

Gold Chapter 291

Fields of Gold Chapter 291 - Allergy

Zhu Junfan didn't live like a prince in his previous life. He had eaten silkworm cocoons and also tried fried cicadas. Thus, unlike other officials or nobles, he didn't reveal a disgusted expression when looking at the fried locusts. He picked up a locust that had its wings cut off and stared at it intently for a short period of time before he started to deliver it towards his mouth. Before he could, a pale, beardless, and handsome youth hurriedly stopped him and said, "Master, may this servant try it?"

Yu Xiaocao had read quite a few novels in her past life and knew that the emperor often had eunuchs test his food for poison prior to eating. Did the heir of Prince Jing also have a taste-tester eunuch as well? She regarded this young man with curiosity. He had skin that glowed with health and she couldn't even see his pores. His face was delicately pretty. Although he didn't have the masculine handsomeness of the heir of Prince Jing and the young royal prince, he was still the epitome of a delicately beautiful young man.

He had a tall, straight figure that did not resemble someone who was used to being an eunuch. Most eunuchs were always bowing and bending to people, so when they walked they seemed to be slightly hunchbacked. This person had an air of being neither too arrogant nor too servile, and he didn't have the greasy flattering expression that most eunuchs had. The only thing that made her feel uncomfortable was that his voice sounded extremely gentle and mellow. However, it also didn't resemble the shrill voices of the eunuchs she had seen in dramas.

Zhu Junyang noticed that the little girl was unabashedly studying Su Ran and he couldn't help but frown. What did Su Ran have that made him so good to look at? This prince was also quite handsome, okay?

"Yu Xiaocao, just what are you looking at?!" Zhu Junyang felt a burst of irritation spark inside him and he couldn't help but interject to interrupt her thoughts.

When they heard Zhu Junyang's voice, both Zhu Junfan and Su Ran turned a bit to look at Yu Xiaocao. Caught off guard, Yu Xiaocao accidentally made eye contact with Su Ran's clear and limpid eyes. She immediately flushed bright red and glared at the young royal prince. She smiled politely at Su Ran and said, "Sir, you have an aura about you that reminds me of a tall graceful glade of bamboo on a desolate mountain. I was entranced by it and lost my senses."

Zhu Junfan guffawed, "Little girl, you have good taste. I also believe that Su Fan has an aura worthy of an elegant gentleman, so I think the metaphor of 'tall bamboo' is quite fitting. Su Ran, I'll give you the nickname of 'cultivate morality' ah!"

“Cultivate oneself, govern one's family, organize the country, let peace abound to all! Master, Su Ran is a crippled person, so I absolutely cannot live up to such a name.” Which man didn't harbor dreams of being a hero in his heart? Unfortunately, his dreams had all been shattered in his youth, when he had to sacrifice himself at the gates of the imperial palace to allow his family to survive a disastrous year.

Luckily, he had been given to an enlightened master who took him along to learn the classics, study martial arts, and discuss the governance of a country. His master never looked down upon him. Compared to the other eunuchs, who were firmly stepped upon by the older, more experienced eunuchs, or someone who had been used as a scapegoat, he was truly quite fortunate compared to his other colleagues who had also had their dignities erased at the gates of the palace.

Zhu Junfan's eyes opened wide and he slapped the table, “If this lord says you can live up to the name, then you can! Su Ran, what has this lord normally said to you? A deficiency in the body doesn't mean much. A true man has self-confidence, self-love, and self-dignity!! Su Ran, with your talents and abilities, you absolutely would be able to govern and pacify the country if you left the palace. You're not worse than other people! Whoever claims you can't live up to this name, make them find me!”

Su Ran could only treat this master, who was simultaneously his teacher, friend, master, and confidant, with the utmost sincerity and return his kindness with all of his efforts. If the master required it, he would gladly sacrifice himself through all tortures without a single thought!

Yu Xiaocao felt a bit regretful inside. What a wonderful person yet he was a eunuch! Although he was quite eye catching, he couldn't be considered a real man in this era! This old society was too hateful to have such palace customs abound!

Su Ran was just about to say something when the expression on his gentle face changed. His whole body started to itch as if he had just been bitten by multitudes of mosquitos. He tried to endure for some time but finally couldn't stop himself from using his hand to scratch his neck. His neck, right arm, and other parts of his body that were hidden by clothing all had large welts raised on it.

“Master, these locusts can't be eaten!” Su Ran stopped Zhu Junfan from placing a locust in his mouth as the itchiness caused his face to flush a bright red.

Yu Xiaocao acutely spotted the large welts on his neck and exclaimed, “Sir Su, you're allergic! Those who are sensitive often have allergic reactions to locusts! Let me go grab some prepared medicinal solution, just wait a moment ah!”

At first, when Zhu Junfan saw Su Ran's uncomfortable expression, he felt quite nervous. After hearing Yu Xiaocao's explanation, he immediately grinned, "So apparently Su Ran is allergic to locusts ah! I'm pretty sure that you also can't eat foods like silkworm cocoons and other similar creatures! Fried cicadas are quite delicious ah! What a pity, what a pity!"

Yu Xiaocao retrieved a small bottle from her room. The bottle was filled mostly with mystic-stone water and the rest of the ingredients were some herbs that stopped itching and reduced inflammation. She handed the bottle over to Su Ran, "Use half of it to drink and half of it on your body. It should work very quickly. Little Shitou, bring Sir Su to your room. Help him treat the areas on his back that he can't easily reach!"

After he saw Su Ran enter the west room with Little Shitou, Zhu Junyang picked up another fried locust and ate it noisily and with relish. He commented, "So delicate, he can even have problems from eating locusts! This prince has eaten so many, yet I don't have any problems at all, right?"

Once Zhu Junfan found out that his eunuch wasn't allergic to a medicinal ingredient, he knew that it wasn't too serious. Furthermore, Su Ran only ate one locust too. He watched as his younger cousin eat the locusts with obvious delight and also grabbed a locust that was fat in the belly. He placed the food in his mouth and slowly tasted it. As expected, it was truly quite good. It was actually very similar to the fried butterfly shrimp from KFC and had a savory and addicting taste!

However, the dish that he liked the most still had to be that bowl full of savory and spicy river snails. He used his hands to pick up one and then placed it by as mouth as he sucked. All of the broth and meat was delivered into his mouth. After gently chewing a couple of times, the savory and spicy taste lingered in his mouth and could not be forgotten.

In one meal, almost half of the large basin of savory and spicy river snails had been eaten by him alone. He also ate a lot of fried locusts and pork stewed with vermicelli. Only after his stomach was so bloated that he couldn't eat another bite did Zhu Junfan finally put his chopsticks down.

His eyes whirled around and then Zhu Junfan pointed at the plate of vermicelli to ask, "This vermicelli is quite delicious. Was it personally made by Xiaocao?"

At first, Little Shitou was a bit reserved when he first met the 'heir of Prince Jing' since the man had a noble identity. After spending time with the guest and noticing that he was quite easy to get along with,

even easier than the young royal prince, he relaxed. He smiled in delight, “My second sister's hand-made vermicelli isn't even in thickness and is a bit ugly. This vermicelli is all from Third Young Master Zhou's factory!”

“Eh? So what you're saying is that Xiaocao truly knows how to make vermicelli?” Zhu Junfan continued to ask with an ulterior motive. Little Shitou proudly replied, “My second sister is too awesome!! Vermicelli is something that my second sister had taught Third Young Master Zhou's factory workers to make ah! My second sister also knows how to make roasted chicken, salted duck, roasted duck, and they're all more authentic than the ones made by Zhenxiu Restaurant! My lord, if you're not in a hurry to go back to the capital, you can spend some time trying my second sister's culinary talents. After my headmaster ate the food my second sister made, he said that he never wanted to eat the food at restaurants again. He stated all of the food was only 'fit for pigs to eat'!”

Zhu Junfan was even more sure now that Yu Xiaocao was a transmigrator. He pouted and said, “From what you're saying, I've eaten more than twenty-seven years worth of food 'only fit for pigs to eat' ah!”

Eating food that was 'only fit for pigs to eat', didn't that also mean he was a pig? Little Shitou didn't dare to reply and stared imploringly at his second sister.

Yu Xiaocao received her younger brother's gaze asking for help and glared at him. 'Are you still proud now? The more you talk, the more likely you'll make a mistake. You can't offend someone by not talking. What was the point of studying so much?'

She smiled at the 'heir of Prince Jing' and said, “There are many famous chefs in the world. Any one of them would be able to bypass me, a commoner girl. My younger brother is only boasting because I am his family, you know, just trying to sell me up! My lord, don't take these words to heart and lower yourself to this little boy!”

At this point, Su Ran had just come out of the west room. Although he still had some welts on his neck, it looked like it wasn't as itchy as before. The expression on his face had also become gentle and elegant again.

Zhu Junfan made fun of him, “Su Ran, fried locusts are quite delicious, it's such a pity that you can't have any! Luckily, I'm not allergic to locusts so I can eat my fill.”

Yu Xiaocao smiled, “It's not that he can't eat any! I've made a few jars of grasshopper sauce. After fermenting, it won't cause an allergic reaction! If Sir Su is interested, I can give you a jar when you head

back to the capital. When you're eating it, make sure to stir-fry it in some oil and it'll really make the food go down!”

After Zhu Junyang heard this, he grumbled sourly from the side, “You're so cruel! The last time I was here, how come you didn't give me a jar to bring back to the capital? Those two carts of grain were used to feed an ungrateful dog!”

Yu Xiaocao placed her hands on her hips and retorted with quite a bit of heat, “What are you saying ah?! If you don't feel happy about sending us the grain, then pull them back to the capital! It's not as if we'll starve to death without your two carts of grain, right? The last time you left, the jars of grasshopper sauce hadn't finished fermenting yet. How could I let you bring some back?”

Zhu Junyang felt the knot in his heart relax when he found out that she hadn't given him any grasshopper sauce because it wasn't ready, not because she was treating him differently. He looked up at Yu Xiaocao, who still had her hands indignantly on her hips, and quietly muttered, “You only show your temper around me! You're always gentle and accommodating to other people, with a smile on your face. However, when it comes to me, it's like you want to strangle me!”

Yu Xiaocao let out a laugh to relieve her temper, “Isn't it because I treat you like one of my own family members that I'm this impolite to you? That being said, it's only because you, Young Royal Prince, have an easy-going temper that I can be this unrestrained in front of you!”

Zhu Junfan watched the two of them squabble with great interest. The only thing he was missing was a plate full of roasted melon seeds for him to snack on. After hearing Yu Xiaocao's last sentence, he almost choked on his own saliva.

Royal Prince Yang had a good temper? That was the most unbelievable lie he had ever heard! Did she think his nickname of 'cold faced death god' was just for giggles? When this guy lost his temper, he didn't recognize any of his family members and would even beat up the Heavenly Emperor himself if he came down. All of the rich playboys who tried to mess with him had all been beaten until they cried for their parents. His younger cousin had caused a lot of trouble for him ever since his childhood. This fellow gave him such a headache, yet there was someone praising him for having a good temper? 'Yu Xiaocao, are you blind?'

As for Zhu Junyang, who had just been called 'one of my own family members' by Yu Xiaocao, he was feeling quite good now. All of the resentment he had earlier had immediately dissipated. Everything this little girl said was right. People generally treated the people closest to them with their truest natures.

The little girl was as clever as a fox, so she naturally knew who truly treated her well and thus treated them back with the same sincerity!

Zhu Junfan inspected his younger cousin with renewed interest. His cousin was smiling like a fool after being flattered by a little girl. Zhu Junfan couldn't help but shake his head and let out a sigh!

Fields of Gold Chapter 292 - To Curry Favor

Jianwen Emperor, Zhu Junfan, spent five days in Tanggu Town, and he went to Dongshan Village with his younger cousin every day. The villagers of Dongshan Village were burning with curiosity, and they kept talking about the Yu Family being so lucky. First, they became adoptive relatives with a general. After that, they received special treatment from Royal Prince Yang. Now, they had also become acquainted with the heir of Prince Jing's Household.

Madam Zhang curled her lips and sourly said, "So what if they're acquainted with Prince Jing's heir? Can they be rewarded with a position of an official? When the lord returns to the capital, will he still remember who the heck Yu Hai is? The villagers are so snobby. Seeing that Yu Hai's family has become rich, they're all fawning over them. So shameless!"

Madam Li, who she was talking to, wrinkled her big face and groaned, "Mother, if we didn't divide the family, wouldn't these benefits apply to our entire Yu Family? Perhaps Younger Brother-in-law can also benefit from this. As the saying goes, 'the gatekeeper of the Prime Minister's Estate is considered a seventh-rank official'. If one can be liked by the heir of Prince Jing's Household and become the gatekeeper of the Prince Jing's Estate, then that would be even more honorable than being a county magistrate."

Madam Zhang was especially concerned about everything related to her youngest son. When she heard Madam Li's words, Madam Zhang's heart somewhat swayed. Her triangular eyes darted around as she considered the possibilities! It was impossible with Yu Hai since he had a grudge against her for the murder of his mother. That grateful Yu Hai probably wanted to devour her, let alone help her. However, she could try talking with Old Yu. Even if they were no longer a married couple, Yu Bo was still their son. If their son became well-off, wouldn't the father also benefit from it?

As a result, one evening after dinner, Madam Zhang blocked Old Yu's path when she saw him coming out for a stroll.

Looking at Madam Zhang's wrinkled old face, Old Yu couldn't help but turn his head and say, "We're already divorced, why are you looking for me? With how you treated me, I have already left you off easily by not reporting you to the yamen and suing you for attempted murder! Stay away from me so that no one will gossip about us!"

Madam Zhang's mouth twitched, but she forced out a smile and said, "Xiaobo's father, no matter what, we were once husband and wife. I used to be muddleheaded and made irreparable mistakes. For the sake of the children..."

