

## Gold Chapter 271

### Fields of Gold Chapter 271 - Battle of Words

"Don't exaggerate so much, ok? If Zhenxiu Restaurant collapsed because of one dish, then it's better to just close it down earlier!" Could Yu Xiaocao still not understand him? One point was exaggerated into ten by him, wasn't it just to get recipes from her?

Third Young Master Zhou laughed and smiled, "Some of the older stores in the capital have started joining hands to go against Zhenxiu Restaurant. If we don't show some creativity, we will be dragged down by those old crafty guys one day! Xiaocao, you said that you know how to make floral-scented flaky roasted duck and vegetal crispy roasted duck. Teach Yang Feng how to make them!"

Yu Xiaocao hesitated slightly but she didn't persist. She also taught Yang Feng how to make two kinds of roasted duck, reminding Third Young Master Zhou that he could launch them later on to keep the novel feelings and attract customers. Third Young Master Zhou had a talent in business that surpassed a lot of people. Even without the reminder from Xiaocao, he would've done as she said.

When they came out of the Zhenxiu Restaurant, Zhu Junyang, who had kept silent and pretended to be cool, suddenly said to Third Young Master Zhou, "There are still a few roast ducks made by Yu Xiaocao in the kitchen, pack all of them and have them taken with us. Put it on Yu Xiaocao's tab!"

Yu Xiaocao yelled on one side, "Young Royal Prince, aren't you being unfair? Let's not talk about how these two days, you've been freeloading off of me. Why are you packing the roast duck and letting me pay for it? How much money is the third young master of Imperial Prince Jing's estate and the favorite of the emperor, Royal Prince Yang, lacking?"

Third Young Master Zhou was surprised at Yu Xiaocao's manner of speaking in front of Royal Prince Yang. The cold-faced prince was young but he had a strong atmosphere. Even he had to be careful in front of him in fear of saying the wrong word. The other party gave him a look and he immediately became as quiet as cicadas in the winter. This lass was really brave, treating the cold faced prince like she treated him, becoming angry and yelling whenever she wanted.

What surprised him the most was that although the cold faced prince's voice was still cold, he didn't seem to be getting angry. He just glanced at Yu Xiaocao, who was hopping around full of vigor and expressionlessly said, "Just think of it as payment for my company today!"

Yu Xiaocao immediately rolled her eyes in an exaggerated manner, 'Who let you follow me? Wasn't it you who was bored at home and insisted on following me? You ate quite a bit of the food at Zhenxiu

Restaurant, and you even ate most of the roast duck. What do you mean you are accompanying me? Young Royal Prince, can you confuse right and wrong anymore and be any more shameless?'

"Alright! I'll pay, I'll just think of it as showing filial respect to the Princess Consort!" Yu Xiaocao knew that Princess Consort Jing liked osmanthus duck. The fruit-scented roasted duck was fatty but not greasy, crispy and delicious; Princess Consort Jing should like it too, right?

After leaving Third Young Master Zhou, on the way back to the compound, Zhu Junyang, who had nothing to do, quarreled with Yu Xiaocao, "The roasted duck is in your hands now. If someone's going to show filial piety then it would be me, what does it have to do with you?"

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes again and said, "If I didn't make the fruit-scented roasted duck, what would you use to show filial piety to the Princess Consort?"

"The fruit-scented roasted duck you made wasn't for my lady mother! Do you want my mother to accept your love? No way!" Where was the cold-faced prince character? If any of the rich playboys saw Zhu Junyang now, their chins would drop to the ground.

Head Steward Liu, who was carrying the roast duck behind them, was very pleased. His master finally acted like a seventeen year old. Only when he was in front of Miss Yu did the master take off his protective shell and show his human side.

That evening, Princess Consort Jing, who had delicious duck in three different ways, was very happy and excited when she heard Head Steward Liu's report. Her decision to let the little girl from the Yu Family stay was right. Yu Xiaocao was a girl that could give people warmth and happiness. Princess Consort Jing believed with her company, her young son's icy appearance and heart will fade layer by layer.

Time passed slowly between Zhu Junyang and Yu Xiaocao's squabbles and battle of wits. In a blink of an eye, it was the middle of June and the middle of summer. The corn had been planted for three months and has entered the grouting stage. On each corn stalk, there were at least two corn cobs. Some had three but not many, and even fewer have four.

This was very good already. On ordinary corn plants, there were only one or two corn cobs. As long as there weren't any unforeseen accidents, the corn yield of the Yu Family's fields would be more than the

previous yield of 1500 catties per mu. A conservative estimate would be that 2000 catties should be no problem.

To Princess Consort Jing's relief, her little son's arms had almost recovered. It had only been a little longer than a month. After the imperial physician's diagnosis, he was full of praise for Yu Xiaocao's ointment.

Zhu Junyang's arms, apart from not being able to use martial arts, was no different from ordinary people's arms at this point in time. The ointment originally was changed three times a day and now it only needed to be changed once a day. Every day Yu Xiaocao massaged him with the ointment and used the little divine stone's power to help him heal his muscles and tendons. She believed it wouldn't be long before he recovered and be back to normal!

Just when Zhu Junyang was enjoying his leisurely life of shopping, eating delicious food, and squabbling with Yu Xiaocao in Tanggu Town, the emperor decided to call him back to the capital. Yu Xiaocao was the happiest out of all of them. Her dark days of enslavement and oppression were finally over! The day after the young prince left Tanggu Town, she said farewell to the Princess Consort Jing and happily returned to Dongshan Village.

Their daughter, who had been staying in town for more than a month, finally came home. Madam Liu and Yu Hai were very happy, so they killed some chickens and geese to fill her up.

"My dear daughter, how could Princess Consort Jing's compound be more comfortable than staying at home? Look, you've become so thin!" Madam Liu wiped her tears and held her little daughter in her arms. She was only ten years old and had lived alone with an unfamiliar and influential family. That royal prince didn't seem like an easy master to serve, so her daughter must've suffered a lot.

Yu Xiaocao wiped the tears from her mother's eyes. With a smile, she explained, "Mother, I was asked by Princess Consort Jing to help with the young royal prince's arm. It's not hard labor. She provided delicious food and drinks every day. I also had servants waiting on me, and the courtyard I stayed in was bigger than our East Courtyard. I don't have to do anything except make the ointment. Touch my waist, it has gotten rounder!"

Madam Liu stopped crying and smiled. She pinched her daughter and said, "You're a child, how can you have a waist?"

Yu Xiaocao took out Lao Laizi's [1] entertainment skills and pointed to her side waist, "Who said children don't have a waist? What's this?"

"That's the belly!" Madam Liu teased with a smile.

Yu Xiaocao patted her back and said, "What about here? Isn't this the waist?"

"That's the back!" Madam Liu continued.

Yu Xiaocao pouted, "Then where's my waist?"

"Children don't have a waist!" Madam Liu chuckled.

Looking at the unhappy face of the little girl, Yu Hai said, "Alright, don't bully our daughter anymore. Make some more delicious food for lunch to give her a reception!"

Cao'er what do you want to eat? Mother will make it for you!" Madam Liu smiled as she looked at her daughter as if she couldn't see enough of her.

Yu Xiaocao went to the Zhenxiu Restaurant early in the morning. She took the fruit-scented roasted duck from the first batch of the roasted ducks. With a smile, she said, "For lunch, I'll make duck three ways for everyone. I saw that there were clams in the water basin, so let's add spicy stir-fried clams and two random vegetable dishes."

At this time, the sandworm and oyster collection business wasn't busy. Yu Jiang could handle the business by himself. Yu Hang had come over with a moment of leisure and looked at his little sister with a smile. He watched her take out a roasted duck from the oiled paper bag and a strong fragrance floated out.

"It smells so good! Isn't this the new fruit-scented roasted duck from Zhenxiu Restaurant? It's rumored that it's even more popular than when roasted chicken first came on the market. It's gotten to the point where it's hard to find a duck. Little Sister, was this fruit-scented roasted duck your recipe again?" Yu Hang sniffled and said in surprise.

Yu Xiaocao gave him a thumbs up and, with a proud expression, she said, "Big Brother, you have good eyes! Correct, I taught them how to make fruit-scented roasted duck. We can earn five taels for each duck sold! When the end of the year bonus comes, just see!"

Yu Hang rubbed her head and said with a smile, "Little Sister, you're just like a golden egg-laying hen in the stories. It makes me want to open your head and see what's in it."

Yu Xiaocao pushed aside her big brother's hand on her head. She rolled her eyes and said, "The result is the same as the story. It's not worth the loss!! Eh? Where's Oldest Paternal Aunt and Uncle?"

Yu Xiaocao had been back for a while, and it was quiet next door as if no one was there. There wasn't any need to ask about the corn now. In the original watermelon field, sweet potatoes were also planted. There wasn't any work in the fields, so what was Oldest Paternal Aunt's family doing?

Yu Hai took the roasted duck from his little daughter and took it to the kitchen. Hearing her question, he said, "The village head has allocated a homestead for your aunt. Your uncle has found some people from the village. They are digging the foundation and making the sun-dried dirt bricks to get ready to build the house before the autumn harvest."

After selling watermelon for more than a month, Liu Hu had also earned dozens of taels of silver. As soon as he and his wife thought it over, they decided to first build a two-roomed adobe houses to live in first. The rest of the money was saved to see if they could rent a shop in the town and do some small business. Liu Hu went to do odd jobs again, so his annual income was also enough to cover his family's food and daily expenditures.

After living at his brother-in-law's house for a few months, bad rumors were spread by someone in the village. The rumors said that Liu Hu's family relied on his younger brother-in-law to live and Yu Hai was supporting his elder sister's family, a family with a different surname. Yet, he didn't ask after the elderly in his family. It was clear who spread the rumor without any questions!

Liu Hu didn't want to cause his younger brother-in-law any trouble. As soon as he had some money, he decided to quickly build a house.

Yu Xiaocao listened and angrily said, "Those rumors must've been spread by Madam Zhang or Li Guihua. Besides the two of them, who else has the free time to gossip about our family? They really do have a

short memory. I think it's necessary to give Madam Zhang a reminder. We still have material on her on hand!"

Yu Hai sighed and said, "Forget it! A young couple is each other's company in old age. For your grandfather's sake, don't get on the same level as Madam Zhang... By the way, your grandfather is sick, take a roast duck over and take a look at him!"

Yu Xiaocao wasn't happy. Grandfather was sick, and greasy things like a roasted duck shouldn't be eaten. If she took it over, it would just be given to Madam Zhang. She pouted and asked, "What sickness does Grandfather have? Is it serious?"

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"Yu Dashan and your grandfather set off to the sea some time ago and they encountered a storm. Yu Dashan was swallowed up by the sea, so your grandfather choked on some water while saving him. When he returned, he started coughing, which later on turned into a fever. It has been going for over half a month already, and he still hasn't gotten better!" Yu Hai said in a worried tone.

Yu Hang snorted and said, "Grandfather's sickness wasn't serious at the beginning. His illness must have gotten worse because that cheap Madam Zhang didn't want to use money to get Grandfather treated. Father shouldn't have given her the ten taels of silver last time. Instead, you should have used it to get a doctor to treat Grandfather's illness. That money is probably never coming back now!"

In the recent year, Madam Zhang's cheap antics had worsened. The main dish was coarse grain flatbreads without any fine grain mixed into it. As if that wasn't enough, all the vegetables came from the garden that she planted, and she wouldn't use any oil to cook it. Now that Madam Li's son had the ability to work, she had complained numerous times that she wanted to live on her own. But, as soon as she heard that she had to leave all her properties, including her house behind, she stopped complaining.

However, Madam Li, who was a big mouth, did not refrain herself from talking behind her mother-in-law, Madam Zhang. She said that Madam Zhang favored her younger son more by giving him all their family's income to support his studies in the prefectural city. Not only that, she also said that Madam Zhang treated her family badly. Her son had turned fifteen already, yet Madam Zhang still hadn't helped him with his marriage affairs. She was just draining the entire family's blood in order to feed the bottomless pit, Yu Bo.

Upon Yu Xiaocao's return this time, she got them three roasted ducks because clearly one wasn't enough for everyone. When her third uncle went back later, she would ask him to get one more. One

roasted duck cost five to six taels of silver. If she took it to visit Grandfather, they probably wouldn't get to eat it. Instead, Madam Zhang would probably sell it for money!

Yu Xiaocao bought a fat hen and fifty eggs from her neighbor, the Zhou Family. After that, she went to visit her grandfather with her older brother, Yu Hang.

When they pushed open the old wooden door, there was no one in the courtyard and it was very quiet. Her younger uncle was studying in town, so her aunt and Doudou went back to live in their maternal family home. After her youngest paternal aunt got married, only her grandfather, Madam Zhang, and Yu Dashan's family lived here.

At this time, Yu Dashan should be back from the sea and selling fish in the fish market by the dock. Madam Li went somewhere to gossip in order to avoid doing labor. Madam Zhang went to the beach during the low tide to dig for spoon worms in order to earn more money to pay for her younger son's tuition. Apart from the sounds of the hungry pigs in the hogpen, there were no other sounds.

Suddenly, the sound of severe coughing could be heard from the West Room. This was where Yu Hai and his family used to live in. The cough was followed by another cough, as if someone was about to cough his lungs out; it made everyone worried that he might faint the next second due to suffocation.

