

## Gold Chapter 301

### Fields of Gold Chapter 301

After Royal Prince Yang finished his command, all of the bodyguards on the ladders pulled back the strings on their bows and shot their arrows towards the wolf pack rushing towards the gate. Immediately, howls of pain and grief filled the air.

The alpha wolf let out a low howl and the wolves striking the gate became even more fierce. Some of the wolves had blood dripping from their heads and bodies. The bodyguards by the gate calmly placed a second arrow on their bow strings and continued to shoot at the wolf pack outside. Each wave of arrows left behind a few dead wolf corpses.

The wolf pack retreated to a safe distance after following the alpha wolf's subsequent howl. The head wolf's eyes whirled. There were pit traps on both sides and the gate was protected by the rain of arrows. It looked like it needed to change its plans ah! The alpha wolf had no intention of retreating even though the Yu Family was a hard nut to crack. The Yu Family had plenty of 'food'. If the wolf pack didn't take a meal now, they would all starve to death. They needed to succeed or die trying!

The head wolf took the rest of the wolf pack in a feigned retreat. It wanted to lower its enemies' guard by making them indecisive. Zhu Junyang, who was sitting on the rooftop and directing this command, yelled at the bodyguards at the gate, "Group one, leave behind two people to continue to guard the gate. The remaining two people come to the back courtyard to provide assistance. Head Steward Liu, a wolf pack holds grudges. Since they had a stumble here, they absolutely won't just leave the matter at that. Since the wolf pack was able to enter the Qian Family's back courtyard with ease, they will certainly try to mostly attack the back courtyard here. Bring some people to heavily guard the rear courtyards three walls!"

Under the light of the moon, the two bodyguards swiftly ran from the front gate towards the back courtyard. Near their feet, there were two little shadows, one black and one white, that were following along. The speed of these two shadows was not any slower than the bodyguards' top speed.

Zhu Junyang had also spotted those two 'little puppies' that resembled balls of fur. He couldn't help but praise them, "Xiaocao, they all say that dogs resemble their masters. It is truly correct. Your two little puppies at home are also stupidly brave like you! There were so many starving wolves outside earlier, yet the two little guys aren't afraid at all and even ran towards the back courtyard to guard it. Tsk tsk! Should I say that they are heroic or should I say that they're overestimating their own abilities here?"

Yu Xiaocao was also still on the roof. She watched as her two little wolves, one black and one white, scampered towards the back courtyard like two little balls of fur. They stretched out their forelegs and lifted their bottoms up as they howled through the cracks in the gate.

The back courtyard had two little wild pigs that already weighed almost fifty to sixty catties each. They seemed to have sensed the lurking danger approaching and let out indignant squeals. The hares in the cages were all crowded into one corner, shivering with fear. The little roe deer was in the courtyard, pacing back and forth in a very anxious manner. From time to time, it would raise its head and prick up its ears to listen to the sounds. Its tail was upright, revealing white fur that was arranged in the shape of a heart.

Sure enough, as Royal Prince Yang predicted, the wolf pack had taken a long detour around and crept up alongside the pond. They started attacking the back gate. The bodyguards who were guarding the back gate didn't even need their master to order them as they swiftly shot arrows towards the wolves rushing over. Not a single arrow missed its target. Before long, around seven to eight wolves lay dead on the ground.

The thirty odd wolves did not seem like a small number. However, four to five wolves had been caught in the pit traps outside the Qian Family's residence and another five gluttonous wolves had fallen victim to the pit traps at the Yu Family's walls. At the front gate, another five to six were slain by arrows and another seven to eight had died at the entrance of the back courtyard. All in all, around twenty-three to twenty-four wolves had been killed by now.

Zhu Junyang observed the vastly thinned out ranks of wolves, which were only around a dozen now, and then gestured a signal to the bodyguards that were in the front courtyard. The six to seven bodyguards secretly opened the gate and then began to flank the wolf pack from afar. Yu Hai also went along with them. In his hands were his bow and arrows, and he also had a hunting fork on his back. Yu Hai also knew that wolf packs held grudges. You either had to kill them all in one stroke or avoid them from afar. Now that his family had already clashed with them, they needed to put an end to all of the wolves in the pack. Otherwise, he would be leaving a calamity for his family in the future.

When the alpha wolf noticed that things were going south for them on the attack at the back courtyard, it gave an order to retreat. At this point, the wolf pack had less than ten wolves left. Before the leader of the pack turned to leave, it leveled a glare full of hate at Yu Xiaocao, who was still on the roof. It seemed to be warning her, 'You better not leave the house in the future, otherwise...heh heh!'

Yu Xiaocao complained silently to the little divine stone when she saw a lowly beast warning her, [I know you can understand the language of animals, can you not show off? You're not doing anything right now, yet you're in the mood to translate what the alpha wolf is saying to me.]

The little divine stone huffed, [Being idle is still just being idle! If only it was possible to eradicate the whole wolf pack. Otherwise, your family will not have peaceful days in the future. A thief can be around for a thousand days, but people can't defend themselves a thousand times. This saying can also be used on these wolves.]

The bodyguards who had set an ambush at the foot of the West Mountains had already started fighting with the defeated wolves. These men were exceptionally skilled. Even if their first arrow didn't kill the wolf instantly, they would rush up with a sharp sword and fix that quickly. In the blink of an eye, this small group of wolves was slaughtered.

The alpha wolf seemed to know the concept of targeting the weakest link. It knew it couldn't escape anymore, so it ran towards Yu Hai. Yu Hai shot an arrow towards the leader wolf, but it nimbly dodged it. By the time he shot the second arrow, the distance between them was already very close. The alpha wolf rushed forward despite its wounds and didn't slow down at all. It opened its mouth wide, fangs gleaming, as it leapt toward Yu Hai. The arrow collided with its forelegs and a burst of blood flowered out.

Yu Hai was quite agile with his hands and was able to grab the pitchfork from his back. He quickly used it to obstruct the alpha wolf's gaping jaws. However, he was unable to block the animal's raking claws. Long, deep scratches appeared on Yu Hai's body and blood started to gush out. The smell of the blood provoked the head wolf's viciousness and it completed a difficult turn in midair and slammed its body towards Yu Hai.

Although Yu Hai was able to block the alpha wolf's second attack, he had been knocked over by the force of the animal's impact. The wolf's claws were cruelly pressing down on Yu Hai's shoulders. Even though the wolf's fangs were being blocked by the pitchfork, it was doing its best to strain forward to break the pitchfork between its jaws. It desperately desired to kill the repulsive human that had injured it so heavily.

Most hunting forks were made of iron at the prongs, yet the handles were made of plain wood. How could a piece of wood possibly withstand the force of a ravenous wolf's jaw and teeth? Before long, a sharp cracking sound could be heard as the hunting fork was snapped in two by the wolf.

Its dense row of gleaming white teeth that exuded a rotten smell headed in the direction of Yu Hai's neck. The bodyguards were currently in the middle of a fight with the other wolves, how could they pay attention to what was happening here? Yu Hai believed that he was screwed and risked getting his neck snapped in two as he viciously stabbed the prongs of the pitchfork towards the wolf's chest.

The wolf's teeth got closer and closer. They were about to kiss Yu Hai's neck when, suddenly, a forceful impact from the side pushed the alpha wolf away from Yu Hai. Yu Hai was stupefied for a second and then touched his neck. He was okay? He hurriedly flipped over and looked towards the wolf that had been attacking him. There was a silvery-gray wolf, about the same size as the alpha wolf, that was currently fiercely fighting the leader wolf.

The head wolf was truly the leader of wolves. Although it had been injured, it was still as vicious and fierce as before. However, this gray wolf was not inferior in any aspect. It was fighting the alpha wolf to a standstill.

At this time, there were some bodyguards who had finished their fights and walked towards Yu Hai. They looked at the two wolves fighting and inquired, "What's going on here? How come these two, the same species, are fighting with each other?"

Yu Hai let out an incredulous laugh and mocked himself, "Who knows? Perhaps they're trying to fight over me as a piece of food? Nowadays, it's not necessarily a good thing to be plump and brawny!"

The bodyguards laughed, "Are you okay? You should hurry back and get your wounds treated ah! Just leave these two wolves to us brothers!"

As they finished talking, the alpha wolf had already been pinned down by the gray wolf and its throat had been ripped open. The leader wolf lay on the ground, breathing its last. The gray wolf glanced at Yu Hai. This man had the smell of the little girl on him. Did it rescue the wrong person?

In the blink of an eye, the gray wolf had been surrounded by the bodyguards. There were seven to eight bodyguards who were very skilled and all of them had shiny swords in their hands that were pointed at the gray wolf.

The gray wolf cautiously observed the bodyguards as it tried to find a way to escape. Aish! Doing a good deed was for naught. In order to save a human, it had to pay with its own life.

One of the bodyguards inspected the gray wolf and said, "This wolf seems to be different from that pack. It has such beautiful fur. I'd absolutely be able to pick it out again." Yu Hai hesitantly said, "This wolf just saved me! How about...we let it go?"

The second bodyguard was on the more cautious side and shook his head, "It doesn't matter if it's a part of that pack or not. Wolves will always have fierce natures. If we don't kill it now, I'm afraid that in the future it will pose a threat to Dongshan Village's safety."

Yu Hai was slightly persuaded after hearing that. What type of wolf didn't eat meat? His children often went up to the West Mountains to catch locusts and set traps. If they met this wolf, what could happen to them? At the thought of endangering his children, Yu Hai's heart became hard.

As the circle surrounding the wolf tightened, the gray wolf was on the brink of being killed...at this moment, two little figures squeezed through the legs of the first and second bodyguards. They looked down and saw the Yu Family's two little pet dogs. One was named Little Black while the other was named Little White.

The two little puppies squeezed through the encirclement and bounded towards the gray wolf.

Yu Hai was shocked and hurriedly yelled, "Little Black, Little White! Come back..."

However, when he saw the scene before him, Yu Hai abruptly fell silent. The two tiny puppies had unexpectedly ran towards the gray wolf's legs to act spoiled and cute as they rolled around in front of it. Little Black even nibbled at the fur on the gray wolf's chest and swung around like a swing.

Love flashed through the gray wolf's emerald green eyes. It lowered its head and used its tongue to gently lick Little Black and Little White. The two little puppies also intimately licked the gray wolf's wounds. They whimpered and whined as if they were trying to say, 'Father, does it hurt? Let us lick your wounds and they won't hurt anymore!'

The first bodyguard exclaimed in amazement, "These two puppies actually do have the blood of wolves running through them. Could the gray wolf possibly be their father?"

The second bodyguard nodded his head, "No wonder the gray wolf would save Older Brother Yu! It probably could smell the scent of his sons on Yu Hai's body. I must say that this gray wolf is quite handsome. All of his fur seemed to be crafted out of silver and his eyes seemed to be as beautiful as the emeralds our master brought back from the western hemisphere. He looks quite clever and smart."

The first bodyguard exchanged looks with his comrade and said, "What should we do then? Should we still kill this gray wolf?"

Little Black and Little White had been fed mystic-stone water by Yu Xiaocao every day. They could already understand simple words from the human language. When they heard the word 'kill' come out of the first bodyguard's mouth, they hurriedly raised their fur up until they resembled angry little hedgehogs.

