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Zhu Junyang came back fatigued from the experimental plot of a field on the outskirts of the capital. He dusted off the dirt on his body and took out a moon-white daily robe from his wardrobe. Head Steward Liu requested to enter the room from outside, and, when he got permission, he hurriedly entered.

"Master, I've heard that Tanggu Town is in the disaster area of the locust plague. After the locusts went through, there wasn't any grass or crops left..." Head Steward Liu reported while carefully watching his master's reaction.

Zhu Junyang stopped getting dressed; his face had become serious and his forehead was wrinkled. Head Steward Liu suddenly felt that there was a pressure spreading from the top of his head, and a suffocating oppressiveness was aimed at him. He bowed lower and buried his head as deep as he could.

"In other words, Dongshan Village's ten mu of corn that's about to be harvested is going to yield nothing?" Zhu Junyang's first thoughts were not of whether the corn seeds would be able to be recovered but whether if the girl with big eyes would cry broken heartedly in despair at this serious blow.

When they were in Tanggu Town, Head Steward Liu and his master were busy running between Tanggu Town and Dongshan Village. His master had great expectations and hopes for that corn, and he had watched the corn seedlings grow with his own eyes as it sprouted, grew taller, and matured...Miss Yu had said that the corn would be ready in the next few days and she would cook some for the master to try. Who would have thought that such a big disaster would happen once the master came back to the capital. It seemed like Miss Yu's promise wouldn't be fulfilled this year.

"Master, what happened to the corn is quite a pity but it's already happened. Don't be upset about it! Aren't there still some seeds in the storehouse? Just plant them again next year!" Head Steward Liu couldn't help but open his mouth to comfort his master after he saw that the prince was silent for a long time.

Zhu Junyang slowly put on his clothes. Head Steward hurriedly went forward to help his master fasten his belt and tidied up his clothes for him. Zhu Junyang continued to be silent for a long time before he finally said, "Dongshan Village is in the disaster zone. What's the current price of food?"

Head Steward Liu was glad he had asked this question when he was inquiring about the situation. He hurriedly answered, "It's said that when it first started, with the exception of the Zhou Family whose grain prices increased by not even five copper coins per catty, the other prices increased by ten copper coins per catty. Currently, it has already risen by one hundred copper coins and a limit had been placed on quantity bought. The price of white rice and noodles are even more outrageous. One or two silver taels can only buy two catties... The reserves of grains in many of the grain shops aren't able to keep up. It's estimated that in the near future, the price will rise exponentially... "

"In order to grow corn and watermelon in the Yu Family's fields, not one mu of grain was planted in the spring. They all depended on buying grain to eat! That lass only cares about money, how would she be willing to spend that much money to buy grain? There are so many people in their family; have they run out of food yet?" Zhu Junyang said to himself in a low voice.

Thinking of the thin figure with skinny arms and legs, Zhu Junyang's frown became more prominent. The next time he went to Dongshan Village, would he see a famine refugee who was as thin as a stick?

"Head Steward Liu, transport two carts of grain from the estate to the Yu Family of Dongshan Village first. Just tell them that I'm going over in a few days and that they don't need to worry or feel guilty about the corn. No one can stop a disaster. Tell the county magistrate of Tanggu Town to maintain order in Tanggu Town and the surrounding villages. The imperial court will issue disaster relief as soon as possible. Speaking of the food supply, the people just need to try to hold on. The food for disaster relief will arrive soon. In addition, let Fang Xun start the fleet to go south and purchase food immediately. As for money, use my private savings first!" Famine was often accompanied by riots, and the Yu family were considered rich by people in Dongshan Village. If there was chaos then they would be the first ones to suffer!

Head Steward Liu hesitantly looked at his master. The imperial court hadn't said anything, yet the master ordered the fleet to go purchase food supplies from the south. Wouldn't that arise suspicions from the top that he was trying to buy the hearts of the people?

Zhu Junyang took one glance at Head Steward Liu and knew what he was worried about. He waved his hand at him and said, "Go ahead and follow my orders. I'll go into the palace!"

In the imperial study, Jianwen Emperor called all the ministers to discuss the matter of disaster relief. After several years of recuperation and development, although there were minor disasters every year, Jiangnan, as the Ming Dynasty's bread basket, had good weather and the national treasury was full. This locust disaster occurred mostly in the coastal areas, with a wide area and serious repercussions. It also happened right before the spring harvest, making it impossible for people to take precautions!

The head eunuch came quietly to Jianwen Emperor's side and whispered in his ear, "Emperor, Royal Prince Yang requests for an audience!"

Zhu Junfan waved his hand and said, "Let him in!"

"This subject would like to go to Tanggu Town for disaster relief, I hope Your Imperial Majesty can approve this!" Zhu Junyang's face was cold, but his eyes, although cold, showed deep concern.

"Ah, Junyang! The corn in Dongshan Village can be harvested in about half a month, right? It's better for you to go there and see for yourself how much corn the Yu Family have collected. Pass on my decree, just say that even if corn isn't harvested, their family still has a meritorious service." Zhu Junfan lamented.

The worries in Zhu Junyang's eyes receded a bit and he continued on to ask, "This subject also would like to ask to send the fleet to support the disaster relief!"

For the sake of the citizens of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Junfan didn't refuse. With a stroke of his brush, he threw an imperial edict at Zhu Junyang and said, "Agreed, Royal Prince Yang will be appointed as the Minister of Disaster Relief and will be responsible for the national treasury's millions of relief fund. Seeing this edict is the same as seeing us in person. No one can delay the disaster relief for any reason, otherwise, immediate decapitation!"

"This subject receives the decree!" Zhu Junyang bravely walked out of the imperial study holding the bright yellow imperial edict.

All the ministers looked at Royal Prince Yang's quickly disappearing figure. It seemed a bit more elegant. They all inwardly sighed, 'The younger generation will surpass the older generation.' Those that were jealous, who really hated how much the emperor favored Royal Prince Yang, hoped that he would screw up the disaster relief.

In the imperial court, the tides were changing and the young seventeen year old Royal Prince Yang had become the emperor's favorite. It had only been half a year since he came back from overseas, and he had already been entrusted with an important task! It seemed that they should focus on making connections him! Soon people began to earnestly pull to make a connection with Royal Prince Yang.

Royal Prince Yang was cold and indifferent to everyone? That didn't matter, wasn't his father Imperial Prince Jing? As long as they could make friends with Prince Jing's estate, then nothing can go wrong! Royal Prince Yang was going to immediately leave the capital to deal with the disaster relief, and they wouldn't be able to find his shadow? That was a small matter, hadn't Princess Consort Jing already returned to the capital? Their wives connections were still very useful!

At this time, the royal prince didn't know or want to know about any of these events. He transferred a batch of grain from his estate and personally led a team of imperial bodyguards to escort the food to Tanggu Town.

After receiving the imperial edict, the fleet left for Jiangnan under the command and leadership of Fang Xun on the same day to purchase food for disaster relief. Fang Xun had followed Royal Prince Yang to the western hemisphere. This journey not only opened his eyes to the world, but it also promoted his rank. He was promoted from a strong cavalry guard of the fifth rank to a commander of the fourth rank, rising two ranks at once. Although he encountered many risks at sea, Fang Xun also had a taste of receiving wealth and many benefits by following Royal Prince Yang.

As soon as he heard Royal Prince Yang was in charge of the disaster relief and that he was appointed to purchase the food for the disaster relief by the recommendations of the prince, he felt deeply moved and naturally gave a hundred and twenty percent of his effort to carry out his appointed mission. He was ready to live up to Royal Prince Yang's trust and recommendation by making some achievements!

Royal Prince Yang escorted two carts of grain. On the way to Tanggu Town, he met many refugees. Fortunately, the wagons containing the grain were disguised as vehicles containing coal and were protected by strong bodyguards. Thus, they avoided unnecessary complications.

In order to avoid a delay, the prince ordered them to pass the prefectural city and go straight to Tanggu Town. Three days later, the wagons transporting the grains didn't enter the town and turned onto the official road to Dongshan Village.

When the party arrived at Dongshan Village, they arrived just in time for dinner. Looking from afar, he could see smoke curling up from the kitchen chimneys. Zhu Junyang saw that the situations in Dongshan Village were better than that of the other villages they passed along the way, since they were still able to cook. Thinking that the villagers must've saved some money from selling seafood and, along with the ocean, they should still be able to find food, his heavy heart suddenly became lighter.

Due to the locust disaster, Rongxuan Academy had a holiday break. Little Shitou, who was bored at home, took Liu Fangping with him to go up the mountain to catch locusts or down to the sea to pick seafood. He also took the time to review the tasks assigned by the teacher, so his days were busy and full of life.

"Brother Shitou! A group of official soldiers seems to be heading toward our home! " Liu Fangping shouted after seeing the party dressed as bodyguards when he was looking up from having caught a locust and put it in a cloth bag.

Little Shitou straightened, squinted at the group, and worriedly said, "It seems that the Young Royal Prince is walking at the front. I don't know if we will get punished for harvesting the corn early. "

"But, if we didn't harvest them in advance then they would've been all eaten by locusts! We hurriedly harvested so much corn, so we should be rewarded!" Liu Fangping hurriedly followed up, thinking of the scene of them harvesting day and night for two days. During that time, he had also done his best to do a part. Although he couldn't do any large tasks, he still made himself useful by doing small errands.

Little Shitou wasn't in the mood to catch locusts anymore. "Let's head home and have a look!" He said to Little Fangping as he took the bags.

The official soldiers led by Zhu Junyang had come to the Yu Family's house under the curious and timid looks of the villagers. In the shack outside of the Yu Family's house gates, the purchase of marine products was still going on. There was a long line in front of the shed. Yu Hang and Yu Jiang were busy weighing and settling accounts.

When he saw that official soldiers had stopped in front of his family's door, Yu Hang looked up and stopped working. He went up with his uncle to greet them.

Zhu Junyang got off the horse's back and threw the reins to the manservant beside him. He nodded to them and said, "No need for the ceremony." He raised his feet and walked toward the inner courtyard without any welcome.

Those who were selling seafood were mostly the people of Dongshan Village. When the locust disaster came, each family had suffered some losses. Fortunately, they only stopped work on the wharf for two days before recovering to normal. A part of the younger labor force went to the docks to find work.

More and more villagers were now leading their families to dig for sandworms and pick oysters. This meant that they at least had some income every day. The price of grain had risen again and their savings were dwindling. Every villager had to plan for the future.

There were so many people who came from other villages to sell seafood to the Yu Family. Seeing the formation being led by Prince Yang, they all asked in a low voice, "Who is this? He looks more imposing than the rich young masters in town..."

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"Shhh—be quiet. Don't let those imperial bodyguards hear you!" Most of the villagers of Dongshan Village could recognize Royal Prince Yang. In a low voice, they proudly explained to the people around them, "This noble man is His Highness the Royal Prince. He is a true member of the imperial family. If you offend him, you will be executed!"

When the villager, who came from another village, heard this, he quickly shrunk his head and hid in the crowd. He didn't dare to say another word. A villager, who had a decent relationship with the Yu Family, asked Yu Jiang in a low voice, "Jiang'zi, I heard that your family harvested the corn in advance. Will it affect the yield? Will the royal prince be angry at Dahai's family because of this?"

Yu Jiang looked anxiously at the guards in front of the courtyard. He shook his head and worriedly said, "I don't know either! The royal prince has always thought highly of my second brother's family. The corn grew very well before the disaster, moreover, it wasn't a human error. So, there shouldn't be any major problems, right?"

Zhu Junyang walked into the courtyard and was shocked by the glistening yellow and dazzling corn cobs. The Yu Family's yard was originally very large. The place where they used to grow vegetables had been cleared up and filled with corn cobs for drying. The corn kernels were all plump, and they were bigger and brighter than the kernels that he brought back from abroad.

The Yu Family were currently sitting around a table with smiles on their faces as they happily chatted and rubbed off the corn kernels. Yu Xiaocao was also among them, and her smile was as dazzling as the summer sun. With her small snow-white hands, she was holding corn cob without any kernels and another corn cob. She rubbed them against each other, and the golden kernels fell into the basket in front of her.

It seemed as if the heavy boulder that Zhu Junyang had within his heart when he came over had completely disappeared now. He turned his gaze from the dazzling little girl to the corn drying in the yard. He noticed several small animals frolicking around the corn, chasing locusts that occasionally

landed on top. There were many dead locusts in the gaps between the corn cobs. Were they all killed by these cats or dogs? Not only were the members of the Yu Family capable, but they also raised outstanding little animals. Wait, wasn't that a roe deer? Weren't roe deer herbivores? Why was it chasing after locusts like a cat or dog?

"Eh? Young Royal Prince, you returned from the capital?" Yu Xiaocao looked up and saw Zhu Junyang strolling in the courtyard, so she greeted him warmly. The rest of the Yu Family also quickly came forward to welcome the royal prince.

Zhu Junyang said, "Don't stand on ceremony," and told them to continue doing what they needed to do. He had Yu Xiaocao stay behind and casually asked, "When did you start raising two more puppies? They look like a mixture of wolves and dogs..."

Yu Xiaocao naturally wouldn't tell him that Little Black and Little White were purebred wolves. She shrugged her shoulders and said, "I found them in the forest a few days ago. At that time, the two little fellows had just opened their eyes and looked very pitiful. They are also living beings, so I took them home to raise."

Zhu Junyang looked at her and expressionlessly said, "It seems like this prince's worries are unnecessary! When there's a natural disaster, other people would want to kill all their pets, for fear of wasting food. You, on the other hand, bring animals home. Are you afraid that you have too much food at home and don't have anywhere to throw them?"