"Grandfather?" The siblings exchanged looks and ran towards the West Room hurriedly. It may be because no one had lived in that room for so long that it appeared even more worn down. There were only sparse hays on the roof, and it was unknown how long the room hadn't been repaired. If it rained, droplets of rain would probably leak in.

Since Yu Hai's family moved out, this room had been used as a storage room. How did Grandfather ended up living here?

Pushing open the nearly falling door, the darkness in the room blinded the siblings and made it hard for them to clearly see the situation in the room. After a while, they saw a scrawny figure lying on the worn-out kang bed with his body hunched over and having another coughing fit.

"Grandfather!" Yu Xiaocao put down the stuff in her hands and rushed into the room. She helped Old Yu sit up and patted his back to make him feel better.

There was a disgusting odor in the room. People couldn't help but want to retch because of the strong stench that came from her haggard grandfather's body, as well as the smell from the hogpen next to him.

When his coughing finally stopped, Old Yu quickly pushed Yu Xiaocao away and said with great effort, "Xiaocao, stay away from Grandfather. They all say I have tuberculosis, which is contagious. Both of you need to get out of here quickly to avoid being infected."

Yu Xiaocao saw that her grandfather's clothes were full of urine and sweat stains. It was obvious that it hadn't been changed for a long period of time. Looking at her grandfather, who was helplessly lying on the bed, her nose turned sour. She tried to hold back her tears and said to Yu Hang, "Eldest Brother, find a set of clean clothes for Grandfather and help him change into it. I will go boil water and help him wash."

"There's no need. You guys need to go back! There is no cure for my disease, so hurry and go. Don't let the disease get to you. There's no cure!" Old Yu became so anxious that he wanted to sit up straight, but his skinny arms had no strength and he panted heavily on bed.

Yu Xiaocao checked his pulse. It wasn't tuberculosis at all, but instead it was only pneumonia caused by a severe fever. She reckoned that her grandfather didn't take his fever seriously at first, and then it slowly turned into pneumonia. Madam Zhang was too cheap to find him a doctor and just got him some herbal medicine for him to eat. Hence, the fever had now developed into such a serious condition.

"Grandfather, who told you that you got tuberculosis?" Yu Xiaocao saw the dry skin on her grandfather's lips and the empty cup next to the bed. No wonder it would turn into pneumonia! Grandfather had a fever, yet they didn't even give him water to drink.

After Yu Xiaocao boiled a pot of water, she scooped out a cup for it to cool off, added a drop of mystic-stone water, and fed it to her grandfather. Old Yu hadn't drunk water for two days already, so the warm water moisturized his dried body like sweet dew.

At the beginning, Madam Zhang would still deliver him the food and water, but after his coughing worsened, especially when he coughed out blood two days earlier, she started to get anxious. A man in her ex-husband's village had gotten tuberculosis, and he spread it to the whole family, so his entire family died off.



Madam Zhang was scared that Old Yu's disease would spread onto her, so she told her older son to carry him to the West Room. Every time she delivered food and water, she used a towel to cover her nose and mouth. Seeing that Old Yu had gotten so sick that he couldn't get up anymore, she thought he would die within these two days, so she stopped giving him food and water, only leaving him to die in the West Room helplessly.

Yu Xiaocao dipped the towel in cold water and wiped her grandfather's forehead, neck, and armpits in order to help lower his body temperature. Old Yu was very worried ah! He was already so old, so he didn't mind if they had just let him die. His granddaughter was still in her best years and she had learned a great amount of skills. She couldn't die because of an almost dying person! But no matter what he said, Yu Xiaocao still wasn't moved.

It would be fake if Old Yu said he wasn't touched. Adversities prove the sincerity of relationships. He had seen all of Madam Zhang's coldness and Yu Dashan's cruelty these days, and it pained his heart.

Yu Dashan was only two years older than Yu Hai. He was only seven or eight years old when he first joined their family, and Old Yu never treated him as an outsider. He never favored anyone over the other, anything Dahai and Caifeng had, Yu Dashan also had them. He fell ill because he went to save Yu Dashan. But now that he was sick, he didn't even show up. He wasn't his biological son after all. He had raised an ungrateful being all these years ah!

As for Madam Zhang, they had been married for decades! She didn't even bother to care for him when he fell sick. She just left him in the West Room indifferently, hoping that he would die faster so that she could save more food. There was an old saying: 'a day together as husband and wife means endless devotion the rest of your life'. How was Madam Zhang acting any different from someone who killed their husband? How disappointing! If he was lucky and ended up surviving this time, he cannot tolerate living with such a cruel and cold hearted woman. Or else he might get killed by that malicious woman when he was asleep.

These days, Old Yu had been thinking about his first wife. It was retribution! He knew that his first wife had been murdered by Madam Zhang, but for his children and his reputation, he opened one eye and closed the other. Now, it was his turn. Well, so be it. If he could find his first wife when he arrives at the netherworld, he would confess his sin to her. He didn't even take care of their two children! He deserved to die!

"Older Brother, why is it taking so long?" Yu Xiaocao asked in confusion as Yu Hang entered the room with a familiar set of clothing.

Yu Hang glanced at his grandfather and sighed, "Grandfather's clothes were all piled up at the corner of the courtyard and no one has been washing them for him. There are no clean clothes in the box, so I ran home and brought a set of Father's clothes here.

Old Yu sighed heavily. She just couldn't wait for him to die, could she? What was the use of washing a dead person's clothes?

While Yu Hang helped Old Yu take a bath, Yu Xiaocao killed a hen and made it into stew. She was going to use the chicken soup to make porridge for her grandfather. Madam Zhang was really cruel. Not only did she not find a doctor to treat her sick husband, but she also didn't even give him any food or water!

When Madam Zhang returned home, she saw the smoke rising from the kitchen. She thought that Madam Li was secretly cooking things to eat for herself. She quickly strode into the house with her bound feet. As soon as she entered through the door, she saw Yu Xiaocao carrying a bowl of chicken porridge. Xiaocao glanced at her indifferently and headed towards the West Room.

When she smelled the chicken stew in the air, Madam Zhang patted her thigh, "My chicken!" She hurriedly walked to her chicken pen and carefully counted the number of chickens inside twice. When she found out that she wasn't missing a chicken, she let out a sigh of relief.

After that, as if she remembered something, she ran to the kitchen and found that the basket of rice she had concealed had been touched. When she took it down to have a look, she realized that some of the white rice was missing. She was about to throw a tantrum and scold her when she realized that Yu Xiaocao had never listened to her. What's more, her weakness was in her hands!

Madam Zhang slammed the basket of white rice down on the kitchen counter. When she saw that there was still more than half a chicken remaining in the pot, she took a clay pot out and filled the remaining chicken and stew into the clay pot. She decided to bring the chicken soup for Doudou to drink when she goes to visit him in town tomorrow.

After she hid the chicken soup, Madam Zhang arrived at the door of the West Room. Old Yu had changed into a clean set of clothes and the kang bed had also been cleaned up neatly. Yu Xiaocao was currently holding a bowl and feed her grandfather food.

She used her hand to cover her mouth and nose, and strangely said, "Don't blame me for not remaining you, but your grandfather has tuberculosis. There is no cure and it's contagious. It's better if you guys hurry up and go home. Don't forget to take a bath and use mugwort to air out the clothes. In addition, you should use boiled water to heat up your clothes a few times..."

Yu Xiaocao handed the bowl of porridge to Yu Hang and stood up. She walked in front of Madam Zhang, coldly looked at her, and said, "How do you know that my grandfather has tuberculosis? Did you invite a doctor here to treat him? You aren't a doctor, so how can you diagnose him?"

Madam Zhang was frightened by her imposing manner, so she backed away two steps. She pursed her lips a few times before saying, "My neighbor from my old house contacted tuberculosis and the entire family was infected and died. The symptoms are the same as your grandfather's. They started out coughing, and then they coughed out blood. After that, they wouldn't even be able to get out of bed! It's not because I don't want to spend money to treat your grandfather, but it's because tuberculosis is incurable! No matter how much money I spend on him, it would be wasted. Why not save the money and use it to provide for my youngest son's studies?!"

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Yu Xiaocao sneered and said, "Is a human life more important or is studying more important? I don't know how younger uncle's teacher and classmates will look at you after they find out that you traded his father's life for him to be able to study."

"Don't talk nonsense! Little girl, you're too malicious! Your younger uncle can't stay in town anymore because of you. Now, you still want to slander his reputation, but he's your uncle! Are you still a person?" Madam Zhang's youngest son was her weakness, so she would never hesitate to argue with someone for him.

She recalled the scene of her grandfather as he laid in a small, black, run down room with wind leaking in, appearing as if he were waiting for death alone. Yu Xiaocao felt her anger skyrocket, "The person who tarnished younger uncle's reputation is you! Grandfather has worked himself tirelessly everyday for more than twenty years for this family. Furthermore, to save your eldest son, he got ill. Yet when he got sick, you didn't even spare some money to help him get treated. His minor illness was dragged on until it became serious, and you even threw him into a rundown house. You didn't even give him any food or water, nor did you help him change his clothes as they got that filthy! My Grandfather is your husband! You just can't wait for him to die, can you? You're a ruthless and heartless mother, and younger uncle will sooner or later be dragged down by you!"

Yu Xiaocao's voice was sharp and clear. The Yu Family's courtyard wasn't remote and desolated like their old residence. When their neighbors heard their clamor, they all stretched their necks to eavesdrop for

news. When they heard Yu Xiaocao's words, they saw how Madam Zhang's gaze had changed. This old woman was quite vicious. She'd rather watch her man die than to spend two taels of silver to get him treated.

They recalled how before Yu Xiaocao's family had split from the main branch, she also became ill. At that time, Madam Zhang also refused to give Xiaocao's father any money to get her treated. Yu Hai had to borrow money from everywhere, so that his daughter could see a doctor. They originally thought that it was because she wasn't her blood related granddaughter, so she was able to steel her heart. But now, it seemed that Madam Zhang really has a poisonous heart. It could be seen that nothing was more important than money in her heart!

When Madam Zhang heard how her neighbors were quietly gossiping about her, she angrily said, "Your grandfather has tuberculosis! There is no cure!"

"Who said my grandfather has tuberculosis? Which doctor gave you this diagnosis? Why don't you tell us? I've studied medicine and from my diagnosis, Grandfather has just received a fright and caught a cold. But the cold wasn't treated and was delayed, so it became serious! You don't even want to spend money to get Grandfather's illness diagnosed. It's not like you don't have any money in your hands. What happened to the ten taels of silver my father gave you a few days ago? That's the money my father gave to Grandfather for him to see a doctor and get medicine. Yet, you don't even want to spend a copper coin on Grandfather! Is it because my Grandfather is old now, and can't earn money for you, so you want to just kick him away?" The more angry Yu Xiaocao became, the faster she spoke, giving Madam Zhang no room to refute her claims.

"I knew you were a ruthless person, but I didn't expect your heart and lungs to be completely black too, rotten into pus! When my father was injured, Uncle Zhao had given you three hundred taels of silver he earned from selling the bear. He gave that money to you and told you to take good care of my father's leg injury. At that time, you said that there was no hope for my father, so you concealed the three hundred taels of silver that my father had used half of his life in exchange for. When we split households, you obviously had around three hundred to four hundred taels of silver, but you made a big fuss saying that you don't have any money. In the end, you only gave us some worn-out furniture."

Xiaocao paused and then continued, "When you saw that we were doing well after the split, you went to the place where we did our business in town and caused a ruckus. You made the older brother, who had moved out and split from the household, to pay the tuition for his younger brother. That was fine. My younger uncle was cheated by a scammer and wanted to walk through the back door to get into Rongxuan Academy, so you stubbornly asked us to give you five hundred taels of silver! When we split our households, you practically made us leave with nothing! Our family was injured, sick, and young. If it wasn't for Maternal Grandfather's support, we wouldn't even have a house to live in for winter! How

thick skinned are you? As soon as you reached out your hand, you asked us for five hundred taels of silver."

"Okay! It's fine if you treated my father that way because he's not your blood related son. But my grandfather is your man, he's the father of your son and the pillar of this house. You don't want to part with your money, so you just left him to die in the West Room! Are you still a human? Do you have any humanity in you at all?"

What Yu Xiaocao listed were actual situations that happened. Madam Zhang wanted to refute her, but she didn't know what to say. She could only sit on the ground, patting her thighs and cried without any tears, "Is there any more law and order? Does it make sense that someone from the younger generation would point their fingers at an elder and scold them? God, why aren't you striking her to death——"

After Yu Hang finished feeding Grandfather some porridge, he stepped out of the room, and threw the broken bowl at Madam Zhang. The bowl hit Madam Zhang's head and then shattered into pieces when it hit the ground. Yu Hang pointed at Madam Zhang and angrily said, "If God has eyes, then the first person he'll strike will be you! You should know all about the vicious things you did!"

Madam Zhang's heart became fearful because they knew a lot of her weaknesses. She lowered her head and began to bawl, as if she had been greatly wronged.

After the neighbors heard Xiaocao's accusations, how could they sympathize with her? They looked at Madam Zhang with contempt and disdain.

Yu Xiaocao said coldly, "Elder? Who is my elder? I only called you grandmother because of your relationship with my grandfather. But since you want to kill my grandfather, aren't you considered to be our enemy? Yet you still have the face to say that we should call you an elder?"

"Cao'er... go invite the village head and your eldest granduncle here... " Old Yu had recovered some of his energy after eating a bowl of shredded chicken porridge, so he allowed Yu Hang to support him to walk out here.