At this time, Yu Xiaocao had come over with the young royal prince. She curiously looked at the center of the bodyguard's encirclement. With the light of the moon helping her, she spotted a familiar silvery-gray figure.

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Yu Xiaocao quickly pulled away the guards and rushed into the encirclement. Before Zhu Junyang could intercept, she hugged the wolf and rubbed its thick fur. "Big Gray, why did you come down the mountain? Was there not enough food in the mountains? It's ok, I have a big brood of rabbits at home, I can share them with you!"

Big Gray's fur was almost the same color as the moon. Yu Xiaocao gently caressed its soft fur, the protruding bones on his back was a little harsh on her hands. It seemed that the food chain at the secret base had also been destroyed. She wondered how Big Gray survived these two months.

When Yu Hai saw his daughter run toward the wolf, his heart almost jumped out of his mouth. He hurried forward a few steps and stopped upon seeing the scene before him. Under the moonlight, a little girl was nestled beside the silver-gray wolf and stroking the back of the wolf. The wolf was as tame as a domesticated dog. At their feet, two little cubs rolled around acting cute. The scene was as beautiful as a dream.

When Yu Xiaocao turned her head, she saw her worried father. She smiled reassuringly at him and said, "Father, this wolf is very intelligent. He remembered that I helped him before and never attacked me. When I went up the mountain, he entrusted me with Little Black and Little White!"

Zhu Junyang looked at the gray wolf with interest and asked, "Are Little Black and Little White his children? How come they don't look like him? Could there be a mistake?"

"Beasts have a really good sense of smell. If it's not their children, why would they put in so much effort? Little Black and Little White's mother died shortly after giving birth to them. It was the Big Gray who fed them with the blood of his prey to keep them alive. The last time I went up the mountain, he gave me the two little guys to bring back!" Yu Xiaocao said amusingly.

Yu Hai was still worried. He had many children at home. What would he do if the wolf became berserk one day and bites his children? Thus, he was deeply opposed, in his heart, to taking the wolf home. After thinking about it, he asked, "Cao'er, have you decided to take in this gray wolf?"

Yu Xiaocao gently stroked the gray wolf's fur and nodded, "The wolf pack came down the mountain tonight, which means that there is less and less food available on the mountain. Father, I want to keep Big Gray until things are better on the mountain. After that, I will let him go back up the mountain."

Feeling somewhat distressed, Yu Hai frowned slightly and said, "We have so many people coming and going at our house. If one day the gray wolf suddenly goes mad and bites people, it would be hard to explain."

"That won't happen, Big Gray understands human speech and won't hurt anyone. Unless someone wants to hurt him or us. He already saved you just by depending on your scent, Father. This alone proves that Big Gray isn't a common wolf!" Yu Xiaocao tried to persuade her father. If she disregarded Big Gray, then he might die of starvation.

Yu Hai still felt doubtful as he said, "But...in a famine year, people can't get enough to eat yet you want to take a wolf home to raise. I'm afraid the villagers will talk..."

"Alright! What is there to contend for? When that time comes, just say that it's a pet trained by this prince and I like buying meat to raise him. Let's see who can say anything then! Let's go! It's almost dawn. Clean up the wolf corpses and be careful of attracting other predators again!" Seeing that the two were arguing back and forth with no end in sight, Zhu Junyang made the decision.

With Big Gray's problem solved, Yu Xiaocao was in a good mood. When she went back home, she saw the injuries on her father's body. Her heart ached as she grumbled, "Father, how come you didn't say

that you were hurt? You've bled so much. Quick, lie down. I'll sprinkle some anti-inflammatory and styptic powder on it."

At this time, Madam Liu, who stayed in the room with the children, came in and lit the oil lamp. She saw the bloody scars on her husband's body caused by the wolf's claws, and said with tears, "How could you be so careless? The wound is so deep, should we ask Doctor Sun from town to come and take a look?"

Yu Hai was fully confident in his daughter's medical skills. He smiled and comforted his wife, "It's nothing. It's a much lighter injury than the bite from the blind bear from last time!! Our daughter can pull me back from the gates of the underworld, what's this injury? Don't cry, if the children see you, they will laugh at you."

Yu Xiaocao boiled a pot of water full of medicinal herbs. She added a lot of mystic stone water and brought it out in a basin. Seeing her mother wiping away her tears, she felt that she should find something for her to do so she wouldn't be entertaining different thoughts. "Mother, dip the gauze in the medicine and help father clean his wounds. The wolves' claws are dirty. Only when you wash the wounds thoroughly will they not get infected. After the wounds are cleaned, sprinkle the powder on it. I'll go make the ointment."

Taking the basin of water, Madam Liu nodded her head and said, "Mhm, hurry and go make it so you don't delay your father using it!"

Madam Liu used the warm medicinal water to gently clean her husband's wounds. The children all gathered around him and asked, "Father, does it hurt?"

"Uncle, you are really something, being able to go head to head with wolves!"

"Mother, why don't I help clean father's wounds?"

"Uncle, is the wolf pack wiped out?"

"Uncle, is wolf meat delicious?"



"Father, I'll go out to see if I can help with anything..."

Yu Xiaocao came over with a mortar to make medicine and shouted softly at the group of chattering kids, "All of you shut up! Father must feel so uncomfortable after losing so much blood. Just let him quietly lie down for a while."

Seeing that her mother wouldn't let her help, Yu Xiaolian said, "I'll go kill a hen and make a stew for Father. Once the wound is taken care of, he can drink some chicken soup to nourish his body."

"Take some Angelica Sinensis and wolfberry from my medicine box and cook them together. It's good for replenishing blood!" Yu Xiaocao added some mystic-stone water with the medicinal herbs and pounded hard. Hearing Xiaolian's comment, she hastily reminded her.

Yu Hang and Liu Junping were both considered half laborers in the family. They saw that the bodies of the wolves were being dealt with outside, so they rushed out to help. After the wolves were skinned, they picked out the relatively complete ones. When Yu Hai's wounds were healed, he could tan the skins. Then, they could lay the wolf skins on the bed in the winter, which would be so warm and comfortable. Wolf meat would be stored in the icehouse and could be eaten for a long time!

There were two imperial bodyguards outside that were accidentally scratched by a wolf's claw. Liu Yaner brought over a pot of medicine for them to clean their wounds.

The two seven-years-old kids, Little Shitou and Liu Fangping, couldn't help much, so they stayed in the room and quietly watched Madam Liu help Yu Hai clean his wounds. From time to time, they also asked, "Does it hurt?"

He didn't know if he was numbed by the pain or some other reason, but when the medicine touched the wound, Yu Hai didn't feel any pain at all. Instead, after a while, there was a light sense of coolness that spread from the wound. Vertigo caused by blood loss also disappeared in an instant.

Madam Liu cleaned very meticulously, and her movements were very light, for fear of her hurting her husband. By the time the wound was cleaned, Yu Hai felt that he had almost fallen asleep. When applying the powder, there was a slight tingling sensation. However, when the black ointment was applied, the tingling disappeared again. Instead, there was a cool and comfortable feeling around the wound.

The rest of the ointment was given to the two wounded bodyguards to be applied. The two imperial bodyguards weren't seriously injured and just had some minor external injuries.

There were bodies of more than thirty wolves that had to be taken care of. The dozen or so imperial bodyguards worked until dawn, but still hadn't finished tidying the bodies. The Zhou Family next door carefully opened their door at daybreak. Seeing that there wasn't any danger, the Zhou Family's head of the household got his tools and went over to inquire about the situation with his son. Last night, the Zhou Family had stayed all night after hearing the movements from the nearby Yu Residence.

As soon as they entered the gates, they saw that the yard was full of the dead bodies of wolves. Zhou Dalian was stunned and couldn't believe his eyes. They went into the room and asked about Yu Hai's injuries. After that, the father and son also joined in the task of cleaning up the bodies of the wolves. When Madam Fang heard that Yu Hai had gotten injured, she came over to visit him with a chicken and a basket full of eggs.

Currently, there were still many locusts. The Zhou Family's chickens were also raised within the vicinity of their home, and they basically didn't need to buy food or anything. The Zhou Family probably wouldn't be able to raise so many chickens in the winter, and thus most of them would be killed.

After daybreak, the news that the old Yu Residence was attacked by wolves spread all over Dongshan Village. The village head came to visit them with several families, who had a good relationship with the Yu Family. When they saw the skinned wolf corpses in the courtyard, they were all stupefied.

Wolf meat was slightly thicker than dog meat, so it tasted quite good when cooked well. When Yu Hai, who just got treated with medication and bandaged, saw the bodies of more than thirty wolves, he felt a headache coming. If they ate too much wolf meat, they would also be tired of it, okay? There were so many wolves that they wouldn't be able to finish consuming them until next spring!

After inquiring the royal prince, he was told that the Yu Family could do whatever they wanted with the wolf corpses. Yu Hai discussed with his family and decided to donate twenty of the wolves to be distributed to each household in the village. Although these wolves were a little thin, about thirty catties of meat could be cut off of each wolf. In this way, each family could receive nearly twenty catties of wolf meat!

After being hit with both the locust plague and the drought, the villagers of Dongshan Village no longer had enough money to buy food, much less meat. Therefore, when the village chief rang the village's bronze bell and gathered all the families on the field in front of his house, all of their eyes reddened upon seeing the skinned wolves. When they found out that the Yu Family had selflessly donated these wolf meat, the villagers' gratitude and respect for Yu Hai became even deeper.

In the morning, the Qian Family came back from their maternal family's home and saw the damaged wooden door and the disorder in their backyard. Madam Mao felt upset over the dozen or so ducks that had been eaten and killed. Fortunately, most of the ducks escaped into the pond in the afternoon and survived. When she saw the bodies of the four wolves in the traps around her yard, the pain in her heart slightly eased. They wouldn't be able to finish all of these wolf meats, so some of it could be sold to the restaurants in town, which could also make up for some of their losses.

Knowing that nearly thirty wolves had been wiped out by the Yu Family, Qian Fugui and Madam Mao were both glad and afraid. If they hadn't made the decision to go over to Madam Mao's maternal family every night, they would've to bear the attack of more than thirty wolves. They didn't have a dozen or so bodyguards to help them. After the wooden door was broken, the consequences could be imagined.

After expressing concern and sympathy to the Yu Family, Qian Fugui dealt with the bodies of the four wolves. He took two relatively intact skins and the meat from two wolves back to his father-in-law's house. After hearing about the incident from last night, Madam Mao's parents and older brother insisted that they stayed for a few more nights. Madam Mao and her husband would return to tend to the ducks in the morning, and then they would rush back to her parent's house in the evening. Although it was troublesome to run back and forth, it was nothing compared to the possibility of being attacked by predators.

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Once they entered summer, besides the occasional two or three rainfalls, it didn't rain anymore. Although it was better than the drought in the Northeast, if it wasn't for the locust plague, then there was a good chance that harvest would've just declined sharply, and there would've been places without the possibility of the final harvest.

On the West Mountains, the only trees left after the locust plague were dry and looked dead. If it didn't start raining soon then it would be very likely that all the plant life would die. Even the stream that flowed yearlong from the West Mountains was also dried up. The pond behind the Yu Family's old house was also only a tenth of what it had been. Large areas of mud at the bottom of the pond had large gaps from being dried up by the sun. Occasionally, a fish died in areas without water and would give off a rotting smell.