Yu Xiaocao, who had long been used to his cold face, replied with a grin, "How much can two little puppies eat? The little fellows learned to catch locusts to eat by themselves. They even knew that they should pick locusts with seeds in their stomach. They're so smart! Young Royal Prince, how's the situation in the capital?"

Zhu Junyang thought of the corn leaves that had been bitten and filled with holes in the experimental fields. He sighed and said, "The locust plague isn't that serious in the capital, but it's still a disaster! The corn is at the important stage of grouting. The drought and locust plague will definitely reduce the yield... Your family's corn wasn't affected by the swarm of locusts?"

Yu Xiaocao improved the explanation that her father gave to the village head and told Royal Prince Yang, "When my father was getting water from the mountains to water the fields, he encountered a fortune teller, who claimed to be a half-immortal. He predicted that there would be a disaster in two days, but he didn't say what kind of disaster it would be. We saw that the corn was almost ready to be harvested,

so if there really was a disaster, we would have all worked in vain. With the mindset that it was better to believe it was true, we worked day and night and reaped all the corn. Fortunately, we usually took good care of them. After a few days of drying, it seems that there isn't a very serious drop in the output of corn!"

Zhu Junyang didn't ask about the so-called half-immortal. Looking at her with approval, he slowly nodded and said, "You guys did the right thing! A slight reduction in output is better than no harvest at all! What about the potatoes? Were they also quickly harvested?"

"Yes, they are reaped! They're all in the east wing-room!" Yu Xiaocao led the way to the east wing-room. The windows in the Yu Residence were all made of glass. There were many windows in each room, so it wasn't dim inside after opening the door.

Zhu Junyang saw a pile of potatoes inside, and the smallest was about the size of an adult's fist. A trace of emotion appeared on his originally expressionless face, "This prince remembers that we only planted one mu of potatoes, right? There can be such a big harvest in one mu of land?"

Yu Xiaocao snickered unceasingly in her heart and thought, 'Is this considered a lot? We also secretly stored a lot in the cellar of the west courtyard!' However, she appeared serious as she nodded and said, "Yes! Potatoes are quite productive. There were at least five to six thousand catties in one mu of land."

Head Steward Liu, who followed behind his master, was so stunned that he couldn't close his mouth. A harvest of over five thousand catties in one mu of land? It was even more high yielding than sweet potatoes? Moreover, they were planted in sandy land that wasn't very fertile. If they were planted in fertile land, wouldn't the yield be even higher? If the emperor found out, he would definitely be very pleased, right? Over the years, the emperor had always been searching for high-yielding crops so that the people could fill their stomachs and live a prosperous and contented life. With the high-yielding potatoes and corn drying in the yard, the emperor's wish should have been fulfilled.

Zhu Junyang bent down and picked up a palm-sized potato. He carefully examined it, and then asked, "Do you know the methods of eating potatoes? Do we just cook it like sweet potatoes?"

Yu Xiaocao thought about it and answered in a vague manner, "I think so? But potatoes don't have much taste. It has a very plain flavor, so it's better to dip it in salt or sugar. However, during times of disasters, it's enough to satisfy our hunger. Also, unlike sweet potatoes, eating too much won't cause heartburn."

"How do you know? Did you secretly taste it?" Zhu Junyang gently glanced at her with his charming phoenix eyes, but there wasn't any sense of blame at all.

Yu Xiaocao laughed hollowly and said, "While digging out the potatoes, quite a few of them were damaged. We were afraid that they would go bad, so we tried making a few dishes with the potatoes. It tasted quite good. Young Royal Prince, should I prepare a potato feast for you for lunch?"

"At least you still have a heart!" Zhu Junyang looked at the room full of potatoes with a faint trace of a smile in his eyes. He looked at Yu Xiaocao and said, "This prince will make the decision and give one-tenth of the potatoes in this room to your family. It's up to you how you want to eat them! You don't need to sneak around!"

"May Young Royal Prince live for ten thousand years——" As soon as Yu Xiaocao shouted, her mouth was covered by Head Steward Liu, who came out from nowhere. The expression on Royal Prince Yang's face also abruptly changed.

In a flustered and exasperated manner, Head Steward Liu cried in a low voice, "Do you want to kill our Royal Prince? How can you casually say words such as 'long live'? If someone heard it and wants to accuse our master of treason, would you be able to take responsibility?"

Yu Xiaocao remembered now that 'long live' could only be used for the emperor during ancient times. It wasn't a synonym for cheering like in her previous life. She also realized the severity of this matter. Her eyes were red, and tears welled up in her eyes, "Young Royal Prince, I didn't do it on purpose. I was so happy that I didn't know what I was saying! What should I do? I'm just an ordinary commoner, so it doesn't matter if I die. But will this cause trouble for Young Royal Prince?"

Zhu Junyang looked outside. Yu Xiaocao's voice wasn't very loud earlier. Based on the response of the members of the Yu Family, who were rubbing off corn kernels in the yard, it seemed like they didn't notice the incident here. The entrance of the courtyard was far away, and the imperial bodyguards guarding outside were all his trusted subordinates. He signaled Head Steward Liu with his eyes, telling him to check around the area to see if there was anyone else around.

Head Steward Liu glared at Yu Xiaocao like he wanted to eat her, and then he took his order and left.

Zhu Junyang looked at Yu Xiaocao, who was so scared that all color had drained from her face. He unconsciously softened the expression on his face, and his words of reproach also turned into comfort, "This prince believes that it was unintentional. In the future, you must be more careful when speaking. Not everyone is as forgiving as this prince! If you said such treacherous words in the capital, all your family's properties will be confiscated, and your entire family will be beheaded!"

With tears flowing down her face, Yu Xiaocao nodded, sniffled her nose, and said, "I understand! In the future, I won't mention that phrase again!"

Zhu Junyang seldom saw her being as obedient as a rabbit. Usually, when he said one word, she would readily refute him with several words. When faced with a pitiful and obedient Yu Xiaocao, the cold-faced Young Royal Prince was actually in the mood to joke with her, "It's not that you can't mention it, but it depends on who you are addressing. If you see the emperor, you can still say that phrase."

Yu Xiaocao's tears hadn't dried up, but she started arguing with him again, "I'm just an ordinary commoner, so how can I have the chance to see the emperor? You're the most honorable person who I have ever met... No, I think I have cooked for the emperor emeritus when he traveled incognito in the past!"

Zhu Junyang remembered his imperial grandfather, who would mention delicious food in every three words, and didn't know what to say. Last time, when he returned to the capital, his imperial grandfather had specially visited him to ask for the pig head meat and pig ear ribbons made by the little lass of the Yu Family. He also said that the ones made by the capital's Zhenxiu Restaurant wasn't authentic, and only the ones made by Yu Xiaocao suited his taste.

When he heard that he didn't bring any back because of the hot weather, his foodie imperial grandfather clamored about going to Dongshan Village. He said that he hadn't eaten the meals of a peasant family cooked by the little lass of the Yu Family in a long time and really missed it. In the end, he finally stopped after his older cousin, the emperor, tried his best to persuade him and made a promise to 'find an opportunity to bring the little lass of the Yu Family to the capital to cook a table of delicious dishes for him'.

Imperial Grandfather was getting old, so the emperor was afraid that his body couldn't withstand him travelling all over the country. Thus, he didn't want him to get exhausted from running around and had him stay and relax in the imperial palace.

However, his imperial grandfather insisted, "Life lies in movement!" He could never stay still for a moment, which caused all his imperial children and grandchildren to be worried all the time. He heard that a few days ago, if the emperor hadn't noticed in time, his imperial grandfather would have ran to the borders to do some military drills with General Zhao.

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Yu Xiaocao handed a peeler to him. With a potato in her left hand and a scraper in her right hand, she demonstrated to him and then said with a smile, "Just scrape the potato skin like this. We're depending on you for the potato feast at noon ah!"

Madam Liu, who came to see if they needed help, cried out in surprise, "This child, how can you let His Highness the Royal Prince work?"

What shocked Head Steward Liu the most was that his master didn't say a word and swiftly peeled a big potato with the peeler in his hands, making it clean and smooth. He even showed it to Miss Yu with a proud expression, "Look! This prince scraped it faster than you! Would your clumsy little hands be capable with a knife? You're probably just good with a cooking ladle!"

Head Steward Liu covered his face, 'My dear lord ah, what is there to show off with a potato peeler?' However, he was very pleased and happy that his master was able to show his child-like side. With her innocence and sincerity, Miss Yu allowed his master to wholeheartedly relax, and even his temperament became much more easy-going.

Imperial Prince Jing, who had also noticed this, had specially called him to his study and asked if something special happened to his master in Dongshan Village. When Prince Jing found out that Master's change was due to a little peasant girl, who was only ten, he didn't know whether he should laugh or cry as he shook his head, "It's fate ah! Perhaps it's because Yang'er is the youngest in the family and doesn't have any younger siblings, so he treated the little girl as someone who was weak and needed protection, right?"

When Head Steward Liu came out of the study, he heard Imperial Prince Jing whispering to himself, "Mhm... Meijuan's (Prince Jing's pet name for Princess Consort Jing) body has gotten much better. Is it time to give Yang'er a younger brother or sister?"

Head Steward Liu nearly tripped over his own feet. Did his master change only because Miss Yu was younger than him and needed protection? Among the young girls accompanying the noble madams in the capital, there were many who were younger than his master, but why didn't he see his master even look at them? Last time, the young ten year old daughter of the senior official of the Supreme Court

wanted to get closer to his master, but she ended up crying after being scared by his gaze. How come he didn't see his master treating her more tenderly?

Compared with the girls in the capital who boasted about being noble young ladies, always put on airs, and had fake smiles on their faces, Miss Yu possessed the innocence, naturality, sincerity, and kindness that they lacked! Perhaps the thing that his master wanted to get close to were these qualities that Miss Yu had?

Head Steward Liu put away his thoughts. He wanted to take the potato from his master's hands, but Zhu Junyang evaded him.

Zhu Junyang had become more adept at peeling potatoes. He pointed at the large basin of potatoes that Yu Xiaocao brought over and told Head Steward Liu, "Don't steal from this prince. If you want to practice, there's more than enough over there!"

Two rows of tears immediately flowed down Head Steward Liu's cheeks, 'My dear prince ah! This old servant wants to help you get out of the laborious task of peeling potatoes. I didn't expect you to be ungrateful and drag this old servant into it too!'

He accepted his fate and picked up a potato. Since his master was able to do this, as a servant, what could he say? Head Steward Liu worked hard to peel the potatoes. If he peeled more, then his master would have less work to do.

Yu Xiaocao poked her head out of the kitchen and looked at the imperial bodyguards who were standing in a row at the entrance, like pillars. She boldly hollered at the young royal prince, "Young Royal Prince, your subordinates have nothing to do so they might as well sit down and help us rub the kernels off the corn cobs! Look, not only in this courtyard, but there are also corn being dried in the adjacent courtyard. Since the weather is good these days, let's rub off all the kernels and dry them thoroughly, so that we can put them into bags as soon as possible."

Zhu Junyang glared at Yu Xiaocao, who was being insatiable, and then waved his hands at the guards at the entrance. The leader of the imperial bodyguards, Wu Deshun, marched over and waited for his master's orders.

"Tell your brothers to come over and learn how to rub the kernels off the cob. It was difficult to get these corn back, so don't make any mistakes. Hurry up!" Zhu Junyang ordered expressionlessly.

Wu Deshun secretly glanced at the potato that his master was peeling in his hands and thought, 'Even Master was ordered to do work, so there was no way that we, the subordinates, can stay idle. There's no need to say anything. I need to quickly rub off the kernels.'

When Yu Xiaocao poked her head out of the kitchen again, a dozen or so imperial guards were sitting in the courtyard. They had strong hands, so when they rubbed the corncobs, only the sound of kernels falling down could be heard. Yu Xiaocao smiled so much that only her teeth could be seen. She shouted out towards that yard, "Imperial bodyguard older brothers, thank you for the hard work! I'll add more food for your lunch ah! Little Shitou, go buy five catties of pork belly and ten catties of spareribs from the neighboring village's Uncle Li. Little Fangping, go to Auntie Zhou's house and buy five cockerels, and then ask your older brother to help slaughter them!"

After receiving their tasks, the two little fellows put down the corn in their hands. Little Shitou ran into the room to get the money, gave his younger cousin a silver bit, and then they split up to accomplish their tasks.

Among the imperial bodyguards, Wu Deshun and two other guards had been to Dongshan Village before. They knew that the little girl from the Yu Family was an excellent cook, and her cooking was much better than many of the famous restaurants in the capital. Thus, he smiled and said to his fellow brothers, "Brothers, work hard! There will be a delicious meal at noon!"

The other bodyguards didn't think too much of it. Wasn't it just pork belly, spareribs, and chicken? They frequently ate these at home. Even if the meals from peasant families were tasty, how special would it be?

When a tantalizing fragrance drifted out of the kitchen, the imperial bodyguards couldn't stay calm anymore. They kept rubbing the corn in their hands, but their heads all looked towards the direction of the kitchen. Their eyes were all fixed in that direction, and they swallowed their saliva from time to time.

Looking at his hopeless subordinates, Wu Deshun shook his head with a smile and freed a hand to rub his own tummy. So fragrant ah! It was so appetizing that the 'gluttonous bug' in his stomach was rebelling!

As if there was someone dragging its tail, time slowly passed by. After waiting and yearning, it was finally time for lunch. The Yu Family took out stools and wooden boards and set up a simple dining table under the shed built for rubbing kernels. They also borrowed some chairs and stools from their neighbors. With a dozen or so imperial bodyguards and over ten members of the Yu Family together, the scene was quite spectacular, as if they were holding an all-day banquet.

The imperial bodyguards sat in rows, and they all looked eagerly towards the kitchen. It was time to serve the dishes!