The neighbors couldn't help but gasp in surprise when they saw Old Yu's appearance. They haven't seen him for over ten days, how did the old man become like this? He appeared emaciated. His appearance

was haggard, and his eyes were sunken. From time to time, he would let out a fit of coughing; it was as if he might stop breathing at any moment.

In the past, Old Yu was capable and full of spirit! When he was young, he was able to support his entire family by himself. There were only a few people in Dongshan Village whose fishing techniques were comparable to Old Yu's! Madam Zhang was really malicious. It hadn't even been a month, yet she had already maltreated him to this point. Wasn't she basically trying to kill off her husband?

Yu Xiaocao moved a chair over for Old Yu to sit on. Old Yu was just about to talk, when he began to violently cough again. When he removed the hand that was covering his mouth, the glaring bloodstain on his hand was seen by everyone.

Madam Zhang refused to be defeated as she jumped up from the ground. She took a few steps to the side and cried out, "Look at it! Look at it! He's coughing up blood, if it's not tuberculosis, then what is it? Everyone beware and keep your distance from him to prevent yourself from getting infected!"

When the neighbors heard her words, the expressions on their faces changed as they quietly moved away from the courtyard.

"Madam Zhang, don't try to frighten everyone away! This won't help you cover up your evil deeds! Everyone, I have studied medicine under Grandpa You for a while. Doctor Sun from town would also give me some pointers. I can distinguish the difference between tuberculosis and a cold! If you don't believe me, you can invite a doctor over to diagnosis him, and see if he has tuberculosis or just a cold!" Yu Xiaocao fed her grandfather some warm water that was infused with mystic-stone water.

When the neighbors saw how close Yu Xiaocao was standing to Old Yu as well as her firm expression and unhesitating tone, they believed 70% of her words. That's right, Xiaocao could be considered half a doctor. After Doctor You left, if anyone had a headache or fever, they would always go to Xiaocao to get some medicine. Her medicine was effective as soon as they took it. It was even more effective than the medicine Doctor You prescribed when he was here.

People who studied medicine would never put themselves in a situation where they would risk being infected. Old Yu couldn't have tuberculosis! How dark was Madam Zhang's heart? She didn't allow people to get treated when they were ill. Instead, she forced them to drag their illness until they died! She even falsely accused someone of having tuberculosis.

"Go! Find the village chief for me, I want to divorce my wife!" Old Yu shouted loudly. He was finally able to breathe smoothly. Just that sentence from Old Yu was able to subdue both the neighbors and Madam Zhang's clamor.

Repudiating his wife? It had been several decades in Dongshan Village since someone divorced his wife. However, Madam Zhang's actions could be considered as attempted murder on her own husband. It would've been impossible for Old Yu to tolerate that. Which man would want the person sleeping next to him to wish for him to die?

Old Yu was seriously ill these past few days, but he wasn't muddle headed. If he had really gotten tuberculosis, then it would've been fine. But Madam Zhang didn't even invite a doctor over to give him a diagnosis before sentencing him to death. If he hadn't died of illness, then he would've died from starvation and from all the coughing. With his understanding of Madam Zhang, she would even kill her female cousin to reach her goals. Since she didn't succeed this time, in the future, when he couldn't work anymore and became a burden on the family, she would definitely kill him then. Why didn't he take advantage of this opportunity and break things off once and for all?

He didn't even need to ask Xiaocao to invite them. There was a busybody among his neighbors, so he already invited the village head and Old Yu's brother here. Old Yu's other brothers lived far away, so it would be difficult to invite them over upon such short notice. But the village head and Yu Lichun were both persons of virtue and reputation, so it was enough to have them as witnesses!

In one breath, Old Yu told them all about how Madam Zhang and how Yu Dashan's family had treated him. In the end, he said despondently, "Madam Zhang, after what you've done, I think that divorcing you wouldn't have been excessive. But for Yu Bo and Caidie's sake, I don't want them to have an abandoned mother. It would ruin their reputation, so let's have a peaceful separation!"

Madam Zhang knew that things couldn't be undone and since Old Yu was sick to such a point, he wouldn't be able to live for many days. Even if he didn't die, his body was too weak to do any heavy jobs, and would just become a burden soon.

Madam Zhang had her head lowered, and her entire mind was thinking about ways to fight for her own interest. There was an ominous glint in her eyes as she raised her head confidently and said, "We can have a peaceful separation, but our youngest son must follow me!"

She had devoted much of her life to nurture her youngest son, hoping that he will pass the imperial exam with a high ranking, giving her fame and glory. Seeing that her youngest son was almost able to reach her goal, how could she be willing to let him go?

"My youngest son needs money for his studies. I can't do any heavy labor or work, so the house and the money should all go to me! Your body isn't like what it was before, so you might not be able to go out fishing at the sea again even if you recovered. Our eldest son has called you father for over decades, why don't you give the family's fishing boat to him?" Madam Zhang's abacus was making clack clack clack sounds as she quickly calculated everything, making sure that all the valuables in the family would rest in her hand. She was about to make Old Yu leave this marriage empty handed!

When the village head and the neighbors heard this, they thought that Madam Zhang's approach to this was too over the top. The Yu Family's family property had all been earned by Old Yu and Yu Hai. In the end, they would both leave their own house empty handed. The way Madam Zhang handled matters was too extreme!

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Although Old Yu didn't want to rip apart the family, this last event had left a deep scar within him. Today truly was the last straw. Madam Zhang was too malicious. If he continued to live with her, he was afraid that one day he would end up losing his life to one of her unknown schemes.

However, if he steeled himself and forcefully divorced Madam Zhang, his two youngest children, Yu Bo and Yu Caidie, would also be affected. They were both of his flesh and blood. His son's scholarly career would be negatively influenced and his daughter would have no status with her in-laws anymore.

When the current emperor ascended the throne, he revamped the laws and established peaceful separation as an option. The main idea was to protect women's rights and raise their status in society. It encouraged women, who were being abused in their husband's family, to raise the possibility of separating peacefully from the marriage. Peaceful separation was something that was protected by the law.

For the sake of his two youngest children, Old Yu decided to choose to peacefully separate. However, he didn't expect Madam Zhang's greed to have no end. She wanted to take all of the Yu Family's assets with her. He knew what type of person the old woman was. Asking her to take out the money that had already reached her hands was something that even the gods couldn't do.



Old Yu had lost his will to fight and didn't want to strive for anything. He weakly shook his head and said, "I only have one request. All of the Yu Family's assets can only be inherited by the Yu Family's bloodline."

The reason why Madam Zhang was shamelessly demanding the assets, other than trying to guarantee her own income in the future, was mostly for her precious youngest son. She had a cold heart. Although Yu Dashan was also blood-related to her, he was nothing compared to Yu Bo. Her youngest son, who had been guided since childhood by her, was the most important person to her.

The paperwork for the peaceful separation was very quickly written out. Old Yu and Madam Zhang both placed their handprints on the document to seal the deal. By the time the two siblings, Yu Hai and Yu Caifeng, heard the news, everything was already done. The two siblings took their father back to the old residence and moved him into the West Courtyard, where Yu Caifeng was currently living. They then invited Doctor Sun from town over to treat him. Sure enough, as Yu Xiaocao previously said, Old Yu had inflammation in his lungs that led to him coughing up blood.

While Doctor Sun was treating the patient, Yu Lichun and some other villagers who had good relationships with Yu Family were all waiting in the West Courtyard. All of them heard Doctor Sun say that Old Yu's illness wouldn't have gotten so bad if he had been treated promptly. Old Yu's body was now weak. If they waited for another two days, he likely would have lost his life and died. Lung inflammation was quite a serious condition and eating medicine alone may not be enough. He also had to lie in bed and recuperate while eating highly nutritious foods. Doctor Sun had also said that Old Yu was getting old, so he might not be able to do much physical labor even if he became well.

Yu Lichun and the other villagers all sighed in sorrow. Everyone cursed Madam Zhang for being ruthless and having a venomous heart. A perfectly healthy man had been turned into an invalid just from delaying his care. Yu Lichun said a few comforting words to Old Yu as he wanted him to heal at ease and not have any other pressures.

Old Yu, who was now at Yu Hai's place to heal, was quite upset inside. Ever since his previous wife had passed away, this son of his had been neglected. Before they separated from the family, Yu Hai had always done the most work yet received the least. At that time, Old Yu thought that the most capable people were the ones who did the most work. It was right and just for someone to work so much for the sake of the whole family. After they split from the family, Old Yu believed Madam Zhang's words and focused all of his efforts on his son, who was studying, and his youngest daughter, who had not yet married. He almost didn't give any assets to Yu Hai.

As a father, for these years, he had truly owed his son too much. However, in the end, the son he neglected the most was the son who came through for him. Old Yu had tried to excel his entire life and now he felt he had no face left.

His mood directly influenced his recovery. Although he ate medicine and nourishing foods every day, Old Yu's illness continued to stay and he never healed.

Yu Xiaocao would always add some mystic-stone water to her grandfather's medicine when she decocted it. She was even able to save her oldest uncle from the brink of death, so how come her grandfather never seemed to get better? Yu Xiaocao noticed that Old Yu looked depressed and dead inside. As someone who had lived two lives, she concluded that her grandfather's mood was influencing his recovery.

She brought the problem up with her father and Oldest Paternal Aunt. The two siblings started to talk to their father. Yu Caifeng supported Old Yu to sit upright on the bed and covered him halfway with a blanket. As she fed him chicken noodle soup, she softly said, "Father, eat some noodles. Xiaocao made this especially for you."

"There's no point in eating anything for this body, leave the rest for the children." Old Yu had heard Doctor Sun say that even if he got better, he wouldn't be able to do work anymore. Whenever he thought of becoming a dead weight for his son and daughter, anxiety bubbled up in his heart and he couldn't keep anything down.

Yu Hai said, "Father, the children all have some. Xiaocao stewed a whole old hen and cooked enough noodles for the whole family to eat. Father, you need to recuperate at ease and don't worry about matters regarding money. Our family has planted vegetables and melons these past two years, so do you think we lack the money to feed you?"

Old Yu moaned, "Even if I get better from this illness, I'll still be a dead weight. It's better for me to die...."

"Father, why are you saying this? Are you trying to cut open my and Xiaohai's heart right now?" Yu Caifeng felt a wave of sorrow hit her after hearing her father's words. Her eye sockets slowly turned red.

Yu Hai hurriedly patted his older sister's shoulder and spoke to Old Yu, "Father, the doctor isn't necessarily completely right. It's just like my leg; didn't the doctor also say that it was hopeless ah? But aren't I perfectly fine now? This son remembers when you were young, you were not only an expert at

fishing but you were also one of the best at farming in this village. Cao'er's corn and potatoes should be ready to harvest in about a month. When that happens, we're counting on you to help us ah! This is an assignment given to us by the imperial court and we can't have any mishaps happen."

Old Yu looked at his son's right leg, which had completely recovered. His gray complexion slowly brightened up with hope. That was right! At the time, the doctor had said that Dahai's leg needed to be amputated or else he would die. Now, not only was the man perfectly fine but his leg was also completely preserved. A doctor's diagnosis was not always completely accurate ah! The doctor had said that his illness wasn't anything serious at first, only that they had waited too long to treat it. If he healed completely, perhaps he'd be able to help his son for another few years then!

"What Dahai says makes sense! Feng ah, give the bowl to me, I'll eat it myself!" Old Yu, who had recovered his will to fight, wheezed as he devoured the bowl of noodles.

The next few days, Old Yu energetically complied with his treatment and took his medicine. Yu Xiaocao also continued to provide medicinal cuisine to him as if it didn't cost any money. Old Yu ended up recovering very quickly from his illness. His body was also being slowly nourished, so it regained its strength. About half a month later, people could see the figure of Old Yu strolling along the corn fields with his hands clasped behind his back.

"Uncle Yu, you've recovered quite quickly ah!" Recently, more than a month had gone by without much rain, so the soil was quite dry. Many families who had farmland all carried poles of water along their fields to water their plants. Dongshan Village's terrain was decent, so they always had a supply of spring water from the West Mountain all year round. As long as they didn't have a drought that lasted years, they wouldn't feel the effects too much.

Old Yu grinned until his face folded like an accordion. He nodded his head, "That's right ah! My son feeds me eggs, meat, and fish every day, so how can I not recover quickly ah?"

Wang Ergou had lent his fields to Yu Hai to plant watermelons in the spring. At this time, there were newly planted sweet potatoes in the fields. After he made a lot of money with Yu Hai, Wang Ergou had become more steady and no longer needed his wife to push him. He had gone out to water the sweet potato plants on his own.

Wang Ergou smiled, "Uncle Yu, in the future, you'll be with Older Brother Dahai and you'll definitely be able to live comfortably!"

Old Yu nodded his head in approval, "Dahai and the rest of the children are all filial!"

Wang Ergou stepped forward a few steps with the buckets of water on his back as he said, "Uncle Yu, when I'm done watering all the sweet potatoes here, I'll help Brother Dahai water the corn. Your body just got better, so don't walk for too long. If you get tired, then go sit in the melon shed over there to rest."

"Okay! Go do what you need to do then! I'm going to stroll around a bit!" Ever since he was able to get out of bed, Old Yu followed the doctor's directions and exercised a bit every day. At first, he only walked around the courtyard. Afterwards, once he got more strength back, he would go into the fields to stroll around. He was able to strengthen his body as well as help his son watch over the corn fields to prevent malicious people from spoiling the crops.

