the adult male in the family had an accident?" Yu Xiaocao's worry wasn't without reason. If something happened to the man in the family, then a widowed mother and orphaned children wouldn't even be able to get a portion of land, so how were they supposed to live?

Wang Maocai was silent for a moment before saying, "I was just about to report this to Master. Liu Dazhuang, who works at the plantation, broke his leg after falling in the mountains. He's the only labor force in his family. Last year, four mu of land was distributed to him. What should we do this year?"

Yu Hai ceased his brows slightly. According to the old policy, the family should not be allocated land if the only labor force in the family was bedridden. However, if they lost their farmland when the pillar of the family had fallen, that would be making their bad situation even worse. How would the family support themselves?

At this time, a twelve or thirteen year old boy rushed out from the crowd. With tears in his eyes, he clenched his fist, knelt down in front of Yu Hai and said in a loud voice, "I'm already thirteen years old, so I can work like an adult! Master, please don't take away our farmland."

“Shanzi, quickly come back!” A haggard-looking woman squeezed out of the crowd and shouted anxiously at the young boy kneeling on the ground for fear that her son would get punished for offending the master.

Yu Hai lowered his head to look at the youth, who was about the same age as his eldest son, with mixed feelings in his heart. He recalled the time when he had been bitten by a bear and was lying on the bed on the verge of death. The situation at that time was very similar to the situation of the family in front of him. At that time, he really hoped that someone would help his family.

After pondering briefly, Yu Xiaocao made a decision and said, “My father has already said earlier that this year's land distribution will be the same as last year's until a new decision is made.”

The young boy, who was kneeling on the ground, lifted his head with hope and asked, “My family received four mu of farmland last year, so do we still get four mu of land this year?”

Yu Xiaocao nodded and said, “That's right. You will receive the same amount of land as last year. In the future, not only will adult laborers will receive land, but boys over the age of ten and females between the age of sixteen to forty can also get a distribution of farmland. As long as one has the ability to work, farmland will be divided to both male and female based on their circumstances.”

What? Women could be allocated land, too? A happy expression appeared on the faces of people with qualified women and many children in their families. On the other hand, there was a slight change in the expressions on the people who had more adult male labor force in the family. There were only so much land in the plantation, so if land were also divided to women and children, they would certainly receive less land. These people felt somewhat dissatisfied in their hearts, but they didn't dare to say anything. The new owner had new rules. If they showed their dissatisfaction and the master didn't distribute any land to them, they could only watch on the side!

Yu Hai said a few more formal remarks, encouraged everyone to work hard on farming, and finally said, “The farming season won't wait for anyone, so everyone should take advantage of today's good weather and quickly go farming! Alright, everyone can go now!”

After coming out of the plantation, the father and daughter were going to buy some daily necessities in town. When the carriage arrived outside of the town gates, they noticed that there had been an increase in the number of refugees outside the town. It was currently the time when there was a food shortage between the two harvests. Many people in the northeast, who didn't want to leave their homeland, had ran out of food after surviving the harsh winter, so they had no choice but to flee to the south.

Yu Hai, who was in a good mood after buying a plantation, sat outside the carriage to talk to the head steward. Suddenly, an emaciated figure among the refugees caught his attention. He stared fixedly at that person's back, clenching his hands tightly. Was it her? If it was her, why didn't she come find him at Dongshan Village, and instead settled down in the refugee camp outside of town?

As if she detected his gaze, that thin figure turned around and looked over. When Yu Hai saw that haggard but familiar face, he slightly choked up as he called out in a soft voice, "Older Sister..."

Perhaps it was too far away, but that person didn't recognize him. Instead, she continued to walk forward and slowly squatted down in a simple shed made of dead branches. In actuality, even if they met face-to-face, Yu Caifeng may not have recognized him.

Since Yu Hai got married, his older sister had only returned once and more than a decade had passed. Although Yu Hai's face hadn't changed much, he had matured quite a lot. For more than a year, he ate well and was in a good mood. Thus, his originally thin and tall figure had become strong and powerful.

Today, he was wearing a new set of clothing and riding on the Fang Estate's horse carriage, like a rich master in town. Even when Yu Caifeng saw him, she just felt that he seemed familiar, but didn't dare to acknowledge him!

"Stop the carriage, quickly stop the carriage!" Yu Hai snatched the reins from the head steward's hands and pulled hard. The horse, who was trotting forward steadily, made a long neigh, stopped, and trod uneasily on the ground. It was fortunate that the Fang Estate's horses were well-trained. Had it been another steed, it might have been startled!

Yu Xiaocao, who was dozing off in the carriage, nearly flew out of the carriage. She poked her head out in confusion, only to see her father leaping off the moving carriage and darting toward the place known as the refugee camp.

"Father! What are you doing? Wait for me ah!" With the help of the head steward, Yu Xiaocao got down from the carriage. Holding her long skirt, she chased in the direction that her father ran off to. She was only accompanying her father to the plantation, but her godmother insisted on having her dress more formally. It was so inconvenient to run in. If she wasn't careful, she would accidentally step on the hem of the skirt.