"Don't mention the children! Over all these years, it's not like you don't know how I treated the child who you brought over from your previous marriage. But, what about you? How did you treat my children? You married Caifeng off to a remote village far away, moreover, he was a widower. Dahai is such a capable and kind child ah, yet you treated his family so harshly for so long! Ay... I won't settle these old grudges with you. We're people who have gotten divorced, so if we meet in the future, it's better to pretend that we don't know each other!" With his hands clasped between his back, Old Yu didn't even look at Madam Zhang.

Since he came to Dahai's house, he had been drinking extremely expensive tonics and eating lavish meals. Moreover, they didn't let him do any work at all. Caifeng and Dahai were both very filial, and their children also lived happily together with their parents. He didn't have to listen to Madam Zhang's shrill and sour complaints, as well as the sound of Madam Li indirectly scolding Dashan. With the exception of being somewhat worried about his youngest son, who was studying away from home, Old Yu felt very content with his life.

Madam Zhang must have regretted her decision, and thus stopped him in order to talk to him. She wanted to trick him to go back to do laborious work for her, and then kick him to the side when he couldn't work anymore. Did she think he was stupid! Why would he go back to be tortured by her when he could enjoy a good and leisurely life?

Madam Zhang stepped forward and blocked in front of Old Yu, saying, "Child's father, I don't blame you for not thinking of our past relationship as a married couple. However, Xiaobo is a descendant of your Yu Family. You can't disregard him ah!"

Old Yu stopped in his tracks. His expression changed as he said, "What's wrong with Third Son? What happened now? Didn't I tell him to focus on studying and don't try to advance through crooked methods? If he can't continue to stay in the prefectural city, then tell him to come back to farm!"

Madam Zhang couldn't bear others saying bad things about her younger son. She raised her sparse eyebrows and hollered, "My Xiaobo is doing very well in the prefectural city! How can you curse your

son like that? He said that he will definitely pass the county level examination next year, so you can just wait to have a county official as a son!”

Old Yu finally felt relieved. He glared at the old woman and said, “You said he's doing fine, so what do I need to worry about? I barely know how to read, so what can I help him with? Just tell him to study steadfastly. That's better than anything!”

Seeing that Old Yu still cared about their son, Madam Zhang immediately felt slightly more relieved. She looked around and said, “In the plays, they say 'it's easier to be an official, if one knows someone in court'. Our Xiaobo will certainly become an official in the future, but if he doesn't have any connections, he will definitely have to work a difficult path.”

“What do you mean? Just say it!” Old Yu frowned as he looked at the old face that moved closer to him.

Madam Zhang suppressed the displeasure in her heart and said, “Didn't that good son of yours become acquainted with some heir in the imperial court? The heir will inherit the prince's position in the future, so how can he not have some assistants beside him? Our Xiaobo is a capable and fine-looking man. If someone can help him out, the heir will definitely recognize his abilities. He will surely have a bright future. As his father, won't you also feel honored?”

Old Yu's heart slightly swayed, but as if he thought of something, he scolded Madam Zhang, “You're thinking of crooked methods again. Don't you think that you have harmed your son enough already? Did you already forget the lesson from last time? As long as he has the capability, why would he need to worry about not having opportunities in the future? Is this your idea, or Third Son's idea?”

Madam Zhang shrunk her neck and said unwillingly, “It's my idea—if it wasn't for that stupid girl, Yu Xiaocao, would Xiaobo's incident become so big? Xiaobo was implicated by Yu Xiaocao...”

Upon hearing this, Old Yu's temper immediately flared up. This stupid woman was deliberately distorting the truth. Had it not been for Dahai's family's Xiaocao, the family's money would have all been cheated by that swindler. How would they still have money to send their son to study in the prefectural city?

“Shut up! If you and Third Son weren't harboring improper intentions and trying to enter Rongxuan Academy through the backdoor, would you have been deceived? Had it not been for our Xiaocao, you two would be helping them count the money after being sold! Yet you still have the face to complain about Xiaocao? At that time, we shouldn't have helped you guys. What an ungrateful and vicious person

ah!" Old Yu was so angry that he lost his temper. He ignored Madam Zhang's shouts and left with great strides.

Old Yu had recuperated at Yu Hai's house for over a month, so his body had become stronger than before. His waist wasn't bent, and his back wasn't hunched. There were less wrinkles on his face, and thus he looked several years younger than Madam Zhang.

Madam Zhang's life wasn't very happy right now. Her eldest son, who was encouraged by his wife, had actually started to keep a private purse. She was receiving less and less of the money that he earned from selling fish every day. From time to time, her younger son, who was in the prefectural city, would send messages back asking for this and that. Her savings were getting smaller and smaller. Madam Zhang couldn't eat or sleep well. She was already so old, but she still had to go dig for spoon worms like those young people.

Before Yu Hai separated from the family, she only needed to collect the money and didn't have to personally do the housework. It was such a leisurely life ah! Now, she couldn't depend on that lazy woman, Madam Li, at all. She had to worry about every aspect of their household. As a result, she had aged considerably over the past two years.

Meanwhile, when Old Yu got home, he kept tossing and turning on the bed and couldn't fall asleep. After all, Yu Bo was also his flesh and blood, and they had spent over ten years nurturing him to be a scholar. There wasn't any father who didn't want their child to be successful. But, he couldn't open his mouth ah. Yu Hai was just helping Royal Prince Yang plant some corn because he was a good farmer. The royal prince was just giving them some face because they were helping him. Disregarding whether the royal prince would agree, if he asked Dahai to help him ask for a favor, he was afraid that the prince would blame Dahai for being insatiable.

This night, Old Yu hardly closed his eyes. When he got up the next day, the dark circles under his eyes were particularly apparent. Yu Xiaocao looked at her grandfather's depressed appearance in surprise and asked, "Grandfather, are you not feeling well? Do you need to see a doctor?"

Old Yu waved his hands and said, "I'm in good health. There's nothing wrong. It's not easy to earn money, so don't spend them so easily."

Yu Xiaocao advised, "Is money more important, or people? The money spent can be earned again. If you're ill, then you must treat it quickly. If it's delayed and becomes more serious, then we'll have to spend more money!"

Old Yu sighed and said, "I'm really fine. It's just that there's something bothering me, so I couldn't sleep the entire night."

"If something is bothering you, just tell the family and we'll think of a solution together. No matter how difficult it is, as long as the whole family works together, it can be solved." He was fine yesterday, but Grandfather suddenly had something on his mind after taking a stroll last night. Could it be that Madam Zhang's side caused trouble again? Yu Xiaocao had inadvertently stumbled on the truth.

Although this granddaughter of his was young, she had a lot of ideas. After coming here, he had seen very clearly that even Yu Hai, the head of the household, would first ask for the lass's opinion before making any decisions. This lass was indeed very capable. With just one trip to town, she was able to create a pesticide to kill the locusts and plant vegetables. These vegetables were sold at the price of meat, and they could make several taels of income daily. Perhaps, she could come up with a solution?

Old Yu briefly hesitated, and then told her what Madam Zhang said to him yesterday. He looked at Yu Xiaocao and slightly anxiously said, "Cao'er, what do you think?"

Sure enough, it was Madam Zhang again! This Madam Zhang was such a troublemaker. Everyone related to her would be unlucky. However, seeing Old Yu's anticipating gaze, she really couldn't outright reject him. She thought about it and decided to stall for some time.

"Grandfather, I'm not really sure either. Why don't I ask the young royal prince later?" Yu Xiaocao replied.

Old Yu repeatedly nodded his head and seemed to have breathed a sigh of relief as he said, "Yes, that's right! Ask the royal prince first. He's closer to our family. Even if we say something wrong, he won't punish us!"

Not long later, 'the heir of Prince Jing' came with his imperial bodyguards, and Royal Prince Yang naturally also came along. Zhu Junfan was apparently in high spirits. Displaying the bow and arrow in his hands, he said to Yu Hai, "This prince heard that you're good at hunting. Come! Let's compete to see who catches game first. We can add something for lunch!"

Yu Hai was still frightened by the incident with the bear last time. These two noblemen in front of him, one was the heir of Prince Jing's Household, while the other was someone favored by the emperor. If there were any mishaps, he wouldn't be able to bear the responsibility ah!

“My Lord, we're in the midst of famine. The wild animals in the mountain lack food, so they're very ferocious now! Even if we catch game, they are probably just skin and bones. If you want to eat pork, this commoner can go buy some in the neighboring village...”

Fields of Gold Chapter 293

Before Yu Hai had finished speaking, Zhu Junfan interrupted, "How can purchased pork be better than meat hunted by oneself? Don't worry, this prince's imperial bodyguards can all single-handedly fight with a ferocious tiger. I'm afraid we won't encounter them, but if we do, I'm certain that they won't be able to return!"

With no other choice, Yu Hai could only take the 'heir of Prince Jing' and his party to walk around the periphery of the West Mountain. Yu Xiaocao was also conveniently taken along by Zhu Junyang.

The drought was still on going. The grass and trees on the mountain that had been eaten by the locusts had all withered. The entire West Mountain was like an old man with a scalp full of lumps. Yu Xiaocao's initial worries weren't superfluous. The herbivores who lost vegetations as their source of food were faced with hunger, and some had died because they couldn't find food. In a gap between stones not far from the road, Yu Xiaocao found a dead wild hare that was scrawny and had mottled fur. It looked very miserable.

The group didn't travel for long before encountering a family of wild boars—two adult boars came out to search for food with three young boars. Fortunately, the wild boars could use their tusks to dig out the grass roots in the soil and gnaw on the tree barks. Although they looked slightly thin, they still appeared quite spirited.

The imperial bodyguards of the 'heir of Prince Jing' surrounded the boar family as their master pulled back his bow and shot his arrow at the male boar's eyes. Wild boars had thick and rough skin, so it was usually very difficult for ordinary arrows to penetrate their thick skin. In order to kill it in one shot, one had to aim for its weakness—the eyes.

The male boar seemed to have noticed the upcoming danger, becoming grumpy and restless. With the female boar and his children, he was about to leave this place that made him uneasy. Just as he blinked his little eyes and wanted to find a way out of this dangerous situation, Zhu Junfan shot an arrow

through the wild boar's eyes and penetrated deeply into the boar's head. The male boar instantly died before he could even make a sound. Seeing this, Yu Hai inwardly complimented, 'Excellent skills!'

When the female boar realized that her husband had been killed, she became crazy and ran aimlessly through the forest. Coincidentally, she was charging directly towards Yu Xiaocao.

Due to the little divine stone, Yu Xiaocao had an affinity with taming animals, but she had no way to deal with a crazy boar that could allegedly defeat a bear!

As the tusk of the wild boar was about to penetrate her body, Yu Xiaocao felt her body becoming light and found herself on top of a tree in a blink of an eye. She looked at the arm that was around her waist, and then turned to see the young royal prince's icy face. It turned out that at that critical moment, Zhu Junyang had hugged her waist and jumped up on a big, slanted tree nearby.

"Qinggong, you know how to use qinggong?" Yu Xiaocao's pair of big eyes twinkled with light. Her apparent admiration made Zhu Junyang very confident about himself.

He feigned indifference and faintly said, "It's a basic skill for martial artists to be able to raise their qi and lighten their bodies. It's nothing special!"

Yu Xiaocao continued to look at him with admiration and asked, "After practicing qinggong, can one really leap onto roofs and vault over walls? And climb cliffs and mountains as though walking on flat ground?"

Zhu Junyang nodded slightly and said, "In theory, it's possible. As long as one can find the right foothold, there shouldn't be any problems with climbing a cliff."

"Wow! So amazing!! Young Royal Prince, can you teach me qinggong?" Yu Xiaocao had long forgotten that there was a large boar attacking them under the tree, and was completely focused on her desire to learn the qinggong.

Zhu Junyang looked at her weak and frail body and said with lips curled up, "You? Let's forget it! qinggong isn't a specific type of martial arts. It's supported by one's inner energy. If you start learning

now, you will have to practice for at least ten to twenty years to achieve moderate success. At that time, you should be able to jump up a tree this tall."

Yu Xiaocao's desire to become a chivalrous heroine, who could leap on roofs and vault on walls, instantly disappeared by half when heard that she also needed to cultivate inner energy. Moreover, after practicing for ten to twenty years, she could only jump up a three to four meter tall tree. She was capable of climbing up such a tall tree without learning qinggong, okay?

As they spoke, Zhu Junfan had already killed that wild boar that was crazily charging at the tree. The three younger boars should have been born recently, but they were very difficult to tame. However, they weren't opponents to the imperial bodyguards and were soon captured alive.

"Don't kill those young boars. We can raise them at home and slaughter them when they get fatter!" Yu Xiaocao nimbly got down from the tree and suggested as she looked at the screeching boars in the guards' hands. These young boars didn't even add up to twenty catties in total, and they were so thin that their stomachs were shriveled. There was barely any meat to eat. It was better to raise them at home, and then slaughter them for meat a few years later!

Zhu Junfan made a 'listen to her' expression to the imperial bodyguards, and then teased his younger cousin, "Junyang ah! Where's your bow? It's not like you to go hunting without your bow and arrows and hide on a tree when encountering danger ah!"

Zhu Junyang glanced at the emperor with his long, charming phoenix eyes and had a look of indifference to his provocation. But Yu Xiaocao jumped out and said, "The young royal prince suffered an injury on his arms. He can't lift heavy things or use a bow for half a year. What kind of older brother are you? You don't know anything about your younger brother's injury, moreover, you're also teasing him?"

"Impudent!" Zhu Junfan's personal imperial bodyguard glared at her with large, copper bell-like eyes and hollered.

Yu Xiaocao wasn't afraid of him. Her godfather's eyes were much bigger than his, okay? Even if he didn't glare at people, he still looked more stern than him. She raised her little nose and snorted at the imperial bodyguard, "Stop pretending to intimidate people. Your master didn't even say anything yet, so how dare you speak? My lord, your subordinate doesn't know any proper manner. He needs to be properly disciplined!"