Right now was the most important time for the corn growing season. The beginning of summer had been on the dryer side. In order to prevent the corn from losing output, Yu Hai, his wife, and Yu Hai's sister and brother-in-law had all been watering the corn by hand for the past couple of days.

Dongshan Village's condition during the drought was actually considered not bad. The people who had traveled from the southern parts of the country had said that the situation there was much more serious. Many brooks and streams had stopped flowing and the level of water in the lakes had gotten to an all time low. If any of the farms were able to make any harvest, it would be considered a miracle from the gods!

Yu Caifeng and Liu Hu, who had just experienced drought conditions in the northeast, were especially energetic as they irrigated the crops. Even Liu Junping worked like an adult. All of them had personally experienced the bitter conditions of a drought, so they prayed every day to the gods to bring some rain to relieve the dryness.

However, the gods didn't answer their prayers. Several days of scorching hot weather came next that intensely heated the environment. The Yu Family's corn and potatoes were doing fine as Yu Xiaocao had secretly used some mystic-stone water to irrigate them. Thus, they had above-average drought-resistant abilities and still grew vigorously. However, the families nearby, who had planted sweet potatoes, all saw the leaves on their plants slowly withering. Any water that was given to the plants evaporated almost instantaneously. The sweet potato plants still needed another month of growth before they could be harvested. With the drought raging on, the output would definitely be less than before.

That evening, Yu Hai and the entire family sat around the stone table to eat dinner. Old Yu heavily sighed and said, "These past two years have had constant disasters. There was that disastrous blizzard the year before last. Last year was slightly better, so us commoners were just about to see better days but now we have the drought this year. I don't know how many people there are that won't be able to fill their stomachs..."

Xiaocao served a bowl of nourishing ginseng astragalus pork bone soup to Old Yu. This medicinal cuisine required stewing together astragalus root, ginseng, and pork bones together to make a soup. Astragalus root strengthened the spleen and lung by making them stronger and more efficacious. This type of food was very nourishing to Old Yu's body.

Old Yu ate three meals a day with this type of medicinal cuisine. Because medicinal cuisine required both food and medicinal ingredients, Old Yu's meals alone was enough to bankrupt an ordinary family. The old man noticed the ginseng within his food and said to Yu Hai, "I don't know how long the drought this year will last for, but the price for food will definitely go up. My body is already much better, so I don't need to eat any more medicinal cuisine ah! Save some money and buy more grain for us to store here. Us commoners, as long as we have a good storage of grain, there's nothing to be worried about ah!"

Yu Xiaocao smiled as she explained on her father's behalf, "Grandfather, don't worry about money. The most important thing for you to do right now is to strengthen your body until it is hale and healthy. The herbs I use for the medicinal cuisine are mostly obtained from the mountains, so they're not worth much money. You, ah, should just relax and nourish your body. There's no need to worry about money. I can't say this for anything else, but I am positive that we are more than able to afford to eat meat, fish, and eggs every day!"

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Old Yu drank the pork bone soup as he shook his head, "Even if you have money, you shouldn't spend it like this! Save more money so you have some on hand when problems arise in the future! Oh right, Dahai, tomorrow you should go into town to buy some more grain. Judging from what I see, I don't think it is going to rain anytime soon! If the drought doesn't break, the prices of grain will definitely go up."

Yu Caifeng frowned, "It's the hottest period of the year, so it's very easy for grain to draw insects over! If we buy too much and it starts raining in a few days, won't all of the grain go rotten?"

Old Yu finished gnawing on the last pork bone in his bowl and looked at his children, "Then buy some more sorghum, wheat, and other grains like that. We can let them dry in the sun on clear days, so we won't end up losing too many!"

Yu Caifeng recalled what had happened to her family in the northeast and said in a voice full of concern, "Father, we should remind the village chief to have the villagers store more grain. Otherwise, when our family has food and they don't, all of them will come to borrow or take some and we won't be able to last a long time! If people are starving, they won't care about feelings or sensibilities!"

Last year, in the northeast, the drought was ongoing. Her family had originally had enough grain to last until spring but afterwards other people around them eyed that food. This was the reason why they had to flee their old home and rely on her maternal family to help. She didn't want her younger brother's family to have to walk down the same road.

Old Yu thought for a bit and then nodded his head, "After we're done eating, I'll go to the village chief's house and talk to him."

Yu Xiaocao was currently eating delicious boiled corn. That's right, boiled corn! In her previous life, Yu Xiaocao always bought a few ears of corn right when they became ripe. She boiled them until they were soft and tender so that when she ate them the taste of fresh corn would dominate her mouth. She just loved the first bite.

After she transmigrated over, corn hadn't reached the country yet, so she couldn't eat them even if she craved some. The young royal prince had gone to great lengths to bring corn over. After planting ten mu of corn, how could she not pick a few ears to eat to her heart's content?

She took advantage of the fact that the overseer, the young royal prince, wasn't around these past few days. Yu Xiaocao had the little divine stone promote the ripening of a few corn stalks. Today she picked over a dozen ears of corn to boil for the whole family to try.

Corn was, after all, a crop that the imperial court attached a lot of importance to. When Yu Xiaocao came back home with the harvested ears of corn, Madam Liu, who was in the kitchen cooking dinner, almost fainted at the sight. Eating corn on the sly while they were experimenting for the court was a crime worthy of beheading ah. Her daughter's courage was really sky high to be able to silently harvest a few ears of corn and bring it back home. It was too late to fix the problem, so it made Madam Liu so angry that she picked up a wooden dowel and tried to give Xiaocao a beating. Luckily, Xiaocao was agile and was able to quickly avoid suffering Madam Liu's 'evil scheme'.

When she saw Yu Xiaocao happily gnawing at the ear of corn as if she was a tiny squirrel, Madam Liu gritted her teeth and snarled, "Eating! You truly dare to stick it in your mouth and eat!! If the royal prince found out, it'd be surprising if he didn't beat you with a plank!! If this news became known to the imperial court, they might even chop off your head!"

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes in exasperation, "Aren't I just eating an ear of corn ah? Is this necessary? Even if the young royal prince was around, there are so many ears of corn in the fields, what does it matter if we eat a few ears? That being said, I've already picked them and they can't grow back. If I don't eat it, it'll all go to waste. Oldest Paternal Aunt, Oldest Paternal Uncle, Junping, you all should eat ah! If you don't eat, then I'll eat for you!"

When Yu Caifeng saw that Yu Xiaocao was at ease, the nervousness within her heart dissolved a bit. Her niece was right. Since the corn was already picked, then it might as well be eaten! She picked up an ear and gave it to her husband as she smiled, "How big is your stomach that you think you can more than a dozen ears of corn? Not afraid of blowing up?"

Liu Junping saw that both his mother and father were eating the corn, so he also picked an ear up and copied Yu Xiaocao's motions. He gnawed off a large bite. The unique delicious taste of corn slowly spread through his mouth and each soft kernel had a hint of sweetness.

It had to be said that corn that had been watered with mystic-stone water tasted a lot better than regular starchy corn. Even Little Fangping ate with relish. Yu Xiaocao reminded the little boy, "Little Pingping, you need to chew the corn carefully before you swallow ah. Otherwise, when you go to the bathroom, you'll end up pooping out the kernels you didn't chew!"

Little Fangping chewed carefully and he couldn't be bothered to reply. He nodded his head furiously to signal his assent.

Liu Yaner also loved the taste of corn. She slowly enjoyed each bite of corn in her mouth before she finally swallowed some down. She stated, "This corn is truly a high-yield crop. Just three to four corn stalks yielded enough ears to fill this huge basin. I weighed it a bit and I think a bushel of corn must be at least half a catty. Uncle, how many stalks of corn do we have per mu? How many catties of corn does that yield ah?"

Little Fangping swallowed down the corn in his mouth with a large gulp and grinned, "That's right, that's right! There's so much corn that even if we ate it everyday, we wouldn't be able to finish it all!"

Liu Junping gently knocked the little boy on the head and remarked, "You little foodie! You only think about eating!! Uncle is helping the imperial court to grow these fields of corn. If we ate them all, when the court officials come, what will we give them? You absolutely cannot tell anyone that we have eaten corn. Otherwise, the authorities will arrest you and put you in prison!"

When Little Fangping found out that eating corn could cause him to be imprisoned, he immediately stopped gnawing on his half-eaten ear of corn. He didn't know whether he should continue eating or not.

Yu Xiaocao thought the distressed expression on his face was super adorable and pinched his cheek as she said, "As long as you don't tell anyone, the authorities won't find out, so they won't imprison us! We've planted so much corn, who would notice if one or two stalks were gone? Quickly eat up, when you're done, older cousin has something else that's delicious for you!"

What Yu Xiaocao was referring to was the stalks of the corn plants. After the corn was harvested, Yu Xiaocao also had the little divine stone hasten the growth of the corn stalks. With the mystic-stone water inside the stalks, the stalks had a sweet and delicate flavor. It was even more delicious than sugar cane!

After they finished dinner, the children all held a cut off portion of corn stalk as they enjoyed the flavor. Little Fangping grinned, "Older Brother, the authorities won't catch me for eating corn stalks right? In the future, when they harvest the corn, we can cut off the corn stalks and eat it as a snack!"

"When the corn stalks are dried, they don't have any moisture anymore. If you want to eat some, you must eat it within one to two days of harvesting. Otherwise, the corn stalks are good for feeding livestock. Our family's Little Gray and horse will all have their winter rations! Corn stalks that are dried are also useful as firewood!" Yu Xiaocao introduced all of the applications that corn stalks could be used for.

Little Fangping happily remarked, "Every part of a corn plant is a treasure! In the future, we should plant more ah!"

Yu Xiaocao calculated out loud, "We planted ten mu, so we can at least get around twenty thousand catties of corn. Corn can be ground into cornmeal. Staple foods made out of corn taste a lot better than



those made out of ground millet. Furthermore, eating a lot of corn doesn't cause stomach issues like eating a lot of sweet potatoes do."

Old Yu was stunned silent and it took him a while to digest his thoughts before he said, "A mu of corn can grow up to two thousand catties? It truly is a high-yielding crop. No wonder the emperor sent the royal prince on a thousand-mile journey to the western hemisphere. If this corn can be spread throughout the country, the common people will no longer fear going hungry!!"

Yu Xiaocao sighed, "That's right ah! The emperor is truly a good ruler who cares about the people!" At the present time, this old transmigrator friend of hers was considered pretty okay. At least the man wasn't an incapable ruler. Perhaps when she finally got exposed and had to confront this rival, her ending might not be too bad!

The gnawed cobs and the corn leaves were left out to dry under the sun for an entire day. After getting dried, they were used to burn in the fire. Madam Liu only felt relieved when the corn cobs and leaves were all completely burnt away and stirred into inconspicuous ash—now no one should find out they ate some corn, right?

The drought continued. Every day the Yu Family went to the foot of the West Mountain to carry water to bring back to irrigate the corn crops. The sweltering heat and the cruel rays of the sun seemed to bake the earth until it was cooked.

On one particular day, Yu Xiaocao wore a straw hat as she helped irrigate the corn plants. The little golden kitten seemed to dart across the far-away ground near the thickets of the mountain like a bolt of lightning. It scampered over towards the fields of corn. The little divine stone's voice was full of worry with a hint of joy intertwined in, [Master, Master! Something bad is about to happen!!]

Yu Xiaocao didn't take its words to heart. Just what sort of bad event could cause it to sound so happy too?

[Master! My spiritual energy has recovered to the point where I can communicate with animals!] The little golden kitten jumped onto Yu Xiaocao's shoulders and triumphantly trumpeted its new skill to her.

"Congratulations, congratulations!" Yu Xiaocao inwardly thought, 'Isn't it a good thing that you can speak to animals now? What's bad about it?'

The little golden kitten seemed quite dissatisfied that Yu Xiaocao's words were said in such an absentminded manner. It used its claws to scratch at her cheek as it said, [Pay attention!! It's truly a bad situation!!]

"If you have something to say, say it. If you have to fart, just fart. Don't hold it for the sake of suspense, alright? Yu Xiaocao was so busy that she couldn't straighten up her back. She didn't have the time to play word games with the stone.

The little divine stone grunted in displeasure and stated, [All of the birds in the forest are flying towards the south, do you know why?]

"Flying south? It's not the time for the weather to get cold now ah? Is it because the drought is getting worse and the animals that can sense it are migrating early?" Yu Xiaocao was somewhat nervous now. After all, natural disasters were often closely followed by human disasters. Perhaps they needed to buy a larger residence in town and move the whole family there. The town had authorities there, so it shouldn't get too rowdy.

The little divine stone shook its head and replied, [No, it's worse than the drought!!]

Yu Xiaocao was now even more nervous. She picked up the little golden kitten by the scruff of its neck and shook it as she anxiously said, "Can you just spit everything out? Don't just stop halfway to get people to listen to you ah?"

The little golden kitten rolled its eyes as her antics. It turned into a golden mist, drifted through her fingers and then formed itself back into a golden kitten next to her. Yu Xiaocao looked around her like a sneaky thief to see if anyone was around her. When she saw that there was no one there, she let out a long sigh of relief. She reminded the little divine stone to not morph in broad daylight in the future. Otherwise, it might be considered a monster and get burnt at a stake!

The little divine stone rolled its eyes again at her, [Do I need you to remind me? This divine stone had long used my energy to scout the area. There are no people around us!]