It was indeed a potato feast! Braised potatoes, pan-fried potato bites, cumin baked potatoes, sliced potatoes sautéed with green pepper and tomato, sautéed spareribs with potatoes, braised pork with potatoes, sliced pork stir-fried with potatoes, sour and spicy shredded potatoes, sliced potatoes pot, shredded potatoes stir-fried with eggs... There were also French fries, potato chips, and mashed potatoes, which were the children's favorites, as well as their homemade ketchup. Even the staple food were made of potatoes, such as pan-fried potato pancake, shredded potato egg pancakes, and the delicious-smelling crispy potato pancakes—such a sumptuous potato feast ah!

They were all homemade dishes, but after all, potato was a new type of food and it was also very tasty. The guards relaxed their cheeks and ate until their mouths were covered with grease. They couldn't stop eating!

Her grandfather and oldest aunt's family, who sat at the same table as the young royal prince, didn't even know what to do with their arms and legs, let alone eat. Thus, Yu Xiaocao considerately set up a table for them in the West Courtyard and brought the dishes over.

The Yu Family members were already used to eating at the same table as the royal prince. Although the royal prince didn't really smile a lot, he was quite a good person. He didn't put on airs, and he also didn't require them to follow formalities.

"Young Royal Prince, you should try my second sister's French fries. Dipping them in the ketchup, there is a sweet and sour taste. It's crispy on the outside and tender on the inside. It's very delicious!" Little Shitou held the French fries that his second sister specially placed in front of him and suggested Royal Prince Yang to try it.

Zhu Junyang readily picked one up and dripped it into the ketchup. He put it into his mouth and carefully tasted it, and then slowly nodded to Little Shitou, who was looking at him expectantly, saying, "Mhm, delicious!"

Suddenly, as if he had found an ally, Little Shitou beamed with delight and said, "If it's tasty, then you should eat more! With my second sister's cooking skills, she can make something different out of anything!"

Zhu Junyang took a bite of the 'pan-fried potato bites'. The freshly fried potatoes were crispy on the outside and glutinous on the inside, and retained the purest flavors of potatoes. It had a delicious smell, and with a bite, the tangy taste melted within one's mouth. It was indeed a simple and good taste that people couldn't easily give up on.

"Little Shitou, you can't just eat French fries and potato chips. These can only be considered snacks. If you want to grow as tall as the imperial bodyguard older brothers, you need to eat more proper meals!" Seeing that her younger brother was eating the French fries with relish, Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but remind him.

Little Shitou obediently nodded and said, "I'll eat one more... Second Sister, when school starts, can you fry some French fries and potato chips for me to bring back? Little Fatty, Brother Jinye, and Situ definitely haven't eaten them before. I want to let them try it!"

Yu Xiaocao looked at the young royal prince and said to Little Shitou, "Of course! But, you have to explain to your friends the potatoes that our family eats were the ones that got damaged when being harvested. The potatoes can't be used as seeds!"

Zhu Junyang looked at her and said, "No need to be so careful! With around a thousand catties of potatoes, this prince can still make the decision to give you some! In principle, these potatoes and corn are grown by your family, and thus belong to your family. When I gave the seeds to you, I made it clear that the imperial court will buy them according to the price you set after they are grown. Have you guys decided on the price?"

The Yu Family were very genuine and honest people. Zhu Junyang wasn't concerned that they would set a high price at all. 'Mhm! These potatoes taste quite good and the cooking methods are also very simple. If they are popularized, the common people can learn them too!'

Zhu Junyang kept eating, but he also didn't forget to say to Yu Xiaocao, "You should organize the cooking methods for potatoes, and it will be best if you write it down in a book. This prince will take it back when I go back to the capital next time!"

Yu Xiaocao grumbled, "Young Royal Prince, you want to take my recipes with just a few words? You're not going to give me some benefits in return? Back then, when the emperor emeritus traveled incognito, he had spent three hundred taels to buy my recipes for pig head meat and braised food! My family is also continuously receiving money for the roasted chicken and roasted duck recipes that I sold to Zhenxiu Restaurant... Aiya, Mother, why did you hit me?"

Madam Liu looked at the young royal prince's expression and pretended to hit her younger daughter again as she said, "This child, is money the only thing you think about? The royal prince and the emperor got these high-yielding potatoes and corn so that the common people can fill their stomachs. You, on the other hand, had only done a small favor but still wants some benefit. Aren't you ashamed!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 284 - Disaster Relief

Yu Xiaocao replied in a justified and confident manner, "The emperor is doing it for the future of his country, and the young royal prince wants to successfully complete his task. What do you think I'm doing this for? Aren't I doing this to earn more money so that my family can eat well, wear warm clothes, and not suffer from poverty? Our family has over ten mu of farmland, but we didn't even plant one mu of grain. Grains are really expensive right now ah! The locust plague hasn't ended yet. If we want to plant grain, we have to wait until at least the beginning of spring next year and harvest them in the summer. During this period of nearly one year, we would have to constantly purchase overpriced grain. Although our family has made some money, it's still not enough for our family to use it in this way for a year!"

Madam Liu thought about the price for coarse grain in town, which had risen to over one hundred copper coins. Moreover, the price was inflating day by day. It was already considered good if the food they hoarded could last them until the autumn. Although these corn and potatoes were high-yielding crops, they didn't have any control over the disposition of them at all and had to hand them all to the imperial court. After hearing her younger daughter's words, the whole family became downcast, and the originally delicious potatoes turned tasteless in their mouths.

Taking in everyone's expressions, Zhu Junyang ate a piece of potato from the braised pork dish, slowly swallowed it, and then said, "It makes sense! But you missed a point!"

"Missed what?" After shouting, Yu Xiaocao felt relieved and started eating the 'sour and spicy shredded potatoes' in big mouthfuls. In her previous life, this dish was her favorite, and she would never be tired of eating it.

“You forgot that this prince is here!” Seeing that she was eating with relish, Zhu Junyang also grabbed some with his chopsticks and put it in his mouth. He continued, “This prince never mistreats the people who works for me! Do you see the two carts of goods in the yard? One cart of white rice and one cart of wheat flour! There are at least two thousand catties. It should be enough for you guys to eat for a while, right?”

The Yu Family members were stunned when they heard this. Over two thousand catties of fine grain ah! If each person ate fifteen catties of grain per month and there were currently twelve people in the family, they would need about two hundred catties of food each month. With two thousand catties, it would be enough for them to eat for more than half a year!

“Almighty Young Royal Prince!” Yu Xiaocao almost jumped up with joy and kissed him a few times on his face. However, she remembered that it was ancient times now. If she did that, it would be extremely shocking. It was better to keep a low profile!

Zhu Junyang looked at the young girl, who had a fawning expression, snorted and said, “The emperor personally bestowed this prince with the position of the Minister of Disaster Relief. The imperial court has already allocated money and food, and it will soon be distributed to all the prefectures. This prince has already checked. Tanggu Town is a serious disaster area, and we will prioritize providing disaster relief to the more severely affected regions.”

Yu Xiaocao worriedly asked, “But, the capital was also affected. How much food can the imperial treasury provide?”

“This isn't something you need to worry about!” Zhu Junyang took another bite of the 'sour and spicy shredded potatoes' and had fallen in love with the taste of the sour and spicy food. He said, “The fleet has already set sail. In these past two years, the weather has been good in the south and they have an abundant amount of grain. There will be enough food for the disaster relief!”

After hearing this, the Yu Family finally felt relieved. They were very grateful for and had a lot of good words to say about the emperor, who loved his country and people.

With more than a dozen free laborers, they finished rubbing off the kernels for all the corns in the Yu Residence and packed them in uniform-sized sacks in three days. In the ten mu of land, they harvested a

total of nearly eighteen thousand catties of crops, which also meant that the average yield per mu was one thousand eight hundred catties.

One must know that the current grain output was very low right, so a harvest of five hundred catties of wheat per mu was considered very high. What did it mean to have a yield of one thousand eight hundred catties per mu? For example, if the income from one mu of farmland could support a family of two, then this one mu of farmland could support six or seven people! Just think about it, with such high-yielding crops, would they still have to worry about the common people not being able to fill their stomachs?

After a discussion, Yu Xiaocao's family decided to sell the potatoes and corn at the price of improved varieties. One catty of corn cost one hundred copper coins. Out of the eighteen thousand catties, Zhu Junyang only took fifteen thousand catties and left the remaining three thousand to the Yu Family as seeds and grain ration. In this way, the Yu Family received one thousand five hundred taels as income with just corn alone. Potatoes were sold at the price of two hundred taels per catty, so five thousand catties of potatoes cost one thousand taels.

To the present Yu Family, two thousand five hundred taels didn't mean much compared with the dividends that Yu Xiaocao earned from Zhenxiu Restaurant. But, on second thought, it was definitely the first time in the Great Ming Dynasty that anyone had earned more than two thousand taels in one year for their harvest in eleven mu of farmland. Ahem, of course, that was with the exception of the Yu Family's early-maturing watermelons.

Right now, besides the two thousand catties of fine grain that the young royal prince brought over, the Yu Family also had three thousand catties of corn and six to seven hundred catties of potatoes. In addition, they also had the grain that they hoarded in the storage room. Yu Xiaocao no longer had to worry about losing the money in her hands due to buying high-priced grain.

The Yu Family's corn and potatoes weren't affected by the disaster, and they still had a good harvest. Moreover, there was a high yield too! Zhu Junyang couldn't sit still anymore. After hastily arranging the matters of the disaster relief, he took a few carts of corn and potatoes back to the capital to receive his reward for accomplishing his task!!

The food for the disaster relief arrived in the Jinwei Prefectural City three days later. The prefectural magistrate knew that the Minister of Disaster Relief, Royal Prince Yang, was in Tanggu Town, so he naturally sent the grain to Tanggu Town first. Five days later, a cart of food for disaster relief arrived at the county yamen in Tanggu Town.

County Magistrate Zhao was also born from a poor family, so he could deeply understand what natural disasters meant to the common people. He worked tirelessly with the officials sent by Royal Prince Yang to distribute the food for the disaster relief to every village. In particular, the four villages that were more seriously affected received larger portions of food. Dongshan Village was one of them.

On this day, the bronze bell of Dongshan Village rang again. The villagers all gathered at the open space in front of the village head's house. Clearing away the previously dreary atmosphere, everyone was beaming with joy.

County Magistrate Zhao personally took care of distributing grain in Dongshan Village. Several days ago, the Minister of Disaster Relief, Royal Prince Yang, went to Dongshan Village everyday to investigate the situation of the disaster. But, how could County Magistrate Zhao not know the importance of Dongshan Village's Yu Family to Royal Prince Yang? If the disaster relief in Dongshan Village was arranged properly, then he would have completed most of his work!

The village head couldn't stop smiling as he shouted to the villagers, "His Majesty is a brilliant ruler who cares and sympathizes for the people in the disaster-stricken areas. He sent us food and solved our urgent needs. His Majesty is indeed an excellent emperor who loves the people as his own child! Long live the Emperor!!"

As he spoke, he knelt down in the direction of the capital and seriously kowtowed three times. The villagers also followed the village head and kowtowed three times while shouting, "Long live the Emperor!"

The village chief tottered as he got up. He looked at the villagers and said, "The first batch of food for the disaster relief has arrived. After deliberation by the upright Magistrate Zhao and the disaster relief official from the capital, the food will be distributed based on each individual. Adults will each receive fifteen catties of grain, while children will get ten catties of grain each. A half-grown child will eat more than his parents can afford, so those over the age of thirteen are counted as adults!"

The villagers instantly burst into cheers. Each person could get fifteen catties of grain. If they consumed it sparingly, then they would have enough to eat for two months! If they bought it in town right now, they wouldn't be able to buy fifteen catties of grain without spending at least two or three taels! Although the villagers of Dongshan Village had some savings in the past two years, they still couldn't afford to squander their money on such expensive food ah!

The village chief asked County Magistrate Zhao, "Magistrate Zhao, do you have anything else to say?"

County Magistrate Zhao stood up and scanned over the villagers with his burning gaze. The originally whispering voices soon quieted down. County Magistrate Zhao nodded with satisfaction and said, "Villagers! The difficulty is only temporary, and the disaster will eventually pass! The imperial court attaches great importance to the disaster relief and sent Royal Prince Yang as an imperial envoy to supervise the matters regarding the disaster relief! Villagers, you don't have to worry. Royal Prince Yang's fleet, which had traveled to the western hemisphere, has already gone to the south to buy grain. Royal Prince Yang has said that the grain that they bring back will be sold to the common people at the capital cost, and they will not earn a single copper coin from it! If we persist for two more months, we will be able to put the low-priced grain on the market. Those profiteers, who privately raised the price of grain to make huge profits, won't last long!"

When the villagers heard this, they gave another thunderous cheer. Royal Prince Yang's prestige reached an unprecedented height in Dongshan Village.

The village head was also very excited, but he forced himself to suppress the exhilaration within his heart. He calmed the villagers, "Fellow villagers, we are fortunate to have a good emperor and good officials ah! Now, everyone can line up to receive food! Don't fight and don't rob! There's enough for everyone! The elderly and children in one line, and adults in another! Everyone hurry home and get your utensils!"

The villagers dispersed, and the Yu Family was also among them. Originally, Yu Hai didn't think that they should take the food from the disaster relief. However, they were also afraid that it would be too eye-catching if they didn't, and it would cause certain people to pay attention to them! Each adult received fifteen catties of grain, so if they persisted for two months, it could only guarantee that they wouldn't starve. It was impossible to fill up one's stomach!