Zhu Junfan still had a smile on his face as he nodded in assent, "You're right! Miss Xiaocao is right. As an older brother, I'm not caring enough about my younger brother! You, what are you still doing here? Aren't you going to withdraw?"

Su Ran lightly glanced at the imperial guard and nonchalantly said, "When you return, remember to receive your punishment at the punishment chamber..."

The imperial bodyguard's forehead was full of cold sweat, so it was apparent that the punishment chamber that the head steward mentioned was a very terrifying place. Yu Xiaocao felt some sympathy for him and said, "Sir Su, since it was his first offence, please spare him this once. After all, he was just trying to protect his master."

The imperial bodyguards that the emperor brought along this time were all trained by Su Ran, and they were all elite bodyguards. They had already experienced Su Ran's methods of handling people and situations, so when facing this handsome young man, who appeared seemingly harmless, the imperial bodyguards were all like mice seeing a cat. They were all extremely terrified of him.

Su Ran had a well-known characteristic, which was the fact that no one was allowed to refute his decisions. Even the emperor wouldn't be able to change his mind! As a result, those imperial guards who made a mistake could only hope for the best!

Su Ran looked at the little girl in front of him with a smile on his face. So it turned out that she was a kind-hearted girl who didn't hold grudges. With a gentle voice, he softly said, "He scolded you, and had such a bad attitude. I'm helping you punish him, so shouldn't you be happy?"

"I was indeed being disrespectful to the heir of Prince Jing. What's wrong with the imperial bodyguard brother faithfully protecting his master?" Yu Xiaocao helped put in a good word for the imperial bodyguard without any ill feelings.

"You also said that he didn't have the right to speak when his master hadn't spoken?" Seeing that the little girl was reasoning with him in a serious manner, Su Ran began to tease her. The imperial bodyguards were all amazed. Normally, the fellow who dared to contradict the head steward would have already been smacked to death by him. There was no way that he would be so kind as to reason with the little girl in such an affable manner.

"The master's dignity was provoked, so of course, the subordinate should immediately jump out in his defense. If he only waited for his master's orders, then he would be too tactless. From my perspective, I will definitely feel unhappy after being reprimanded by him. On the other hand, from the standpoint of the imperial bodyguard brother, not only should he not be punished, but this is also something he should be praised for!" Yu Xiaocao wholeheartedly felt that the imperial bodyguard didn't do anything wrong. Why should he be punished?

Su Ran had an even deeper smile on his face, "Based on what you're saying, I'm in the wrong for punishing him?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded and said, "If you insist on punishing him, then that's definitely not right! The heir of Prince Jing only ordered the guard to withdraw, and didn't say that he should be punished. Why are you acting on his behalf? You are both subordinates of the heir. Although your position is slightly higher than his, you shouldn't act this way because others will hold grudges against you. Sir Su, you should win people's heart with virtue!"

All the bodyguards inwardly took in a breath of cold air. 'The head steward got disciplined by a little girl. This little girl is going to be so miserable. Those who disciplined the head steward a long time ago had long become a pile of bones.'

Zhu Junfan, on the other hand, watched the little lass of the Yu Family lecture Su Ran with great interest. She had a series of logic, and even knew the principle of 'win people with virtue'. Interesting!

What surprised everyone the most was that Su Ran actually nodded solemnly and said, "Miss Xiaocao is right. Only by convincing people with virtue can people truly be convinced. Since you don't think it's reasonable to punish him, then let's withdraw his punishment!"

"Sir Su is wise!" Yu Xiaocao slightly flattered him. When she turned her gaze to the imperial guard, she noticed that the cold sweat on his forehead still hadn't dried yet. Sir Su was such a gentle and amiable person. Why did the imperial bodyguard brother look as if he had seen a ghost? Wasn't he too cowardly!

When Zhu Junfan saw his imperial bodyguards looking as if they had seen a ghost, he hastily suppressed his laughter and asked, "Junyang, what happened to your arms? It sounds pretty serious."

With an emotionless face, Zhu Junyang simply answered, "It's fine now!"

Zhu Junfan looked at Yu Xiaocao with questioning eyes, and it was apparent that he wanted her to explain. Yu Xiaocao did as he expected, saying, "In order to save my father, he hurt the tendons and muscles in his arm when drawing a bow that he didn't usually use. Fortunately, Doctor Sun has excellent medical skills and cured his arms. However, there's still half a year of recovery period. He can't carry heavy loads with his arms."

"He just carried you up a tree earlier. Would it hurt his arms?" Zhu Junfan knew that the injury of muscles and tendons was very serious. This younger cousin of his was too willful and reckless. Zhu Junfan knew about that bow of his. Even two well-known strong men in the military couldn't draw back the bow together, yet he actually pulled it forcibly. Did he still want his arms? Zhu Junfan couldn't help but worry.

Fields of Gold Chapter 294 - Plan

Zhu Junyang endured the faint pain in his arms and simply said, "She barely has any meat on her body, and isn't even as heavy as a little chick. She can't be considered a heavy load!"

"I may look thin, but I have meat on my bones, okay?" Yu Xiaocao was most annoyed at people who said that she was skinny. She clearly ate a lot of food for every meal and even had a better appetite than Xiaolian, but she still couldn't gain much weight. However, she thought that she was very well-proportioned. She wasn't emaciated with just bones and skin. As long as she was healthy, wasn't it better to be thin than fat? At least she didn't have to worry about losing weight.

Yu Xiaocao touched the young royal prince's arm, and then widened her eyes and fiercely said, "No matter what, I'm considered half a doctor. You must apply half a month more of medication on your arms. Don't speak! If you don't want to practice martial arts and draw a bow anymore, then you don't have to apply it."

Zhu Junyang felt that the injury on his arms were not as serious as Yu Xiaocao said, but when he heard that there was a possibility that he couldn't practice martial arts and use a bow in the future, he immediately closed his mouth in cooperation. Wasn't it just applying ointment? It wouldn't hurt or itch, but it was just somewhat troublesome.

Zhu Junfan was also worried about his younger cousin's arms, but seeing that his beast-like younger cousin behaved like an obedient and gentle cat in front of the lass, he couldn't help but sigh in his heart, 'It's true that there is always one thing to overcome another ah!'

The purpose of this trip was to hunt for wild boars. Since they had caught the boars, they should go down the mountains now! The youngest son of the Yu Family said that this Yu Xiaocao's culinary skills was even better than those at Zhenxiu Restaurant. When would he finally be able to eat the authentic roasted chicken and roasted duck?!

Zhu Junfan and his brother walked in front, while Yu Hai held his daughter's hands and followed closely behind them. The scene of the wild boar chasing his daughter just now had scared Yu Hai. He wished that it was him instead. However, he was too far from her and he couldn't run as fast as the boar. Thus, he could only stand there without doing anything. Fortunately, the young royal prince was beside his daughter and saved her. Yu Hai secretly vowed in his heart that he would never bring his daughter hunting in the mountains again.

The imperial bodyguards carried the wild boars and young boars back. The bodyguard, who managed to escape punishment, followed the emperor faithfully. He occasionally looked at Yu Xiaocao with complex feelings of gratitude and shame.

When the group came down the mountains, they happened to meet the Yu Family's neighbor, Madam Mao. She widened her eyes and had a stunned expression on her face, "Oh my god! You guys actually managed to catch two big wild boars! Oh, oh, oh! There are also three young boars! Ah, it's true that there are no weak soldiers under strong generals ah. The subordinates of the heir of Prince Jing are really outstanding."

Yu Xiaocao warmly greeted Madam Mao, "Auntie Qian, you're wrong! The heir was the one who killed the boars! The lord is amazing. He can shoot with great precision; killing one with each shot!"

Madam Mao quickly smiled and fawned on him, "As expected of the heir of Prince Jing. Amazing! Amazing!"

Zhu Junfan smiled faintly at her, and then walked past her. Madam Mao murmured, "My god, are all the noblemen from the capital so good-looking? He looked like an immortal from the heavens. My heart is thumping because of his smile."

Except for Yu Xiaocao and her father, everyone in the group practiced martial arts and had keen ears and eyes. So, although her voice was low, they all heard everything she said. Zhu Junfan's mouth

twitched, and he took a few steps forwards, pretending that he didn't hear her. With a trace of smile in his eyes, Su Ran couldn't help but glance at the emperor.

“What are you looking at! You're also one of the noblemen from the capital!” Zhu Junfan had always liked to squabble with this childhood friend of his.

Su Ran chuckled and said solemnly, “The matron is right. Master is indeed good-looking. I'm sincerely praising you ah!”

Zhu Junfan was quite satisfied with his delicately beautiful man appearance in this lifetime. Had it been in his previous life, there would definitely be a lot of talent scouts chasing after him. Being an actor was much more interesting than being an emperor. Ay, he was born in the wrong time period ah!

When they got back to the Yu Residence, it was quite laborious to tidy the two wild boars. Fortunately, Old Yu was skilled in slaughtering pigs when he was younger. He borrowed a butcher knife from Li Dazhu and skillfully handled the wild boars.

The two wild boars looked thin, but they must have added up to a total of five to six hundred catties. The weather was hot, so it wasn't easy to preserve meat. Fortunately, the Yu Family had an icehouse. The meat was divided into pieces and stored in the icehouse.

While the Yu Family were handling the pig head and offal, Zhu Junfan went to take a look at the icehouse. Little Shitou warmly introduced the origin of their icehouse and showed him the place where his second sister made ice.

Zhu Junfan had heard about making ice with saltpeter in his past life, but he didn't know the specific ratio that was needed. He couldn't help but admire this fellow transmigrator of his. Zhu Junfan made a piece of ice by himself with great interest and transported it into the icehouse. He decided to ask about the method of making ice, and then teach it to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. If they didn't have enough ice in the future, they could make it themselves!

At noon, they ate a pig feast. There were the fresh and tender 'pig blood soup', refreshing and tasty 'stir-fried intestines', rich and fragrant 'red braised intestines', exceptionally fragrant 'stewed pork tripe', 'marinated pig tongue' with a crispy mouthfeel, and the chewy 'braised pig trotters'... They had over ten dishes that were mostly made of pig's offal and odds and ends of a pig. When eaten, the taste was even more memorable than regular pork.

As Su Ran gnawed on a trotter, he joked, "Our master brought two wild boars to your house, but Xiaocao, you're only treating our master to these unpresentable things?"

"No matter what the food is, only its taste matters! How are these dishes unpresentable? Zhenxiu Restaurant's pig head meat and pig ears are very popular! Sir Su, could you please not eat so happily when making that comment?" Yu Xiaocao loved gnawing on pig's tails. She stewed pig's tails with the pig snouts. It had a rich taste that didn't feel greasy. She could finish the two pig tails by herself.

However, Zhu Junfan didn't let her do as she wished. Seeing that she was eating with relish, he picked up a piece of pig tail and started gnawing on it like her. As soon as he bit into it, his eyes lit up. It didn't matter whether or not he looked refined while eating. In front of delicious food, he needed to eat first and think later. He swiftly finished gnawing on a pig's tail, leaving only the bones. After that, he reached out his chopsticks towards the pig's snout...

It seemed like Zhu Junyang liked to eat the stir-fried intestines the most. For this dish, she used the small part that connected the small intestines and large intestines, which wasn't much in quantity. It had a crispy texture when eaten, and it also had a lot of nutrients. The plate of stir-fried intestines was mostly devoured by him.

The imperial bodyguards sat at one table, and thus ate in an unreserved manner. These men all liked to eat meat, so pig feast was just right for them. They enjoyed their food even more because of Yu Xiaocao's cooking skills. They completely devoured a table of nearly twenty dishes. Their stomachs were full, but they still wanted more. The imperial bodyguards really looked forward to their master staying in Dongshan Village for a few more days. In this way, they could eat delicious food every day.

The emperor was still the emperor after all, and thus had numerous affairs to attend to every day. It was already very good that he was able to secretly come out for a trip. During the few days that Zhu Junfan stayed in Tanggu Town, he had seen that the relief work was carried out in a timely manner and there wasn't a serious famine like he expected. Hence, he reluctantly left. Ay! The occupation of an emperor wasn't something that just anyone could do. There must be a large pile of imperial memorials for him to look through when he returns!

Zhu Junyang, on the other hand, stayed because he needed to apply medication for an extra half a month! In actuality, his arms weren't really affected by his use of strength this time. However, for sake of being cautious, Yu Xiaocao insisted that he use the ointment for a little longer.

In order to prevent the young royal prince from traveling between town and Dongshan Village, Yu Xiaocao had even offered them to stay at her godfather's house on the hillside. This house originally belonged to the Zhao Family. After the Zhao Family was bestowed the position of a general and returned to the capital, Fang Zizhen lived there. After Lady Fang came, she carefully cleaned up the house. The residence appeared simple and crude on the outside, but it was very warm and comfortable inside.

The young royal prince settled down in the guest room of the house. Head Steward Liu transferred some maidservants and servants from the residence in town over. Although the master didn't like being closely served by others, he still needed people to do the chores around him. He couldn't let him, a head steward, sweep the floor, boil water, and wipe the table, right?

In a blink of an eye, the fleet transporting food had already been gone for over a month. If the people ate frugally, the food from the disaster relief could at most last them for two months. In other words, if the average-priced grain couldn't be delivered back in two months, the common people would starve.

Even if they received food from the relief, the villagers of Dongshan Village still needed to plan the portions of their meals. They ate two meals a day. They had to work in the morning, so they filled their stomachs with flatbread made with a mixture of bran and coarse grain. At night, they just drank a bowl of porridge, and then lay on the bed to endure the hunger.

Due to the locust plague and drought, the cost of living in the prefectural city had increased by a dozen fold. The academy that Yu Bo attended had already increased its tuition. Yu Bo kept spending money during the few days that he stayed in the prefectural city, but there wasn't enough money and food to support him. He had no choice but to pack his bags and go home.