The water level in the well behind the old house had also dropped a lot and the ropes on the bucket had been changed again and again to be longer. The well in the Yu Family's home was considered to be in good condition, having been drilled deeper. Many of the wells in the village had already dried up and finding water to drink was becoming a problem!

Just when everyone in the disaster zone was starting to become more and more desperate, freezing rain fell one evening near the end of autumn. It left a transparent string of ice on the roofs and branches, which melted and fell to the ground as water droplets at noon. The autumn rain continued to fall, moistening the dry ground. The annoying locusts were also frozen to death by the freezing rain. This rain came in at just the right time. Not only did it provide relief from the drought, but it also solved the locust plague problem. Spring planting shouldn't be affected next year.

The freezing rain alleviated the effects of the drought but it also brought disaster to the vegetables the Yu Family was growing. The Chinese cabbage, radishes, and other autumn vegetables managed to survive. Green vegetables, like lettuce and other greens, were all frozen into a droopy state overnight. If Yu Xiaocao hadn't watered the vegetables with the mystic-stone water every so often, they would've most likely frozen to death.

The rain continued to fall gently without ceasing for ten days. During these ten days, the Yu Family braved the rain in order to put all the vegetables into the warehouse in order to reduce some losses. After selling these vegetables, the autumn vegetables would almost be ready for harvest.

Cabbage, radishes, and onions... there weren't many autumn vegetables that could be planted in this era. The Yu Family's west courtyard was planted with autumn plants, which would be more than enough for their family to eat for the whole winter and some surplus to spare. Chinese cabbages were cut out from the ground one by one and were dried slightly before being put into the cellar in the west courtyard. The cellar in the east courtyard had already been converted into an ice cellar.

Radishes were pulled out of the ground and the more tender radish seedlings could be used for cold dishes. Pulling radishes out was a strenuous job that was given to the men in the family. The women and children worked on chopping cabbages and pulling up onions.

After working for ten days, the autumn vegetables were all put into the cellar. The surplus autumn vegetables of the Yu Family were contracted at a high price by Zhenxiu Restaurant. It wasn't that other vegetable growing families didn't grow cabbages and radishes, but they were all destroyed by the locust plague shortly after sprouting. Many of the wealthy people in town had bought the special pesticide

from Yu Xiaocao, but what they grew wasn't enough for them to eat, much less sell it. Furthermore, these families didn't lack the money to buy vegetables either.

Out of all the restaurants of Tanggu Town, only fresh vegetables could be eaten in Zhenxiu Restaurant. Other well-known restaurants bought vegetables from the south, but their prices were higher and most of the vegetables weren't as fresh after such a long journey.

The taste of the Yu Family's vegetables was recognized by all of Tanggu Town. There used to be people who investigated the cause of the difference in the Yu Family's vegetables and those of other families. In the end, it was concluded that the well water behind their house was from a top grade mountain spring, which couldn't be found anywhere else.

Not even a month after the autumn rain had fallen, the temperature sharply dropped and snowfall quietly began. Winter came without anyone noticing. All of the residents of Dongshan Village hid inside their houses for the winter. The winter this year wasn't any better than last year's winter. Although reasonably-priced grain was being shipped from the south, besides some dried vegetables and dried seafood, there wasn't much food to be had.

Last year, the villagers had more money in their pockets and were able to have a good winter. Now, many people weren't even able to keep themselves full.

However, for the Yu Family, the impact wasn't that big.

After winter began, Royal Prince Yang and his attendants had returned to the capital to report on their tasks. He did a good job with the disaster relief and the stipulated grain prices were put in place in a timely matter. The citizens in the disaster area were all deeply grateful to the emperor and Royal Prince Yang. The reputation of the imperial court also rose among the people.

In this past year, Royal Prince Yang had brought in high yielding seeds from overseas and managed to cultivate one thousand catties of corn per mu and five thousand catties of potatoes per mu. He also did relatively well with the disaster relief. The emperor gave him a very generous reward. If he hadn't recently been promoted to the rank of royal prince, there would've been a good chance that he would've been given the rank of imperial prince, the same rank as his father!

Fang Xun, who had gone with Royal Prince Yang to sea and was in charge of the acquisition and purchase of provisions, was also rewarded. He was not only promoted two ranks but was also awarded with the title of a defense marshal and placed in charge of the imperial guards. He was already an

official of the second rank at such a young age, so how could others not be greedy and jealous? However, they could watch with envious eyes. After all, Royal Prince Yang looked highly upon Fang Xun, leading to his repeated promotions!

Royal Prince Yang was now the emperor's favorite. There was a saying being circulated privately among the official circles of the capital: "If you side with Royal Prince Yang, it is guaranteed that your rank will be promoted." This saying wasn't without any evidence and reason. The emperor trusted this younger cousin of his and often made him in charge of anything important going on. It was very easy to get results when working with someone like him. Furthermore, Royal Prince Yang never took credit for someone else's contribution. As a matter of fact, he was currently in court asking for the merits for the people who had helped him grow corn and potatoes!

"Your Imperial Majesty, the Yu Family planted ten mu of land and ended up harvesting ten thousand catties of corn. They also planted one mu of potatoes, which produced five thousand catties. If corn and potatoes become widely planted in the north, then wouldn't the people no longer need to worry about having enough food and be able to live in peace? I believe the Yu Family has made great contributions to the country and should be rewarded!" Zhu Junyang presented his thoughts to the emperor.

Minister Liu of the Ministry of Revenue agreed with the prince, "Imperial Majesty, such talents should be recruited to the Ministry of Revenue! I calculated that, if it wasn't for the locusts plague, the yield of corn per mu in the Ministry of Revenue's experimental fields would've been around six to seven hundred catties per mu. This subject has also seen that the corn planted by the Yu Family was full and even. The potatoes were big too! In my opinion, the Yu Family has a rare talent in farming, so it should be put to use!"

The other civil and military officials listened to the words of Minister Liu of the Ministry of Revenue and began calculating in their hearts. The experimental fields of the Ministry of Revenue were all fertile and had specially assigned people to take care of them. One mu of land could produce six to seven hundred catties. However, it was said that Dongshan Village had mostly mountainous and barren sandy land, yet the yield of one mu of land was more than one thousand catties.

What was going on? Either the Yu Family didn't record all of their planting methods or the Yu Family definitely had a brilliant talent at farming. With Zhu Junyang, the cold faced prince, watching over them, the Yu Family would certainly dare not hide anything. In other words, there was a 90% chance that it was the latter.

What was the Great Ming Dynasty lacking the most right now? Grain ah! Jiangnan, the land of fish and rice, was doing alright. The climate there was suitable for planting and there was an abundance of fertile

land. With two harvesting seasons, the annual yields in Jiangnan was considered decent. At least the common people could fill their stomachs. However, north of Yangtze River, especially the bitter northeast and northwest, they only had one harvesting season each year due to the climate. Although the emperor has repeatedly reduced taxes on agriculture, the yield in the north was still too low. Most of the commoners there were happy if they could eat until they were half full.

It was said that corn and potatoes weren't picky with soil and climate and were easy to grow in the north. Most importantly, they have a high yield! One season was equivalent to two or three seasons of other crops. If every mu of land was able to reach a yield of a thousand catties per mu, what worries would the people have about hunger?

Corn could be ground into cornmeal, which could be used to make steamed rolls and kneaded flat cakes. Although staple foods made with cornmeal were not as tender compared to white flour, it tasted better compared to other coarse grains such as millet flour and bean flour. The methods to cook potatoes had also been circulated among the officials. Some of them even borrowed a few potatoes to cook. After all, the cooking methods weren't difficult. If potatoes became popular in the future, there will be many dishes to be had in winter.

All of the officials believed within their hearts that corn and potatoes should be planted in larger quantities. This year, they managed to harvest ten thousand catties of good seed. Therefore, next year, they could plant a few thousand mu of land. By the autumn of next year, they would be able to harvest several million catties of seeds...Thus, in three or five years, corn could be widely planted in the north!

With this type of talented person, they were sure that no one would oppose his promotion!

The Minister of Revenue had been hinting that he hoped the emperor could give the Yu Family a small seventh official rank so they could serve the Ministry of Revenue. None of the other officials raised an objection.

The emperor, who was sitting on the high dragon throne, had a smile on his face but stayed silent. The Minister of Revenue was starting to feel a little anxious. He thought the emperor didn't agree with him. When he was about to say something, the emperor finally said, "Royal Prince Yang, you've had the most contact with the Yu Family and have the most say on the matter. Who do you think should take the credit?"

The Minister of Revenue had been to Dongshan Village in person. Besides Yu Hai, the rest of the household were all women and children. It wasn't that he looked down on women and children, but

they could only do housework in the home. Wasn't farming the job of the man? So who would get the credit? Of course, it would be Yu Hai, who was the head of the household.

Zhu Junyang took a look at his smiling cousin and honestly said, "According to the observations of this subject, the planting methods for the corn and potatoes were all invented by Yu Xiaocao, Yu Hai's daughter."

The Minister of Revenue had seen Yu Xiaocao before, but she was only a skinny little girl. He couldn't help but frown and retorted, "Royal Prince Yang, that girl is only ten years old, how capable could she be? It seems to be that Yu Hai and his brother in law took care of all the corn..."

Royal Prince Yang glared at him coldly and said, "It doesn't matter who is in charge of the field. The key is who came up with the idea and who was making sure it was carried out. Your Majesty, this subject lived in Dongshan Village for more than three months. What this one saw was Yu Xiaocao coming up with the idea and commanding behind Yu Hai's back. Yu Hai's whole family worked together in order to have a big harvest of corn."

The Minister of Revenue saw that Royal Prince Yang didn't seem to be joking. His brows wrinkled and he whispered, "Is this Yu Xiaocao really so powerful?"

Zhu Junyang ignored him and continued on, "Imperial Majesty, you saw it in your last private visit. During the locust plague, Yu Xiaocao used her understanding of drugs to work with Doctor Sun to create a pesticide that kills locusts. It's a pity that some of the materials needed for the medicinal liquid are rare so the cost is too high for it to be produced in large quantities. However, the vegetables planted with the pesticide were not ruined by the locusts at all. This shows intelligence! How difficult is it for her to grow corn when she can grow vegetables during the locust plague? This subject believes that your majesty should give credit where it is deserved. That is the type of governance the Great Ming Dynasty should have!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 304 - Unresolved

Zhu Junfan sat on his throne in the Hall of Supreme Harmony, amusedly watching his younger cousin, who was usually quiet seemingly become another person as he spoke animatedly of Yu Xiaocao. Hearing his last sentence, he rolled his eyes at Zhu Junyang, exasperatedly saying, "Do we even need you to remind us?"

Then, he continued to ask, "According to you, I should actually reward the ten-year-old little girl from the Yu Family instead of Yu Hai?"



However, Zhu Junyang shook his head and said, “The Yu Family successfully grew corn, that's a contribution and should also be rewarded. However, Yu Xiaocao's contribution is the greatest, so, by right, the reward should be on her name!”

“Your Majesty, this official disagrees! A woman's virtue is in having no talent; how could a little girl become an official such as us?” Imperial Censor Yang voiced out his opposition first.

Official Zhang, the Minister of Transmission, had always been good at guessing the emperor's intentions. Since his ascendance to the throne, the emperor had been consistently trying to raise the ranks of women, and his determination could be seen clearly from his awarding of the master of embroidery, Jiang Siniang.