If the Yu Family didn't go get food, wouldn't that be telling the other villagers that 'I have food in my hands'. When the time came, different families would be asking to borrow several catties of grain. As fellow villagers, would it really be possible for them to only lend grain to certain families? There were more than thirty households in Dongshan Village, so no matter how much food they had, it still wouldn't be enough for them to lend out ah!

After deliberation, the Yu Family decided that it was better to keep a low profile. They went home to get baskets and sacks, and then returned to the open space in front of the village head's house. At this time, the food distribution had already started, and there were two long, crooked lines!

The twin sisters took their younger brother, Little Shitou, and Liu Yaner led her younger brother Liu Fangping, and followed behind Old Yu to queue in the line for the elderly and children. Yu Hang

hesitated on the side. His nominal age^[1] was thirteen, but in actuality, his twelfth birthday hadn't passed yet. Would people say something if he stood in the adult line? After briefly thinking about it, he went to the children's line and lined up behind his younger sisters.

Beside them, a villager couldn't help but praise, "Dahai's family really knows how to teach their children. Xiaosha (Yu Hang's nickname) is really an honest and good child!"

There were also people who disagreed. That person pursed his lips and said, "We're about to starve to death, so who still cares about being honest? It's five catties of grain less for a person ah! Five catties of grain are enough for a family to eat for several days!"

The others turned silent. In times of natural disaster, nothing was as important as survival.

People from the yamen were responsible for distributing the food. The utensil in their hands was called a dipper. Using the dipper, when they scooped out grain from the cart and flattened it with a board, it would be fifteen catties. On the elderly and children's side, they also specially made a smaller dipper, which scooped out ten catties. In this way, the speed of food distribution greatly increased since each person received one scoop.

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It was soon the Yu Family's turn, and Yu Hai let his older sister and brother-in-law go ahead of him. When the people from the yamen was filling the grain for Yu Caifeng, a sharp voice suddenly sounded, "Can a married daughter also take the food for the disaster relief?"

Magistrate Zhao, who happened to walk by for inspection, heard this and said with a frown, "If she married someone in this village and their household registration belongs to Dongshan Village, then of course, she can receive food from the disaster relief."

The Yu Family looked towards the voice and found that it was Li Guihua, who was gluttonous and lazy and liked to cause trouble for others. With a hand on her waist, she pointed at Yu Caifeng, who was getting grain, and spluttered, "Yu Caifeng married out of the village, all the way to the northeast. Everyone in the village knows about this matter. She fled to Dongshan Village in spring. Can she be counted as a part of Dongshan Village?"

Li Guihua was harming others without benefitting herself. It wasn't like she would be able to get an extra catty of grain if Yu Caifeng couldn't get any of the food. Even if Yu Caifeng got the grain, it still

wouldn't affect how much grain she would receive. What did food mean during a year of famine? They were all precious living lives ah! Li Guihua stopping others from getting food was no different from killing others for money ah! What grudge and enmity did she have with Yu Caifeng for her to be so vicious?

The villagers of Dongshan Village all looked at Li Guihua with complicated gazes. This woman was a poisonous snake that might suddenly jump out and bite people. When they returned home, they must tell their wives to stay far away from people like her.

The village head, who was busily helping to distribute the grain, pulled a long face and scolded her, "Li Guihua, just go and get your food. Why are you talking so much?"

Shaking the fat on her body, Madam Li smiled at the county magistrate and said, "Aren't I helping my lord, the magistrate, pick out the people who are trying to take advantage of the situation? The food distributed by the imperial court can't be taken by these random people! Village Chief, you can't shield the Yu Family just because you're close with them ah!"

Madam Li's heart was full of resentment towards Yu Hai's family. Liu Hu was an outsider with a different surname, yet he took him in, supported his family with food, and let them live in a brick and tiled-roof house. He also helped them build a house, while telling others that it was built with the money that Liu Hu earned himself. In the past half a year, besides selling watermelons outside of the village, when did Liu Hu ever go out to make money?

Yu Hai would rather help an outsider than do small favors for Yu Dashan. Allegedly, Yu Hai's family ate meat and fine grain every day. She, on the other hand, could only eat the little coarse grain and flatbread given by her mother-in-law. Her maternal brothers were also becoming annoyed with her going home to take things. Her older sister-in-law, in particular, always made harsh remarks. She was bringing back less and less food each time, which wasn't enough for her to eat at all. The feeling of hunger was so unbearable, and she even dropped down a size!

After Old Yu divorced Madam Zhang, Madam Li repeatedly clamored about dividing the family. However, Madam Zhang threatened that they would have to leave empty-handed. With Madam Zhang, they could at least eat something every day. If they really left the house with nothing, then they would need to do everything themselves. Madam Zhang still had several hundred taels in her hands, so she couldn't just readily give it all to that good-for-nothing Yu Bo. There was also another advantage of not splitting from the family. If Yu Bo passed the examination to be an official, her family could also benefit.

But, every time she saw Old Yu, who had a ruddy and healthy complexion from being nourished, Madam Li couldn't sit still anymore. Exactly how much money did Yu Hai's family have? They were able to restore a nearly dying person's body to become even more hearty than before he had gotten ill. She didn't get any of these benefits at all. There was no way that she would be satisfied without causing some trouble for them. With such a rare chance, Madam Li immediately jumped out.

County Magistrate Zhao looked doubtfully at the village head and raised his voice, asking, "Village Chief, what is going on?"

The village head was so angry that his face had turned into the color of pig liver, vividly purple. He couldn't argue with this woman, so he could only glare angrily at Madam Li and explained to County Magistrate Zhao, "My Lord, don't listen to her nonsense. Although Yu Caifeng's family escaped to Dongshan Village, they have already transferred their household registration to Dongshan Village and settled down in the village. I personally took them to the yamen to complete the formalities. If you don't believe me, I can have Yu Caifeng bring the household registration over for you to see."

After hearing the explanation, County Magistrate Zhao's expression somewhat softened. He nodded and said, "Mhm! Bring the household registration over and show it to the villagers on the spot, so that no one will talk behind their backs!"

Liu Junping stepped forward and said, "My Lord, Village Chief, I'm quick on my feet. I'll go get it!"

Yu Caifeng gave the key to the cabinet in the room to her eldest son and reminded him again. Liu Junping glared angrily at Madam Li with a ruthless gaze, and then ran towards the old residence with the fastest speed.

Yu Caifeng was afraid of delaying the progress of the food distribution, so she stepped aside and let the villagers behind her go first. The matron smiled at her and said, "Caifeng, we're all from the same village, so everyone knows each other very well. We all believe in you!"

Someone in the line whispered, "This Madam Li has such a vicious heart ah! The food belongs to the government and has nothing to do with her, but she jumped out to report her own older sister-in-law! How did she offend her?"

Another person smirked and said, "Husband's older sister? That Yu Dashan was brought here by Madam Zhang when she got remarried. He has no blood relationship with Caifeng. Besides, Old Yu has already gotten a peaceful separation with Madam Zhang. Yu Dashan has nothing to do with Dahai and Caifeng now!"

"Madam Li and Madam Zhang are truly one family; they both have such cruel hearts. Old Yu is fortunate to have a real son like Dahai, otherwise he would have been dead a long time ago!"

"With Madam Zhang's stingy attitude, she might not even prepare a coffin for him. She will probably just roll him up in a straw mat, dig a pit, and throw him in! Ay! This Madam Zhang isn't even afraid of getting retribution!"

While the villagers discussed in low voices, Liu Junping had retrieved his family's household registration certificate. Dongshan Village was clearly written on the neatly folded household registration. Although there were a lot of refugees in Tanggu Town at that time, the people at the yamen took into consideration that Yu Hai's family was adoptive relatives of the imperial envoy and highly valued by Royal Prince Yang, and swiftly completed the process. They didn't even take the 'thank you' money that Yu Hai offered.

Facts spoke louder than words, and thus certain people with malicious intentions finally stopped. Under scornful looks of the public, Madam Li timidly avoided everyone's gazes. After she got the food, she quickly ran away as if she was being chased by a wolf.

Besides this small incident, the food distribution went very smoothly. With six adults and six children, the Yu Family received a total of one hundred fifty catties of grain, which would be enough for them to eat for a month. However, the food that they received was mostly coarse grain. If they added around one ounce every time Xiaocao made steamed buns or pancakes, it would take a long time for them to finish it.

With their large accumulation of grain at home, the Yu Family felt a sense of security in this disaster year. The vegetables harvested from the garden in the yard had all been dried. At present, the only flaw was that they couldn't eat fresh vegetables. Yu Xiaocao thought about it. Since mystic-stone water could kill locusts, was there anything she could do with it?

That's right! In her past life, didn't they terminate bugs with pesticides? Could they use herbs to develop a slightly toxic and volatile solution as a cover for her mystic-stone water?

One day, Yu Xiaocao rode her little red horse to Tongren Medicine Hall to find Doctor Sun and told him about her idea. He was very interested in it, so the two of them worked together and really developed a liquid that had the effect of insect repellent! But, without mystic-stone water, the solution was a lot less effective!

Because the solution was made of herbal medicine, the price was relatively high and not everyone could afford it. Hence, it was unlikely for it to be popularized. Yu Xiaocao's real purpose of making this solution was for it to act as a cover for the mystic-stone water.

After creating the pesticide, Yu Xiaocao bought a lot of medicinal herbs from Tongren Medicine Hall and started busily working when she got home. When the Yu Family heard that the pesticide was costly but effective for killing the locusts, they immediately became full of energy again.

They had long plowed the land in the courtyard. In the front and back yards of the East Courtyard, they had sowed seeds of green vegetables with short-term growth periods. In the West Courtyard, they planted autumn vegetables like cabbage and radish.

Yu Xiaocao went to the blacksmith in town and made some watering cans. The watering cans were filled with pesticide mixed with mystic-stone water, which needed to be used to irrigate the crops every day.

Although the little divine stone's mystic-stone water was good for animals and crops, it needed to be used with moderation. For example, the two little wolves that her family raised could bear one percent concentration of mystic-stone water. If the concentration was higher, it would be harmful to their bodies. If they consumed pure mystic-stone water, they would die due to the overload of spiritual power. The concentration that locusts could bear was even lower, which meant that they only needed to use a few drops of mystic-stone water every day to kill the locusts!

Crops had a higher tolerance for mystic-stone water. A higher concentration of mystic-stone water could accelerate the growth of crops. It also left a slight amount of spiritual power in the crops, which was beneficial to the human body. This was also one of the reasons why the Yu Family never had to worry about the sales of their vegetables despite being more expensive than others.

The planted vegetables seeds soon sprouted tender buds, and the locusts naturally wouldn't give up on such delicious food. However, the scent that the pesticides emitted caused most of the locusts to make a detour. Occasionally, a few locusts would fall down and die because they couldn't bear that spiritual

energy in the mystic-stone water. Every day, the children of the Yu Family could pick up many dead locusts from the ground.

Yu Xiaocao thought that it was a pity to throw away the locusts, so she bought more than thirty recently hatched chicks from Auntie Zhou. Zhou Shanhu was very curious about it and asked, "Xiaocao, people don't have enough to eat in times of famine. Where are you going to get food to eat the chicks? For my family, we can sell the grown chickens for money. As for those half-grown chicks, my parents are worried about what to do with them..."

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, "Our family has a lot of kids. Every day, we can go up the mountains to catch a lot of bugs back. In addition, we also have the corn leaves and sweet potato leaves that we collected. It should be enough to raise the chickens. If we don't have food in the winter, we can slaughter them to eat."

As a result, Liu Junping led the children of the Yu Family to go around and catch locusts. After catching the locusts, they froze them in the icehouse. Every day, the Yu Family would make several barrels of ice to replenish the ice that melted in the cellar. Besides ice, the fifty or sixty square meters cellar was filled with baskets of locusts. They could probably raise thirty more chickens, let alone the mere thirty chickens.

They sundried the locusts that died in the cellar, ground them into powder, and mixed them in the chaffs. The chicks were very fond of eating it, and they grew even faster than when they were only fed grain.

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The imperial court had sent the relief in a timely manner. Although the people in the disaster area had to go through some hard times, they were able to maintain their daily lifestyles. There didn't seem to be people leaving their homes to flee the calamity. The common people were very grateful to the imperial court, and many people set up longevity plaques for the emperor.

Yu Xiaocao's maternal grandfather's family lived on the west side of the West Mountain, which was separated from Dongshan Village by the West Mountain. There was a rugged path in the mountain that led directly to Xishan Village. Although the path was about half as long as the official road, it was difficult to travel on the mountain road, and occasionally there would be wild animals hurting people.

The Yu Family had enough food to eat until the beginning of spring when the crops were ready to be reaped, so they weren't worried about not having enough to eat. Madam Liu finally felt relieved, but

now she was concerned about whether the fifteen members of her maternal family had enough to eat and if they would starve.

After Madam Liu mentioned for the nth time about her concern for her maternal family, Yu Hai decided, "Since you're so worried, let's send some grain over then! As children and grandchildren, it's not right for us to eat lavishly while our parents and siblings starve!"

They couldn't grow grain because of the locust plague. Except for Liu Hu, who went to work as a stevedore at the docks, most of the family just idled at home. Old Yu took several of the children to gather seafood at the beach and Yu Xiaolian sold starch jelly at the docks. The ingredient for making starch jelly was the dried red marine algae that they hoarded last year. Due to the high price of grain, they couldn't sell cold noodles!

The reason was very simple. A bowl of cold noodles usually cost five copper coins, but the price of grain had soared to the sky-high price of thirty or fifty times more than usual. If they set a low price for cold noodles, then they wouldn't be able to make any profit. If they raised the price, who could afford to eat it? Fortunately, they still had a lot of the red marine algae that they collected last year. They should have enough to sell for two to three months. However, they needed to slightly raise the price for starch jelly, which cost five copper coins a bowl now. The business at the docks wasn't as good as last year's, but there was still some profit every day. Thus, Yu Xiaolian naturally wouldn't give up on it.