His wife's, Madam Zhao, maternal family wasn't very well-off either. In a disaster year, they barely had enough to eat, so who would have the spare money to study? The school opened by Madam Zhao's father, Scholar Zhao, had been closed for a long time. The family didn't have any farmland and food, so if they relied on buying expensive grain to live, they would quickly use up all their money and resources.

Madam Zhao's mother suggested to her daughter, "Isn't your older brother-in-law very capable? They made a lot of money from planting watermelons and vegetables, so their family must have food. I reckon you should bring Doudou back to Dongshan Village. Your mother-in-law always fawns on you, so if she has something good to eat, there's no way that she would be unwilling to give them to you."

“Mother, are you telling us to leave?” Madam Zhao was Scholar Zhao's only child, so her parents had doted on her since she was a child. She had never thought that her mother would drive her back to Dongshan Village.

Her mother sighed and said, “It's not that Mother is being cruel and telling you to leave. As you can see, our family is short on food! The price of food is increasing day by day, and no one knows when it will stop. Mother doesn't have any other choice ah!”

Madam Zhao knew that her mother was telling the truth. Her eyes gradually reddened, and she said, “Mother, you're talking about Second Brother-in-law, who had already separated from the family. My mother-in-law is someone who never knows to leave a leeway when doing things. At their most difficult times, she made Second Brother-in-law's family leave home with barely anything. Think about it, would they still care about our lives after getting rich?”

“But filial piety is the most important ah! Your mother-in-law isn't your second brother-in-law's real mother, but your father-in-law is still his biological father, right? He can't eat and live well himself and not even care if his father can fill his stomach, right? You guys haven't separated from the family, so it's natural for you guys to eat together. If Old Yu has something to eat, then you guys will surely have a share, right?” Scholar Zhao's wife was very shrewd, and also very good at making meticulous plans.

Fields of Gold Chapter 295

Madam Zhao couldn't lower herself to do this. At the beginning of the year, when everything was fine, she stayed at her maiden home and enjoyed a comfortable life. But to rush back to Dongshan Village when there wasn't enough food to eat, she really couldn't do it! However, her maternal family was really running out of resources. They had been eating porridge for the past few days, and Doudou looked apparently thinner. She could eat less but she felt very distressed when she saw her clever and lovely son's thin and listless face.

Just as she was struggling with whether she should go back to Dongshan Village, her husband returned from the prefectural city. Seeing that his originally chubby son had become so thin that even his chin had become sharp, Yu Bo immediately brought the mother-son pair back to Dongshan Village. The maidservant who served Doudou had long been sold by Scholar Zhao's wife at the beginning of the disaster year. They could barely feed their own family, so how would they have enough food to support a stranger?

Madam Zhao finally found out that her mother-in-law and father-in-law were divorced when Yu Bo's family of three got back to Dongshan Village. She inwardly scolded her mother-in-law for being stupid. If Father-in-law was still with the family, Second Brother-in-law would give them ten taels monthly, which

would be enough for the entire family to buy food. Well, wasn't it great now? They ended up with nothing. Moreover, the two families became enemies who didn't talk with each other.

Seeing her younger son's family returning, Madam Zhang was so happy that she slaughtered the only hen in the pen. Without food, the chicken didn't lay any eggs. It was better to kill it to make stew for her son and grandson rather than raising it! She also grabbed a handful of white rice, which she treasured the most, to make porridge for her precious grandson to eat.

Yu Bo and Doudou were the only ones who had a share of the chicken soup and porridge, while everyone else could only watch them eat. Madam Li immediately felt dissatisfied and shouted, "In order to support the family, my husband goes fishing in the sea every day without fail. Why aren't we allowed to eat? It's not right to be biased like this. If you only care about your younger son, then let's divide the family! Mother should just live with your younger son!"

Madam Zhang was so angry that she moved the basket of coarse grain pancakes closer to herself, glared fiercely at Madam Li, and said, "You're an expert at stirring up the household. Don't think that I don't know that you encourage your husband to save a private purse and keep at least half of the money he made from selling fish every day! You gluttonous and lazy wretch, you sleep late in the morning and eat more than everyone else. You want to split from the family? Okay! You three, get out of here and live somewhere else!"

"The family should be divided fairly! When Yu Hai separated from the family, he also got a run-down house. So why aren't we given a house when splitting from the family? Mother, Dashan is also your biological son. You can't just be partial and give everything to Third Brother-in-law ah!" Unlike Madam Liu, Madam Li wasn't someone who was easy to deal with. It was impossible to drive them out!

Madam Zhang didn't argue with her. She stared at her eldest son and asked, "Dashan, what do you think? Do you also want to separate from the family?"

Yu Dashan was used to being subdued by his mother. Seeing that she was looking at him with eyes filled with rage, he slightly moved his mouth, and then lowered his head. He didn't dare to even make a sound. Madam Li was so angry that she mercilessly pinched his arm.

Yu Dashan summoned up his courage and stammered, "Mother, it's my duty, as your son, to support you. However, I don't have the ability to support Younger Brother's entire family! Moreover, you're being too biased and giving everything to Younger Brother's family. My family's Heizi is also your

grandson. He does laborious work at the docks every day, but I have never seen you make delicious food for him..."

When Madam Zhang heard this, she knew that her simple and honest son had also become dissatisfied with her after being egged on. If her eldest son really separated from the family and moved out, how was she, a nearly dying old woman, supposed to support her younger son's studies?

Madam Zhang lamented while crying, "Dashan ah! I raised you up with so much effort. In the most difficult times, Mother had never thought about abandoning you. Now that you're all grown up, you want to be independent and not care about your mother, is that right?"

"Mother, I didn't say I'm not going to care about you..." Yu Dashan, who was still a dutiful son, hastily explained.

Madam Zhang smacked her leg, sniffled her nose, and said, "Then what do you mean? Your younger brother didn't have much to eat in the prefectural city, and has become bone-thin. Also, Little Doudou, who was originally such a chubby child, is so skinny that he barely has any meat on his body. They are your biological younger brother and nephew. How can you complain about them?"

Yu Dashan looked at his younger brother, who had lost a lot of weight, and his nephew, who was scared and hiding in his mother's embrace. He lowered his head with shame.

Seeing that her son was feeling somewhat remorseful, Madam Zhang struck the iron while it was hot and said, "At the beginning of next spring, your younger brother will take part in the county exams. After passing the county examinations, he must immediately participate in the imperial examinations held in autumn. If he passes that, he will be considered a provincial official. Scholars who pass the provincial exams can purchase an official title..."

"Mother, I won't donate to the government for an official title. I will pass the metropolitan exams and palace exams with my own abilities. I can't guarantee placing first, but I will at least get into the top three. Those in the top three positions are imperial scholars who will be given an official position in the imperial court!" Yu Bo confidently said.

When Madam Zhang heard her younger son's words, she immediately beamed with delight and said, "Yes! My son is determined! Just focus on studying and don't be discouraged!"

Yu Bo briefly hesitated, then asked, "I heard... Second Brother's Little Shitou is also participating in the county-level examinations next year. Is it true?"

Madam Zhang curled up her lips and said, "Who knows! With how much Little Shitou plays and eats, he will be taking the exams in vain!"

Yu Bo nodded in agreement and said, "How many years has Little Shitou been studying? He barely knows how to read and write, yet they're already letting him take the exams. Does Second Brother take the imperial exams as a joke? Acting recklessly due to their impatience for success will ruin Little Shitou!"

"Let's not worry about their matters! He can do whatever he wants!" Madam Zhang saw that the 'heir of Prince Jing' had already gone back, but Old Yu still hadn't come to talk to her. She felt even more resentful towards Old Yu and Yu Hai within her heart. However, they had evidence of her crime. She couldn't go cause trouble, so she could only ignore the existence of the family in the old residence!

Hearing the confident words of her younger brother-in-law, Madam Li's heart started to sway again. Her husband had supported her younger brother-in-law's studies for so many years, and it wasn't easy to see the light of hope. Wasn't it a loss to separate from the family now? No way! They should wait until after next spring to decide whether they would divide the family. If her younger brother-in-law passed the exam, she would pretend that she had never mentioned this matter. If he didn't pass, then they shouldn't blame her, Li Guihua, for being inconsiderate. Even if she had to take it up to the county yamen, she had to make sure that they get a fair split from the family!

After dinner, Yu Bo's family of three returned to their own room. Madam Zhao fanned for her son, who was sleeping soundly holding his bloated belly. Her heart broke to see the way her son was drinking the porridge earlier. They hadn't eaten a hearty meal for a long time.

"Husband, should we visit the old residence tomorrow? Although father-in-law and mother-in-law are divorced, he is still your father after all. If you don't visit him this time, what would the villagers say?" Madam Zhao reckoned that it was better to have a good relationship with people in the old residence. They couldn't depend on that stupid woman Madam Zhang. After all, her husband was related to them by blood. Even if one's bones were broken, the tendons were still connected ah!

Yu Bo didn't have any ill feelings towards his second brother. When his second brother left the family with nothing, he had felt bad for him in his heart. However, he was very clear about his mother's temper. It was useless for him to say anything. He was seriously speechless about the reason for his parents' peaceful separation. He didn't expect his mother to be so cruel that she would rather watch his father die than spend money to get him treated. If his own wife looked forward to his death so that the family could feed one less person, then he would definitely divorce her. He wouldn't let her take away a single seed, let alone leave the house and all the money to her... His father's action was considered to be extremely benevolent.

Hearing his wife's words, Yu Bo was very glad that he married such a reasonable wife. Looking at Madam Zhao with a smile, he nodded and said, "Mhm, let's bring Doudou over to pay respects to Father tomorrow. Are there any presentable gifts at home? After all, I haven't been home for nearly half a year, it's inappropriate to visit Father empty-handed."

Madam Zhao took out a piece of dark-colored fabric from the bottom of the box. Originally, she had wanted to use this fabric to make clothes for her own father. In order to have a good relationship with the old residence, she gritted her teeth and took it out, "Take this piece of fabric! There's nothing good at home, since we have already pawned most of our goods!"

Yu Bo knew that during this past half a year, his wife lived in her father's house without paying a single coin. It wasn't easy for his father-in-law's family ah. He took out a silver bit that was worth one tael from his bag and handed it to Madam Zhao. He said, "I saved this money by eating and living frugally in the prefectural city. Give it to Mother-in-law. We can't let your parents starve because of you and our son."

Madam Zhao was very moved. With reddened eyes, she carefully put away the money and whispered, "Originally, I planned to pawn some of my dowry to help my parents get through this difficult period. With this money, it's enough for my parents to eat frugally for half a month. Thank you, Husband!"

"We're a family, so why do you need to say thank you? Father-in-law and Mother-in-law has helped us a lot over the years. As a human being, one should have a conscience, right?" Yu Bo held his wife's slightly rough hands. After the maidservant was sold, Madam Zhao had to personally do all the work. Coupled with not being able to fill her stomach, she appeared much more haggard. However, it made her look more delicately attractive...

On the morning of the next day, Yu Bo slowly headed toward the west side of the village with his wife and child. His long gown stood out in the village. The villagers, who were chatting under the tree, greeted him upon seeing him, "Oh, isn't this Old Yu's youngest son? You came back from the prefectural city?"

"This must be Doudou. He's already so big. He has gotten taller in the past two years ah!"

"Are you going to see your father? Xiaobo is quite filial ah!"

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With a slight smile on his face, Yu Bo politely greeted the elderly men and women in the village. Madam Zhao also told her son to greet them as 'Grandpa' and 'Grandma'. The villagers all praised Yu Bo for being capable and Doudou's polite manners...

After traveling across the entire Dongshan Village, the family of three reached the foot of West Mountain. From afar, they could see the tall courtyard walls and the brick and tiled-roof house of the Yu Family's old residence. Madam Zhao bent down and said admiringly to her son, "Doudou, look! That's Second Uncle's house!! Do you remember Older Brother Shitou and Older Sister Xiaocao? You can see them soon."

Doudou blinked his big eyes and softly said, "I remember Older Sister Xiaocao. The fish stew she made was very delicious!" He even smacked his lips as he said that.

With a slightly bitter smile, Madam Zhao tapped his small nose and said, "You ah, you're indeed a little foodie!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 296

Yu Bo gently knocked on the door, but there was no response for a long time. Madam Zhao looked at him and said, "The courtyard is so big, would they be able to hear you if you knock so lightly?"

Yu Bo laughed and shouted, "Is there anyone at home?"

A crisp voice sounded, "Someone is knocking on the door. I'll go open it!"

There was a rush of footsteps in the courtyard, and the door quickly opened with a creak. A small head peeked out from behind the door.

Liu Fangping looked curiously at the strangers in front of him with his large, round eyes. He politely asked, "Hello, who are you looking for?"

Doudou pointed at Liu Fangping and asked his mother, "Mother, Older Brother Shitou?"

Madam Zhao looked at the unfamiliar little boy, shook her head, and said, "Doudou, he isn't Older Brother Shitou."

"Are you guys looking for Brother Shitou? Quickly come in!" Liu Fangping had never seen the three people in front of him, but since they knew Brother Shitou, they shouldn't be strangers.

With a warm and gentle smile, Yu Bo asked the young boy, "What's your name? How old are you? Do you live here?"

"My name is Liu Fangping and I'm almost seven years old. I live in the house next door." Sister Xiaocao said that they had to treat guests in a warm and polite manner, which was something that Liu Fangping felt that he had accomplished.

'Live in the house next door, and surnamed Liu?' When his mother delivered food to him in the prefectural city, she had once mentioned that his oldest sister had fled back home and got taken in by his second brother. Second Brother treated Oldest Sister very well, and he even gave them a separate house to live in. Looking at the little guy's clothes and complexion, he should be living quite well. Seriously, what was wrong with Second Brother? He would rather help raise another family's children than help the family.