Imperial Censor Yang was too pedantic and didn't know how to be more flexible, so even though he was more qualified than all the first-rank officials, he was still dawdling in second-rank. Zhang Zijian felt that he was younger and more capable than the old fellow, and he knew that the emperor really needed a loyal subject that could convey his intentions. Thus, he decided to test his luck!

“Official Yang! His Majesty and the emperor emeritus always value a person by their abilities. His Majesty once said, 'Do not restrict the talented'. Now, the drought in the north is still an ongoing problem and the areas by the sea also suffered from a locust plague. Food is the basis to calm the people—the important factor for maintaining peace in the kingdom! And Yu Xiaocao so happens to have such a talent! Talented agriculturalists are hard to find, so what is wrong with making exceptions?” After receiving the emperor's praising gaze, Official Zhang became more and more confident in his speech.

Imperial Censor Yang lifted his chin and said with a frown, “The success in growing corn didn't spawn from only the efforts of that little girl! If her father were to be rewarded, she will also rise in ranks from a mere farmer girl to the daughter of an official, which will also be equivalent to her being rewarded. Why must we let a girl become an official and let her unsettle the court!”

“These words are not right, Official Yang! According to you, the contributions of children should be credited to the father, so doesn't that mean that in the future, if Deputy Yang made a contribution, he need not be rewarded? Instead, all the credit should go to you, so you can rise in ranks and get wealthy?”

Imperial Censor Yang's son was the current Deputy Minister of the Household, a fifth-rank official. This Deputy Yang had the ability, and wasn't as stubbornly pedantic as his father, so originally, he would've been able to reach magnificent heights in his career. However, in most dynasties, there were very few

fathers and sons who were both of equal, high rank. With Imperial Censor Yang oppressing him, he had always been short of opportunities to rise through the ranks.

Hearing Official Zhang's words, Deputy Yang looked at his father with a gaze filled with dissatisfaction. His father was old and had already reached the peak of his career in the court, so it was extremely difficult for him to progress further in his career. However, Imperial Censor Yang enjoyed his high rank and dreamed of the moment when he would be promoted to a first-rank official, whereas Deputy Yang who was already more than forty years old was still a fifth-rank official because his father was oppressing him. If his father could retire earlier, he would definitely be able to achieve his father's dream of becoming a first-rank official before he, himself, retired. Such a big dream—they are indeed a father and son duo!

It is common in court to have both father and son as court officials. All the sons directed their discontented glares towards Imperial Censor Yang.

For a moment, Imperial Censor Yang felt like there were knives at his back. He was not so callous as he hurriedly explained, “Your Majesty, this official did not mean it that way, it is Official Zhang who misinterpreted my intentions! This official simply thinks that women should not be appointed as court officials as they would unsettle the court!”

Zhu Junfan was a bit annoyed at this bunch of old officials that often took advantage of their seniority, and his expression showed his displeasure as he said, “Beloved Official Yang, you have crossed the line! How much trouble can a mere seventh-rank official under the Ministry of Revenue cause? Or is it that beloved Official Yang thinks that we are incapable rulers like King Zhou of Shang and Emperor Xuanzong of Tang?”

“This official doesn't dare!” Alarmed, Imperial Censor Yang trembled and hurriedly dropped on his knees, lowering his entire body to the ground.

Official Zhang also kneeled, saying, “Please cease your anger, Your Majesty! This official thinks that Imperial Censor Yang is old and muddleheaded. He takes advantage of his seniority and misinterprets Your Majesty's intentions. He is no longer suitable for the position of the censor, who inspects the impeachment of officials, discerns wrongdoing, monitors the various departments, and acts as the 'eyes and ears' of the emperor.”

Hearing this, Imperial Censor Yang felt stifled and found it difficult to breathe. He outstretched his hand, shakily pointing at Official Zhang. Official Zhang gave the others a look that said, 'See, Imperial Censor Yang is indeed old!'

The emperor pretended to scold, "Minister Zhang, your words are not right! It is all because of the contributions of the senior officials that the Great Ming Dynasty was able to stabilize after mere decades. Without the old general following the emperor emeritus to fight battles, there would not be the Great Ming Dynasty today; and without the hard work and cooperation of the civil officials, we would not have the prosperous Great Ming Dynasty today!"

Official Zhang realized that he had been too eager, so he quickly laid prone on the ground and pleaded guilty, "Your Majesty is wise! This official has been narrow-minded! I have only been discussing the facts, and did not mean to disrespect the senior officials. Please make a wise judgement!"

The emperor sighed heavily, "Beloved Official Zhang, in court, every word that you speak must be thought through thoroughly. Since this is your first offense, your punishment will be the deduction of half a year's salary!"

The deduction of half a year's salary was akin to an itch to Official Zhang, so even though he was punished, he was still secretly gleeful. It seemed that his actions had pleased the emperor!

As expected, the emperor turned his gaze to Imperial Censor Yang, who was clutching his chest and panting heavily, and asked with concern, "Does the imperial physician need to be summoned, beloved Official Yang?"

Imperial Censor Yang panted heavily a few more times, shaking his head, "My utmost gratitude for Your Majesty's concern, but this official is fine."

The emperor continued to express his concern, "Beloved Official Yang, your health should be the utmost priority. You should rest your body first in order for you to better contribute to the court! We will grant you a month's leave of convalescence from court, meanwhile the Vice Imperial Censor will take over your tasks. Are there any more issues to discuss, fellow beloved officials?"

"Your Majesty, this official..."

“Court is dismissed!” Su Ran's voice coincidentally covered over Imperial Censor Yang's words.

All the officials sighed and shook their heads, looking pitifully at Imperial Censor Yang. Some of them gladly watched the show, while others smiled gleefully at his misery.

At the back of the formation, Deputy Yang felt his cheeks burning. Walking over with his head lowered, he helped up his father, who had gone limp, and whispered, “Father, the emperor's intention to award the little girl from Yu Family is so clear, why must you displease the emperor over such a small character?”

Imperial Censor Yang still could not believe that he had been suspended from his duties. He mumbled, “I've always been loyal, albeit straightforward, what did I do wrong? Why did His Majesty want me to take a sick leave? I'm not sick, I need to find the emperor...”

“Father, stop creating trouble!! If you keep on making a ruckus, it'll be difficult to keep your futou [1] on your head!!” Why did he have such an unreliable father? Deputy Yang's brows furrowed deeply as he increased the strength in his grip, partly supporting and partly dragging his father out the palace doors.

However, the dispute over awarding the Yu Family was left unsettled after having gone through this commotion caused by Imperial Censor Yang. Far away in the fishing village, Yu Xiaocao, who spent the winter staying at home, had no idea she had even been in the center of a dispute in court.

At this moment, she was trying to convince her father to help her make a small sled, so that the next time it snowed, she could let Big Gray pull her as she enjoyed the thrill of sledding on snow.

Ever since Big Gray became known as Royal Prince Yang's pet and took up residence in the Yu Family's house, Yu Xiaocao had continuously used the mystic-stone water and wild boar meat stored in the cellar to feed it. Big Gray looked like a ball of silvery fur from afar as it now had a thick layer of fur covering its entire body, and it rippled with energy when it ran because its whole body was composed of well-developed muscles.

Big Gray was more sentient than all the other animals at home, til the point that it could almost understand all of human speech. It was also more sensitive towards the good and bad intentions of other people, and the entire Yu Family were glad to have it guarding them.

“Big Gray, come, try and see if it's suitable!” Yu Xiaocao excitedly waved to Big Gray once the sled was made. Big Gray who was lying on the snowy ground lazily glanced over, seemingly unwilling to bother with Yu Xiaocao.

Yu Xiaocao threatened it with a stern face, “Big Gray, if you don't listen to me, you won't get dinner!”

Although Big Gray wasn't very interested in frozen boar meat, if it went against this little girl's wishes, it was very probable that it wouldn't get any of that delicious water to drink for the whole of tomorrow. Ay... Big Gray slowly picked itself up, shaking its fur. Only then, with graceful steps, did it move towards Yu Xiaocao.

Yu Xiaocao fixed the sled on Big Gray and found it to be just perfect. Her father's skill really wasn't only for show!

“Try walking a couple steps!” Yu Xiaocao had always been jealous that Eldest Granduncle reared a few big dogs in his house. Back then, when there were no horse carriages or donkey carts in the village, they always relied on those dogs to pull the sled to town on snowy days. When she got 'sick' that winter before they divided from the family, she was brought to town on a sled. Unfortunately, she was wrapped into a ball at the time, so she could not see the outside at all, and could not experience the joy of the dogs pulling the sled.

Big Gray lazily moved two steps forward, and the sled behind it slid forward on the ground slowly. Little Black and Little White, the two little wolf cubs thought it was some kind of fun game, so they followed behind their father in an effort to hinder it. They bit the rope of the sled, jumping forward with all the might of their four short legs. When Big Gray pulled the sled forward, they would tug it backward, but how could the strength of the two little fellows be compared to Big Gray's? Naturally, they were dragged forward.

Yu Xiaocao, who was both annoyed and amused, picked up the two fellows and placed them on the sled. There was only a thin layer of snow in the courtyard, and Big Gray pulled the sled, slowly making its way to the door of the courtyard. The two little fellows sat on the sled, excitedly moving about. They wanted to jump down from the sled, but they were also reluctant to give up the feeling of riding on the sled.

Little Black readied itself and jumped when the opportunity arose, but in the end, it fell haphazardly off the sled. In its unsteady state, it turned in circles twice on the spot. Then, realizing that the sled was getting further and further, it began moving its short legs to chase up to it.

Little White, on the other hand, calmly sat on the sled and let its father pull it towards the outside of the courtyard.

It only snowed lightly, so the temperature outside wasn't too cold. A group of children was having a snowball fight nearby and stopped immediately to stare when they noticed the gray wolf reared by the Yu Family come out.

The entirety of Dongshan Village knew that the Yu Family was helping the royal prince to rear a wolf, and this wolf had supposedly been tamed and wasn't aggressive at all towards the Yu Family members. Nevertheless, the villagers still warned their own children to stay away from the wolf, or else beware that they will be eaten!

But looking at this mighty gray wolf act like a dog and pull a little sled, moreover, with a cute little white dog sitting on top of the sled, that scene was just too cute!

Fields of Gold Chapter 305 - Returning in the Snow

When Royal Prince Yang arrived at Dongshan village after travelling from the capital in the snow, this was the sight that greeted him: a big, silvery gray wolf pulling a small sled sliding across the snowy ground, and a little figure wearing a red cloak rode on the sled; the fluffy brim of the cloak being blown back by the wind.

Behind the sled, two little dots of black and white chased after it with difficulty. They occasionally howled once in awhile. When they met with a deeper pile of snow, the two little pups would disappear for a split second and emerge from the other side of the pile, continuing their chase of the sled.

The cheeks of the little girl on the sled were red, and her laughter was more delightful than the chime of silver bells. She looked like a fairy in the forest, so dazzling, so eye-catching...

"Second Sister, let me ride for a while, please let me ride for a while!" Little Shitou ran over excitedly while waving his hands as he saw the sled turn and head in his direction.