Now, the busiest members of the family were Yu Xiaolian and Yu Hang. They both had their own businesses to take care of. Everyone else was just idling at home and tending the several mu of garden in the yard.

Madam Liu handed the task of spraying pesticide on the vegetable garden to her older sister-in-law, Yu Caifeng. Yu Hai loaded ten sacks of grain onto the horse carriage, and each sack contained around fifty catties of grain. Madam Liu was very moved when she saw this. Her maternal nephews and nieces were all grown and ate the same amount as adults. With just the food from the disaster relief, it would be considered pretty good if they were half full! She didn't know when the average-priced grain that the officials mentioned would arrive, so she couldn't just watch her maternal family starve without doing anything at all!

No matter how much food they had at home, it was food that the Yu Family earned with their own capabilities. No one would say anything even if they didn't give the Liu Family any. After all, food was the most important during famine. She had only briefly mentioned, but her husband had gotten a cart full of grain for her to take back to her maternal family. How could Madam Liu not be moved within her heart?

"Mother, I have never been to Maternal Grandfather's house ah. Can you take me along so I can see which house it is?" Before Yu Xiaocao transmigrated over, she was bedridden every day and couldn't go anywhere. After splitting from the main family, for one reason or another, she had never gone to Xishan Village. She had been very bored at home these past two days. When she heard that there was a chance to go out, she quickly asked to go along.

Little Shitou also rushed out of his room and shouted, "I want to go, too! I want to go, too!"

Yu Hai chuckled and said, "Okay! Let's all go together!"

Madam Liu rolled her eyes and said, "You ah, you're always spoiling them!"

Yu Xiaocao took out the grasshopper sauce from the cellar, and brought a bag of the biscuits that she made yesterday, as well as her homemade cured meat and dried duck. These gifts were absolutely presentable!

The grain on the horse cart was covered by straw thatches and corn stalks. Yu Xiaocao and Little Shitou climbed to the top of the grain and sat on it. Madam Liu sat on the shaft, while Yu Hai drove the cart. The four members of the family traveled on the newly built road at the foot of the West Mountains and headed in the direction of the official road.

Originally, from the Yu Family's old residence, they had to travel across the entire village to go out. Later, when Imperial Prince Jing was building his mountain manor in the West Mountain, he specially opened a road, which just happened to pass by the gates of the Yu Residence. It went around the village and led directly to the official road, saving a lot of traveling time.

The gossiping matrons in the village saw a horse cart coming out of the Yu Residence from afar, and it was full of unknown goods. Madam Xiong, who was the most garrulous one, said to Madam Li, "Your brother-in-law just drove a cart of goods somewhere. Madam Liu also went with him, are they delivering grain to her maternal family?"

Madam Li's rolled her eyes and said, "Who is my brother-in-law? Yu Bo is my only brother-in-law. He is currently studying in the prefectural city and waiting to take the county-level exams next year!"

Another woman, who disliked her, smirked and said, "That's right. You guys have already severed relationships with Uncle Yu, so you're no longer one family. Brother Dahai would rather subsidize his in-laws than give you guys anything!"

Madam Liu glared at her, but when she saw that the person in front of her a matron who was good at fighting, she turned cowardly again, "Calling him 'Brother Dahai', you seem quite close ah. It's a pity that no matter how much you fawn on them, they won't give you even one granule of grain."

The matron curled up her lips again and said, "I'm not like a certain someone, who is gluttonous and lazy and also being oppressed by her mother-in-law. My family collected all our sweet potatoes before the disaster, and with the food from the disaster relief, we definitely have enough to eat for three to five months. It's so sad that some people can't even eat the food that they have received ah!"

Hearing this, the rage in Madam Li's heart flared up, but she couldn't find a way to vent. Why was she able to come out to gossip with others today? It was because her mother-in-law wasn't home. She had gone to the prefectural city to send food and money to her precious son.

All the grain that she brought home was locked in the cabinet by her mother-in-law. She was going to be away for three days, but only left three catties of food for them. There were two adults and one half-grown boy at home, so three catties of grain wasn't even enough to eat for a day!

Madam Li kept complaining to her husband about how her mother-in-law had given all the food that they received to her younger brother-in-law. Madam Li had even gotten in a big fight with Madam Zhang regarding this. However, she wasn't good enough to be Madam Zhang's opponent. She became more well-behaved after being punished to go hungry for a meal.

The matron saying this was equivalent to rubbing salt on her wound. Madam Li instantly stood up with widened eyes. She was about to let out a series of curses when she saw the matron rolling up her sleeves as if saying 'if you dare to scold me, then I'll slap you silly'. Seeing this, she immediately deflated like a balloon. She glared angrily at the matron. If shooting daggers from the eyes could kill people, then that matron would have already died countless times. With a humph, Madam Li patted her bottoms and went home!

Madam Xiong sourly said, "Yu Hai's family have made a lot of money in the past two years. Before the disaster, I saw them buying grain from town. There must be no shortage of food at their house! That

horse cart is definitely loaded with grain and seems like they're heading in the direction of Xishan Village. Ay! This Yu Hai is so generous to send a full cart of grain. The Liu Family of Xishan Village is so fortunate. They are blessed with several hundred catties of grain by just sitting at home and doing nothing. Why doesn't my family have such rich relatives ah?"

The matron, who was at odds with Madam Li, couldn't stand Madam Xiong's way of conduct. She stood up and prepared to leave, "What's the point in saying so much? It's no one's business who they send food to. No matter how much we talk about it, it still won't have anything to do with us. I'm going to help our head of the household to dig for spoon worms. In a day, we can earn enough money to buy salt! It's better than sitting here and waiting for a pie-in-the-sky!"

Yu Hai's family didn't know that people were talking about them, and hurriedly drove the cart all the way to Xishan Village. There were almost no pedestrians on the road. Those who could find work had already gone to work, while those who couldn't all stayed at home. By minimizing their activities, they could consume less food.

The family set out rather late, and the horse cart didn't move very quickly because it was pulling several hundred catties of grain. Despite only having a difference of a single character, Xishan Village and Dongshan Village were vastly different! First of all, there wasn't any prince building a mountain manor in Xishan Village and repairing the road for them. Thus, after getting off the official road, there was a section of road that was full of bumps and hollows, which was very troublesome.

In addition, Xishan Village wasn't close to the sea. Unlike the villagers of Dongshan Village, they couldn't gather seafood in their spare time and sell them for money. However, Xishan Village had more good farmland. Besides growing sweet potatoes in the wasteland on the mountains, wheat was grown in all the fields.

The locust plague had caused great losses for Xishan Village. The wheat could have been harvested soon, but all of it had been destroyed by the locusts. The sweet potatoes were buried in the ground, so they could more or less reap some of them.

The Liu Family had ten or so good farmland, and there was no harvest of wheat at all. They only planted five mu of sweet potatoes. Before the disaster, they had heard the news from the Yu Family. Under the lead of their father, the three brothers of the Liu Family quickly reaped all of their sweet potatoes and worked around the clock to cut their several mu of wheat fields. Although the wheat had not matured, it was in the last stage of grouting. After roasting green wheat with fire and rubbing the grain out, it could be eaten.

The four members of Yu Hai's family arrived at the gates of the Liu Residence, the whole family were sitting in the yard and rubbing grain out of wheat!

"Father——" Seeing that her father had more white hair on his head, Madam Liu felt tears rise and she couldn't help but call out.

Liu Zhimin, the thirteen year old son of Xiaoaco's third maternal uncle Liu Hao, raised his head and exclaimed in surprise, "Younger Aunt! Grandfather, Younger Aunt came!!"

Liu Cuijin looked up and saw his daughter standing at the entrance with reddened eyes. He hastily stood up and greeted, "Lass Yun, why did you come? Is it because you don't have enough food to eat? Our family harvested a lot of green wheat, so take some back for emergency use!"

When Madam Liu heard this, she burst into tears. She was the youngest in the family [1] and the only daughter. Since childhood, she had been favored by her parents and pampered by her three older brothers. Before she got married, she had lived without any worries.

When she got married, her family gave her a lot of dowry, which had all been confiscated by Madam Zhang with the excuse that she would keep them until they separated from the family. After that, she never saw her dowry again.

After she got married, she lived a hard life and would occasionally complain to her maternal family. With a lot of people in the family and relatively little land, her maternal family wasn't very well-off. But, every year, they would save some money and food from the little resources that they had and send them to her. Unfortunately, she failed to put up a fight, and all the money and food were taken by Madam Zhang.

When they separated from the main family, it was the most difficult time for her family. It was her elderly parents, brothers, and sisters-in-law who helped them repair their house, sent them food, and gave her money for daily necessities. They were the ones who helped her family overcome their most difficult time.

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The first thing her father thought when he saw her was whether or not she lacked food to eat. He even took out a large amount of grain from his own family to give to her. How was she supposed to hold back her tears of gratitude?

Xiaocao's maternal grandmother, Madam Yao, immediately became anxious when she saw her daughter cry silently, "What's wrong? What's going on? Tell us ah! No matter what it is, as long as we work together, we can all survive these hard times!"

Madam Liu's older sister-in-law, Madam Han, also came over and looked at her with concern. Madam Liu wiped her eyes and a smile crept out as she laughed, "It's nothing, I just missed all of you. I came over to see how you were all doing and if you needed any grain!"

When Liu Cunjin heard that his daughter was doing fine, he immediately relaxed a lot. He chuckled, "We're fine, we're fine! We got your message and managed to hastily harvest a lot of green wheat. We got around a few dozen catties of grain from each mu. Added on to the disaster relief grain that the court sent over, we have enough to last us a few months. How's your family? Did the corn and other crops get ruined by the locusts ah?"

Madam Yao gave her husband an exasperated look and said, "Do the two of you just plan on chatting here the entire time? Stop blocking the gate ah and let our daughter come sit inside!"

"Grandmother, Grandfather!" Little Shitou was on top of the grain sacks and was just carried down. He immediately ran through the gate and hollered his greetings to Liu Cunjin and his wife.

Yu Xiaocao was right behind him and also greeted her two elders. Then she also faced the courtyard where Madam Han and Madam Bian were standing and greeted them, "Eldest Maternal Aunt, Third Maternal Aunt..."

Madam Yao happily hugged Little Shitou into her arms and then freed a hand to rub Xiaocao's head. She grinned until her eyes squinted up and said, "Oh! Our Xiaocao and Shitou also came over ah? Look at your little faces, all red from being under the sun. Come, go into the house, Grandmother will give you some sugar water to drink!"

Little Shitou perceptively replied, "No need, Grandmother, we're not thirsty! Let me help you rub the green wheat, okay?" As he talked, he picked up a shaft of wheat from where Madam Yao was previously sitting and started to rub it between his hands.

Madam Yao hurriedly restrained him, "Be careful, don't hurt your hand from rubbing wheat! Our Shitou's hands are used for writing and learning. If they get injured, how will you be able to complete your homework that the teacher assigns?"

Yu Hai, who was outside, was currently unloading the cart. The Liu Family's neighbors heard the noise and came out to look. When they saw the cart full of grain, they were so envious that their eyes turned red.

"Everyone says that Old Liu's daughter has hit the jackpot! As expected, look, look! Grain is so expensive right now, yet they sent a whole cart's worth!"

"That's right, that's right! This cart of grain must have around four to five hundred catties, right? If they eat it carefully, I'm sure Old Liu's family could last a few months!"

"In the past you even laughed at Old Liu because his daughter had married a poor man and had a stern mother-in-law. She likely had a difficult time! Old Liu's family had spent a lot subsidizing this daughter who had married out already. Now look at them. If they had known earlier that their son-in-law would gain a fortune, then they wouldn't be at a loss even if they gave more in the past ah!"

"Obviously! This cart of grain must be worth around dozens of taels now ah! Hasn't Uncle Liu already earned back everything he sent out before?"

Under the jealous and envious gazes of the neighbors, Yu Hai hauled a sack of flour on his shoulders and went into the courtyard. Liu Cunjin had been preoccupied with his daughter ever since she came back and only now realized that his son-in-law was outside. When he saw him bring in the grain, Liu Cunjin frowned and said, "Visiting is one thing! Why do you need to bring grain over? Is my family so poor that we can't even supply a meal to my daughter and son-in-law?"

Madam Liu hurriedly interjected for her husband, "Father, that's not what we're trying to imply at all! We had stored up a lot of grain in the past and then the royal prince also gave us two carts full of grain. Our family can't finish the food, so we brought some over for you all."

Liu Cunjin continued to look displeased as he said, "We're in the midst of a disaster year so having more grain stockpiled is a good thing! The locusts will only freeze to death when it's winter, so we won't be able to plant anything in the ground until next spring. How much grain does your family have? How could you all possibly not be able to finish it all? Quickly take the grain back!"

Yu Xiaocao hastily stepped in, "Grandfather, don't worry about us! Let me tell you a secret. The young royal prince gave us two thousand catties of grain and we also managed to harvest three thousand catties of corn. Even if we ate until we were bloated every day, we wouldn't be able to finish the grain in one year!"

Little Shitou also spoke up, "Second Sister also managed to create a pesticide that's able to kill and expel locusts. Our family's courtyard is now planted again with a lot of green vegetables, and they're this tall now!" Little Shitou used his hands to gesture.

Madam Yao reacted in delighted surprise, "A pesticide that can kill locusts? Then can't we plant some soybeans now?"

Liu Cunjin thought more thoroughly than his wife and quietly asked, "Cao'er, is it expensive to make this pesticide? How much would it cost to use enough pesticide to cover one mu?"