"Eldest Uncle, Sister Xiaocao, we have guests!" Liu Fangping skipped ahead, leading the way.

As soon as Madam Zhao entered the door, she saw the fresh, green vegetables in the yard. There were no insects on them, and not even one locust could be found. It should be noted that villages around town had also tried planting autumn crops, but the locusts immediately devoured them as soon as tender buds sprouted. Thus, they wasted a lot of seeds in vain. How did Second Brother-in-law's family prevent their crops from being eaten by locusts?

"Eh? Grandfather, Younger Uncle came to see you!!" Yu Xiaocao poked her head out of the kitchen and shouted towards the rear yard.

Old Yu and Yu Hai, who were picking vegetables in the rear yard, strode out of the rear yard with hands covered in mud. When Old Yu saw his son, whom he had placed great hope in, his heart was full of complex emotions. His mouth slightly moved, and he finally said, "Xiaobo, when did you come back?"

Yu Bo also silently looked at his father, whose face glowed with health and body appeared stronger than before. He inwardly sighed, 'I almost couldn't see Father anymore! Fortunately, there was Second Brother's family, or else... Mother has indeed crossed the line this time!'

Yu Bo went forward and knelt in front of Old Yu. He kowtowed to him two times and choked with sobs, saying, "Father, this unfilial son has come to see you!"

Old Yu's hands were stained with mud. He wanted to help his son up, but he was also afraid of dirtying his clothes. He quickly told Liu Fangping, who was standing on the side, "Fangping, quickly help your younger uncle up. Xiaobo, quickly get up. Quickly get up!"

Yu Bo slowly stood up and said to his son, who stood next to him, "Doudou, quickly greet Grandfather!"

"Grandfather——" Little Doudou looked at Old Yu with slight shyness, and then lowered his head to look at his feet with his lips pursed.

Yu Xiaocao came out of the kitchen with a basket of pancake made of a mixture of corn flour and wheat flour. She smiled at Yu Bo's family and said, "Younger Uncle, Younger Aunt, you guys haven't eaten breakfast yet, right? Let's eat together! Grandfather, Father, go wash your hands. The family can work together to pick vegetables after breakfast. There's still enough time!"

At this time, a strong fragrance wafted out of the kitchen. Breathing in the smell, Little Doudou swallowed his saliva, pulled on the corner of his mother's clothes, and whispered, "Mother, it smells so good ah!"

Madam Zhao touched her son's thin face and said to Yu Xiaocao with a smile, "Cao'er, what delicious food are you making again? Such a mouthwatering smell!"

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, "Breakfast is relatively simple. I only cooked two plates of green vegetables... Oh, that's right. I also sautéed a pot of grasshopper sauce! It's made of the locusts that we caught. I don't know if Younger Aunt will like it."

When Madam Zhao heard that it was made of locusts, she immediately felt her stomach turning. Yu Bo saw that his wife's face was being unsightly, so he quickly said, "Father, have Second Sister-in-law make a set of clothes for you with this piece of fabric. Son had been away for half a year, and thus was unable to serve and accompany you at home. I feel very ashamed ah! Mother is waiting for us to eat at home, so we won't stay for breakfast..."

Holding the cloth, Old Yu was extremely moved in his heart. In the past, his youngest son had never bought anything for the family. He actually brought a gift when visiting him this time. His son had finally grown up!

How could Yu Hai just let his younger brother go? All visitors were guests. How could he let them go without eating? He pulled on his younger brother's arm and said, "Eat breakfast before leaving. You can rest assured that no matter how difficult this year is, your older brother can still treat you to a meal."

Yu Caifeng and her husband also came out of the backyard. Upon seeing Yu Bo's family, they were initially stunned, and then greeted them with a smile, "Xiaobo, you came. Quickly sit down. It's been such a long time since we, the three siblings, have eaten at the same table!"

When Yu Caifeng got married, Yu Bo was already seven years old. He remembered that when his mother arranged this marriage for his oldest sister, the whole family was opposed to it. However, his mother was greedy for the betrothal gifts and just married his oldest sister to the widower. Yu Bo looked behind his oldest sister and saw a dark-skinned man with an untrimmed beard. Standing next to his good-looking Oldest Sister, he looked apparently seven or eight years older. Ay! It was no wonder that his second brother's family was indifferent to his mother. It was understandable.

While he was distracted by his thoughts, Yu Bo had already been pulled to sit at the table by his second brother. Little Shitou pulled Doudou's small hand, pointed at the golden corn flour pancake, and introduced, "Doudou, this is made from corn that was grinded into flour. It's imported from a foreign land! It's very tasty! Look, it's scorched until it's a golden-brown color in the back, so it's very crispy and fragrant when eaten. It's especially delicious if you have good teeth!"

Doudou looked at it, showed his pearly whites, and said, "Doudou's teeth are very good. There's no bugs!"

Little Shitou chuckled and said, "Good, you can eat more later! This is grasshopper sauce, and it tastes better than shrimp paste!"

Little Doudou obediently let Brother Shitou take him to wash his hands. After drying his hands, he sat obediently on the small bench and waited to eat. Seeing that her husband and son had sat down, Madam Zhao didn't think that it was good for her to stand there, so she also sat down beside Madam Liu.

Yu Xiaocao brought out the mushy corn porridge, which emitted a faint fragrance. Madam Zhao looked at the big pot of golden-colored corn porridge in surprise, and was attracted by its unique smell. She helped Xiaocao divide the porridge into everyone's bowls and gave everyone a big piece of pancake.

Madam Liu was afraid that her younger sister-in-law would feel restrained, so she smiled and said, "There's still a lot of pancakes and porridge in the cauldrons, so don't be polite and just eat to your heart's content."

Madam Zhao saw that there were a couple plates of green vegetables sautéed with oyster sauce, and a large plate and a small pot of sauce with alluring fragrance. There were also an unlimited quantity of pancakes and porridge. It appeared even more lavish than normal, so how was this still a meal eaten during a disaster year?

"Started eating already? This prince is a little late today! I had no choice since I encountered a big fellow on my way out. It took some effort to finally kill it!" Zhu Junyang strode in with Head Steward Liu, who was walking behind him with a gray animal on his back.

When Head Steward Liu threw the game on the ground, the Yu Family finally saw that it was a wolf. Yu Hai was shocked and said, "It seems like the beasts in the deep mountains have run out of food. Even a lone wolf has come down the mountains to look for food. It seems that we need to set more traps nearby to be safe."

The two wolf cubs, Little Black and Little White, curiously ran to the dead wolf and sniffed it with their noses. After that, they suddenly bared their teeth furiously at the dead wolf, making a fierce expression.

"Oh! These two little fellows are quite good! If you train them, they will definitely be excellent hunting dogs!" Zhu Junyang had long noticed that they were wolves, but seeing that the little guys were even more obedient than puppies in front Yu Xiaocao, he didn't say anything about it.

Yu Hai was slightly worried as he asked, "Royal Prince, are you certain that this is a lone wolf? Wolf packs are the most vengeful. If any of them escaped, I'm afraid that there won't be any peace for the families that live nearby!"

Zhu Junyang sat down at the table that was specially prepared for him. He looked at him reassuringly and said, "What is there to be afraid of? With this prince here, even the largest wolf packs wouldn't be able to return alive!"

"Wait until your arms have completely recovered and you can draw a bow before boasting!" Yu Xiaocao filled a bowl of corn porridge and placed it in front of him. She tore the corn pancake, dipped it into the thick grasshopper sauce, and stuffed it into the young royal prince's hands.

Zhu Junyang took a bite of the delicious corn pancakes. After chewing and swallowing it, he said, "Aren't you looking down on this prince? Does this prince need to use my hands to deal with the wolves nearby? I can just kick them down one by one! Do you see that tree over there? Believe it or not, this prince can break it with one kick!"

Yu Xiaocao looked at the tree he pointed to. It was a tree that was even thicker than the opening of a bowl. She curled up her lips and said, "Young Royal Prince, it's better that you stop? Don't break your legs before your arms have even recovered! Alright, stop talking about this and eat!"

Zhu Junyang didn't bother to argue with the lass and ate the corn pancake with relish. At this time, Yu Bo finally found a chance to speak, "This student, Yu Bo, greets Royal Prince Yang."

"Yu Bo? Are you that uncle of Yu Xiaocao who wanted to use connections to go through the backdoor and serve in the Prince Jing's Estate?" Zhu Junyang clearly held contempt for those who were unskilled and still shamelessly try to gain favor with the rich and influential. Thus, he straightforwardly pointed it out in front of everyone.

Yu Bo's expression changed, and he solemnly asked, "This student had just returned from the prefectural city yesterday. May I ask why Your Highness said that?"

Zhu Junyang looked him up and down. Although he was a little far from him, he could still sense that the other party had impure intentions. With a smirk, he withdrew his gaze and replied, "Why did this prince say that? Wouldn't you know if you go back and ask your mother? Let this prince tell you. Our Prince Jing's Estate will only accept those with true talent and knowledge!"

For the sake of Yu Xiaocao's family's face, he didn't say his own subtext—don't just stuff this trash and good-for-nothing into the Prince Jing's Estate!

The rest of the meal was tasteless for Yu Bo. There were several times that he looked at Royal Prince Yang and wanted to say something but ended up saying nothing. Royal Prince Yang, on the other hand, didn't even spare him a glance and focused all his attention on eating.

Fields of Gold Chapter 297 - A Glimmer of Hope

His son, Little Doudou, ate with delight. In front of him was the grasshopper sauce that Xiaocao especially made for children. It didn't have any chili peppers and there was some sugar added. The sauce tasted savory with a hint of sweetness and was a hit with children. Little Doudou ate the sauce with a large pancake. When they left, he was so stuffed that he could barely move and had to be carried back by his mother.

When they got home, Yu Bo threw a temper tantrum at his old mother. He wailed that he had been working so hard in the prefectural city, yet she, his mother, was impeding his progress. Now the royal prince had such a bad impression of him. Even if he passed the exams in the future, it would be hard for him to be able to hook a large patron like Prince Jing's Estate. After saying all of this, he started to sob loudly like a child.

Madam Zhang panicked. She had originally wanted to help her son, yet she had overestimated her own capabilities. She watched as her youngest son sobbed his heart out and her eyes also turned red. She stamped her feet and said, "I'll go apologize to the royal prince and tell him that this was all my idea. I was the one who brought you down! I'll kneel in front of him and have the royal prince change his opinion of you!"

Madam Zhao hurriedly pulled at her mother-in-law as anger bubbled within her heart. She silently cursed this pig of an ally, yet she could only persuade the other woman in a virtuous and sweet manner, "Mother, don't go off and do something again. Please leave my husband a road to walk on ah!"

“How could you say that, I'm trying to help Xiaobo...” Madam Zhang glared fiercely at Madam Zhao with her red-rimmed eyes.

When Madam Zhao saw her country-bumpkin mother-in-law's eyes crusted with gunk, she hurriedly looked away as she continued to gently persuade, “Mother, that royal prince does not look like a man who changes his mind easily. If you kneel in front of him, he not only will not think you are pitiful but also think that you're trying to threaten him. I'm afraid that it would only cause the opposite of your intended effect.”

Madam Zhang instantly was at a loss, “Then...then what can be done ah?! So he's just fated to misunderstand our Xiaobo ah!”

Madam Zhao, after all, was the daughter of a man who passed the county-level exams and had grown up in a scholarly family. She thought for a bit and then said, “There is nothing we can do at this point! Once this issue slowly fades from his mind, my husband can then use the chance to see Father-in-law in the future and show off his outstanding side. More exposure will lead to more familiarity, and, in time, the royal prince will change his mind about my husband! Husband, right now you need to spend all of your time closeted up and studying at home. If you're able to pass the exams next year and get a high-ranking, then, at that time, the royal prince will see you with a fresh pair of eyes!”

Yu Bo wiped the tears from the corners of his eyes and sniffled a bit before he looked gratefully at Madam Zhao, “It is still my wife who is knowledgeable! That's right, the royal prince himself had said it, solid learning is the most important of all. Next spring, I will absolutely have good results on the exam to prove my true talent!”

After finishing the fight, Yu Bo spent the rest of his time behind closed doors cramming. Other than eating or going to bed, he didn't leave his books even once.

Madam Zhao had a few more tricks up her sleeve. She noticed that her second brother-in-law's children all seemed to really like Doudou, so she went over every couple of days to call on them with her son.

Little Doudou also really liked going over to his second uncle's house. Every time he went, Older Sister Xiaocao would always give him something good to eat. Sometimes it would be a plate of delicious fried locusts, and sometimes it would be a perfectly roasted sweet potato.

Other times, it would be a piece of boiled corn, and occasionally it would be a batch of salt and pepper sunflower seeds.

The sunflower seeds were also goods that Royal Prince Yang had brought over from the western hemisphere. He gave Xiaocao a few seeds and allowed her to plant some on the perimeter of the back courtyard's wall. When the locust plague was approaching, Yu Xiaocao, with the help of the little divine stone, promoted the ripening of the sunflowers and managed to get enough to make four to five catties of dried sunflower seeds. She set aside a portion to be used as seeds later and the rest had been roasted to become snacks. After Madam Liu tasted the roasted seeds, she hid two catties worth of sunflower seeds and said that she was saving them for guests during the New Year celebrations.

Madam Zhao's skill at the feminine arts were quite good, so her embroidered flowers and plants looked vivid and lifelike. She gave Xiaolian and Xiaocao each an embroidered handkerchief. After receiving it, Xiaolian wanted her younger aunt to teach her how to embroider. However, she was out early every day and only returned in the evening, so she only had time to learn in the evening. Thus, Madam Zhao came over every evening and diligently taught Xiaolian how to embroider.

The Yu Family didn't let her teach for free. Because Xiaolian had to pack up the stall late, the Yu Family ate dinner later than a lot of people in town. Every time Madam Zhao brought Doudou over, they arrived just in time for dinner at the Yu Family's. Thus, they allowed the two of them to eat dinner at their house.