Yu Xiaocao let Big Gray stop and jumped off of the sled so that her little brother could get on. She took off her cloak and wanted to place it on him, but Little Shitou crinkled his nose at the red cloak and said, "Older sister, I have rabbit fur hat and neck scarf, I don't need to wear a cloak!"

This cloak was precious and was brought back from the capital by Xiaocao's godfather, Fang Zizhen. It was rumored to have been personally made by Jiang Siniang herself. But such a bright color was only suitable for little girls to wear, and Little Shitou thought himself a little man, so he was determined to resist all things girly.

"If you don't wear it, I won't let Big Gray pull you!" Yu Xiaocao threatened. In the end, her threat worked, and Little Shitou reluctantly wore the cloak, pouting unhappily as he sat on the sled.

Big Gray, seeing that the person behind it had changed, did not even bother to spend so much energy as it slowly walked on the snowy ground. Despite Little Shitou's attempts to rush it, it persisted in its unhurried steps.

In spite of that, Liu Fangping still watched from the side in envy. He followed behind the sled for a few steps, whispering his pleas to his Brother Shitou to also let him ride on it, even if it was just a little while! Then, he would have the right to brag in front of all the other children in the village: You've all seen dogs and horses pulling sleds, but have you ever seen a wolf pulling a sled? He had not only seen it, he had also rode on it!

At this time, Yu Xiaocao had already noticed the tall figure standing in the snow, holding the reins of his horse. He wore a purple robe with gold embroidery, and at his waist, an indigo cloth embroidered with animal designs was tied. His long hair, that resembled flowing water, was tied up using the same colored cloth, and his slightly raised phoenix eyes seemed stained by the snow. With the white snow as his background, the tall figure standing gracefully beside the black stallion seemed as though he was the only focus in the world.

In her deer skin boots, Yu Xiaocao ran two steps towards the young prince before she sank into the snow and lost her balance, falling face-first onto the snowy ground.

Zhu Junyang's face changed. Letting go of the reins, he immediately sprinted over to the struggling Xiaocao's side and picked her up from the snow.

"Pfft——" Zhu Junyang heartlessly laughed. The little girl's entire head and face was covered in snow, making it seem as though she had grown a white beard around her lips and made her look extremely hilarious.

Yu Xiaocao struggled in his grasp until her feet touched the ground. She used her sleeve to brush off the snow on her head and rolled her eyes at the young prince, exasperatedly saying, "Young royal prince, you didn't brave the snow and travel all the way from the capital over just so you can watch me embarrass myself, did you?"

Zhu Junyang reached out to help her brush off some snowflakes from the top of her head, smiling, "Of course not! Nevertheless, I'm still happy to receive such a big bow upon our first meeting."

Yu Xiaocao knocked his hand away, huffing, "So tell me, what matter of importance has brought your esteemed elderly [1] grand presence to Dongshan Village?"

"Am I that old? I'm only just 17 years old this year, still very well in my prime..." Zhu Junyang touched his own cheek—it was still quite elastic!

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him, saying, "You're older than me by a whole seven years, yet you still say you're not old? When I'm twenty-something years old, you would already be thirty-something years old; and when I'm thirty years old and a blooming flower, you'd be forty years old and the scraps of tofu. So, aren't you old?"

Zhu Junyang raised his eyebrow, "I've heard the emperor say 'a man in his thirties is a blooming flower, a woman in her thirties is the scraps of tofu'? Did you remember incorrectly?"

Yu Xiaocao jumped up, saying, "That's not true! If women took care of themselves, they'd look 20 years old even if they were 30! On the other hand, men who put lesser importance in self-care, especially those like you who are always traveling all year round and are exposed to the sun and wind, age even more easily! If you're not the scraps of tofu, what are you?"

Zhu Junyang stubbornly lifted his head and said, "Tasteless girl! I'm one of the most eligible bachelors in the capital; so many ladies from prestigious families try to attract my attention but I ignore all of them. Even if I were 40 years old, I'd still be a golden bachelor!"

He also heard the phrase 'golden bachelor'—meaning a rich, attractive and single man—from his cousin. Zhu Junyang distastefully looked at the young girl in front of him that seemed like a mung bean sprout. When this girl turned 16 and became eligible for marriage, he would only be 23 years old and in his prime, how could he be scraps of tofu?



Yu Xiaocao sized him up disbelievingly, frowning, "Young royal prince, you wouldn't be so bored as to come all the way over to Dongshan Village just to boast about how well you've been living in the capital, right?"

Zhu Junyang nodded his head, saying, "I am indeed that bored! Didn't you ask when your family's reward would come last time? I came to inform you earlier: the longer good wine is aged, the more fragrant it will be, so wait patiently because a huge surprise is awaiting you!"

After dismissing court that day, the emperor specially called him into the imperial study to say that the little girl of the Yu Family was still too young. Even though there has been a case in history whereby a 9-year-old became a prime minister, her gender was still a problem among the old, stubborn officials in court. They had to take things slowly, step by step.

What he meant was that they will let the Yu Family help the court cultivate corn in Tanggu Town next year. More land around the capital would also be cleared for plantation, and they would invite the little girl to be the instructor and help grow corn and potatoes. If there were great harvest next year, then corn could slowly be introduced to the civilians so that they could fill their stomachs and appreciate the court's effort. Then, naturally, the award would come.

If the little girl really had talent in agriculture and was able to produce high-yielding wheat grains and rice, then it would be considered a great contribution! At that time, she would qualify to be an official with an even higher rank than seventh-rank!

Hearing the young royal prince's words, Yu Xiaocao asked a little excitedly, "What surprise? Is it uncountable treasures?"

"Uninsightful! Is that all you desire?" Zhu Junyang looked at her in disdain, "Don't you want your family to change from their farmer status to the status of a court official's family?"

Yu Xiaocao got even more excited, carefully lowering her voice as she said, "It couldn't be that...the emperor will award us the position of a small official?"

“Of course, and it will be a seventh-rank official at the very least!” Although Zhu Junyang did not think highly of seventh-ranked officials, a mosquito still had meat despite its tiny size. This status was more than enough for them to do whatever they wished in Dongshan Village.

However, Yu Xiaocao was quite satisfied with it, and laughed unceasingly like a cat that stole and ate an entire fish. Seventh-rank official, wasn't that the same rank as a county magistrate? Not to mention, she had godfather and the young prince supporting her family, so in the future, even the county magistrate would have to be courteous to them!

Again, Zhu Junyang revealed to the little girl about the emperor's wish to cultivate more corn in the following year, "I've already sent people to see if there is any fertile land near town on sale. Next year, Tanggu Town will have to produce at least 100 mu of corn."

"What? 100 mu?? We only have 10 or so members in my family and most of them are children, do you wish to make us die of exhaustion?" Yu Xiaocao sternly opposed.

Naturally, Zhu Junyang had already thought of this problem, so he said, "What are you worried about? The start of spring is exactly the time when people will lack food and require a new source of income. You don't think so many villages around Tanggu Town are able to earn a living from digging spoon worms like Dongshan Village, do you? There are still very few families that have excess money, so at that time, there will definitely be a bunch of people who are looking to earn money through hard labour. Then, you will just have to hire more people to work in the plantation! I give you my word that you will be reimbursed for the money you spend on hiring workers."

Yu Xiaocao blinked her big eyes, her long eyelashes flickering as she smiled slyly, "Then...will the court still purchase the corn at a high price?"

Zhe Junyang knocked her on the head and said, "You materialistic little girl! When have I ever mistreated you? Enough said, I came all the way over to bring you good news, but you're just letting me stand here in the snow, drinking the wind?"

Yu Xiaocao mumbled, "What good news? Such an unsure matter and he asks to be rewarded? He definitely has his sights set on my family's grasshopper sauce!"

Zhu Junyang was extremely fond of Yu Family's grasshopper sauce. Regardless of whether it was fried or fermented, he loved it all! Sometimes, he didn't even eat the stir-fried vegetables—he just ate pancakes dipped in the sauce, and he finished seven or eight pancakes in one go. Yu Hai could only manage to eat

three of the Yu Family's steamed pancakes before he couldn't eat anymore. The young prince's stomach didn't seem big, so where did all the pancakes go?

Zhu Junyang knocked her head again, smiling, "I not only have my sight set on the grasshopper sauce, but I also want your potato feast! The imperial cooks in the palace are all quacks, even if they followed your recipe, the taste of the potatoes that they cook are only just so-so, it's not even half as good as your dish, Xiaocao!"

Yu Xiaocao had an expression full of delight but still grumbled, "Young Royal Prince, are you taking me as your cook? When you think of food, you come to my house to eat! In the future, bring your own ingredients, I'm afraid that my entire family's food will be finished off by you, the big appetite king."

"What? Is there not enough grain to eat? I'll arrange for two carts to come over from a reasonably priced grain shop tomorrow!" Zhu Junyang had never been miserly towards the Yu Family.

Yu Xiaocao shook her head, "There's still a lot of grain! Probably enough to last us until next year's harvest in fall without any problems. Rest assured that I definitely won't be courteous with you if there isn't enough grain!"

After that, she turned towards Little Shitou and Little Fangping and shouted, "The weather's cold, so don't play for too long and come home earlier!" To which the two little fellows agreed to from afar.

After having lunch with the Yu Family, Zhu Junyang left for home with his guards. Now that it was nearing the year end and both the Prince Jing and Princess Consort Jing were in the capital, it was a given that he would have to go home to celebrate the new year with his parents.

Fields of Gold Chapter 306

It had been snowing heavily since the beginning of winter. Dongshan Village had entered a complete stage of hibernation. Every night, a big gray wolf patrolled and stood guard with his two silly sons. Peace had been restored at the foot of the West Mountain. The five members of the Liu Family went back to live in their new house.

The courtyard in the west side of the Yu Residence was left unused after Royal Prince Yang returned to the capital. Old Yu had moved into the wing room of the West Courtyard and said that he would help look after this side of the house. Yu Hai and his wife tried to persuade him to move into the main room, but he stubbornly refused.

As soon as winter came, Yu Xiaocao started having ideas again. She told her father to make a lot of shallow boxes, dug out a lot of fertile black soil from the pond, and put them in the boxes. After that, she placed the wooden boxes on the unused kang beds and sprinkled some vegetable seeds in it. The kang bed in the room was heated every day, so it was naturally as warm as the spring. With mystic-stone water to promote the growth of the crops, the vegetable seeds soon sprouted with long leaves. A lush green color appeared in the wooden boxes.

Old Yu was overjoyed. Whose family could grow green vegetables in the winter? His young granddaughter was indeed extraordinary! Since this old man came to the old residence, his illness and body had quickly recovered due to the filial piety of his son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. Old Yu now felt that his body was full of vitality, and as if he became more than ten years younger, there was limitless energy in his body.

The vegetables in the two main rooms and several wing rooms of the West Courtyard were carefully looked after by Old Yu every day. The firewood in the woodshed was piled up like a mountain. In addition to the portion of dead branches that the members of the Yu Family cut down and brought back from the mountain, some of them were bought with money. When they bought the firewood, Old Yu felt somewhat distressed. He felt that there was firewood all over the mountains, so they could just cut some back when needed. Why did they have to waste their money to buy them? Moreover, there was enough firewood at home. Would they be able to use up so much firewood? Now, it seemed like the lass Xiaocao had planned to grow green vegetables on the kang bed since autumn.