Before Xiaocao could question it further, it continued in a serious tone, [I learned from that bird that there is a swarm of innumerable locusts from the south flying towards us. All of the birds are going to the south so they can eat a giant feast!]

Locusts? Oh right, she faintly remembered that swarms of locusts often followed drought, which was why there were the sayings: 'a long drought will cause a locust swarm' and 'locusts and droughts go hand in hand'. The drought conditions in the south were quite severe, so the locust swarm arose in the south.

Yu Xiaocao was no longer calm anymore. A locust swarm was absolutely not a joke. Once a plague of locusts arrived, millions of locusts would descend to the ground and devour the vegetations and trees around them. The farm crops and the surrounding forests in the mountain would all be eaten clean, and all of the people would suffer tremendously.

Locusts liked areas with water and low-lying ground, so they often gathered in dry areas to swarm towards areas that had more moisture. Dongshan Village was also an area struck by drought, so these locusts should only be passing by. However, once these locusts passed by, they would only leave the people with a devastating loss of crops.

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Yu Xiaocao looked at the not yet ready corn growing in the fields. Her eyebrows came together in a deep frown. If the plague of locusts came, then everything here would be hard-pressed to escape. The corn still needed about a month's worth of growth before it was ready to harvest. If the plants were harmed by the locusts, then their losses would be inestimable.

The family's economic damage wasn't even their first concern. The imperial courts and the young royal prince were ardently hoping for this crop of corn to go well as they only had a small subset of fields growing corn in the capital. In the future, the plan was to slowly push out this crop to the whole nation, especially the northern and northwestern parts of the country. Those areas truly needed a high-yielding crop that wasn't picky about the soil.

Now back to her family's concerns. Ten mu had all been planted with corn. If all of that was destroyed, then all the work they had done for a season would be gone! Yu Xiaocao reckoned that the emperor, whose policies had always helped the commoners, would not have their family plant these crops for the court in vain. He would very likely buy this corn back from them at a high price to be used as seeds later.

Yu Xiaocao wasn't able to guarantee anything else, but she was pretty sure that there was no one in this era who was better at raising crops than her. Although the officials in the capital had her growing

methods, this was still the first year they were growing corn. How could they compete with her years of experience with raising corn in her past life? That being said, the mystic-stone water in her hands was more effective than any other fertilizer. Corn watered by it produced large ears of corn that were incredibly delicious. Other people couldn't even dream of growing corn like hers!

The young royal prince had also said that once the bumper harvest of corn was done, he wanted to help them get a reward. The things that the emperor would give them not only would have a lot of glory attached to them, but they would also be incredibly valuable.

In short, if they encountered the locust swarm, her family's losses would be disastrous! That wouldn't work, she needed to think up an idea to contain their losses to a minimum. "Little Divine Stone, do you know when the locust swarm will arrive here?" Yu Xiaocao inhaled a deep breath and forced herself to calm down.

The little divine stone's consciousness was linked with hers so it could detect that she was feeling quite uneasy. It became serious to fit the mood, [From what the birds were telling me, they should be about two days away by flight.]

That wasn't too bad. At least they had about two days of time to think of something to do against these locusts before they arrived. Didn't the little divine stone have the ability to ripen plants faster? Starting from today, they needed to harvest however much corn they could get their hands on!

When Yu Hai came by with a bucket of water for irrigation, Yu Xiaocao quickly stepped forward to bring him over to the side. She carefully looked around and mysteriously pulled Yu Hai to a secluded area.

Yu Hai noticed that his daughter had a very serious demeanor and there were some hints of anxiety leaking out of her. He repeatedly asked, "Cao'er, what's wrong? What's going on??"

"Father, do you believe that our world has gods that warn us through our dreams?" Yu Xiaocao pretended to be extremely nervous as she quietly asked him.

Yu Hai remembered that two years ago Xiaocao had hit her head open, she had said that she had toured the underworld. Furthermore, she had even talked to beings that resembled King of Hell and the God of Wealth. Perhaps, his youngest daughter had met another god?

"I believe ah! What's going on? You dreamt of the gods?" Yu Hai nervously stared at his youngest daughter. His youngest daughter was clever beyond her age. Some of the village elders even said that she was the reincarnation of an immortal child from the heavens and thought that she wouldn't reach adulthood before the heavens would descend down and take her back. Perhaps...

"Father, when I was watering the plants earlier, I suddenly fainted and lost consciousness. The god who taught me how to plant crops and cook food suddenly appeared in front of me. The god told me some very important news!" Yu Xiaocao crafted a very believable lie. She had a sincere expression on her face that was slightly colored with some worry.

Yu Hai became more uneasy, "What news? Does the god want to take you away? Cao'er, you're Father's good daughter, please don't agree with the god taking you away ah! If you ascend to the heavens, Father and Mother will never be able to see you again in this lifetime!"

Drops of cold sweat fell off Yu Xiaocao's forehead. Her father's imagination was even more bizarre than hers. How could there be gods around? Why would she be brought up to the heavens?

[Although this space is quite deficient in spiritual energy and is lacking in resources needed for cultivation, there are still gods around. Do you really think it was a coincidence that lightning struck the owner of that carpentry store? This divine stone had negotiated with the God of Thunder and Goddess of Lightning to help us ah!] The little divine stone silently corrected her mistake within their bond.

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes in her thoughts at it, 'What do the gods existing have to do with me? In any case, I haven't seen any and I don't want to!'

After she finished her statement, she continued to ignore the little divine stone, who was repeatedly saying that there were gods around. She started to placate her father, whose eyes were turning red, "Father, I don't know why you think the gods are going to take me away, but the god didn't want to do that. He told me that in two days, there will be a plague of locusts that hasn't been seen in a hundred years descending on Dongshan Village. He wanted us to get ready."

"What?!" Although Yu Hai had never experienced a swarm of locusts, he had heard about the destruction the insects could cause. When he was a child, he had heard Grandpa Gao, who was ninety years old at the time and an elder of the village, talking about the horrible aftermath of a locust plague. That was truly a devastating scene to imagine as there was no food at all to be had ah!

Similar to Yu Xiaocao, Yu Hai's first thoughts were about the test fields of corn and potatoes that his family had. Neither of these crops were ready for harvesting. If they delayed the court's missions, then his family would naturally be punished! The imperial court might forgive them in light of the natural disaster. However, the young royal prince had traveled thousands of miles across the seas to get these seeds from the western hemisphere. He had spent so much time on these crops and almost came over to Dongshan Village every day to inspect the crops (Author's note: He actually came over to bum a meal, okay). The prince obviously cared a lot about these crops, so he would naturally be very disappointed and angry if they get spoiled. What could they do? What could they do?!

Yu Xiaocao's eyes flickered as she replied, "Father, don't worry! The god gave me a piece of magic that is able to ripen corn and potatoes early. However, this magic is only good for one time. Once we use it, it'll be gone!"

"Then what are we waiting for? Quickly use the magic on the crops and ripen them early. Our whole family will have to work harder these next two days and harvest all of the corn and potatoes!" Yu Hai lightly let out a sigh of relief when he heard his daughter's words.

Yu Xiaocao hesitated for a second before she said, "Father, do you think we should warn the other villagers about the locust plague? If they ask us where we got the news from, what should we tell them ah?"

Yu Hai clenched his jaw and replied, "Don't worry about this, I'll go tell the Village Chief!! You should go and ripen the cornfields in the middle right now. Be careful, don't let anyone see you!"

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head, "Father, don't worry! The corn stalks are so high and thick now that no one will be able to see me once I step in!"

Yu Hai watched as his daughter stepped into the cornfields and then lowered his head to think a bit. He stamped his feet and then dashed towards the village chief's residence. His youngest daughter had said that the swarm of locusts were going to arrive in about two days. Time was food, so time was the difference between living and dying ah!

When he got to the village chief's residence, Yu Hai was panting heavily as he pushed open the gate. The village chief was drinking tea inside the courtyard and looked in surprise at Yu Hai, who was puffing with a worried look on his face. The man swiftly stood up and repeatedly asked, "What's going on?"

"Village Chief, something bad is going to happen! A plague of locusts is going to descend soon!!" Yu Hai hollered out this sentence before he even caught his breath.

The village chief was startled by this and his face immediately paled, "What's going on? Plague of locusts? Dahai, this is not a joking matter!"

Yu Hai deeply inhaled a couple of breaths and organized the story within his mind. He stammered as he continued, "I was carrying water from the stream at the foot of the West Mountain and saw a snow-white elk. I wondered if I could catch it and add it to my dinner tonight. Who knew that by the time I caught up with it halfway up the mountain, I met an old man whose entire head of hair and beard had gone white. This elk was his mount. The old man told me that, in two days, there will be a disaster arriving in our Tanggu District. I inquired further and he only mysteriously said that this disaster was a plague of locusts that hadn't been seen for a hundred years. He couldn't bear to see the people suffer so he sent his elk to lure me over to tell me this news. Chief, do you think this is reliable?"

Sure enough, Yu Hai was related to Yu Xiaocao. They were both experts at crafting believable stories.

The village chief anxiously circled around the courtyard a few times. He knew what type of person Yu Hai was. He wasn't someone who would come up with something like this to joke around. If what that old man said was true, then when the swarm of locusts arrived, all of their spring crops would disappear into thin air!

The land around Dongshan Village was not very suitable for growing crops as it was relatively infertile sandy dirt. However, many villagers had fields they tended. For the most part, they usually grew high-yielding crops like sweet potatoes. Right now, it was about a month before the sweet potatoes would be ready for harvest. They didn't have the time to wait anymore; everyone needed to harvest what they could now!

The village chief sounded the alarm bell and gathered the entire village over. He repeated the 'meeting' that Yu Hai had to all of the villagers. Finally, he added, "Given Yu Hai's personality and character, I believe that he is definitely not trying to trick the entire village. As for what that old man passed along, I rather believe it than not! If things are truly going to happen as he warned, we need to harvest everything we can now. Although we'll lose a great amount of harvest from our sweet potatoes, it's still better than having the locusts eat it all! Right now it's up to your own decisions. If you want to believe it, then harvest early. If you don't, then do as you please! Everyone needs to consider this carefully. When a locust plague passes by, not a single grain is left behind. A whole half a year's worth of work will disappear into thin air!"

Currently, Yu Hai's credibility with the other villagers was second only to the village chief's. The vast majority of people living in Dongshan Village voiced that they believed him and immediately went home to get their farming equipment to start harvesting their sweet potatoes. The village chief also repeatedly reminded everyone that when harvesting the sweet potatoes they should also remember to dig up sweet potato shoots. In a pinch, the shoots could also be eaten in times of famine.

The families that didn't have farmland all rushed around harvesting whatever other vegetables they had planted in their gardens and stored them in their cellars. The people who had straw houses also hurried about gathering up more straw. Once the locusts passed over, they needed to repair their houses.

There were also some villagers who didn't quite believe the news and wanted to wait and see. For example, Madam Zhang's vegetable garden still had many vegetables that were immature. If she harvested them now, she would lose a lot of potential food. If the old man that Yu Hai met was not reliable, then wouldn't all those vegetable shoots go to waste?

Madam Zhang, who was banking on her luck, only harvested the vegetables that were ready. She still left half of her garden full of vegetable shoots. Yu Dashan suggested that they should go into town and buy some grain in case the locusts did come. That way, when the grain prices inevitably rose after the disaster, they would still have something.

Madam Zhang, on the other hand, felt that the current weather was too hot and would make it easy for the grain to attract pests. Thus, she only gave Yu Dashan enough money to buy a hundred catties of coarse grains in town.

There were a few others who were like Madam Zhang and hoped for the best. All of these people felt their hearts ache at the thought of harvesting their premature sweet potatoes and vegetables.

Naturally, there were also people who had more malicious thoughts. They envied Yu Hai's abilities and consequently hated him. They thought he was spewing nonsense and didn't place his warning into their hearts.

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The Yu Family didn't have the time to consider those people's reactions. Everyone wished they had eight arms at this moment.



Ever since Old Yu heard that a plague of locusts was coming, all he could talk about was grain, grain, and grain! Although he had not completely recovered from his illness, he insisted on going with Yu Hai on the family's horse cart to and from town to procure grain that everyone liked to eat. All of the storage rooms and cellars in the house had been crammed full with coarse and fine grain. In addition, they even secretly stored a few hundred catties of grain in their house in town.

Under Yu Xiaocao's leadership, Liu Hu and all of the family members, began to harvest all of the corn that was already ripe. Baskets full of corn were then transported back to the house on the donkey cart.

Yu Xiaocao carefully avoided other people and promoted the ripening of the corn using the little divine stone's power. The little divine stone's current capabilities allowed it to ripen one mu of corn every hour. She worked until night fell before all ten mu of corn was completely ripened. Following that, the one mu of potatoes was also ripened.

Liu Hu abandoned his half-built house and took his family of five to work crazily within the corn fields. Other than Little Fangping, who had just turned six, all of the other members were well versed with hard work. Even Liu Yaner, who wasn't much older than Xiaocao, was harvesting corn and managed to do more than half of what older people could do.

Madam Liu sent Yu Hang to go to the docks to bring Yu Xiaolian, who was doing business there, back. While he was there, he also passed on the news that the old immortal had told Yu Hai to his two maternal aunts. Madam Han didn't even bother to help Xiaolian clean up the stall once she heard the news. She hurriedly rushed back home. The Liu Family had planted more than a dozen mu of sweet potatoes and they needed to harvest them all that night. Currently, the sweet potatoes were only the size of a person's fist but harvesting some was still better than having no harvest due to the locusts.