At first, Madam Zhao tactfully refused and stated that she had already eaten. Madam Zhang, like the vast majority of other villagers in Dongshan Village, only had two meals a day at her house. One meal was at nine to ten in the morning and the second meal was around three to four in the afternoon. By the time the Yu Family in the old residence had dinner, it was already seven at night. So when Madam Zhao said she had already eaten, she wasn't lying.

Yu Xiaocao had already found out through Little Doudou just exactly when the two of them ate their second meal and what they ate. Madam Zhang only gave each person a bowl of watery gruel and a small plate of salted vegetables. By the time seven o'clock rolled around, all of the food they had eaten at three to four in the afternoon had pretty much been digested. Thus, when Little Doudou saw the table full of flatbread made with more white flour than coarse grain, and all of the tantalizing dishes, drool had long pooled in his mouth.

Yu Xiaocao knew what type of personality Madam Zhao had. She wasn't the type of person who liked taking advantage of others like Madam Li. Thus, she didn't have any ill will towards the woman. The

originally healthily plump Little Doudou had been starved into a slender sprout. This made her feel bad inside. No matter how hard it got, children shouldn't have to suffer this much, right?

Thus, Xiaocao persuaded her aunt, "Younger Aunt, you're helping to teach us the feminine arts so you're also considered half a teacher to us. It's only right and fair that the disciples provide their teacher a meal. Please don't decline the invitation anymore. If you continue to be this polite, how could Xiaolian and I have the nerve to bother you in the future?"

Madam Zhao couldn't refuse at this point and brought her son to the table to eat a bit. The next day, she deliberately came over half an hour later in order to come at a time when the Yu Family had already finished eating dinner.

However, as soon as she entered the courtyard, Yu Xiaocao rubbed her rumbling stomach and said, "Younger Aunt, can you come over a bit earlier next time? We've been waiting for you to eat and we're about to faint from hunger."

When she saw that the Yu Family was sincerely inviting her over for the evening meal, Madam Zhao finally received it gratefully. After eating a couple of meals there, Madam Zhao had a new understanding of how her second brother-in-law's family was doing.

They had just experienced the locust disaster, so most families were tightening their waistbands. Most were just eating what they could, especially the evening meal. After eating that, most villagers would soon go to bed and didn't have to do any hard work. Thus, the vast majority of families didn't eat much for their second meal.

However, Yu Hai's family still had plenty of large flatbreads to eat. Furthermore, every meal they had at least four dishes and a soup. The flatbreads were also made with more fine grains than coarse. Sometimes, they even used white wheat flour to roll out some noodles. Every two to three days, they would also stir-fry a couple plates of meat. The meat had apparently come from Royal Prince Yang's hunting. The meat changed from wild boar meat, wolf meat, hare meat, and wild pheasant meat.

After half a month, her son's thin little face had regained some plumpness and he also became much more cheerful. Without her guidance, her son would run over to his second uncle's home to play. He spent his time with Older Brother Shitou and Older Brother Fangping. They fed the chickens with locusts, gathered river snails to eat, or ran around with the other village children to the beach to gather seafood. At night, when he was dreaming, he would even yell, "Older Brother Shitou, I dug up a clam..."

Although her son had gotten tanner, his body was getting stronger and his appetite improved. For the sake of her son, she could only brazenly bum a meal off of her second brother-in-law's family. His family was honest and kind. Most of the time they would even let her bring some food back for her husband. However, they only had one request: the food could only be eaten by the three of them.

After a month passed, all three of them had gained some much needed weight and they looked much more healthy. When Madam Li noticed this, she stood in the middle of the courtyard and hollered, "There are some people, who look all noble and virtuous, but are actually sneaks who hug onto the thighs of others and lick their feet! No matter if the leftovers are delicious or trash, they'll still willingly take it back home!"

Madam Zhang naturally knew that Madam Zhao often went to the old Yu Residence. However, she always brought some good food back for her son. When she saw that her son had grown fatter, Madam Zhang was able to turn a blind eye to this. If there were people willing to help her raise her son and grandson, at no cost to her, what did she have against it?

When she heard Madam Li's harsh words, Madam Zhang screamed at her, "If you have the ability, then why don't you go hug their thigh too? I bet that, from the way you look, you wouldn't even be able to cross the threshold before they shoo you away. If you don't have the ability, then don't stand here like an idiot!"

Madam Li shut her mouth. Her mother-in-law was right. Last year, she had been caught in the middle of Yu Hai's melon fields and even ended up crushing some immature melons and not yet grown melon plants. Ever since that happened, no one at the old Yu Residence welcomed her again. Sometimes she would brazenly go over to try her luck at pulling up some scallions or vegetables in the garden, but she would always be unceremoniously driven away by the fierce Yu Xiaocao. After her mother-in-law peacefully separated from her father-in-law, they had drawn a clear line between the two families. Thus, she had even less of an excuse to wheedle even one copper coin from them.

Every evening, she would stealthily watch from the crack in the door as Madam Zhao brought food back home. She could barely hold back the saliva in her mouth as she silently cursed Yu Hai's whole family for their wealth and their persistence in fawning over her younger brother-in-law. She was certain that they were only doing this because they could bask in the glory of her third brother-in-law once he became a high-ranking official! What was the point in cursing though? Her husband, who was an unreliable and wooden man, could only watch stupidly from the side as other people ate good food and drank rich things.

Time passed and it was at the point when the vast majority of villagers in Dongshan Village could barely eat one meal a day. If more days passed, then the families would start going hungry. At this time, good news passed from the docks—the grain ships that had gone down to the south to bring back reasonably priced grain were now here!!

When Royal Prince Yang heard the news, he rushed over to the docks to organize the situation. The bodyguards under his command had already surrounded the perimeter in a tight formation to prevent the hungry commoners from causing a riot.

Fang Zizhen also brought along some soldiers to help keep the peace. More than half of the construction on the harbor had been completed. The dockworkers were currently hauling all of the grain off the ships and moving them into the warehouses that had already been finished. The grain would be sold the next day.

Another batch of grain had been sent to the yamen's storehouse under the guard of the soldiers. They were preparing to open shops in Tanggu Town and the docks at the same time. The price of grain had already been decided and it would be almost the same price as it was before the locust plague. Coarse grains would be sold for five copper coins a catty and fine grains ten copper coins a catty. Because all of the grain would be sold for the price they had bought it for, the imperial court was going to undertake the costs of transportation and labor involved.

When the news disseminated, a lot of the villagers rushed over that night and started to line up in front of the stores. Because the Yu Family had a good relationship with Royal Prince Yang, the people of Dongshan Village found out first. Thus, if someone looked closely at the long, winding line, they'd be able to see the villagers from Dongshan Village in the front and middle of the line but not at the end.

Several hundred ships had been dispatched to haul enough grain to supply the victims of the disaster area. Thus, there was no quota imposed on the grain. Some families had been scared after going hungry and planned on storing more grain at home. Thus, they took out all the money they had to buy some reasonably priced grain.

Fields of Gold Chapter 298

There were also people who noticed that there was more than enough grain to be had and remembered that Royal Prince Yang had promised there would be a second and third shipment of reasonably priced grain...thus they only bought enough grain to last their family two months.

The Yu Family still had a lot of grain back home, so Yu Hai and Liu Hu took out the horse and donkey carts to help their fellow villagers transport grain back to Dongshan Village.

Because Royal Prince Yang had a connection to Tanggu Town, the first fleet of grain ships stopped at Tanggu Town first. However, there were a total of three prefectures and nineteen villages that were affected by the locust plague. For the past two months, the commoners who lived in these prefectures and towns all had to tighten their waistbands. By now, most of their stores of grain had been almost exhausted. The villagers who lived closer to Tanggu Town all hurried over to the docks and town to line up to buy grain.

For the next few days, the twenty or so reasonably priced grain shops in Tanggu Town and the docks had massively long lines in front of them. Even when the grain shops closed for the night, the lines waiting for grain did not disperse. The people stayed overnight to sleep as they were all afraid that they would have to line up again the next day. They were also afraid that the reasonably priced grain would be sold out.

Every morning, County Magistrate Zhao of Tanggu Town would take his people from the yamen and punctually opened up the grain shops at six in the morning. The shops only closed their doors at around eight in the evening every night. The grain shops at the docks also had the same operating hours. The people at the shops were busy for five whole days until all of the reasonably priced grain had reached the other towns and prefectures. Only then did the pressure lighten a lot on the grain shops in Tanggu Town and the docks.

When the first batch of grain was almost sold out, the second fleet of ships had already arrived. Furthermore, when the first fleet of ships had finished unloading their stores of grain, they had gone back to the south to pick up more. When the commoners of the disaster stricken areas noticed that the supplies of grain were coming in on time, they also didn't feel the need to frantically stock up on food anymore. Thus, the days of winding long lines in front of the grain stalls became history.

As for the other grain stores that had tried to profit from the disaster, there was only dust at their thresholds. The grain stores opened by the government all sold new grain harvested from the south, while these grain shops only had grain that was saved up from last season. In addition, since the reasonably priced grain stores had fair prices, only idiots would go buy the overpriced grain from the other stores. These shops had already made a fortune from the locust plague, so in order to not let their grain sit for too long, these places also cut down on their prices. Some of the shops were even selling their grain for less than what the government run shops were selling for.

Thus, the pressure on the reasonably priced grain stores had lessened again. Before long, the twenty or so reasonably priced grain shops were cut down to two in Tanggu Town, one on the west side and one

on the east side. The docks also had two shops remaining. Everything slowly came back to normal in the disaster stricken areas.

Word finally came out among the wealthy families in Tanggu Town about the Yu Family's vegetables. All of them expressed their desire to reserve these high-priced vegetables in advance. After the locust plague and drought disasters, these so-called rich families had not been able to eat fresh vegetables for a long time.

On this particular day, there were more than a dozen stewards who were crowded around the Yu Family's gates. They were all heatedly arguing. Steward Yao had already been promoted to the head steward of the estate. He righteously proclaimed, "Our Yao Family was the first family from town to purchase vegetables from the Yu Family. And we had never stopped buying from them for the past two years. The patriarch had already said, no matter how expensive the vegetables, we need to get the contract to buy vegetables from them."

The assistant steward from the Zhuang Family curled his lip, "Esteemed Brother Yu, please tell them that our Zhuang Family was the first to arrive here and the first to ask to buy vegetables from you, right? You absolutely cannot favor one and discriminate against the other ah!"

The Wang Family's steward also aggressively interjected, "You cannot forget about us. Since we have already come, you can't let us go home empty-handed, right?"

All of the other stewards and servants started talking at once to proclaim that they too wanted to buy vegetables from the Yu Family. Yu Hai didn't know who to listen to anymore and felt his head hurt from all of the ruckus.

"Please calm down, everyone please calm down!" Yu Hai hollered at the top of his lungs for a bit until everyone stopped arguing. Only then did he continue, "Everyone here knows that all of the vegetables in the courtyard have been reserved by Zhenxiu Restaurant! We only have a few vegetable fields open in the back courtyard by the pond. We can only harvest around two hundred catties of vegetables every day, so there are not enough vegetables to go around to everyone. Thus, we absolutely are unable to make everyone happy. Therefore, the most important thing right now is that everyone comes to an agreement about what we are to do now!"

"What is there to negotiate? Let money do the talking ah!" The person who spoke up was the rich and imposing steward from the Zhuang Family.

Steward Yao didn't back down one bit, "Okay! Let money do then talking then! Everyone can yell out a price, whoever's price is the highest will be able to buy the vegetables! We will give fifty copper coins a catty!"

The assistant steward of the Zhuang Family sneered in disdain and yelled, "Eighty copper coins a catty!"

Everyone in Tanggu Town knew that the Zhuang Family and Yao Family were the families other than the Zhou Family that had the deepest pockets. At first the other family's stewards also bid, but as the price climbed higher, those other stewards and servants couldn't keep up. They could only watch as the Zhuang Family and the Yao Family bid with gusto. Finally, the price of the vegetables had climbed up to one tael a catty.

Yu Hai felt as if his head was going to explode. They had only sold their vegetables to Zhenxiu Restaurant for thirty-some copper coins a catty, yet these two families had bid up to one tael a catty. He felt very uneasy about this!

Yu Xiaocao also felt antsy on the side as she watched the proceedings. She hurriedly spoke to the two family's stewards, "You guys should stop bidding! You've already reached a sky-high price, so when you guys return, your masters will definitely peel the skin off of you!"

Steward Yao smiled, "Miss Yu has a kind heart! However, our patriarch had already said that no matter how expensive I need to buy these vegetables! Money is not a problem!"

The Zhuang Family had grain shops in all three prefectures, which consisted of more than a dozen villages and towns. Thus, at the start of this disaster year, they had also made a killing. Therefore, the assistant steward of the Zhuang Family proudly stood up tall and looked at Steward Yao with disdain in his eyes, "In terms of money, our Zhuang Family has never feared other people either!"

Yu Xiaocao forced out a smile, "I know both of your families have deep pockets, but you can't just swing around our family ah! This money will burn our hands if we take it ah!"

Zhu Junyang had been watching the proceedings for some time at the side. When he heard Yu Xiaocao's words, he curled his lips, "These people are shoving money at you. It's not as if you're stealing it or

forcing them to give it to you, yet you feel like this money will burn your hands ah! Truly too small-minded!"

The two stewards both knew Royal Prince Yang's status. When they saw him talking, they immediately became quiet. However, Steward Yao still bravely gave his opinion, "Miss Yu, ever since our patriarch ate the vegetables from your family, he can't stomach the taste of any other. In the past, the patriarch only liked to eat meat and very rarely touched the vegetables. He started to feel faint and dizzy, and the doctor advised him to eat more vegetables. Despite that, he refused to follow the doctor's advice. Ever since your family's vegetables came onto the market last spring, the patriarch can't eat a meal without your vegetables, especially the tomatoes. Our patriarch eats your tomatoes like they're fruits! After the locust plague, there hasn't been any fresh vegetables in the past two months. Thus our patriarch's appetite has plummeted. Only after we bought some dried vegetables from your family did he finally have some desire to eat, otherwise..."