Old Yu felt that this winter had been quite fulfilling. He checked the stove at least seven to eight times a day for fear that the fire would go out and their family's vegetables would freeze. However, Xiaocao had specially instructed him to use the water in the vat within the main room when watering the crops. The vat in the main room was placed next to the stove, so it had a suitable temperature that wouldn't freeze the delicate vegetables.

In actuality, every day after Yu Hao filled the vat with water, Yu Xiaocao would drop a few drops of mystic-stone water in it.

The East Courtyard had three main rooms. Yu Hai and his wife occupied one room. Xiaocao shared a room with Xiaolian, while Yu Hang and Little Shitou shared a room. All the other rooms with a kang bed were used to grow vegetables. The main rooms had bigger kang beds that could sleep five to six people. In order to not waste the extra space, the kang beds were divided so that people slept on one side while the wooden boxes used to grow vegetables were placed on the other side.

After Old Yu moved back to the old residence, his oldest brother Yu Lichun often visited him. He didn't have much to do in the winter. The women and children were busy cleaning and preparing for the new year. There wasn't much that Yu Lichun could help out with, so he came out for a walk. As he walked, he arrived at the old Yu Residence.

As soon as he entered the gates, he saw his brother carrying firewood and heating up the kang beds in all the rooms. Yu Lichun slightly furrowed his brows and shouted, "Hey, Third Brother, why are you heating up all the kang beds of all the rooms in the daytime? Do you think that it's easy for the kids to get the firewood? Why are you causing trouble?"

Old Yu turned around to look at his oldest brother, and then continued to add firewood into the stoves. After that, he waved mysteriously to Yu Lichun and said, "Eldest Brother, come take a look inside the room and you will know why I'm heating the kang beds!"

Yu Lichun followed his brother into the main room. After pulling away the thick wolf skin curtain, his eyes were filled with the verdant color on the kang bed. He stood there and blinked hard, but found that he didn't see wrongly and that the green color still appeared in front of him.

"This... these are vegetables? Chives, garlic bolts, bok choy, spinach, potherb mustard... Third Brother, did you grow all these vegetables?" There was some uncertainty within Yu Lichun's shaking voice.

Old Yu was amused by his oldest brother's expression. He chuckled and said, "How can I have the ability? It's Xiaocao and her father. I'm only helping them look after the vegetables. Eldest Brother, this box of chives can be reaped soon. I will cut a batch and send them to you on Little New Year [1]. Tell Sister-in-law to make chives and pork dumplings for you!"

The Yu Family's two wild boars had grown to over one hundred catties after winter. Before Royal Prince Yang returned to the capital, they asked the butcher in the neighboring village to slaughter them. Old Yu's brothers' families and the Liu Family of Xishan Village all received ten catties of pork. Each family also got a few catties of the wolf meat that was stored in the icehouse. Thus, Yu Lichun's family could eat lavishly for New Year even if they didn't buy meat.

Yu Lichun didn't act courteous with him and happily said, "Great! I love eating chives and pork dumplings. Third Brother, take good care of them. I'm waiting to eat the chives that you planted ah!"

Old Yu proudly flaunted, "This is nothing. In the wing rooms of the West Courtyard, there are chili peppers, tomatoes, and eggplants. Xiaocao is even more careful than I am. Those crops have already bloomed, so I reckon that we would be able to eat 'stir-fried eggs and tomatoes' and 'sauteed eggplants with pork' before the New Year! Eldest Brother, you must not tell anyone else about this ah! Our family didn't plant a lot of vegetables. If others find out and want to borrow some chives and chili peppers, we won't have enough to eat!"

Yu Lichun rolled his eyes at him and said, "Do you think your eldest brother is stupid? Do I need you to remind me?" He looked in the other rooms in the West Courtyard, and then came out with his hands clasped behind his back, looking satisfied. It was going to be Little New Year soon. He seriously anticipated being able to eat dumplings with chives fillings in the winter! If they had an ample quantity of chives, he should ask his wife to make some 'pan-fried chives cake' and add an egg... After Yu Lichun came out of the old Yu Residence, he couldn't stop smiling. When he met the villagers, they would ask him what he was so happy about, but he just answered them vaguely. Third Brother was right. This was a matter that only their own family members should know about, and it shouldn't spread it out.

Little New Year was quite important for the people in the north. During the past year, Third Young Master Zhou had been running all over the place and seldom returned to Tanggu Town. When he occasionally came back, he would only stay for three to five days before leaving again. In order to properly spend time with his mother during the New Year, he had returned to Tanggu Town before Little New Year and would leave after the fifteenth of the first month.

When Yu Xiaocao heard that Third Young Master Zhou had returned, she cut a box of chives, got two catties of each vegetables that was ready to be harvested, and put them in a bamboo basket. She covered them with a quilt to prevent them from freezing. In order to show the importance of this friend and business partner, before the Little New Year, she personally drove the little donkey cart and delivered the basket of vegetables to Third Young Master Zhou.

The Zhou Family was one of the most prestigious families in Tanggu Town. The two branches of the Zhou Family lived right next to each other, but each of their compounds had individual entrances. Third Young Master Zhou's second branch had a relatively smaller compound, but at the moment, Third Young Master Zhou and his mother were the only members of the second branch, so the house appeared quite spacious. Speaking of Third Young Master Zhou's mother, she was also quite pitiful. While Third Young Master Zhou was away from home, she had to stay in such a big courtyard alone. So she must be very lonely. It was no wonder that Third Young Master Zhou would set his eyes on Xiaocao's family's little roe deer. Raising a pet could send away some of the loneliness, right?

Yu Xiaocao stopped her donkey cart in front of the small entrance of the Zhou Family's Second Branch, and then knocked on the door. Yu Xiaocao had worked with Third Young Master Zhou for more than two

years and they usually met at Zhenxiu Restaurant, so she had never been to the Zhou Estate. Therefore, when the doorkeeper opened the door, he looked at Xiaocao for a moment and asked, "Little girl, who are you looking for?"

Yu Xiaocao smiled sweetly and softly replied, "Hello, I'm looking for Zhou Zixi, Third Young Master. May I know if he is at home or at Zhenxiu Restaurant?"

The doorkeeper looked at her doubtfully. Why would a young girl, who was around the age of ten, look for his young master? She was trying to cling onto his young master at such a young age? Did she not take a look at herself? With his young master's current status, would just any random cat or dog be able to match with him?

"My young master won't see you. Hurry up and go back to where you came from!" The doorkeeper was convinced that she was someone who wanted to climb up the social ladder, so there was a trace of disdain in his voice.

The smile on Yu Xiaocao's face froze for two seconds, and gradually faded. She stared fixedly at the doorkeeper and said, "How do you know that Third Young Master won't see me when you didn't even report it? Since when is the doorkeeper of the Zhou Family able to make decisions for the masters?"

The doorkeeper was slightly flustered by her frightening gaze, but he felt that he was dutifully doing his job, "Is our young master someone who would easily meet just any random person? Hurry up and leave. If you continue to cause trouble, I will have someone drive you out!"

Yu Xiaocao was angry that she was amused. People often said that 'it was easy to provoke the King of Hell, but it was harder to deal with the little goblins'. The ancients were indeed speaking the truth! She was about to say something, but she heard a familiar voice behind her, "Miss Yu, what are you doing here?"

When she turned around, she saw the head manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant looking at her with surprise. With a pout, Yu Xiaocao said with slight grievance, "My family grew some green vegetables on the kang beds. Thinking that there weren't a lot of vegetables to eat in the winter, I came to deliver some to Third Young Master. I didn't expect that I couldn't even enter the door! If I had known that the Zhou Family's threshold was so high, I wouldn't have bothered to come to be snubbed!"

Seeing that the head manager was very polite to the little girl, he wondered in his heart, 'Who exactly is this little girl? Did I offend someone that I shouldn't have?'

The head manager glared at the doorkeeper and said, "Who gave you the right to stop the guests on your own initiative? Miss Yu is a very important person to the young boss. If you chase her away, you won't be able to stay in the Zhou Household any longer! Are you going to quickly report this to Third Young Master?"

When the doorkeeper heard this, he seriously wished that his parents could give him two more legs. He had never thought that a young girl dressed in such ordinary clothing would be an honored guest of Third Young Master. Based on the head manager's tone, the master seemed to attach great importance to the young girl! In order to make amends, he needed to run faster!

When the doorkeeper breathlessly reported 'Miss Yu has come to visit', Third Young Master Zhou, who was in the middle of chatting with his mother, abruptly stood up from his chair with a slightly excited expression.

Second Madam Zhou looked at her son, who had slightly forgotten his manners, and asked with a chuckle, "Is this Miss Yu the noble benefactor that Xu'er mentioned?"

Third Young Master Zhou smiled slightly, and his eyes were full of nostalgia as he said, "That's right! At that time, Son just couldn't stand seeing the manager of Fulin Restaurant cheat the siblings of the Yu Family, and thus spoke up to help them. Unexpectedly, I met my noble benefactor. Miss Yu has the remnants of a recipe book from the previous dynasty. Oyster sauce, roasted chicken, roasted duck... Nearly all of the money-making dishes of Zhenxiu Restaurant were created by Miss Yu according to the remnants of the recipe book."

Fields of Gold Chapter 307 - Stay for a Meal

Hearing her son's grateful words, Second Madam Zhou nodded and said, "Sure enough, those with kind hearts are blessed! Based on what you're saying, Miss Yu is also a kind and righteous person. Quickly invite the guest in!"

The doorkeeper stood outside the second gates and anxiously waited for the reply from inside. He desperately hoped that the senior servant of the inner gates would reply with the message, 'don't know her' or 'don't want to see her'. But, instead of seeing a senior servant or maidservant of the inner gates, his master's hurried figure appeared in front of him.



“Where's Miss Yu?” When Third Young Master Zhou walked by the doorkeeper, he asked in a slightly pressing tone.

It was in the middle of winter, but the doorkeeper was drenched in cold sweat. He stammered, “In reply to Master, Miss Yu is still waiting outside the main gates...”

“Nonsense!! Zhou Dafu, you have been working as the doorkeeper for more than twenty years, yet you still don't know our Zhou Estate's rules of hospitality?” Third Young Master Zhou stopped his anxious footsteps and finally took a proper look at the doorkeeper. He could see a sense of guilt and uneasiness from his expression, and he immediately guessed that this lowly servant must have acted snobbish again!

This Zhou Dafu relied on the fact that he was the son of Second Madam Zhou's wet nurse, and often fawned on the superiors and bullied the inferiors. However, with the wet nurse controlling him, he didn't cross the line and didn't cause too much trouble. Thus, Third Young Master Zhou and his mother would turn a blind eye to his behavior. They didn't expect that this lowly servant didn't repent, and his behavior worsened in the past two years!

“Don't follow me anymore. Go receive a flogging and then tend the horses at the stable!” Third Young Master Zhou knew that this lowly servant had slighted Yu Xiaocao because she was a child dressed in ordinary clothing.

Zhou Dafu knelt remorsefully in front of Third Young Master Zhou, and his head hit the ground heavily. He begged for mercy, “Master, this lowly servant knows that I have done wrong! Please consider the hard work and contribution of this lowly servant's mother to the second madam and give this lowly servant another chance!”

Third Young Master Zhou didn't stop and walked around him, saying, “The wet nurse can't help you forever. Her merits had long been used up by you, this unworthy son!” After saying that, he left him with the view of his merciless back.