Yu Xiaocao glanced at her maternal grandmother, who was somewhat excited, and quietly replied, "There are two ingredients in this pesticide that are quite expensive. It takes at least five taels to make a catty of pesticide, which is enough to cover four to five mu!"

When Xiaocao's grandmother found out that one mu required one tael's worth of pesticide, she immediately backed off and said, "A mu of soybeans can only be sold for a couple hundred copper coins. No point in using this pesticide, we'd end up losing more than we gained ah! This business is completely not worth it!"

Yu Xiaocao laughed, "We can't afford to plant too much but we can still plant a few autumn vegetables and other crops. That way we'll at least have vegetables to eat come winter. Grandmother, Grandfather, I brought over a pitcher of pesticide over for you. You can take a few drops out every day and dilute it in water and use that to water the plants. I guarantee that all of the locusts that come over will die in spades!"

Madam Han's youngest daughter, Liu Feiyan, exclaimed in admiration as she looked at the pitcher in Yu Xiaocao's hands. She then quietly said, "Is it that powerful? Mother, can we go prepare the vegetable gardens now? The earlier it's done, the faster we'll be able to plant vegetable seeds."

Madam Bian, who had a gentle and sweet personality, lightly shook her head, "We can't plant them in our vegetable garden! Just think, no one else is able to grow food at this point. If our family is able to, we'd end up attracting thieves. In my opinion, we should prepare the rear courtyard and plant some radishes and cabbage. With the addition of our dried vegetables, we should be able to get through winter!"

Second Maternal Uncle's youngest daughter, Liu Feiyan, blinked her large eyes and said, "Anyway, all of our chickens were slaughtered earlier, so we should tear down the chicken fence and plant some green vegetables there. That way we'll have green vegetables to eat during autumn!"

Eldest Maternal Uncle, Second Maternal Aunt, Youngest Maternal Uncle and Second Maternal Uncle's eldest son, Liu Zhiwei, were all out working and not at home. Other than the people who were missing, the rest of the Liu Family surrounded Xiaocao and started a lively discussion on what vegetables they should plant.

Madam Yao pushed aside some people and rescued Xiaocao from within. She rebuked them all with a smile, "Whatever you all need to do, go do it now! We can all discuss what vegetables we need to plant in the evening! Cao'er, come inside with Grandmother so you can wash your face with some nice cool water!"

Xiaocao's two maternal aunts took their children back to where they were previously sitting and continued to rub the green wheat. Second Maternal Uncle, Liu Han, went along with Yu Hai and carried all of the grain from the cart into the family's cellar. Liu Cunjin and his wife watched them as they repeatedly said, "Why did you give us so much grain? You're not going to have enough at home ah! Maybe you should take half of this back home ah?"

Madam Liu pulled both her parents into the room and laughed, "Father, Mother! We, your daughter and son-in-law, are showing our filial respects to you two! Can you just take the gift as it is? If there still aren't any fairly-priced grain available in a couple of months, I'll bring more over."

The two men in their prime only had to go back a few times to move all of the grain into the cellar. Liu Han rubbed his hands and spoke to Liu Cunjin, "Father, Younger Sister only gave us fine grains. There are seven bags of white flour and three bags of well-polished rice. Just look..."

Yu Xiaocao hurriedly interjected before her grandfather could speak, "Grandfather, the young royal prince only gave us fine grains. If you want to ask if we have any coarse grains, I'm afraid my family really doesn't have any ah!"

When Liu Cunjin heard this, he swallowed down the words he was about to say. His entire face was wreathed in smiles as he looked at his daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren as he said, "Then I won't bother saying polite gratuities! In the future, if your family has more work than you all can handle, just remember us. Our family doesn't have much but we definitely have lots of bodies to do hard work! Even that youngster, Zhimin, is almost able to do half a grown man's work!"

At this time, he suddenly recalled his son-in-law's ten mu of corn that they had planted for the imperial court. He asked, "Ah Dahai, how was the harvest of your corn? Did you lose any of it? Aish! Who would have thought that right before it was ready to harvest, we'd encounter a plague of locusts! If it wasn't for the old immortal warning us, there absolutely wouldn't be any corn left, and then the court would blame you...the heavens are looking after us! They truly left us a living road!"

Yu Hai sheepishly smiled, "Our corn's output was quite good and the royal prince was quite pleased. He came over earlier and took away more than a dozen carts full of corn. He even said that he would ask for a reward for us!"

Liu Han was an expert at farming. He calculated silently. More than a dozen carts full of grain and each cart had to be at least five to six hundred catties. That meant that his younger sister's husband's family had to produce at least ten thousand catties of grain from their ten mu...a shocked expression spread on his face, "More than a dozen carts? Then, each mu must have produced at least a thousand catties ah! Corn is such a high yielding crop? One mu of corn produces as much as six to seven mu of our regular crops!"

Yu Xiaocao grinned in delight, "Second Maternal Uncle, if corn becomes a widely planted crop, it could only be considered a coarse grain! It'll be very similar to millet and won't be very expensive!"

Liu Han caught onto the main point very quickly, "The price of coarse grains is usually a half or a third of the price for fine grains. Judging from that, planting corn is still quite profitable! Furthermore, wouldn't

planting a high-yielding crop mean that we no longer have to worry about starving? Even if we ate our fill, we wouldn't be able to finish the entire crop!"

Yu Xiaocao's head bobbed up and down as if she was pounding garlic with it, "Mhm, mhm! If we can't finish it, we can even use it to feed chickens and pigs. Once the animals get plump, we can slaughter them for meat. In the future, we won't have to wait until the New Years to eat a meal with meat in it anymore!"

Liu Zhimin's eyes glistened with light as he stared at Xiaocao, "Younger Cousin, from what you're saying, our family will be able to eat meat at least a couple times every week!"

Madam Bian laughed as she tapped her son's head and said, "You're such a gluttonous little cat that you're not afraid of your younger cousin laughing at you. Haven't you eaten enough meat in the past year?"

The Liu Family's circumstances were now considered one of the best in all of Xishan Village. The two eldest brothers of the Liu Family had followed their younger brother-in-law in selling watermelons and earned a whole lot of money. The third son was a skilled craftsman and had been hired by Prince Jing's estate to build their manor on the West Mountain. Every month he had a salary of twenty taels, so he had quite an income after a year. The family's meals and conditions continued to rise. Although they couldn't eat meat every couple of days like the Yu Family, they were definitely able to eat meat a few times a month.

At lunch, Madam Liu's two sisters-in-law had used the dried duck and preserved meat that Xiaocao had brought over to make a few dishes. They also used all of the eggs that were left over in the house for a stir-fry. In the end, they crafted an entire table full of food. There were a lot of people at home, so the adults sat at one table while the children had their own. Everyone ate and chatted happily.

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When the Yu Family of four was about to leave, Liu Cunjin, who knew his daughter liked to eat porridge made with green wheat, gave all of the thirty-so catties of green wheat that they had finished rubbing to them. Yu Hai repeatedly declined the offer and the old man became angry, "Do you dislike my family's gift as not being presentable? If you don't take it, then take all of the grain back as well!"

Madam Liu was very familiar with her father's crabby character. She hurriedly pulled at her husband's sleeve and smiled, "This is the gift that Father is giving me. You don't have the right to refuse. Father, you still remember that I like to eat green wheat porridge ah!"

“Of course I remember, why wouldn't I remember?” Liu Cunjin's expression relaxed quite a bit when he saw his daughter placing the green wheat in the horse cart.

Madam Yao chuckled from the side, “Dahai, don't lower yourself to that old man's level. He ah, loves his daughter very much. Our daughter Yun loves to eat porridge made with green wheat, so the house always has a pot going. Every time summer started, he would go pick some wheat from the fields without telling the family and secretly rub the grain out so he could make some porridge for his daughter to eat! After our daughter Yun got married, every year he would always mutter under his breath, 'Looks like our daughter can't eat green wheat porridge this year. How about we send a couple catties over for her?’”

Yu Hai also dearly loved his daughters. Otherwise, he wouldn't have allowed Xiaocao to do all of her crazy ideas. He hollered in a voice full of emotion, “Father...we'll take the green wheat. When we get back, I'll especially simmer some green wheat porridge for Muyun to eat.”

Yu Xiaocao added in from the side, “Father, I also like to eat porridge made of green wheat. Don't just think of Mother and forget this daughter of yours!”

Yu Hai chuckled shyly, “Then we'll make an extra bowl. Cao'er can eat with your mother!”

Little Shitou interjected somewhat unhappily, “There's still me, there's still me!” Yu Hai lightly patted the back of his son's head, “You little kid, what are you trying to do? Have we ever slighted you on food or drink? Don't we also have white rice and wheat around? Your mother and second sister just have a few likes, yet you try to insert yourself in?”

Little Shitou deflated and looked for comfort from his grandmother, “Grandmother, Father is biased! Shitou is so pitiful as I have no one who loves and cares about me. I'm just like an abandoned little cabbage in the fields...”

Madam Yao laughed as she hugged him closely and comforted him, “Don't cry, Shitou, Grandmother loves you! We have a lot of green wheat at home, so you guys can't be harsh on your children. If you finish it, just ask your Second Older Brother to send some more over!”

Yu Hai leveled a glare at his son and then smiled, "Mother, don't be fooled by this little guy. Ah he, he doesn't actually love eating green wheat porridge. He's just trying to worm himself in ah!" The phrase 'worm himself in' was a term he had learned from his daughter.

Liu Cunjin looked at the color of the sky and then spoke to Madam Liu, "It's getting late and roads here are a bit rough. Don't rush too quickly back home. If there's nothing going on the next few days, your mother and I will come over to see you. Don't flaunt any wealth and keep an eye on the grain at home. Don't be too generous and don't forget what your roots are!"

After he finished speaking, Madam Liu nodded her head in assent. Although her father's words were a bit crude, every word he said was for her sake.

The horse cart quickly left Xishan Village. When she turned her head back to look, she could still see her white-haired parents waving towards her in fading light. Madam Liu felt a burst of sadness within her heart and vowed to visit her parents more often in the future so they wouldn't have to worry so much about her.

When they got back to Dongshan Village, the sky was completely dark. Luckily, other than the stretch of road just outside of Xishan Village, the rest of the roads were wide and smooth. The horse was able to pull the cart at a steady pace in the dark.

When they got home, Old Yu told them that Zhenxiu Restaurant's assistant steward, Qian Xiaoduo, had come by today under the orders of Third Young Master Zhou with a cart full of grain. When he saw the courtyard full of vegetables, he was so moved that he insisted on placing an order. However, after finding out that Yu Hai and his family members had gone to Xishan Village, he knew no one was around to make a decision so he stated he would come by tomorrow to discuss this.

"Dahai, Zhenxiu Restaurant treats us quite well. We should just give them some of the vegetables we're planting here!" Old Yu thought that the Zhou Family, who were grand imperial merchants, had helped the Yu Family quite a bit. In fact, they didn't even forget to bring some grain over during this year of disaster. To return the favor, they should give them some vegetables.

Yu Hai didn't directly reply and instead looked inquiringly at his youngest daughter. Yu Xiaocao thought a bit and then said, "Our vegetable garden in the courtyard has at least three to four mu, so we definitely can't finish all of the vegetables in there. However, the pesticide we use every day to drive away the locusts is quite expensive. How about...we reserve two mu of vegetable fields for Zhenxiu Restaurant and only charge them the money used to make the pesticide?"

Yu Xiaolian, on the other hand, was not pleased with this idea, "So are you saying that the seeds and the labor used to grow these vegetables are not worth money ah? If we do as you say, we'd definitely be on the losing side! In my opinion, Zhenxiu Restaurant is a large business and they don't care one iota about a little chump change, so we need to sell our vegetables at the current market price! Our family's vegetables are the only ones available right now in town! If Zhenxiu Restaurant is able to offer green vegetable dishes, they absolutely wouldn't sell them for cheap and it would attract a lot of customers to them. Where else would they find such a lucrative business opportunity?"

Yu Xiaobao grinned at her sister and said, "Xiaolian now has a head full of business. Everything you said was right! Okay! Tomorrow, you're in charge of negotiating the terms with Brother Xiaoduo!"

Yu Xiaolian twisted around and grumbled, "No I won't! Tomorrow morning, I need to go sell starch jelly ah, so how would I have the time to manage this? Aren't you quite familiar with Qian Xiaoduo ah? You can discuss with him what his plans were in regard to our vegetables!"

The next day, Qian Xiaoduo came by in the early morning to Dongshan Village. The head steward also came along, which showed just how much importance they regarded this particular business. With the Zhou Family's assets, it wasn't impossible for them to bring vegetables from the south here. However, the amount of money it would take to buy and transport all of the vegetables was also not a small sum. That being said, could vegetables transported from afar be as tasty and fresh as vegetables just picked from the ground? All of the rich people in town had picky tongues and they could tell with one bite if something was fresh or not.

With Qian Xiaoduo leading, the head steward came into the Yu Family's courtyard. The expansive courtyard was planted completely with fresh and tender green vegetable sprouts. There were a mixed variety of plants. Some had just come out of the ground in tiny sprouts while others had already grown about an inch above the ground. The leaves on the plants were a soothing green and seemed to be full of water. There wasn't a single sign that any of these plants had been nibbled on by any insects.

Yu Xiaobao was currently in a field spraying pesticides. She waved in welcome at the head steward, "Head Steward Uncle, why did you personally come over? Please go sit in a room and I'll pour some tea for you!"

The head steward waved a hand and replied, "No need, you can continue with what you were doing!" He walked down a thin walkway that was between the vegetable fields to Yu Xiaobao. He noticed the

spray can full of pesticide that was a faint brown color and asked, "Is this the pesticide that can destroy locusts?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded and said, "This pesticide not only can kill locusts but it can also drive them away! My family's courtyard is quite big, yet there aren't a lot of locusts flying over. The ones that do fly in don't end up going around for long before they die. They don't even have the chance to defile any of our vegetables here!"