"Hey, hey! You can't compete on price, so you're trying to use the emotional card instead ah! Steward Yao, didn't you already agree to selling to the highest bidder earlier ah? Then let's continue ah!" The assistant steward of the Zhuang Family had also been promoted to his position recently and wanted to use this opportunity to show off his abilities in front of his master. In any case, the master had already said that it didn't matter how much the vegetables cost as long as they could get some to allow the matriarch to eat.

The Zhuang Family's matriarch suffered from chronic constipation. Doctor Sun had told them she needed to eat more coarse grains and vegetables. Coarse grains? That was food fit for only poor peasants. If the other rich families in town found out that the Zhuang Family was giving their matriarch coarse grains to eat, wouldn't they be mocked out of house and home? However, it was a disastrous year after the locust plague had passed. Where would they be able to get fresh vegetables?

The master had no idea what to do until the one time he attended a banquet at Zhenxiu Restaurant. There was extremely expensive lettuce seasoned with oyster sauce and vegetables sauteed with shitake mushrooms on the table. Everyone praised these two dishes without end. Furthermore, the lettuce and other green vegetables were very fresh and could not have been left over from the previous year. The master of the Zhuang Family had asked several times, but the people working at Zhenxiu Restaurant had their mouths tightly closed. Later on, he sent some people to stealthily follow the purchasing carts of Zhenxiu Restaurant and only then did he find out that the Yu Family of Dongshan Village was able to grow vegetables. Only then did he send the assistant steward out to buy some.

However, someone had leaked the information and almost the entire Tanggu Town knew that the Yu Family had fresh vegetables available. After eating two months worth of dried vegetables, salted

vegetables, and meat, all of the rich families in town wanted to eat some fresh green vegetables to clean the palate. Thus, the scene in front of the Yu Family occurred today.

Yu Xiaocao saw that the two people were starting to argue again and hurriedly interjected, "Both of you, please calm down a bit! Look, you both know that we only have two hundred catties of vegetables available every day. How about you guys split it fifty-fifty? This year, vegetables can only act as a side dish and can't be eaten as the main meal. Don't you think that makes sense?"

The two stewards looked at each other and finally managed to reach an agreement. Every day, each family would get a hundred catties each. Miss Yu was right. Their two families probably had around a dozen family members each, so a hundred catties a day was more than enough for them. Perhaps they would even have some vegetables left over that would be rewarded to the higher-ranking servants.

As for the price, the locusts hadn't been eradicated yet, so they stuck with the price that was hollered out earlier, one tael per catty. The young royal prince was right. This money was being shoved towards them, so refusing it would only be silly. It wasn't like they were forcing these people to give them money. Thus, the Yu Family was now going to make an additional two hundred taels a day from their vegetables sales.

Yu Xiaocao then addressed the other disappointed stewards, "We don't have a lot of people here, so we're unable to take care of too many vegetable fields. However, I do have a pesticide that can drive away locusts. You guys can buy some to take back home to plant some vegetables and grains that are easy to raise. Every day you need to spray some pesticide on the fields in the morning and night. By doing that, you can avoid the locusts eating all of the vegetables!"

When the rest of the people heard this proposal, they thought about the amount of time it took for green vegetables and lettuce to grow. At most it would take a month until they were ready to be eaten. If they went back and planted them now, they would be able to eat some fresh vegetables before the start of autumn. Furthermore, if they planted autumn season vegetables now, it wouldn't be too late for them to harvest later. Thus, all of the stewards asked Xiaocao about the price of this pesticide.

The pesticide was bottled up in wine liquor bottles that came out to a catty each. The ingredients to make one catty of pesticide cost around one tael. Furthermore, this pesticide required an extremely valuable ingredient: mystic-stone water. Naturally, the price could not be too cheap. Yu Xiaocao set the price at five taels a bottle. One bottle of pesticide was enough to spray one mu for a whole month, so when compared to reserving vegetables, it was a bit more worth it. The only difference was that they had to wait a bit to eat fresh vegetables. The other dozen or so families who weren't able to compete

for the vegetables mostly ended up buying some pesticide to bring back. After calculating the sales, Yu Xiaocao had earned eighty-five taels from selling the pesticide alone.

Liu Hu privately spoke to his wife in admiration, "Wife, your younger brother's ability to make money is truly very good. First it was watermelons, now it's vegetables. Money is just pouring into his pockets ah!"

Yu Caifeng smiled, "In actuality, it's not Yu Hai who is good at making money. Haven't you figured it out after half a year? Every method of making money has something to do with Xiaocao. Xiaohai also told me that the idea for growing watermelons came from Xiaocao. In fact, the methods used for planting and selling the melons all came from Xiaocao while he implemented them. As for these vegetables, if Xiaocao didn't come up with a method to create pesticide, how could they possibly make that much money?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 299

Liu Hu nodded his head, "From what you're saying, it is true! Planting corn was something that she asked the royal prince about. She even was so daring to get seeds from him and sign a military writ. Luckily before the locust plague came, the corn was ready to be picked. Otherwise, they would really be hanging there! Your little niece is clever and has guts. If she was a boy, she would absolutely have a sparkling career in front of her!"

Yu Caifeng gave him a look and replied, "What's wrong with her being a girl? Isn't she also quite capable ah? She helped her family build a five-room house made of tiles and bricks and also made quite a fortune for the family!"

Liu Hu smiled, "I'm not saying girls aren't good! However, when a girl grows up, she'll end up getting married to someone! It's only your younger brother who would spoil Xiaocao like this and have her do as she pleases. If she was married into a family, do you think she would still be able to do as she pleased? Alright, let's not talk about this. Let's discuss something else. How about we also open some fields to grow some early growing vegetables next year? We can sell the vegetables to the nearby villages or the prefectural city. That way we won't be competing with Dahai."

Yu Caifeng thought a bit and then agreed, "Since everyone has nothing to do now, we should build our house quickly. We should copy the old residence here and make the courtyard a bit larger so we can plant more vegetables. If we plant our gardens outside our walls, I'm afraid we'd have a hard time keeping an eye on them at night!"

"Okay! We'll build a large courtyard and make sure to have a stone fence!" Liu Hu made the decision right there.

The next day, with Yu Hai's help, they were able to find a dozen or so villagers in their prime to help with building the Liu Family's new home. The Liu Family's new residence was also located at the foot of the West Mountains and was about five hundred meters away from the Yu Family. They decided to build a more subdued house, so the house was constructed out of dirt and lumber.

Right now was just the start of autumn, which was usually a busy season for the villagers. Because the locust plague happened this year and no one was able to plant crops, most of the villagers were idle at home. Some would go down to the beach to dig up some sandworms or oysters. Others went into town or the docks to find some temporary work.

Sandworms and oysters were now being dug up by a lot of people, so the income a person could get from them had sharply declined. In the past, a person could make at least a hundred coppers a day. Now, those who could dig up about a catty and sell it for forty to fifty copper coins were envied by other people as experts.

The docks and town now had too many people looking for temporary work. Someone waiting for a few days may not be able to get a job. If there wasn't reasonably priced grain to be had, there would have been many starving commoners everywhere.

The Liu Family gave cash to the people who helped them build their house and the wage was thirty copper coins a day. They also prepared the noon meal for the workers. Although the wage wasn't considered very high, Liu Hu was relatives with Yu Hai. Since Yu Hai had a good relationship with his older sister, all of the young, strong workers in the village were willing to do this as a favor to Yu Hai.

After working there for two days, all of the young workers unceasingly praised the food at the Liu Family. They all proclaimed that this work was worth doing! The Liu Family provided two large flatbreads that were made with more white flour than coarse for each worker. Furthermore, the dishes that came along with the flatbreads always had meat in them. On one day, it was the soft and savory braised pig meat head, while on another day it was tantalizing stir-fried pig intestines. Then, on another day, they had some fried little fish that was soft and crispy...

The dish that made people the most happy was that, other than some dried vegetables, each meal also had a plate of sauteed green vegetables. This year, a plate of green vegetables was being sold for the price of roasted chicken and roasted duck at Zhenxiu Restaurant, so it was quite expensive!

Furthermore, there was also Yu Xiaocao's grasshopper sauce that she personally stir-fried herself. It made everyone praise it constantly. Even if there weren't other dishes, just this savory and spicy grasshopper sauce alone was enough to make a person eat an extra two flatbreads.

With delicious food to be had, the young villagers worked with great enthusiasm. They threw mud bricks, cut lumber, and laid the stone wall...everyone was willing to use all of their strength and not a single one slacked off.

Before a month had passed, the Liu Family's three-room mud-brick house had finished construction. They had also accepted Yu Xiaocao's suggestion for the roof and used ceramic tiles. By using a tiled roof, they would save the time needed to thatch the roof every year. Furthermore, a roof crafted of straw leaked rain in the summer and let in the cold wind and snow in the winter. With the Liu Family's current financial circumstances, if they were careful with their money, they were able to afford a tiled roof. What was the point of trying to scrimp and save if they couldn't live comfortably?

The Liu Family lived even closer to the West Mountains compared to the Yu Family, so Yu Hai proposed that his brother-in-law dig some pits around the perimeter of the wall for extra protection.

In actuality, their worries were not in vain. Just when the Liu Family had finished plowing the vegetable garden in the courtyard and planted their seeds, a few days later, all of the families living at the foot of the West Mountains could hear the howls of wolves at night when they were about to go to sleep.

Yu Xiaocao was roused by the noise. She draped a quilt over herself as she climbed into her parents' kang bed and quietly asked, "Father, listen! It sounds like wolves howling! Is a wolf pack coming down the mountain?"

Right after she spoke, a sweet and puppyish howl could be heard from the courtyard. The sound had a tone of warning to it.

Yu Hai didn't know whether he should laugh or cry, "Cao'er, these two puppies you brought back home have been with us for two months yet they still don't know how to bark properly. However, they manage to imitate the sound of a wolf howl pretty good. Quickly bring those two fellows inside to avoid them attracting the wolf pack here!"

At this time, the two brothers, Yu Hang and Little Shitou, pushed the door open and came in. Each of them had a little wolf in their arms. Little Shitou smiled, "Little White is so brave. When he heard the wolves cry, he even dared to howl back at them! However, his howls are too youthful and don't have enough power."

Little Black and Little White were both the progeny of the gray wolf. When they first came over, they weren't even a month old. Right now they still looked as if they were only about two months old. Every day they caught locusts to eat and also had Yu Xiaocao adding some fish and shrimp to their diet, so their bodies were very strong and healthy. Perhaps it was because they had drunken mystic-stone water, but the two fellows grew on the slower side. Two months had passed but they were only about the same size as the two-month old puppy from Dahuang's family. However, they looked very dainty and small, so they were quite adorable.

When the two wolf pups heard the unceasing howls of the wolf pack, their fur puffed up on their bodies. They twisted and turned in Yu Hang's and Little Shitou's arms, looking quite fierce. Yu Hai took Little Black over and placed him on his lap to pet. He smiled, "These two dogs likely have the blood of wolves running through them. Although they are quite small, they are very brave. In the future, if we train them well, they will absolutely become very good hunting dogs!"

Yu Xiaocao snickered endlessly inside. The blood of wolves? These two were wolves, okay? However, she didn't know the color of Little Black and Little White's mother. How could these two wolves be completely different colors and not look one bit like Big Gray? 'Big Gray' was the name that Xiaocao had just given that gray wolf. In the past, she used to call him 'little wolf' but now he had already become a father, so it wasn't right to continue calling him 'little wolf'.

When the two wolves were placed on the kang bed, they immediately scampered over to Xiaocao and rubbed their heads intimately against her. They even rolled around her asking for pets, as if their earlier fierce appearance was just an illusion.

The little roe deer had been a pet for over two years yet it never seemed to grow and still looked quite mini. It had followed the two Yu brothers and wormed its way into the main bedroom. When it saw the two wolves on the kang bed, it raised its forelegs onto the side of the kang bed. It enviously and pitifully stared at the other two creatures.

The Yu Family's three little pets all took a bath every two to three days, so they were all very clean and didn't have any undue odors. Yu Xiaolian helped the little roe deer climb onto the kang bed and held it in her arms to pet. Little Black and Little White were only close to her younger sister and regarded the affections of other people with disdain. Because of this, Yu Xiaolian and Little Shitou both blamed Yu

Xiaocao. Luckily, the little roe deer had an easy-going temper and was quite affectionate with everyone in the family. This somewhat soothed the hurt feelings of the two siblings.

Yu Hang remarked in worry, "From the sound of the howls, there are quite a lot of wolves in this pack! If they descend the mountain, the families here, including us, would bear the brunt of their attack. The royal prince lives on the mountain. Although he has bodyguards to protect him, it is not necessarily safe. How about we invite the royal prince over tomorrow to live in our west courtyard? Father, what do you think?"

Yu Hai nodded his head, "I think it's a good idea! Xiaocao, you're the best at speaking with the royal prince. Tomorrow at breakfast, bring up this idea. The wolf pack's howls seem quite far away right now, so we probably won't have any problems tonight. After tonight, we can't guarantee it will be okay. From the sounds, I'd guess that this pack has at least twenty to thirty wolves. We absolutely cannot underestimate them!"

Experienced hunters could tell from the sounds of the howls just how many wolves there were in a pack. Yu Hai had spent a few years with Zhao Bufan and was unlikely to make a mistake about this.

Madam Liu anxiously stated, "How do you think older sister is doing over there? They're closer to the West Mountains. If the wolves descend the mountain, they will be first to encounter calamity. Other than Older Brother-in-law, the rest of them are all women and children. They might be scared to death! I think that tomorrow we need to bring them over. Our courtyard's east wing is still empty. If we squeeze a bit, we'll all be able to fit."