Madam Liu and her two daughters rushed to harvest all of the vegetables in their courtyard. The ones they couldn't finish now could be used to make dried vegetables. Recovering after a locust swarm was a slow process. After the locusts passed, there would be a long period of time when there wouldn't be any vegetables to eat. Even if the vegetables they harvested rotted, it was still better than leaving them for the locusts to eat! That being said, with the mystic-stone water on hand, the freshness of the vegetables could be preserved for a period of time.

The father-son pair, Old Yu and Yu Hai, worked unrelentlessly in the corn and potato fields with the rest of them after they crammed all of their storerooms full of grain. Because they were afraid that the locusts might come early, the Yu Family didn't even rest at night and chopped corn stalks the entire time. The family had two work animals along with some rabbits and other pets. All of them required fodder. Thus, they also needed to transport all of the corn stalks back home and store them.

Like this, everyone worked without stopping for the next two days and nights in order to store all of the crops in the fields back at home. Even the recently planted sweet potato seedlings were also pulled up. Luckily, the Yu Family's residence had been enlarged during the last set of renovations and they had many rooms. The two wings of the courtyard had both been used to store grain and food. All of the vegetables that were harvested from the vegetable garden at home filled up an entire room. Everyone made sure to lock all of the rooms very tightly and they even used mud to fill in any cracks in the door and window sills. Once everything was in its place and ready, the Yu Family members, who had all worked their hearts out for the past two days, were finally able to close their eyes and go to sleep.

There was a clamor of news in the village on the morning of the third day. Yu Xiaocao and her family all came out to see what was going on and saw a sheet of dark gray clouds from the south roiling forward as it covered the sky. The villagers often saw dark clouds. However, this was the first time they saw dark clouds such as these, which almost touched the ground.

As the dark gray clouds got closer and closer, someone in the village hollered, "Locusts! Countless locusts! Quickly, quickly harvest any grain or vegetables that hasn't been taken already!!"

For the past two days, some of the villagers, who were counting on their luck, only harvested a portion of their sweet potatoes. Furthermore, nothing had happened for the past two days so it allowed some people to relax further. There were also some villagers, who had harvested all of their crops, who started to have complaints within their hearts. They grumbled that if the news about the plague of locusts were false, then it would have harmed them from harvesting more crops in the future.

Now, when those people who had those doubts saw the panicky expressions of their other villagers, they rejoiced that they had listened to the words of the village chief and Yu Hai and had harvested everything they could. As for the villagers who didn't listen, all of them regretted their actions deeply. Even if they wanted to harvest what they could now, how could their speed compare to the speed of the flying locusts? The insects would all be there before they could even get to the fields.

It was truly a disaster that hadn't been seen in a hundred years. The swarm of locusts covered the entire sky and formed an impenetrable wall. The countless army of locusts flew as they pursued the 'three gone' policies—eat until it's gone, gnaw until it's gone, and bite until it's gone. Every bit of vegetation that could be devoured was not spared as the insects passed. Even a layer of tree bark was gnawed off from the trees. As for the more tender saplings, they also could not escape the damage from the evil locusts. The only thing left on the saplings were pitiful little trunks that could barely support themselves.

The main forces of the locusts very quickly arrived at Dongshan Village. The swarm descended onto the old elm tree at the mouth of the village and the tree was immediately engulfed by what looked like a dull brown layer. Locusts crawled all over the trunk, branches and leaves of the tree. The sound of their nibbling rustled and pricked the villagers' ears.

The whole village was soon engulfed by the locusts. They covered the ground, the houses, the farming tools...the whole area was carpeted with a layer of insects. Even the air above the ground was still swarming with flying locusts. If a person stepped outside at this point, just a single step could smash more than a dozen locusts underfoot. People needed to use clothing to wrap their heads when they went outside as the feeling of locusts striking their bare skin was not a pleasant sensation.

The villagers who hadn't harvested all of their crops before all started to cry loud howls filled with remorse. In a split second, almost all of their crops had been covered by countless locusts. By the time they tried to harvest them, all that was left would be some pathetic roots in the ground.

What was to be done? In the future, these villagers were all facing the endless suffering from lack of food and debt. Yu Xiaocao looked at their expressions full of despair and couldn't help but shout, "Locusts can also be eaten! Catch as much as you can and you can use salt to pickle them. That way you'll have something to eat!!"

All of the villagers suddenly realized that everyone in their childhoods had roasted grasshoppers to eat. When they were roasted to a golden color, the grasshoppers were quite savory and delicious. Locusts were the same ah! Thus, the entire village mobilized. Some used bamboo baskets, some used burlap sacks, and some used fishing nets to hold all of the insects they could catch.

Yu Xiaocao's family's courtyard still had some half-rotten vegetable leaves in the fields, so they had attracted quite a bit of locusts over. Countless locusts crawled on the ground as the vegetable leaves disappeared at an astonishing speed.

Liu Fangping was so wrapped up under clothing that only his two eyes peeped out. He courageously stepped out and caught a locust in each hand. He stuffed them into the sack his older brother held. Everyone else in the Yu Family also started moving. They all had a sack in one hand as they swiftly caught the insects and stuffed them in.

The ground crawled with them and the sky buzzed with activity. There were too many locusts in the area. If there was anyone who had claustrophobia, he or she would have long fainted over. Yu Xiaocao,

who had more courage than the usual person, had goosebumps all over her body at the sight of the numerous locusts.

When Madam Liu saw that her youngest daughter's hairs were all standing up straight on her arms, she thought that she was frightened and said, "Cao'er, if you're afraid, then stay in the room. Our family doesn't need to catch the locusts to add to our rations."

The Yu Family had stockpiled a lot of grain and food, so why were they still catching the insects? Old Yu had seen just how many insects were congregated in the area. After calculating, he had a hunch that the disaster wouldn't go by that quickly. Even if the vast majority of insects left, there would still be a large number of locusts left in the village. It was possible that for a long period of time, no one would be able to plant any more crops. Since the locusts could be eaten, why not capture some more and relieve the burden on their stored grain!

When the Yu Family heard Old Yu's thoughts, all of them expressed their approval and started to work hard to catch locusts. Yu Xiaocao took out a fishing net and started swinging it through the areas that were concentrated with insects. In one pass, she was able to catch more than a dozen locusts in the net. She shook her catch into a sack that Xiaolian was holding open and then continued to swing the net. Although she didn't have to physically touch the insects, she still caught locusts at about the same speed as everyone else. With the both of them cooperating together, they quickly managed to fill a whole bag of locusts. After tying the bag closed, Xiaolian picked up another burlap sack that was about as long as half an adult's height and the two of them started working together again.

After pretty much all of the vegetation in the vicinity of Dongshan Village was devoured clean, the vast majority of locusts flew up and towards the north. All of the villagers could finally see the sky after a day had passed. Although there were fewer locusts flying around, there were still a decent amount of them still crawling on the ground.

The villagers came out of their homes and solemnly looked at the devastation in front of them. All greenery had been stripped throughout the village and the West Mountain looked bald and barren now. The people who had lost all of their crops and vegetables in the swarm kneeled on the ground and wailed in sorrow. However, what was the point in crying? No one had a surplus of grain lying around. With an uncertain future in front of them, who knew how long the disaster would last? No one would give out food, which could be the difference between life and death for their own family, to help others now.

At this point, the village chief stood up and looked at the villagers who were crying bitterly. He sighed deeply and said, "Don't be too sad! Our Dongshan Village is supported by the ocean. As long as you work

hard, it's unlikely that you'll starve! You should all quickly go into town and see if you can buy any grain to bring home. I'm afraid that the price of grain will only go up and not down in the future!"

All of the wailing villagers immediately stopped crying and took out every last bit of copper they had saved up at home. The Yu Family selflessly took out their donkey and horse carts to help their fellow villagers get to town.

However, the vast majority of grain stores were closed by the time they got to town. Although the Zhou Family's two grain stores were still open, their prices were quite excessively high, about five times the price as it was a few days ago. This wasn't considered the most excessive price hike. There were some blackhearted merchants who had raised their prices to up to ten times the price of before.

This was nothing more than hitting someone when they were already down. The villagers, who already had a shortage of grain at home, now couldn't buy as much grain because the prices had gone up a lot. Some people wanted to wait and come back in a few days to buy food. However, with the village chief reminding them, they didn't have any choice but to grit their teeth and exchange their money for grain.

The village chief said, "Who knows when this locust swarm will finally disappear and we can plant crops in the ground again. The grain prices will only rise in the next half year and not go down."

The villagers had a good amount of faith in the village chief. Thus, in front of the Zhou Family's grain store, there was a long line of people waiting. The villagers from Dongshan Village dispiritedly lined up at the end. All of the people in line had depressed expressions and it was dead silent. The atmosphere was stifling.

By the time the Dongshan villagers got to the end of the line, a smartly-dressed servant muttered something into the store's shopkeeper's ear. The shopkeeper frowned and then hollered at the remaining line, "There's no more grain left. Everyone should leave now and go somewhere else to buy, okay? We don't have any grain left!"

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The village head, who had already queued up till the side of the door, extended his head to peer inside the grain shop, only to see that the grains inside had been piled to the height of half a wall. How could they say there was no grain?

At this moment, the shop assistant of the grain shop took up the door plank, ready to close up shop. The village head panicked and was about to debate with the shopkeeper when Yu Hai walked over, lightly waving at him and whispered, "Village Head, it's no use even if you argue with the shopkeeper. You've also seen the man who had come just now—it was only because of something he said to the shopkeeper that made him announce that there was no more grain left. Even the shopkeeper cannot defy the wishes of his superiors."

The shopkeeper of the grain shop, hearing bits and pieces of their conversation, nodded his head at Yu Hai. He thought that this man looked somewhat familiar, and only realized a few moments later that this seemed to be Yu Hai of Dongshan Village. Any servant of any importance in the employ of the Zhou Family knew, the Yu Family of Dongshan Village was extremely trusted and respected by the future head of the Zhou Family.

Although the shopkeeper had no idea why the future head of the family would hold a mere farmer in such high regard, but as a servant of the Zhou Family, being able to judge and act according to the master's wishes was the way to attain the master's favor. The servant, who told him to shut their doors and raise the prices by half the next day just now, was currently the favorite of the eldest young master from the first branch. Even though Eldest Young Master was in charge of the Zhou Family's grain shops, but in the end, it was still Third Young Master from the second branch who was going to be the future head of the family. Naturally, the shopkeeper of the grain shop would have his own considerations in his heart.

The shopkeeper of the grain shop walked over with a smile and said to Yu Hai, "Is this Brother Yu Hai?"

Seeing Yu Hai nod, he continued, "May we speak elsewhere?"

At this time, the doors of the Zhou Family's grain shop had already been closed shut. The queue in front of the door made some ruckus for a while, but they had all slowly scattered in time. The ten or so villagers from Dongshan Village, who had come to buy grain, were the only ones left. They looked helplessly at the village head, waiting for his word.

The shopkeeper of the grain shop called Yu Hai to the side and asked with a smile, "Brother Yu Hai came to buy grain?"

What else could he have come for? Could he have been queueing in front of a grain shop to buy meat? Yu Hai nodded his head and said, "Yes, the village is suffering from a locust plague, so there is no harvest. We want to stock up on some grain and see if we can last through this famine."

The shopkeeper of the grain shop thought for a moment, and then said, "Brother Yu Hai, how much grain are you planning to buy? As you can see, our eldest young master had given out orders to close the shop and raise the price. But if it's Brother Yu Hai who wants to buy, I'll sell it to you at today's price—take it as making a new friend!"

Eldest Young Master didn't know how much grain the shop sold today anyways, so he could do a favor for Yu Hai today and make plans for his future. The shopkeeper of the grain shop had capabilities, but he lacked opportunities. If he could get a chance to appear in front of the future head of the family due to Yu Hai, with his capabilities, he definitely wouldn't be a mere shopkeeper of a small grain shop in the future.

Yu Hai appeared conflicted upon hearing this. He shook his head slowly and said, "There are thirty or so families in my village who are all waiting for grain to survive! As fellow villagers, I will not be selfish and care only for my own, disregarding the survival of others!"

The shopkeeper of the grain shop hesitated for a while before giving Yu Hai a thumbs up, saying, "Brother Yu Hai is indeed an affectionate and righteous man. How much grain does your village need? If it is within one thousand catties, your brother, I, can still make the decision!"

Yu Hai was elated, and he eagerly exclaimed, "Really? That's excellent! I'll go and ask the village head how much grain we need!"

Yu Hai ran over and pulled the village head to the side, quietly telling him that the shopkeeper agreed to sell Dongshan Village one thousand catties of grain in private. The villagers who came to buy grain this time were mostly the ones who didn't have much grain in their store and also had no harvest. There was a total of thirteen families.

Coarse grains usually cost about five copper coins per catty, but the Zhou Family grain shop was currently selling them for five times the usual price, which was twenty-five copper coins per catty. These ten or so families had all saved a small fortune from selling spoon worms and oysters, so even though they were quite distressed about spending the money, all of them were still capable of buying grain. Once they heard that the shop was raising its prices, they wanted to buy more grain back. However, the shopkeeper only supplied them a thousand catties of grain for them to distribute among themselves. What should they do?

In the end, the village head made the decision for everyone to distribute according to the headcount in each family. The families with more family members would get a little bit more, while smaller households would get less grain. On average, each family would obtain at least seventy to eighty catties of grain. If they wanted to buy more at this price, it would be impossible! Tomorrow? The price of grains would increase considerably.