The head steward looked in the direction that Xiaocao was pointing. Sure enough, a locust had just landed on a vegetable sprout. Right after it landed, it only managed to walk a few steps before it fell down and stopped moving!

He couldn't help but exclaim in surprise, "Not bad! If this pesticide could be spread to everyone, wouldn't we be able to exterminate all of the locusts?"

Yu Xiaocao sighed, "This pesticide has a few ingredients that are a bit hard to find and some of the ingredients are quite expensive. Most commoners wouldn't be able to afford it. A normal mu could produce enough food to make a hundred copper coins. However, the cost to make the pesticide is well above that income. Do you think anyone would do a business that would obviously lose money?"

The head steward looked at her with a smile on his face and stated, "Don't worry, we won't let you lose money. There's no need to hint at me about the costs of growing your vegetables!"

Yu Xiaocao let out a couple of dry laughs and then continued, "Then I'll just tell the truth to you. One mu of vegetables from start to finish requires three taels worth of pesticide. For vegetables such as these, one mu can produce around three thousand catties or so. What I'm trying to say is that one catty of vegetables now is going to cost around three to five copper coins more than the usual price..."

The head steward waved a hand and said, "Don't worry, we absolutely won't have you guys lose money! I'll increase the price by an additional ten copper coins per catty, what do you think?"

Yu Xiaocao lifted the pot full of pesticide and a bright smile appeared on her face. She gave a thumbs up at the head steward and said, "Very generous! You are truly the head steward of Zhenxiu Restaurant! However, we don't have a lot of vegetables for sale here. The most we can give you is two mu worth."

Two mu worth meant six thousand catties of green vegetables. Zhenxiu Restaurant usually used that many vegetables in a dozen to twenty days. However, this season was different. Green vegetables, especially fresh green vegetables such as these, were much more valuable now. They could naturally sell them at the restaurant for a much higher price!

The head steward slapped his hand down, "Okay! I hope that after we harvest the first batch that you'll be able to plant another round very quickly and continue to grow them until autumn! Furthermore, you guys absolutely cannot sell your vegetables to a second buyer."

"Not a problem, that's absolutely not a problem!" Yu Xiaocao was able to make a decision on her own. She nodded her head, "My family's courtyard is only this large, so even if we wanted to sell to more people, we wouldn't be able to ah! Oh right, we also planted some autumn vegetables next to this. We can also reserve some for you as well!"

The head steward pointed a finger at her and laughed, "You ah, have a natural talent for business! Okay! Zhenxiu Restaurant will take all of the autumn vegetables that your family can't finish. The price will also be increased by ten copper coins per catty."

Before an hour had passed, their cooperative business had been set up. The price they agreed upon was the price they used for the early spring plus an additional ten copper coins per catty. This meant that lettuce was thirty copper coins a catty, romaine lettuce was thirty-five copper coins a catty, spinach was twenty-five copper coins a catty, Indian lettuce was twenty-eight copper coins a catty...Although this wasn't the season for growing spinach, Yu Xiaocao had her cheat item, so what kind of vegetables couldn't she raise?

Although the prices for these green vegetables didn't seem very high, the price of pork was usually around thirty copper coins a catty. Selling a catty of green vegetables at the price for a catty of pork was an astoundingly expensive prospect for the average commoner! However, currently pork wasn't hard to find yet fresh green vegetables were now very rare!

Recently, Zhenxiu Restaurant's business had gone down a bit. One reason was that there were too many meat dishes, while the vegetables weren't very fresh yet extremely expensive. Their taste was also average. Luckily, their signature dishes were still able to bring in customers. Otherwise, they would also have to be like the other restaurants in town and close for this season.

After finishing the talks to seal the deal with the Yu Family, the head steward contently left Dongshan Village with Qian Xiaoduo, who had recently risen to an assistant steward.

When Yu Xiaocao's family heard about this business deal, they were all quite pleased! Using the lettuce as an example, one mu could produce at least three thousand catties of lettuce. If they sold each catty for thirty copper coins, then they could make around ninety to a hundred taels from the field. Other than their watermelon fields, where else would they be able to make this type of profit from their farm?

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Because they had agreed to help Third Young Master Zhou obtain the best quality abalones and seafood, Yu Hai spent his entire summer going out to sea with Liu Shuanzhu. Liu Shuanzhu caught fish while Yu Hai dove down. Yu Hai's swimming skills were quite good and with the help of an air bladder made of sheepskin, he was able to dive around twenty meters down. Every time he dove down, he had quite good luck. He was able to pick up some lobsters, sea cucumbers and abalones. However, most of them were not considered of the best quality, so all of these seafood ended up being at the table for the Yu Family to eat.

Yu Xiaocao also spent a lot of time this summer diving in the water. Every time she made sure to look presentable with her shark-skin diving suit and a sheep-skin bladder full of air. Her father repeatedly warned her to be careful so she always went into the shallow parts of the water. Her little dolphin friend knew how to find her so it was always waiting for her nearby when she dove in.

With the help of the little dolphin, she was able to swiftly swim into the deep parts of the ocean. Furthermore, with the little divine stone's magical bubble, she didn't have to worry about running out of air or getting crushed by the water pressure. Sometimes, the little divine stone was in a good mood and would lead her directly to some areas that had the best quality seafood. Thus, her little sack at her waist was always bulging with her finds.

After diving a few times, she was able to get enough seafood to fill the Zhou Family's yearly quota. Every time she gathered seafood, Yu Xiaocao had to surreptitiously go into town and then come back home to assert that Third Young Master Zhou wanted her father to turn this seafood into dried goods. Yu Hai couldn't help but lament in admiration every time he saw the seafood, "In the wider world, there are always people more talented than oneself! I don't know who is so talented and fortunate to be able to gather such good quality sea cucumbers and abalone all the time."

After the highest quality seafood was turned into dried goods and sent into the capital, the patriarch of the Zhou Family couldn't help but rejoice within his heart that his grandson was able to have a good relationship with the Yu Family. There were very few people in the world who had the swimming ability and fortune of the Yu Family! He repeatedly advised his grandson to make sure to have a good relationship with the Yu Family. In the future, all of the seafood the Zhou Family gave to the imperial court relied on the help of this family!

Third Young Master Zhou naturally didn't need his grandfather to remind him. The Yu Family's father and daughter pair were too astounding. If he didn't try his best to maintain a good relationship, then he would be the one who was stupid. He especially had to maintain a good relationship with Yu Xiaocao. She was extremely talented despite her young age. Many speciality dishes of Zhenxiu Restaurant had come out of her hands. Furthermore, from his understanding, she was the person who managed to bring out early-ripening vegetables and watermelons to the market. Recently he had heard from the head manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant in Tanggu Town say that the little lass had come up with a new pesticide to destroy locusts and had planted vegetables in her courtyard. When this harvest of vegetables came onto the market, who knew what kind of sensation that would cause.

Two years ago, they had met by chance in an alleyway in Tanggu Town. Out of the kindness of his own heart, he had helped the little girl and ended up being rewarded for his good deed. With Yu Xiaocao's help, he was able to make Zhenxiu Restaurant a sensational success. They also opened a condiment factory and started manufacturing vermicelli and century eggs together. All of this allowed him to be looked upon highly by his grandfather and be groomed as the next family successor. His successes had defeated his highly ambitious older brother and he was now the acknowledged heir. The saying, 'good deeds lead to good outcomes' had truly come to circle for him!

As the Yu Family's vegetables matured until they were about ready to be harvested, Royal Prince Yang, who had been away in the capital for more than twenty days, had finally returned back to Tanggu Town covered in dust and travel-worn. He rested for merely one day at the manor in Tanggu Town and then set off the next day to Dongshan Village.

As soon as Zhu Junyang passed through the Yu Family's front gate, Yu Xiaocao joyfully rushed over. When she saw that there was nothing valuable in his hands, she curled her lip and turned around to leave as she muttered, "Didn't you say you were going to get a reward for my family ah? Where's the reward? One absolutely cannot believe a man's words!"

"Pffftt——" An unfamiliar laugh caused Yu Xiaocao to turn back again. She looked curiously at the strange figure who was behind the young royal prince.

The stranger had a tall and imposing figure, pale luminous skin, and a dazzling pair of dark eyes that seemed to be able to see into the depths of a person's soul. When he laughed, he looked as bright as the moon, and when he was serious, he looked as austere as a cold star. He had a straight nose bridge and dark red lips. His face seemed gentle when he smiled and foreboding as ice when he was stern. The profile of his face seemed to be perfectly sculpted by a sharp knife and he was stunning without looking like a gentle beauty...in essence, he was a perfect example of an extremely handsome man!

"And you are——" Yu Xiaocao felt a bit embarrassed by her earlier petty actions. She gazed at that man who was more handsome than any of the actors or idols of her previous life and asked in a somewhat hesitant tone.

Zhu Junyang naturally didn't miss the flash of astonishment that had gone through her eyes. His face became ice cold and he frowned as he turned around to look at the man behind him. He seemed not to know how to properly introduce this person. The emperor was seriously too much. He actually had so much free time that he wanted to travel incognito among his people and insisted on coming with him to Dongshan Village. He really didn't know what he was thinking.

The man smiled slightly and calmly replied, "We...ahem ahem! I am Junyang's eldest brother. You can call me Older Brother Junfan!"

The young royal prince's eldest brother? Oh right, Prince Jing had three sons. She had already seen his second and third sons, so the only one she hadn't met and only heard about was his heir. Yu Xiaocao hurriedly bowed and delicately said, "Greetings to the heir of Prince Jing, may you have much fortune!"

"Ahem ahem..." 'The heir of Prince Jing' seemed to have choked on his own saliva. After coughing a bit, he hurriedly replied, "No need for such courtesy! Us brothers all tend to have easy-going temperaments. Miss Yu doesn't need to act so politely!"

The person who was pretending to be Zhu Junyang's eldest brother was the current emperor. Since the two of them were cousins, he technically wasn't lying. Calling him 'older brother' was something that Zhu Junyang should do.

Why did the emperor decide to come to Dongshan Village? It was quite simple; he was very interested in the Yu Family. When he saw the corn and potatoes that Zhu Junyang sent back, as well as the booklet containing pages and pages of potato recipes, Zhu Junfan was certain that one member of the Yu Family was also a transmigrator like him.

From what he was able to pry out of his younger cousin's mouth, he was pretty sure that his fellow transmigrator was probably the clever and interesting, talented at cooking, Yu Family's youngest daughter. In order to confirm his hunch, he traveled along with his younger cousin to Dongshan Village while incognito.

As soon as they met, this little girl used a phrase that was out of turn. Wasn't it one of those sappy phrases from those historical dramas in his previous life? This era didn't have anyone saying 'and may you have great fortune' as a greeting.

When he saw the entire courtyard filled with verdant green vegetables without a single locust on any of them, Zhu Junfan was quite surprised. Despite his astonishment, he didn't reveal any of it on his face. He grinned slyly and pointed towards the green vegetables with the fan in his hand as he said, "Did you spray pesticides on these vegetables?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head, "My lord is wise. This commoner girl followed the precepts of traditional medicine and, with the help of Doctor Sun from Tongren Medicine Hall, created a pesticide that could destroy locusts. I spray some on the plants every morning and evening, and it protects the vegetables from being eaten by the insects."

"Since this pesticide can kill locusts, that means it has a bit of poison in it, right? Would there be any adverse effects to the people who end up eating the vegetables then?" When Zhu Junfan found out that this pesticide could kill locusts, he thought further ahead. If this could be mass-produced and disseminated, wouldn't the people be able to plant a crop before the start of autumn and harvest something? However, if this was similar to the pesticides in his previous life and had bad effects on the body, then he would forget about it!

Yu Xiaocao proudly smiled and explained, "Although my pesticide does have some poison in it, the poison is volatile and completely dissipates within twelve hours of being sprayed. As long as I don't spray any on the vegetables about twelve hours before we harvest, there won't be any harm to a person's body. Furthermore, even if someone accidentally ate some vegetables with the pesticide still on it, it's not a big deal. The poison isn't very strong. Those with strong and healthy bodies won't feel any effects. As for those who are weaker, they'll just end up going to the bathroom to relieve themselves a couple of times. As long as they drink enough water, they should be fine!"

"Volatile?" Zhu Junfan repeated this term a few times as a mysterious smile flickered on his lips. Aha! I've caught your little tail. He was willing to bet the head on his shoulders that the Yu Family's youngest daughter was a transmigrator.

Yu Xiaocao thought he didn't understand what the term 'volatile' meant and hurriedly gave an explanation, "Volatile means that it dissipates quickly! The pesticide's poison has a time limit for how

long it is effective. When enough time passes, then the poisonous effects will disappear. It doesn't go into the air and actually truly disappears. It won't have any polluting effects on the air or soil around it!"

'Pollution? Heh heh! Miss Yu Xiaocao, the more you say the more mistakes you make! It is you! You are my fellow transmigrator!' Zhu Junfan was calculating the possibilities within his mind and didn't beat the grass to scare the snake. If he had to choose between Yu Hai and Yu Xiaocao being the transmigrator, he would rather Yu Xiaocao be the transmigrator.

Why? The reason was simple. Men tended to have ambitious thoughts. After all, didn't his current grandfather, who was previously a general in his past life, snatch an opportunity during the chaos of the previous dynasty and become the emperor who established the Great Ming Dynasty? Although he wasn't very attached to being the emperor, he also didn't want the hard work that his grandfather had done in establishing this dynasty to be destroyed by someone else.