Yu Hai gave his wife an approving look and nodded his head, "Okay! Tomorrow we'll have Older Sister and her entire family move in with us. We'll be able to come up with something together."

After she finished worrying about Yu Caifeng's family, Madam Liu started to worry about her maternal family. "Husband! Xishan Village is quite close to the West Mountains. I don't know what the circumstances are like at my maternal family!"

Yu Hai comforted his wife, "Don't worry, Xishan Village is still around two to three kilometers away from the West Mountains! Father-in-law's family also live in the interior of the village. Unless the wolf pack is starving, they won't go to places with a lot of people. Last time when we went to Xishan Village, I had talked to the village chief there and told them to set more pit traps around the village and to organize people on night duty. When wild beasts come, those on night duty will beat the drums and light fires. That will also scare the wild animals away."

After hearing her husband's explanation, Madam Liu relaxed ever so slightly. That night, all of the families living at the foot of the West Mountains didn't sleep well! Everyone was like the Yu Family, all squeezed into one room with shovels and other tools in their hands at the ready for an attack.

Just as Yu Hai predicted, the night passed without any issues. The next day, when Qian Xiaoduo came by to buy vegetables, he noticed that everyone in the Yu Family had dark circles under their eyes and they were all acting a bit strange. After asking a bit, he found out the reason. He slapped his chest and promised to give the Yu Family some hunting forks, hunting bows and arrows, as well as hunting knives in the afternoon.

At breakfast, Yu Xiaocao mentioned their idea about having the prince move in with them. Zhu Junyang couldn't help but mock her a bit after he noticed the little girl's dark circles, "It was just a few wolves howling last night, is this necessary?! You're even more timid than a tiny sparrow! Tsk, in a moment, I will move over. With this prince around, even if all of the wild beasts descended the mountain they wouldn't be able to harm you, let alone a wolf pack!"

Yu Xiaocao couldn't resist the urge to refute him, "Don't be such a bringer of bad luck, okay? My father had already said that this wolf pack has at least twenty to thirty wolves in it. If they all descend from the mountains, it will be quite a disaster! And you even said you could protect me if all of the beasts from the mountain came down, do you think we're filming 'Beast Kingdom' [1] right now?"

Although Zhu Junyang didn't know what 'Beast Kingdom' was referring to, he could tell that Yu Xiaocao was satirizing him. He coldly huffed and said, "You only show your rage at me! You're lucky that I don't lower myself to your level, otherwise, you would have died many times over!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 300

By the third day, the wolf pack had descended the mountain. The first to bear the brunt was the old Zhao Residence that was halfway up the mountain. However, all of the people inside had been moved to the Yu Family's residence. Without the smell of food around, the wolf pack detoured around the houses halfway up the mountain and the Liu Family's newly constructed residence and rushed straight towards the Yu Family's next door neighbor, the Qian Family.

The Qian Family's courtyard had about a hundred or so ducks in there. Although it was a disaster year, raising ducks wasn't the same as raising chickens. Chickens required a lot of fodder whereas ducks only needed to be let out to a pond, and they could forage food for themselves. Little fish, shrimp, and snails were all a part of their regular diet. Madam Mao was planning on raising these hundred ducks until autumn and then selling them.

It was currently the fifteenth of September and the moon was bright and radiant. Yu Hai climbed onto the top of his own wall and could clearly see the besieged Qian Family. The Qian Family had also dug some pit traps around them, which served their purpose. There were a few wolves caught in the pits. However, there were too many wolves in the pack. The ravenous starved wolves attempted one after another to scale the walls. Some even tried to use their bodies as a battering ram and slammed themselves against the Qian Family's dilapidated wooden gate....

The Qian Family's ducks in the back courtyard screamed to the high heavens. Their walls were not as high as the Yu Family's and a few strong wolves managed to twist themselves in midair and jump onto the top of the walls.

Yu Xiaocao was laying on the roof as she anxiously watched what was happening at the Qian Family's residence. She quietly asked, "Father, are you sure that Uncle Qian and his whole family aren't at home right now?"

"Mhm! The day before yesterday, your Uncle Qian had told me that he was planning on taking the family to his wife's maternal home in the evening. Last night I saw that all of them had left the village." Yu Hai held a bow and arrow in his hands as his eyes glittered with the shimmering light from the moon.

Yu Xiaocao finally relaxed. When she heard the ducks let out a scream, she remarked in regret, "It's too bad Auntie Qian's flock of ducks will be destroyed. I'm pretty sure they're about to become the wolves' evening meal!"

Although Yu Hai couldn't see the back courtyard of the Qian Residence, he guessed, "Shouldn't be too big of a loss! When your Uncle Qian left, he had opened up the gate to the pond. When the ducks get scared, they should run towards the pond. I'm sure some of the ducks will be eaten by the wolf pack but probably not all of them."

Yu Xiaocao climbed to the highest part of the roof. With the light of the moon, she could faintly see the messy ripples on the lake. It was probably all caused by the ducks heading into the water. Yu Xiaocao relaxed again.

Zhu Junyang calmly sat on top of the roof and saw the worry disappearing from Yu Xiaocao's face. He teased, "You're unable to defend yourself, so why are you worrying about other people?"

Yu Xiaocao turned her head around and looked strangely at Zhu Junyang, who was sitting on the beam of the roof as if he was on flat ground. Then she looked at her own position, awkwardly hugging onto the roof. She curled her lip and said, "What do you mean by this?"

"If the wolf pack can't find any food at the Qian Family's place, they will naturally change their target. The Yu Family is the closest neighbor to the Qian Family. What target do you think they'll go for next?" Zhu Junyang expressed his disdain towards Yu Xiaocao's intelligence. She was normally a very sharp little girl, so how come her brains seemed to have disappeared right now? Was she really scared silly by the wolf pack?

Who was their next target? It was quite obvious! Yu Xiaocao smiled bitterly as she watched the wolf pack finish battering down the Qian Family's gate and run around in the back courtyard. A portion of them were already dashing over in the direction of the Yu Family's residence.

"Prepare! Everyone get into position!" Zhu Junyang commanded his dozen or so bodyguards. All of them climbed up bamboo ladders to get onto the wall. Each of them was energetic and healthy as they prepared and aimed their bows and arrows.

Yu Xiaocao stayed on top of the tall roof and tied up a piece of meat on a bamboo pole. As if she was fishing, she dangled the bait outside the walls.

The first wolf to arrive was obviously the alpha of the pack. It still remembered the pits outside of the Qian Family's residence and stopped right outside of the Yu Family's walls to observe the surroundings. It also howled a bit at the rest of the wolf pack, which was right behind it. Most of the wolves stopped right next to the head wolf, but there was no shortage of stupid wolves who had been starved silly. When they smelled the scent of meat in the air, they ignored the alpha wolf's warning and rushed over in the direction of the meat.

A large and muscular gray wolf leapt up very high and opened its large mouth wide as it soared towards the meat that Yu Xiaocao was dangling. Xiaocao deftly lifted the bamboo pole a bit and the gray wolf snapped onto nothing. It fell towards the ground. Just as its paws touched the ground, a sharp 'crack' resonated in the air. Its feet had stepped onto thin air and the wolf fell deep within the previously dug pit. Within the pit were sharpened bamboo stakes and they pierced the gray wolf's soft underbelly. Immediately, the scent of blood filled the air.

There were two other starving wolves that wanted to fight over the meat. By the time the gray wolf fell down, they had already jumped up, so they weren't any more fortunate than the first wolf. Three wolves had been caught in the traps and had all been injured more or less. The pits were large and deep, yet the mouth of the hole was small. It would be too difficult to climb out even if they wanted to!

Yu Xiaocao shifted her position on the roof. She dangled the piece of meat above another trap. This time, she deliberately hung the meat very low and it almost touched the ground. Some of the gluttonous wolves that had retreated earlier were now becoming interested again.

Yu Xiaocao turned her head around and revealed a proud smile at the young royal prince, "How about that? Looks like my ability to fish wolves is quite good, eh?"

Zhu Junyang reminded her, "Keep an eye on the ground. Be careful that your cleverness doesn't turn into a tragedy..."

Just as the word 'tragedy' left his mouth, he saw the meat that was being dangled by Yu Xiaocao being bitten onto by a skinny old wolf. Although the old wolf had gotten a bite of the meat, it still couldn't avoid falling into the prepared trap. As it fell into the trap, the old wolf refused to let go of the meat in its mouth. Yu Xiaocao had been caught off guard and had been dragged by the weight of the old wolf towards the edge of the residence's wall. In a moment, almost half of her body was about to fall out.

Yu Hai, who had been observing everything from the side, almost had his eyes pop out of his head as he hollered, "Cao'er, quickly let go of the bamboo pole in your hands, let it go!!"

Everything was happening in the blink of an eye. Yu Xiaocao wanted to let go of the bamboo pole, but it was already too late. She could feel that the center of her gravity had already shifted away from the roof. She was facing the prospect of falling into the center of a pack of hungry wolves on the ground.

If she fell like this, she might be like the old wolf and fall into the pit trap. Her body would end up pierced by the sharpened spears in the trap. Or she could fall into the clutches of the wolf pack, and end up torn into pieces...

In her moment of desperation, Yu Xiaocao didn't forget to ask the little divine stone, [If I fell into the pit and became injured, can you guarantee that I won't be mortally injured? Or what if I fall into the wolf pack, can you make the wolf pack not rip me to pieces?]

[To stop you from injuring your vital areas is something I can do. However, if you fall into the middle of the wolf pack, I'm pretty sure I don't have enough time to do anything before they tear you apart. These starving wolves aren't like Big Gray and easy to tame...] The little divine stone still earnestly replied to her during this crucial moment.

[Then I'm screwed! Looks like, Little Glutinous Dumpling, you're about to get a new master...] Yu Xiaocao felt very regretful about this ending. She had only transmigrated over for two years and she hadn't enjoyed enough the feeling of being loved by her parents and siblings. She still hadn't had the chance to taste the sweetness of romantic love. Was she just going to tragically die in the mouths of these wolves?

As her body slipped towards the outside of the wall, Yu Xiaocao's heart was full of despair. She tightly closed her eyes and two tear drops slid down her cheeks...

Just as her entire body was about to slip out, she suddenly felt her ankle jerk and her body swayed. For a second, she was at a ninety degree angle from the outside wall and her nose became intimately close with the tiles. The tears in Yu Xiaocao's eyes spilled out. Her nose hurt a lot ah! These tears were from being struck on her nose, okay?

"Don't cry! You little coward!! With this prince around, how could you possibly fall out?" The young royal prince's voice sounded from the direction of her feet.

Yu Xiaocao turned her head around and saw that her foot was caught by the young royal prince. She could clearly see that fellow's face, which was begging to be smacked, under the clear light of the moon. When he saw Yu Xiaocao look over, Zhu Junyang deliberately wiggled the hand on her ankle. Afterwards, Yu Xiaocao was just like a dead fish as she swayed back and forth in the air.

"Be careful!" Yu Xiaocao suddenly felt the hand on her ankle tighten and her body being lifted a few meters. A stinky smell wafted over and, in the corner of her eye, she saw a row of tightly packed teeth rushing by her. The teeth were about two centimeters away from her head and stopped for two seconds before it quickly disappeared and dropped. Yu Xiaocao stared at the culprit. Apparently, it was a fierce wolf that was rushing towards her and ended up falling into the pit below them.

Yu Xiaocao blew her top out of fury. Because of all of the blood rushing to her face, her face was bright red. She screamed at the young royal prince, "Are you using me as bait ah?! Don't you know I almost died because of you?! Quickly bring me back up!!"

As for the ultimate fate of the previous bait, it could be seen in the pit. That old wolf was still clutching onto it even as it was pierced to death.

Zhu Junyang also felt cold sweat dripping down his body from shock. If his reflexes weren't as fast as they were, that little girl's head would have been bitten off by that wolf. He hurriedly used all of his strength, and hauled Xiaocao back up with one hand on her ankle and the other grabbing the back of her clothes. After she was back on the roof, he gently placed her back where she used to be sitting.

Seeing tears stream down Yu Xiaocao's face, Zhu Junyang rubbed his nose out of embarrassment when he saw the tears streaming down Yu Xiaocao's face and quietly said, "Alright, don't cry! It was my fault earlier...aren't you perfectly fine?"

Yu Xiaocao leveled a glare at him and then rubbed her own nose—it hurt so much! However, she silently rejoiced that she didn't break her nose earlier. This era didn't have any methods to reshape a person's nose. If she broke her nose, she'd be ugly for the rest of her life, alright?

Zhu Junyang pinched her sharp little chin and pushed aside her hand as he attentively inspected her, "What's wrong with your nose? Did it hit the wall and become flat? Looks a little bruised but there's no blood. Should be fine!"

"Go away!!" Yu Xiaocao pushed aside the young royal prince's hand that was pinching her chin. What was he doing? This move was too much like a playboy taking liberties with a respectable young woman. Men and women should not touch hands when they give or receive things. Even though this old woman's body is only ten years old, we're already past the age of being able to share the same table, okay?

Zhu Junyang was just about to say something when he was interrupted by Yu Xiaocao crying out in fear, "Damn it! That wolf pack is ramming the gate again!! These repulsive creatures, they're definitely going to try to do the same thing and bring our gate down to rush in!!"

Zhu Junyang calmly and unhurriedly rubbed her hands. The soft and smooth feeling was unfamiliar to him. He looked at his own fingers, raised his head to look at the direction of the gate and softly said, "Don't worry, it's not a big deal! Your family's gate is very sturdy and the bar holding it closed was switched into a metal rod. The wolf pack doesn't have a chance against it!"

Following that, he raises his voice, "Get ready group one, we're going to shoot these wolves dead. Take aim and fire!"