Zhou Dafu deeply regretted it. From being a doorkeeper, which was a position that could reap the most profits on the side, he was suddenly demoted to be the stinky and tiring horsekeeper that was the least likely to get fringe benefits. He practically fell from the sky to the ground ah! Who would have known that such an ordinary little girl would be so important to his master ah!

The new doorkeeper always remembered this incident as a warning to himself, and never treated anyone rudely after taking the position, especially people from the Yu Family. This had unknowingly improved the reputation of the second branch... This shall be recounted later.

After Third Young Master Zhou dealt with the doorkeeper, he nearly trotted all the way to the main entrance. As soon as he went out the door, he saw Yu Xiaocao trembling as she talked with the head manager. Her fair and tender face had turned red from the cold.

“Xiaocao, when did you come? Quickly come into the house and warm your body!” Zhou Zixu felt a sense of pity in his heart. He felt slightly more irritated at the tactless doorkeeper, and regretted that he had just let him off too lightly.

Yu Xiaocao took her hands out of her sleeves, rubbed her frozen face, and rolled her eyes at him, saying, “My family grew some vegetables on top of the kang beds. My father wants to thank you for taking care of us and insisted that I bring some over for you! Who would have known that the threshold would be so high at Third Young Master Zhou's house? Ordinary commoners like us can't go in...”

The head manager didn't expect that Miss Yu, who was usually smiling, turned out to be such a hot-tempered little girl. She even dared to taunt their future head of the Zhou Household! He suddenly coughed twice and helped his master explain, “Miss Yu, it's that lowly servant who looked down on people. It has nothing to do with our master...”

“How can there be no relation? This shows that he doesn't have keen eyes for people. He doesn't know his subordinates well enough to put them in suitable positions!” Yu Xiaocao pointed at the bamboo basket on the donkey cart and said to Third Young Master Zhou with a terrible expression, “Take it! This is for your family, so quickly unload it. I need to hurry back!”

Third Young Master Zhou personally took the bamboo basket down from the donkey cart and said with a flattering smile, “Alright! It's all my fault. Is it okay now? It's your first time visiting my house, so you should at least come in for a drink. Otherwise, if other people find out, they would say that my Zhou Family doesn't know proper etiquette!”

“Humph! You're already driving your guest out, yet you're still afraid of other people talking about you?” Yu Xiaocao still didn't have a good expression on her face. She pointed at her own little donkey and said, “You're just going to leave my family's Little Gray here? What are you going to do if it freezes here?”

Third Young Master Zhou knew that the speed of the Yu Family's little donkey wasn't inferior to that of a horse. Moreover, it had a sense of humanity, which was extremely rare. He hurriedly ordered the servants behind him, "Why are you guys still standing there? Quickly unload the donkey cart. Lead Little Gray to the stable and serve it with fine fodder."

The servants unloaded the donkey and led the donkey away. A servant, who wanted to curry favor with the master, wanted to take the bamboo basket in his master's hands, but Third Young Master Zhou evaded him and said, "I can hold this basket. Just go and do what you need to!"

In this way, Third Young Master Zhou carried the bamboo basket and personally invited Yu Xiaocao inside. The second branch of the Zhou Family lived in a compound with four sections. Beside the main entrance was a row of back-facing rooms that the servants lived in. After walking a few steps inside the main gate, there was a big and tall screen wall. With a turn, they arrived in the outer court, which was rectangular shaped. After going through the festooned gate, it was the main court that the masters lived in. The mountain corridor connected the east and west wing rooms, which was where the male offspring resided in. The second branch of the Zhou Family didn't have many children, so Third Young Master Zhou was the only one living in the second-gate courtyard. The elders lived in the third-gate courtyard, and thus the person who lived here was the mistress of the Zhou Family—Second Madam Zhou, who was Third Young Master Zhou's mother. The backside building was located in the fourth-gate courtyard. Generally, the daughters of the family resided there, but it was also unused at the moment.

After looking at each of the courtyards, Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but think of a line from Ou-yang Xiu's poem, 'How deep the courtyard is...'

The courtyard that Second Madam Zhou resided in was decorated in a simple and refined manner. It could be seen that the owner was a calm and simple person. When the clever maidservant, who stood outside the main room, saw her master leading a young girl over, she quickly pulled open the curtains with a smile and said with a clear voice, "Madam, Miss Yu is here!"

A gentle voice sounded from inside, "Quickly invite her in—"

"Young Master, Miss Yu, the madam asked you to come in!" The maidservant's smile was very sweet. She glanced at Yu Xiaocao with a slightly curious gaze, and then immediately shifted her eyes.

Yu Xiaocao, who frequently accompanied Princess Consort Jing, had experienced bigger situations, so she naturally wouldn't act overcautious. With a gentle smile, she nodded at the maidservant, and then followed Third Young Master Zhou into the room.

There was a fireplace burning inside the room, so there was a warm feeling when they entered. Yu Xiaocao felt that she had finally come back to life again. She really didn't want to experience the feeling of being left outside on such a cold day again.

Second Madam Zhou didn't have a very beautiful face, but she appeared gentle and kind. Her eyes showed concern as she asked, "Good child, you must be freezing, right? Quickly come warm up by the fireplace!"

Yu Xiaocao politely bobbed a greeting at Second Madam Zhou, and then sat down beside the fireplace in a natural and refined manner. Second Madam Zhou felt slightly surprised. Didn't they say that this young girl with the surname Yu came from a fisherman's family? Why was her speech and behavior even more calm and polite than some of the noble young ladies in town?

Yu Xiaocao chatted with Second Madam Zhou in a completely relaxed manner, "Madam, we, farmers, don't have any presentable gifts. In the winter, everyone wants to eat some fresh green vegetables. My family tried to grow leafy greens on the kang beds, and we unexpectedly succeeded. My parents said that Third Young Master Zhou has treated us very well during the past few years, so we picked a few batches of green vegetables for Madam and Third Young Master to have a taste."

Third Young Master Zhou sat on the seat next to his mother. He opened the quilt that covered the basket and revealed the fresh green vegetables inside.

Second Madam Zhou looked at it with delight and said with a smile, "I dare not say that we have taken great care of you. It was actually your Yu Family that helped my Xu'er. These green vegetables are well-grown and looks very appetizing."

Second Madam Zhou's personal maidservant, Qiu'er, said with a smile, "Miss Yu is so considerate! My madam usually prefers vegetarian dishes, and thus winter is the most difficult time of the year. In the winter, there aren't many vegetables other than radishes and cabbages. Our madam would slim down a lot every winter! With these green vegetables, our madam would be able to eat another bowl of rice for lunch!"

Two lovely dimples appeared on the side of Yu Xiaocao's mouth. Her pair of big eyes curled as she said, "If Madam doesn't mind, I can send some more over when you're almost done eating."

Second Madam Zhou quickly said with a smile, “Your family probably didn't plant much, so it's better that you keep the fresh vegetables to eat for the New Year?”

“Madam, don't be so courteous. I can't guarantee that the vegetables that my family grows would be enough for everyone in your estate to eat, but it's more than enough for you and Third Young Master!” Seeing that Second Madam Zhou didn't look down on her because she was a little peasant girl and spoke to her in an amiable manner, Yu Xiaocao's heart had completely relaxed.

Third Young Master Zhou helped her, “Mother, Xiaocao never says things out of courtesy. Since she said she would send it to us, then she must be sincere about it. You don't need to treat her like an outsider. That's being too courteous ah!”

“This child, you're seriously not being polite at all!” Second Madam Zhou gently glared at her son and revealed a helpless smile.

Third Young Master Zhou grinned cheekily and said, “Mother! If it wasn't because Xiaocao was unwilling, I would have long become sworn siblings with her. Don't Mother often sigh about not having a considerate daughter? It's a pity that Xiaocao already has a godmother...”

“This child, did you even ask if Miss Yu agrees to this? To have such wishful thinking!” Second Madam Zhou also liked this polite little girl, who was neither humble nor arrogant.

Yu Xiaocao quickly said with a smile, “Madam, you can just call me 'Xiaocao'! Even if we don't become adoptive relatives, the relationship between our families won't change!”

The three of them joked and laughed for a while, and the atmosphere was very warm. At noon, Second Madam Zhou asked Yu Xiaocao to stay for lunch. So Yu Xiaocao showed her skills and made several delicious vegetarian dishes like 'thousand shredded tofu', 'steamed choy sum with minced garlic and vermicelli', 'fragrant baked mushrooms', 'three shredded vegetables', 'candied sweet potatoes', and more. Second Madam Zhou was full of praises for the dishes.

In addition to green vegetables, there were also ten or so cattles of potatoes. Yu Xiaocao also taught the Zhou Family's cook several recipes for cooking potatoes so that Second Madam Zhou, who favored vegetarian dishes, had several more vegetable dishes that she could eat in the winter.

Third Young Master Zhou saw a business opportunity from the potatoes. He heard from Xiaocao that they had planted quite a lot of potatoes for next year, so he took the advantage by striking first and ordered all of the potatoes. He also bought all of Yu Xiaocao's recipes for potatoes at a high price. He was confident that Zhenxiu Restaurant's turnover for next year would reach a new peak!

#### Fields of Gold Chapter 308

In the blink of an eye, Little New Year was about to arrive. In the north, there was a custom of eating dumplings during the Little New Year. The meaning behind this custom was to see off the Kitchen God. In ancient times, there was a saying, 'eat dumplings when parting, and eat noodles when meeting'.

In the early morning of Little New Year, Old Yu led everyone in the family to offer sacrifices to the Kitchen God. Madam Liu skillfully boiled stove candy, which was sweets made from malt and millet. The large milky white lumps of candy were placed on a square plate in front of the statue of the Kitchen God. Other items on the table included fresh water, beans, fodder... She still needed to put up festive couplets for the Kitchen God.

When eaten, the freshly made stove candy was crispy and fragrant. It was the children's favorite snack. Every year, the wealthier families would make more stove candy for the children to consume.

Yu Xiaocao wasn't very good at making traditional stove candy. After she boiled the white sugar into syrup, she would either add in fried sesame or peanuts to make it into sesame and peanut candy. This way, they would have some extra snacks for the New Year. When Madam Liu found out, she laughed and scolded her as a 'wasteful girl'! In this era, it was already considered quite good if an ordinary family had enough to eat, where would they have the extra money to buy white sugar to make sesame and peanut candy?

In the evening, the Yu Family made two types of dumplings, meat and vegetable. The meat dumplings were stuffed with wild pork and scallions. The streaky wild boar meat, which had a good ratio of fatty and lean meat, was diced up, and then mixed with chopped onion to make ground meat. There was more meat than vegetables, and it was delicious to eat.

The vegetarian dumplings are stuffed with garlic chives, glass noodles, and eggs. The glass noodles would be soaked in hot water to be softened, then it would be chopped into fine pieces and air-dried in the sun. After that, it would be fried in oil and combined with scrambled eggs and chopped garlic chives. If she were to add the refined oil residue, the dumpling would taste even more delicious. Yu Xiaocao liked to secretly eat a few mouthfuls of stuffing while she made the dumplings. The flavor was extremely tasty.

The whole family sat in a circle around the kang table, eating their favorite meat or vegetarian dumplings happily. The cheerful atmosphere made Yu Xiaocao sigh at the beauty of a family reunion.