A thousand catties of grain were all loaded onto the horse and donkey carts from Dongshan Village. Yu Hai also symbolically bought about a hundred catties of fine grain, totaling up to a cost of nearly five taels. Yu Hai silently thought that the grain shops was really a profitable business. When he came to purchase two days ago, a hundred catties of fine grain only cost about one tael, and now he had gratuitously spent five times the original price!

When he reached home, everyone in the family were busy with work. The hot weather made it unsuitable for the locusts to be left out for too long, so the adults and children worked together to preserve the locusts that they managed to catch.

With Madam Liu and Oldest Aunt's help, Yu Xiaocao made grasshopper sauce. Locusts were more commonly known as grasshoppers and had a delectable texture—delicious like prawns. It also contained protein and all kinds of amino acids that would be beneficial towards the human body if eaten.

In her past life, she had tried making grasshopper sauce according to a recipe she found on the internet. It was delicious and went well with meals. She let her mother and oldest aunt put the locusts into water to drown them before cleaning. After that, they plucked off the wings because the wings could not be chopped into smaller pieces and would affect the overall texture.

Then, using the ratio of one catty of locusts against one and a half ounce of salt, they pickled the locusts, letting them ferment naturally. In about twenty days, the sauce would be ready for consumption. Another type of sauce would be fresh fried grasshopper sauce, which was made by stir-frying crushed deep-fried grasshoppers with minced meat, spring onions and chili together. When it was ready, it would be even more fragrant than fried shrimp.

However, anyone would be able to consume fermented grasshopper sauce, but if it was fresh fried grasshopper sauce, it was easy to get an allergic reaction to grasshoppers. So, Yu Xiaocao cleaned eight earthen jars, which could hold ten catties each, and made a lot of fermented grasshopper sauce.

At noontime, none of them had the mood to cook anything else, so Yu Xiaocao made cold grasshopper sauce. After deep-frying the locusts until they were cooked, she diced them and added some crushed,



fried peanuts and parsley. After that, she drizzled hot oil on top and mixed it well with salt, sugar and chili oil.

She also made stir-fried grasshopper sauce. First, she cut fatty meat into small pieces and diced the cleaned and dried grasshoppers into small pieces. She continued to mince them together until the mixture had a mashed texture. She placed the wok over a big fire and heated the cooking oil. Pouring in the minced grasshopper, she stir-fried it until it was fragrant, slightly dry, and had oil seeping out of the fatty meat. Then, she mixed it thoroughly with the minced grasshopper. After throwing in some spring onions, she stir-fried until evenly mixed, and added salt and MSG, along with some chili flakes. The dish was done after a few more light tosses.

The fragrant smell of the grasshopper sauce was carried by the wind to the Zhou Family not so far away. Zhou Shanhu, who could not hold her composure, rushed towards them and asked, "Xiaocao, what tasty food are you making now? It's so fragrant that I'm almost drooling!"

Yu Xiaocao told her the recipe for making grasshopper sauce. Once Zhou Shanhu heard that this fragrance was actually made from locusts, she immediately became excited, "Wait for a moment, Xiaocao, I'll call my mother over. You have to tell her!"

Zhou Shanhu was older than Yu Xiaocao by a year and didn't have much talent in cooking, and thus belonged in the 'able to cook edible rice' category. If she were to learn how to make grasshopper sauce, she would probably not be able to produce even one plate of grasshopper sauce by the next day.

After teaching Auntie Zhou the method of making grasshopper sauce, Yu Xiaocao carried on with making a lot of pancakes using mixed grain, so lunch was pancake wrapped grasshopper sauce.

Fortunately, no one in the Yu Family was allergic to locusts. The fried grasshopper was extremely crispy and exceptionally delicious when eaten. Combined with the distinct fragrance of grains in the pancakes, the entire family enjoyed the meal thoroughly. Little Shitou who came back from town, ate four big pancakes in one go and still wasn't sated, "Fangping, let's go to the foot of the West Mountains later and catch more locusts back. That way, we'll be able to eat grasshopper sauce all year long!"

Liu Yaner glanced at him and said, "With such hot weather, the locusts can hardly last for more than a few days. Even if we made all of them into grasshopper sauce, we also don't have so many earthen jars."

Little Fangping spoke childishly, "It's alright. We can make grilled locusts, deep-fried locusts, stir-fried locusts, stewed locusts... We can have a locust feast every day! Older Cousin's cooking skills are so good that whatever she makes will definitely taste good!"

Everyone pictured the sight of the table filled with locusts, which had turned into an insect feast, and they couldn't help but shudder. However, Little Shitou smiled mysteriously and said, "Don't forget that we have the skills to make ice. We can make an icehouse at home to freeze the locusts. This way, even when the locust plague has passed, we can just take them out from the icehouse and make grasshopper sauce whenever we want to eat it. Isn't that great?"

"Icehouse? That's something only a wealthy master can afford!" Liu Hu mumbled to himself.

At these times, wealthy folk were mostly collected ice from the river during winter and then stored them in their cellars. It was apparent how much manpower and material resources was needed for that. Nevertheless, Yu Xiaocao knew the technique to crafting ice, so even if the weather was hot, she could still produce ice.

No sooner said than done! In the afternoon, Yu Xiaocao specially took charge of making the ice, and Yu Hai led the entire family to carve out the cellar. By nighttime, the first batch of ice had already been made successfully. Quite a lot of ice was made in this batch, and it managed to fill up one third of the cellar. The people who were in charge of collecting the locusts in the afternoon also sent their first batch of locusts into the icehouse.

Yu Caifeng worriedly looked at the ice inside the cellar, "The ice won't all melt in just one night, right?"

Yu Xiaocao was full of confidence as she replied, "Don't worry, Oldest Aunt! There's a lot of ice in store, so the temperature of the icehouse will be low—they won't melt too fast. Besides, our cellar was dug quite deep underground, and the heat insulation was done nicely; there's definitely no problem in transforming it into an icehouse! Even if a portion of it melted today, we'll just make more to replenish it tomorrow. The icehouse of wealthy masters could be used from winter till summer, so how could ours not last for even one night?"

With the existence of an icehouse, they started worrying that the locusts that had been caught would rot. All throughout the night, under Yu Caifeng and Madam Liu's lead, they started tidying up the locusts that had been caught, and only after storing them into the icehouse did they feel relieved. All members of the Yu Family had gone through difficult times before, and especially as this was a year of disasters, they were extremely zealous towards food.

After working hard for the entire night, everyone except the few children, who didn't stay up for the night shift, were tired and dazed. They returned to their own rooms to make up for some sleep after having breakfast. Little Shitou excitedly took bags and baskets and brought Liu Fangping to catch grasshoppers.

Fields of Gold Chapter 279 - Follow-up

When the locust plague struck, he was studying in the academy in town. The swarming locusts had really scared him, and he wanted to go home to have a look, but he was stopped by the teachers of the academy. As such, he had no experience catching locusts.

Now, the large army of locusts had already passed, but there were still a lot of locusts left that were eating any edible dried grass and roots. They would actually still be able to catch an abundance of locusts in one day if they went! Little Shitou was excited and eager to experience the joy of catching locusts.

Seeing the two excited fellows, Yu Xiaocao also picked up a bag and followed behind them towards the forest at the foot of the West Mountain. Throughout the entire journey, the path that was supposed to be surrounded by lush greenery was now left with the bald stems and roots of plants, and the dirt-brown color of the soil. There were still green or yellowish-brown locusts enjoying the stems and roots of the plants that were left.

The West Mountain that was so full of life before was now akin to an old man showing signs of exhaustion. All the leaves of the forest that were edible had been consumed, leaving behind only stark branches, making it feel as though it were winter solstice. Among the once dense shrubbery, locusts were overflowing, still unceasingly eating; if one were to listen carefully, one could faintly hear the rustling.

“Let's catch locusts here, there's no need to go further into the woods!” Yu Xiaocao felt uneasy seeing the forest like this. If all the plants had already been eaten by the locusts, then the herbivores would most probably die of starvation. If the little herbivores died, then would the savage carnivores come down from the mountains to attack the villagers? Yu Xiaocao let out a long sigh, hoping that her worries were for nothing!

The two little fellows, Little Shitou and Liu Fangping, had already thrown themselves into the bushes, immediately pocketing any locusts that they caught. Naturally, when locusts came into contact with humans, they would hop or fly away, so catching them was a little difficult. However, the two boys had a lot of experience catching grasshoppers, so even though their speed in catching the insects wasn't as fast as when the locust plague first hit, they still managed to catch a few catties within two hours!

“Hare! Hare!!” After Liu Fangping rushed into a bush, a lithe, gray figure immediately leapt out and quickly escaped. The little boy chased after it but lost sight of it after a few steps, so he returned unhappily, pouting.

Little Shitou laughed heartily, “Little Fangping, how could your legs outrun a rabbit? I'll tell you, my second elder sister is the master of trapping hares. If you're craving rabbit meat, you can ask her to help you trap a few to bring home.”

Liu Fangping's bright eyes sparkled with joy and eagerness and he rushed towards Yu Xiaocao, “Is it true, Second Older Sister? You know how to trap hares?”

This past half year, Liu Fangping had been eating and sleeping well and having fun every day under his uncle's and aunt's care, so he had long since lost his original emaciation. Yu Xiaocao pinched his plump cheeks, smiling, “I know, but it's not as fantastic as how your Brother Shitou had described. Don't cry if we don't catch some!”

Liu Fangping wagged his 'tail' and ran around Yu Xiaocao in circles, saying eagerly, “I won't! What do you need, Second Older Sister, I'll go back and bring it here!”

Like magic, Yu Xiaocao procured a rope from her pocket and chose a dense bush to set her trap. In order to not disappoint the two children, she also dripped a few drops of mystic-stone water around the dried grass.

“Just like this, it's done?” Liu Fangping asked disbelievingly as he circled back and looked at the simple rope trap on the ground.

Yu Xiaocao patted his little head and said, “The rope trap is set, but it's hard to tell whether or not a hare would pass-by as it all depends on luck. Let's go and continue catching your locusts!”

Yu Xiaocao set a total of five rope traps. Approaching noontime, the two children had already caught half a big bag of locusts, and impatiently ran towards their older (cousin) sister's side with the same hopeful and excited looks on their faces.

Yu Xiaocao playfully used her hands that were stained with the juices that the locusts spat out to wipe the two brats' faces at the same time. Then, without waiting for Little Shitou to complain, she waved her arm, "Let's go! Let's collect the rope traps!"

Among the five traps, three were empty, and the remaining two both caught something. One was a live hare, while the other was a wild chicken. Looking at the hare that was so thin it was only skin and bones, the sense of foreboding became even stronger in Yu Xiaocao.

At noon, the two brats thoroughly enjoyed the little meat that was on the hare and wild pheasant even more than red braised meat because they felt like they caught them together with older sister (older cousin). Yu Xiaocao also shared her worries to the rest of the family.

Yu Hai's thick eyebrows furrowed. The Yu Family's old home was built at the base of the mountains, and it was only a couple kilometers from the West Mountain. If there really were ravenous wild animals coming down from the mountains, the first few families that they would rush towards would be the ones that lived at the foot of the mountains.

After lunch, Yu Hai found the Qian Family and Zhou Family who lived nearby and told them about Xiaocao's worries. The two families immediately began to panic, and Qian Fugui, Qian Wen's father, looked at Yu Hai, saying, "Brother Dahai, among the three of us, only you know how to hunt, so we will follow whatever that you say!"

Yu Hai expressed his opinions to the two of them, saying, "I think we should take preventive measures. We should dig trapping pits near our courtyard walls and the empty land around us, so we are prepared when the wild animals come. Fortunately, our courtyard walls are higher, so the wild animals may not be able to jump across even if they came. The only thing we need to do is to guard the main door! I'm planning to visit town this afternoon to buy some hunting gear and distribute them among our three families. We'll start digging the trapping pits tonight, what do you think?"

Qian Fugui and Zhou Danian had nothing to oppose, and, after a discussion, the two of them said, "We will have to trouble Brother Dahai in the afternoon. As our courtyard walls aren't as sturdy as yours, we'll have to renovate it this afternoon."

While Yu Hai was busy discussing how to guard against wild animals, Yu Xiaocao was preparing to go to the secret spot to observe the conditions. Little Shitou insisted on following her once he found out about it, and Yu Xiaocao could only helplessly bring along this little tail.

Who would expect that they would be seen by Liu Fangping when they were heading out? Once he heard that they were heading into the mountains, he jumped up and down eagerly telling them to bring him along. No matter how much Yu Xiaocao tried to explain the dangers of the forest, the little brat still did not listen. He even said, "If you can go, why can't I? Older Cousin, if you don't bring me along, I'll cry!" Fine, he even resorted to threatening her!

Yu Xiaocao was forced to bring along two little burdens as she traversed the familiar forest. Most of the shrubbery was already gone thanks to the locusts, leaving, at the most, pitiful stems and roots, which made walking much easier for the three children.

Two hours later, the three of them arrived at the mouth of a pitch-black cave. Little Fangping clutched tightly onto the corner of the shirt of his older cousin, speaking fearfully, "Second Older Cousin, there wouldn't be a man-eating beast inside the cave, right?"

Little Shitou wanted to frighten him, "Of course! How could there not be one? The last time I came with Second Older Sister, we even encountered a massive and imposing wolf!"