If this little girl, Yu Xiaocao, was the transmigrator, then he didn't have to be worried. From his taciturn younger cousin, he could tell that this little girl had either been a farmer or a small restaurant owner in her past life. Otherwise, how could she come up with methods in growing vegetables and watermelons early as well as be able to cultivate potatoes and corn so well?

If his hunch was correct, then he didn't have to worry that the little girl was someone like Wu Zetian [1]. Today he was finally able to meet this weak, delicate, and adorable little girl. He could tell in one glance that she wasn't someone who had raging ambitions. This made him relax even more.

When Zhu Junyang noticed that all of Yu Xiaocao's attention was on the emperor, he immediately felt as if he had been coldly abandoned. He dryly coughed a couple of times and stated, "Yu Xiaocao, I want to eat pork stewed with vermicelli and savory and spicy river snails..."

Yu Xiaocao turned around and rolled her eyes at him, "We don't have any river snails today! We only have potatoes stir fried with potatoes, green vegetables sauteed with green vegetables, and locusts fried with locusts!"

"Locusts? You can also eat locusts?" Zhu Junfan had been born and raised in a city in his previous life. Thus, he had only seen locusts as illustrations in books.

Yu Xiaocao turned back to face the 'heir of Prince Jing' and immediately changed her aggressive expression into one filled with smiles, "Although locusts look quite scary, they are actually very tasty. Furthermore, locusts are very nutritious, so they don't harm the body and only strengthen it! My lord, do you want to try some at noon?"

Zhu Junfan was just about to agree when his younger cousin with the stiff face interjected, "If you don't have any river snails, you can go gather some! There's still some time between now and noon. If you gather some now, you'll still have time to clean them of their dirt!"

"If you want to eat them, go gather some yourself! The back courtyard has a gate that leads to the lakeside. I'll have Little Shitou show you the way!" Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him again and replied in a voice full of impatience.

"Savory and spicy river snails? I've heard that they are quite good. We...I would also like to try some!" Zhu Junfan started reminiscing about his college days. At that time, he had gone out with three of his buddies and they had ordered a plate of river snails and a few bottles of beer. It was the summer, so they were shirtless as they sat next to the small food stall as they ate food and drank beer leisurely. Those were the times that he missed the most ah! Unfortunately, it was highly unlikely that he would ever see those buddies of his again...

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"Since our honored guest who has traveled from afar has a request, as the hosts we will do our best to fulfill it! Little Shitou, find Fangping and grab that bucket. We are going to gather river snails ah!" Yu Xiaocao naturally treated this stunning beautiful man, whose every elegant motion spoke of royalty, with great importance.

Who knew what type of temperament the heir of Imperial Prince Jing had?! Although he always had a smile on his face, she felt deeply scared of him. There was a type of person in the world that could be called a smiling tiger. These people could cut off your head with a gentle smile on their face. Naturally, these people were much more scary than the young royal prince, who outwardly had a grouchy exterior. Although the young royal prince had a somewhat explosive temper and nasty tongue, he had never exploded at her. Even when she infuriated him to the point of him glaring at her, he never accused her of a crime. The young royal prince was probably someone who had a lot of bark but no bite right?

If she had seen Royal Prince Yang in the past, when he killed people without blinking, she wouldn't be thinking this! The 'cold faced death god' wasn't his nickname for no reason. Zhu Junyang was only able to tolerate the tyrannical antics of Yu Xiaocao alone!

When Zhu Junyang saw Yu Xiaocao fawning over the emperor like a slavish dog, he felt his temper rise as he sourly remarked, "Why is it that when he wants to eat some, you jump to make it, yet you don't take my words to heart eh?!"

Yu Xiaocao righteously replied, "The heir of Prince Jing is my guest, so I naturally have to cater to his requests."

"Am I not a guest then ah?" Zhu Junyang pointed at his nose as he asked discontentedly.

Yu Xiaocao curled her lip, "Are you still considered a guest? You come over every few days to bum food and drinks off of me. If I truly treated you as a guest, wouldn't I be exhausted to death ah?! Alright, I'll bring you along to gather river snails and allow you to experience this novelty. Do you want to come?"

"Don't want to!" Zhu Junyang arrogantly turned his head away as he lifted his head up high and snorted, "You won't make the food I want to eat and even make me do work. No manners!!"

Everyone in the Yu Family had long gotten used to these two bickering and picking at each other constantly. So, they all went about their business as usual. Zhu Junfan, on the other hand, regarded the two of them with growing interest. His younger cousin always had a stiff expression on his face and regarded his words like gold. In fact, he even faced him, the emperor, with that constipated look on his face. He never would have expected that the cold faced death god also had such a childish side as well. For the sake of a plate of savory and spicy river snails, he was actually willing to quarrel until he was flushed with anger. Tsk tsk tsk! This was truly eye opening!!

"Second Sister, Young Royal Prince, are you guys coming to gather river snails ah?!" Little Shitou had been watching the two of them quibble back and forth silently. He looked at the color of the sky and decided that if he didn't stop them now, they wouldn't have enough time to gather river snails for lunch.

Yu Xiaocao answered in assent and turned around so Zhu Junyang could only see the back of her head, "Doesn't matter to me whether you come or not! You can just stay in the courtyard ah! My lord, do you have any interest in coming to gather river snails with us?"

Zhu Junfan had never had the opportunity to experience farming in both of his lives. It was a rare chance for him to leave the imperial palace, so he naturally wouldn't bypass this hard to get opportunity.

Yu Xiaocao held a bucket as she took her two younger brothers along as well as the 'heir of Prince Jing' to go into the back courtyard. The back courtyard was also completely planted with vegetables. There was a small, stone-paved pathway in the garden that brought them to the back gate. After opening the gate and walking a few steps, they were at the shore of a lake.

This lake was quite large. Its waters were a tranquil aquagreen color. In the distance there was a flock of ducks cheerfully swimming around in the water and their occasional quacks could be heard. Qian Wu, who was at the lakeside watching over the ducks, swiftly scampered over when he saw Little Shitou and Liu Fangping.

When he saw the buckets in their hands, Qian Wu became even more happy and called out, "Little Shitou, are you here to catch some fish ah? Let me help too!"

Little Shitou waved the bucket in his hands and laughed, "Nope! Second Sister is bringing us to gather river snails. We're going to stir fry them for lunch!"

Qian Wu smacked his lips in delight, "Xiaocao's savory and spicy river snails are so good! I'm also good at gathering river snails, let me help you ah!"

The three little boys grouped up together and ran into the shallow waters of the lake together to gather river snails. Perhaps it was because of the drought, but the lake waters were quite low right now. The children rolled up their pant legs and stepped into the mud at the shore. They carefully put their hands in the water to find river snails.

"I found a big one!" Little Shitou's shout of pure glee broke the silence as he thrust his hand into the air. He had managed to find a river snail that was the size of a pigeon egg.

"I also found one!!" Liu Fangping refused to be outdone and took the river snail he found and compared it to the one that Little Shitou found to see which one was larger. No matter who found a bigger one, neither would be unhappy. The sounds of their delighted laughter echoed around the lakeside.

Yu Xiaocao found a relatively gently sloping area by the lakeshore and spread a bunch of straw on the ground. She said to the 'heir of Prince Jing', "My lord, you can sit down here and rest a bit. The lake has a lot of river snails and we have a lot of people. We'll be able to gather enough for lunch in a jiffy!"

She rolled up her sleeves and walked towards the lake. She carefully inspected the water for any signs of river snails. After her parents passed away in her previous life, she spent a lot of time in the nearby waters looking for river snails to add to her younger brother's and sister's diets. She was quite experienced at this!

After seeing some hazy signs in the water, she accurately thrust her hands in the water and never came back empty handed. The bucket inside her hands very quickly filled up with a layer of river snails that differed in size.

Zhu Junyang, who had stealthily followed them from behind, had also been lured over by the gleeful shouts of the children. He felt an itch inside him and copied them by taking off his shoes to also search for river snails.

Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but roast him a bit, "Weren't you not interested in gathering river snails? Then why did you secretly come over and try?"

"This prince is happy and interested! Can you stop me?" Zhu Junyang's arrogant demeanor was the exact same as the little golden kitten that followed Yu Xiaocao around. Yu Xiaocao curled her lip and stealthily laughed.

Gathering river snails wasn't a task that required skill, so Zhu Junyang quickly got the hang of it. In fact, when he found a particularly large one, he had to go to Yu Xiaocao and brag a bit. However, Yu Xiaocao took out an even larger snail from her pail and proudly grinned at him.

When he saw how joyful the children were, Zhu Junfan also felt an itch. He took off his shoes and was about to step into the water when one of his personal bodyguards stopped him, "Imperial Majesty, please reconsider this!"

"Reconsider what! I've already considered everything! The water is so shallow, so who can get into trouble? Whoever tries to stop us again, we will have them thrown into the lake to feed the ducks!!" Zhu Junfan threw the fan in his hands at the bodyguard. Only after confirming that the bodyguard had caught his favorite fan did he finally step down in the water barefoot.

In the summer, the lake water had been warmed up under the sun, so his feet didn't feel bone cold in it. Zhu Junfan copied the children's actions and started to search for river snails in the water! 'Oh, I feel

one!' Before he could be happy, he took it out of the water to look and discovered that it was a small rock. The smile congealed on his face and Zhu Junfan sulkily continued to search in the water.

His group of personal bodyguards all trembled as they bent over next to him. They were all afraid that he might slip and fall into the lake water...

Just as they were worrying, they heard a 'plop' sound and then saw water splashing everywhere. All of the children burst out into giggles. Zhu Junfan raised his head to look and also couldn't hold back his laughter. His taciturn younger cousin, who was currently sitting in the water, had such a blank expression on his face. It was really too funny!

Perhaps he was laughing too hard, but Zhu Junfan suddenly felt his body losing control. He flailed his arms behind him but he couldn't keep his balance as he watched himself heading closer towards the lake. His two bodyguards next to him swiftly grabbed onto his arms and pulled him back to shore.

After having that false alarm, when Zhu Junfan went back down to the water to gather river snails, his bodyguards did their best to dissuade him. Spittle flew as they persuaded him, and they finally managed to convince the emperor to stay put. All of the bodyguards were dripping with sweat afterwards. If the emperor had fallen into the water earlier, then they would definitely be punished later. Aish! Protecting the emperor truly wasn't a job for humans!

Before an hour passed, Xiaocao and the two boys managed to fill up their buckets with snails. Xiaocao had also managed to catch a bunch of small fish when no one else was paying attention to her. She planned on frying them after coating them with a thin breading. The fried fish would be flaky and savory and their taste would definitely be astounding ah!

When they returned back to the residence, Yu Xiaocao poured all of the river snails into a large wooden basin and filled it with some clean water before adding some salt. She also secretly added a few drops of diluted mystic-stone water. By adding that, it would speed up the process of removing dirt from the snails.

Yu Xiaocao then went into the few rows of vegetables that hadn't been sprayed with pesticide this morning and picked a couple from each type. After thinking a bit, she also retrieved a few locusts that had been frozen in the cellar. She wanted to prepare some dishes that the 'heir of Prince Jing' had probably never seen let alone eaten before.

At lunch, a giant bowl of bright red savory and spicy river snails was presented to the table. Because Qian Wu gave all of the snails he found to Little Shitou, Yu Xiaocao had her younger brother send a smaller bowl of the finished dish to the Qian Family. Since they sent some to the Qian Family, they naturally had to send a portion to Zhou Shanhu's family, who they were closer to. After sending portions here and there, they were only left with this large bowl.

Zhu Junfan tasted one and immediately was transported back to his memories of eating river snails while drinking beer. The savory and spicy taste of the snails paired with a bottle of ice cold beer was truly a refreshing taste. Unfortunately, he was a shipbuilding major and didn't know how to brew beer. Even if he wanted to drink beer he could only do so inside his dreams!

Lunch ended up being quite sumptuous. There was the dish that Zhu Junyang ordered, 'pork stewed with vermicelli'. The pork was fatty without being greasy and the vermicelli was perfectly cooked and shimmered under the light. Just looking at it raised a person's appetite. There was also a plate of fried fish. Yu Xiaocao had especially gathered fish about the size of a finger. After cleaning them, she then added seasonings and coated them in a thin layer of flour. She then placed them in a pot full of sizzling oil and fried them until they were golden. All of the bones in the fish had been cooked until they were soft. The fish was flaky and crispy and incredibly tasty.

There was also a plate full of pig ears seasoned with chili oil and a plate of pig head meat. This was because Madam Liu saw that there were some guests over and thought that they didn't have any good dishes to welcome them. While the children were gathering river snails, she had gone down to the cold cellar, retrieved a pig's head and braised it. Madam Liu's current skill at braising pig head meat was on the same level as Yu Xiaocao and the meat she braised was just as delicious.

Furthermore, there were also plates of lettuce seasoned with oyster sauce, oyster sauce romaine lettuce, and Indian lettuce sauteed with garlic. All of it looked pleasing to the eye and smelled incredible. It was so tantalizing that the imperial bodyguards couldn't take their eyes off of them.

The most special dish on the table was a plate of golden fried locusts. Although they looked quite scary, they were even more delicious than fried little fish and had a texture very similar to fried shrimp. At first, Zhu Junfan was a bit leery of trying them. He watched as the Yu Family's children all stuffed their mouths full and chewed noisily on the crispy food. Even his younger cousin, Zhu Junyang, ate several in a row.

When Yu Xiaocao noticed that the 'heir of Prince Jing' had an expression that was both curious and hesitant, she quickly selected a locust that had roe in it. She placed it into Zhu Junfan's bowl and smiled,

"My lord, the roe of a locust is even more tasty than the roe of a crab. Go ahead and try this one. If you don't like it, feel free to spit it out!"