Little Fangping's voice trembled as he asked, "Then...how did you escape from right below the wolf's snout? Didn't you get hurt?"

Little Shitou teased him as a coward, continuing, "At that time, the wolf wasn't hungry. It left after my second sister fed it some water! Therefore, don't run around carelessly, or else beware that a big, gray wolf will eat you!"

Liu Fangping nodded his head obediently, vowing, "I'll be good and follow beside Second Older Cousin, I won't go anywhere else!"

At both sides of the cave there were smaller openings. Little Shitou once explored inside them--some openings could only fit one or two people, while others were really big and able to contain a couple hundred people without a problem. Little Shitou triumphantly shared his experience at exploration with his little cousin whoa was only a little more than a month younger than him, and Liu Fangping marvelled jealously once in a while.

"Second...Second Older Sister, what's that green light from over there? A will-o'-the-wisp?" Liu Fangping looked in the direction that Little Shitou pointed in, only to see that there was a pair of green lights

slowly approaching them. It frightened him so he hid behind Yu Xiaocao, only daring to peek his head out and watch the green fluorescence in fear.

“Little wolf, is that you?” Yu Xiaocao called out at the fluorescence anxiously. The green light paused for a moment. Then, it sped towards their direction.

Liu Fangping let out a scream, “Coming, it's coming! Second Older Sister, let's run!”

As the green fluorescence got closer, Little Shitou recognized the gray wolf and tossed away the rock that he had grabbed for self-defense, turning back to comfort Little Fangping, “Don't be afraid, this is the big, gray wolf I've told you about. It won't bite!”

Liu Fangping now saw clearly the gray wolf in front of him that was even taller than him, and fearfully said, “You said that last time, it didn't eat you because it wasn't hungry. Who knows if it's hungry now?”

The gray wolf had already stopped two steps away from them, observing them curiously with its head tilted. It seemed to have recognized Yu Xiaocao upon seeing her, as its tail, which drooped behind him, slightly swung left and right and it took slow and graceful steps towards her. Liu Fangping got so scared he shrieked, and the gray wolf stopped in its steps, turning to observe him cautiously.

However, Yu Xiaocao went up to it, lightly patting the gray wolf's head, smiling, “Little wolf, why are you here in the cave? Is it to welcome us?”

The gray wolf looked at her longingly as it licked her palm. Yu Xiaocao poured two drops of mystic-stone water from a porcelain bottle which the gray wolf quickly licked clean.

“It's true, this big, gray wolf really doesn't bite!” Just now he was so terrified, but now, he looked at the little wolf in surprise, asking Yu Xiaocao, “Second Older Sister, can I pet it?”

Little Shitou deliberately tried to scare him, “No! Little wolf wouldn't even let me touch it, moreover you! You mustn't outstretch your hand, or beware your hand will be chomped off!”

Hearing this, Liu Fangping hurriedly hid his hands behind his back, nervously watching the gray wolf.

Sunlight shone through an opening from the top of the cave so the cave wasn't dark. Yu Xiaocao silently, smilingly watched as her little brother teased her little cousin. She patted the little wolf and was about to head towards the valley when she felt a tug at the corner of her clothes.

Originally, Yu Xiaocao thought it was Little Fangping, but she turned her head and found that it was in fact the gray wolf who was biting the edge of her clothes. She was surprised, so she asked, "What is it, little wolf? What is the matter?"

The gray wolf turned and headed towards another opening. After a few steps, it whisked back and looked at Yu Xiaocao who had not moved, as though asking, "Why are you not following me?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 280 - Wolf Cubs

Holding her younger brothers in each of her hands, Yu Xiaocao followed the gray wolf into the dark cave. Fortunately, in the past few years, her eyesight had been strengthened by the mystic-stone water that she added to their drinking, cooking, and bathing water. Although the cave was very dark, she could still vaguely see in the pitch dark.

As she walked, she reminded her two younger brothers about any loose stones under their feet. After stumbling for about a quarter of an hour, the gray wolf that was leading the way stopped.

Yu Xiaocao blinked and tried to look at where the gray wolf was standing. There was a smaller hole there, and it was about half of a person tall. If she and her brother ducked, they would be able to fit. There were indistinct sounds of small animals coming from it.

The gray wolf went in and took a small black animal out, putting it beside Xiaocao's feet. Xiaocao squatted down to see that it was a pure black wolf cub. Xiaocao looked at the gray wolf's belly in surprise, "You gave birth to a pup? It doesn't look like you!"

The gray wolf's blue-green eyes flashed with scorn, 'I'm male. Male!' He then turned his back and went back over to the hole and picked up a lure white wolf cub in his mouth. With one black and the other white, either of them looked like him!

"What do you mean by this? Are you showing off your children?" Yu Xiaocao guessed.



The gray wolf looked at her with contempt and shook his head. Yu Xiaocao thought of her worries that morning. Was this a gray wolf with intelligence, foreseeing the difficulties of hunting in the future, so he wanted her to help raise the cubs?

"Little wolf... Do you want me to raise the cubs?" Yu Xiaocao stared at the gray wolf's eyes as she asked, placing emphasis on each word.

The gray wolf looked lovingly at the two pups and nodded slowly. The mother of the wolf cubs went hunting a few days ago and never came back. She must've met an unfortunate end. The wolf cubs were crying due to hunger. The little cubs were too young to eat the prey that the gray wolf brought back, and they only survived till now by licking the blood remains.

Without their mother's milk, the blood of the prey wasn't enough to feed the two cubs. The gray wolf could only watch as his children became more and more weak, unable to do anything. He didn't expect that he would meet the human who gave him the good-tasting liquid from before. After drinking those drops of water, his physical fitness had improved drastically and his wounds healed faster. After gaining intelligence, his intuition told him that this female human would be able to help him save the life of his two cubs.

"Second Sister, if you have something to say, can we wait until we get out of here? It's too dark here, so Little Fangping is afraid!" Little Shitou didn't say he was afraid, pushing it on to Liu Fangping instead.

Liu Fangping, who hadn't been able to see for a while, was also afraid and said, "Yeah, yeah! It's too dark, which makes it quite terrifying!"

Yu Xiaocao picked up the two weak wolf cubs and said to her two younger brothers, "Grab onto my clothes and don't get lost. You too, Little Wolf, follow me!"

After walking for half an hour, three humans, one wolf, and two wolf cubs walked out of the cave and arrived at Yu Xiaocao's secret base—the hidden valley. The valley wasn't spared by the locust plague. The originally brilliant flowers were completely gone, and the scene of verdant green trees was worse than when she came in the winter. The green vegetation had been eaten up, only leaving uneven branches and roots. The hideous ground was exposed with protruding stones. Fortunately, the small stream was still running.

The two little fellows, who were finally able to see again, saw the two puppies in their elder sister's hands and excitedly surrounded her, "Second Sister, where did you get these puppies? They're so cute! Let me carry one!"

Liu Fangping jumped up and reached with his small hands. He screamed, "Me too! I want to, too!" However, he was frightened by the gray wolf protectively baring his teeth. So, he obediently stood to the side and stared at the 'little white dog' in Yu Xiaocao's hands.

Yu Xiaocao looked down at the two cubs that probably weren't even one month old. They were so thin that she could see their ribs. The cubs' eyes were open. The black one had pure blue eyes, like a clear and transparent sapphire. The white one's eyes were taupe like a shining opal. The two little ones lay in her arms obediently and looked at her with two pairs of cute and trusting big eyes. This was because she had the same smell as their father.

The two wolf cubs were too weak. They were motionless in her arms and didn't even have the energy to look up. Had she come by any later, these two little guys would've been in a perilous situation.

Yu Xiaocao took the two pups over to the stream. She dropped a drop of mystic-stone water into the palm of her hand, diluted it with the stream water, and held it next to their mouths. Mystic-stone water was more tempting than their mother's milk. The two wolf pups, who hadn't eaten for a long time, instinctively licked the mystic-stone water. The mystic-stone water was quickly licked up. Yu Xiaocao didn't give them more because the wolf cubs were too small and weak to bear so much spiritual energy. If they drank too much, then it would be counterproductive!

While she was feeding them mystic-stone water, the gray wolf sat beside Yu Xiaocao and watched the two wolf cubs drink the water with loving eyes. His throat moved, but he resisted the temptation of the mystic-stone water.

Little Shitou and Liu Fangping sat beside Yu Xiaocao. Little Shitou looked at the thin appearance of the two wolf cubs and worried whether they could support them. Seeing the wolf cubs seemed unsatisfied as they licked their mouths after drinking the water, Little Shitou said, "Second Sister, are the puppies hungry? I'll catch some fish and roast them! "

The unique little white fish in the stream were tender and delicious. No matter if it was roasted or stewed in the soup, Shitou liked them. This time, since he came with his second sister to the secret base, he had purposely brought an earthenware jar and prepared to catch some small fish.

Yu Xiaocao looked at him mischievously and said, "Ok! If you can catch them!"

Little Shitou was eager to try but he thought of his past embarrassment when trying to catch the little fish. He squatted down and acted like a spoiled child, "I can't catch them, but don't we still have you, Second Sister? Second Sister, I'll hold the puppies for you while you go catch the fish. Make sure to catch more."

Yu Xiaocao carefully handed over the two wolf cubs to her younger brother. The gray wolf didn't make any radical responses, but he followed Little Shitou step by step, staring at his children without blinking.

Xiaocao caught several grasshoppers from the grass and pinched them into sections. She sprinkled a few drops of mystic-stone water on them, and then she placed the sections of the grasshopper on the edge of the stream. "Second Older Cousin, are you making bait? Are the little fish going to take the bait? What if they don't eat the grasshopper?" Liu Fangping curiously asked.

"Just wait and see if the little fish will take the bait!" Shortly after the grasshopper parts were put into the stream, a group of small white fish came. Each one was only the size of a palm and their bodies were long and thin, similar to the shape of a willow leaf.

Liu Fangping excitedly reached out his hands to catch the fish and shouted, "Fish! Fish! Quick, Second Older Cousin! Quickly catch the little fish!"

Yu Xiaocao smiled at his effort to catch the fish and said, "Slow down! Don't fall into the water. Let's wait a little longer. When more fish gathers over, we can use the net to catch them."

Yes, it was not easy for them to come to the secret base, so the siblings were well prepared. More and more small white fish gathered over. They squeezed together in the stream and appeared like white flowers. Under the sunlight, they shined with pearl-like luster. Liu Fangping picked up his net impatiently and reached out toward the area with the most fish. With one scoop, more than a dozen small fish were caught.

Liu Fangping happily put the fish into the earthen pot and said, "These fishes are so stupid ah. They didn't even hide when the net went down! Maybe there's no natural enemy in the valley for them, and thus it's too peaceful?"

"If it wasn't for the bait made by Second elder sister, do you think the fish would hide or not? I've tried before, it's lucky to catch one or two in an hour!" Little Shitou pouted and said to himself.

'Without the bait made by Second Sister, do you think the fish would hide or not? I've tried before. It's considered lucky to be able to catch one or two in an hour!' Little Shitou pouted and thought.

However, Little Shitou didn't say what he had in mind. He knew that there were many secrets surrounding his second sister. His intuition told him that if these secrets got out, it would be detrimental for his second sister. Therefore, at a young age, he buried the secrets in his heart to protect his favorite sister.

Two children, one was holding the pups and watching, while the other was happily fishing for small fish. Seeing that there was no danger nearby, Yu Xiaocao took a stroll along the stream. Many of the flowers that once bloomed were now all bare poles.

She remembered that her godmother said that many of them were precious species. What a pity! Yu Xiaocao sprinkled the diluted mystic-stone water on the roots of some of the flowers and wondered if they would grow out next year. She had planned to dig up a batch and sell them in the prefectural city, or ask her godparents to help sell them in the capital, to make a small profit!

The valley wasn't very big, so she had returned in less than half an hour. The valley was surrounded by mountains with only one secret entrance to the outside world. It was a good place to use as a refuge. If there ever was a war or something in the future, this place would be a paradise!

Yu Xiaocao was amused by her own thoughts. In this peaceful and prosperous age, people lived and worked in contentment. There was no war. Even if there was war, it would start in the borders. If it got to Dongshan Village, then the Great Ming Dynasty could be considered doomed. The Great Ming Dynasty's army was strong, and they had many outstanding generals. Thus, there shouldn't be any wars for the next few decades.

Yu Xiaocao would've never thought that her random thoughts and speculations would become a reality in the near future. This valley would become the greatest thing that protected the people of Dongshan Village. This shall be recounted later.

After Liu Fangping filled the earthen jar, which was capable of holding ten catties of wine, with small fish, the three of them bid farewell to the gray wolf. They went through the cave and crossed the forest, returning home at the foot of the West Mountain.

On the way down the mountain, they met the craftsmen, who were building the mountain villa. More than half of Prince Jing's mountain manor had been built, but as a result of the locust plague, they were forced to stop work. The craftsmen were worried about the situation of the disasters at their homes and didn't want to stay in the West Mountain.

A few days ago, Royal Prince Yang returned to the capital and had taken Princess Consort Jing with him. The steward, who supervised the construction of the mountain manor at the West Mountain, had to go back to the capital in person to report the halt of the construction to his master.

Yet, the far-off capital was also plagued by locusts. The surrounding farmland had been affected by the swarm of locusts. However, compared to Dongshan village, where there wasn't a single blade of grass left, it was still pretty good. At most, the crop yield would be reduced.