In her previous life, her parents had left the world early, leaving behind three half-grown children. Their first few New Year without their parents were bleak and miserable. Fortunately, her younger siblings already had their own small families before she left, so she was a little less concerned and attached to her previous life.

Yu Xiaocao's expression became a little absent-minded. It seemed like her previous life was becoming more distant, as if it was nothing but a very long dream that was full of hardship...

"Cao'er, what are you thinking about? The vegetarian dumpling you like to eat will be all snatched up by the little guys if you don't eat it quickly!" Yu Hai saw his daughter staring blankly at the corner of the kang table with a lonely expression on her face, which seemed out of place in the lively atmosphere. So, he quickly put a few pieces of dumplings on her plate, softly interrupting her train of thought.

In the north, people usually celebrated the Little New Year with meat dumplings. However, since Xiaocao liked to eat vegetable dumplings, they also made a plate of dumplings stuffed with chives and eggs. Maybe it was because this type of dumpling was new and fresh to them, but Liu Yaner, Yu Xiaolian, and Little Shitou all tried a piece of the vegetarian dumpling, and soon half the plate of dumplings was gone. Little New Year was about having a lively reunion, so the two families decided to celebrate it together.

The chives and eggs dumplings were stir-fried with lard, and there were a lot of eggs stuffed in the dumplings. Xiaocao also added the fragrant refining oil, so it was no mystery as to why the children liked it.

When he saw his father picking up the delicious and fragrant vegetable dumplings one by one with his chopsticks and putting them into his second sister's bowl, Little Shitou protested, "Father, you're being partial to Second Sister! If you give all the vegetarian dumplings to Second Sister, what should we eat?"

Yu Hai glared at the grinning little fellow and said, "Don't you like to eat pork dumplings? Don't create a ruckus without any purpose. There are so many pork dumplings!"

However, Yu Xiaocao picked up a piece of dumpling stuffed with chives from her own bowl and placed it in her younger brother's bowl and said, "Father, the wild pork dumplings are delicious too. I also like to eat them! It's more lively when everyone eats dumplings together!"

Little Shitou covered his small bowl and smiled mischievously, "Second Sister, I was just teasing our father! How can vegetable dumplings be more delicious than pork dumplings? Only Second Sister's taste buds are different from everyone else! We're just trying out the vegetable dumplings, the rest is for you!"

Yu Xiaocao reached out and pinched his chubby cheeks, and said, "Do you think that your second sister is a rice bucket? There are dozens of dumplings left, and if I eat them all, my stomach will explode! Hurry up and eat. Help me eat some!"

Yu Xiaocao divided the vegetarian dumplings in her bowl between the two families. After she shared them, she still had around a dozen remaining, which was just enough for her to eat!

Little Shitou was sitting on the side with his hands covering his face as he protested, "Second Sister, I'm no longer a child, so stop pinching my face! I will be taking the county-level exam next year!"

"Not to mention the county-level exam, even if you are the top scorer in the imperial exam, you're still my younger brother! I pinch you because I like you. Who told you to be the youngest one in our family?" Yu Xiaocao pinched his small face again.

Little Shitou shielded his face with his hands, snuggled up beside Madam Liu, and pouted. In a loud voice, he said, "Mother, you should give birth to a little brother. That way, Second Sister will only pinch our little brother, and not me!"

Madam Liu flushed red in embarrassment when she heard her son's word, and gently patted him twice on his back. However, her man laughed mischievously beside her, and thus received an eye roll from her.

After Little New Year, it will soon be the New Year. The weather had been bright and sunny the past few days. The market in town was bustling with people, who dragged their children to town to buy goods for the New Year. The Yu Family's carriage was now equipped with a shed. The twin sisters, Yu Xiaocao and Yu Xiaolian, Liu Yaner, Little Shitou, and Liu Fangping were sitting inside while chattering happily.



Yu Hang and Liu Junping considered themselves to be older, so they sat outside chatting with Yu Hai, who was driving the cart, and Liu Hu. Besides Madam Liu and Yu Caifeng, who stayed at home to clean and make preparations for the New Year, everyone else came out to buy goods.

Yu Family's horse carriage and donkey cart were both parked outside of the town gates. For just a small fee, they could park there for the entire day and the staff would also help feed the animals. But they must bring their own fodder for their animals, otherwise they would have to pay additional money. The Yu Family's horse and donkey wouldn't eat fodders from other places, and only ate the fodder that had mystic-stone water added to it.

When the children jumped out of the carriage, Yu Hai and Liu Hu looked at the kids, who all had different heights, and felt a headache coming. When they entered the town gate and saw the bustling crowd, their head ached even more!

Yu Hai turned towards his oldest son and Liu Junping, and said, "Your task is to carefully watch after your younger siblings. There are a lot of people here for the New Year, so child traffickers will take advantage of the chaos to kidnap children. Never let your guard down or be careless!"

Yu Hang and Liu Junping nodded their heads solemnly. Little Shitou, who was holding Little Black's leash, confidently gestured at Little Black and said, "If we encounter a child trafficker, then I'll make Little Black bite his butt!"

Little Fangping took over the rope tied to Little White from Xiaocao, he jumped and said, "There's also Little White! Little Black will bite one butt cheek and Little White will bite the other butt cheek! They'll bite the bad guys until they cry!"

Although Little Black and Little White weren't big in size, they were purebred wolves, so they had an impressive and majestic aura around them. Their appearance gave off the feeling that they shouldn't be trifled with. However, the two wolves had completely opposite personalities. Little Black was simple, honest, a little foolish, and cute. He had a good temper and could play with anyone. Little White had a proud and cold temper, and would look at everyone besides Xiaocao with disdain.

At this moment, when Little White saw that its reins were now in Liu Fangping's hands, it began biting at the other end of the rope with its teeth, pulling it back with force. Taking advantage of the fact that Liu

Fangping hadn't noticed, he pulled the rope over to Xiaocao's side. It used its front legs to cling onto her pants and pushed the rope into her hands. Then he glared at Liu Fangping disdainfully.

"Follow me closely and don't fall behind!" After Yu Hai repeatedly warned the children, he then led the large group into the crowd.

Liu Junping held his younger sister, Liu Yaner, with one hand, and with his other hand, he held his younger brother, Liu Fangping, who had his head turned as he tried to appease Little White. Yu Hang followed his example as he dragged Little Shitou with one hand and pulled Yu Xiaolian along with his other hand. He had Xiaolian pull Xiaocao along. With a majestic wolf cub escorting them on both sides, the four siblings became an eye-catching sight on the street.

The seven siblings and cousins were dressed simply, but they were very clean and tidy. There were no patches on their clothes and their appearances were above average. The siblings from the Yu Family were better looking. Yu Hang was nearly 1.7 meters tall, with thick brows and big eyes. His skin was a healthy wheat color.

Xiaolian and Xiaocao were twin sisters. At first glance, they appear very similar, but with a closer inspection, it was very easy to tell them apart. Xiaocao's skin was like a peeled egg; it was fair with a rosy glow and no blemishes at all. Xiaolian's complexion was slightly darker because of the long-term exposure to the wind and sun on the dock. Xiaocao's eyes were big and bright, as if she was able to see through a person's inner heart. Xiaolian's eyes weren't small, but her face was slightly rounder, so her eyes weren't as prominent as Xiaocao's. In general, the two sisters' appearance were very good. They were a beautiful pair of sisters.

Little Shitou was a young boy with a handsome and refined appearance. His eyes were always smiling, and he had a tall, straight nose. It could be said that his facial features were the best among the four siblings.

At the beginning, the children obediently followed behind Yu Hai and Liu Hu, who were shopping for New Year goods in front of them. However, they were later attracted by the various snacks and toys on the street and gradually spread out. Fortunately, Liu Yaner and her brother had Liu Junping looking after them, and Yu Hang followed closely behind his siblings.

"Eldest Brother, there are monkeys performing tricks in the front! Let's go check it out!" Before Yu Hang could respond, Little Shitou had already shook off his brother's hands and walked into the crowd with Little Black.

Yu Xiaocao was also interested in the monkeys performing tricks, so she followed behind her older brother and squeezed into the crowd watching the performance. Inside the circle, there was a duo of monkey trainers, who appeared to be a pair of grandfather and grandchild. A young girl struck on a gong to attract people, while an old man with white hair commanded the monkey dressed in clothes to do somersaults, walk on a tightrope, climb a pole, and to open a box while wearing a mask... Every now and then, the audience would burst into applause.

When the performance came to an end, the young girl held the gong to collect money. Those who were unwilling to give money gradually dispersed, while those who didn't mind giving one or two copper coins, threw one or two copper coins into the gong. Yu Xiaocao looked at the young emaciated girl and thought that it wasn't easy being a performing artist, so she tossed two copper coins in.

At this time, a cry suddenly came from the scattered crowd, "Where's my child? Has anyone seen my child? Gouwa—Gouwa—"

"Oh dear—" An old man beside Yu Xiaocao sighed deeply and said, "Her child must've been kidnapped by child traffickers! Every time people come to town to shop for the New Year, they would abduct a few children. These adults are also too much, don't they know how to look after their child when they go out..."

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"Shitou, Little Shitou—" Yu Xiaocao felt her heart thumping as she raised her head to listen to the sound. When she looked up, she saw her older brother anxiously searching and calling for her younger brother in the crowd.

"Xiaocao, Xiaolian, have you seen our younger brother? After the monkey show ended, he was lost in the crowd!" Seeing that his two younger sisters were still here, Yu Hang's heart was half relieved. But his younger brother was gone and he kept looking around them anxiously while he talked to his two sisters.

"I didn't see him. Wasn't our younger brother with you the entire time?" Yu Xiaolian remembered the words the old man had just said and tears began forming at the corners of her eyes.

Yu Hang appeared worried, remorseful, and full of self blame... all kinds of emotions were intertwined together. He frowned and said impatiently, "We were together before the monkey show dispersed. When the young girl was walking around to receive money, Little Shitou squeezed into the crowd and

gave her two copper coins. Then, we were separated by the crowd when it began dispersing. When I searched for him after that, I couldn't find him."

When Yu Xiaocao saw how his brother was blaming himself for his carelessness, she quickly comforted him and said, "Don't worry, maybe he was just pushed by the crowd to another place. Let's go look for him again! Besides, he has Little Black with him, so there shouldn't be any problem..."

Although Xiaocao had said that, she was still quite worried about her younger brother. If Little White had been the one following him, then he would've been of some use. Little Black was too unreliable. It was likely that while they were being kidnapped, Little Black would've thought that the kidnappers were playing a game with him!

Yu Hang said to his two younger sisters, "Let's split up and search for him. I'll go search in this direction and the two of you will search for him in the other direction. Make sure that the two of you don't stray off from each other!"

Yu Xiaocao didn't randomly search for her younger brother like a headless fly as Yu Hang did. Instead, she crouched down and stroked Little White's soft fur. She softly said, "Little White, are you able to find Little Black's scent in the crowd?"

Little White and Little Black had grown up on mystic-stone water given by Xiaocao. In addition to that, wolves inherently have a stronger sense of smell. Little White raised his head, closed his eyes, and sniffed the air lightly. Within the chaotic crowd, Little White was able to catch a whiff of a familiar scent. He lifted his right front leg and pointed to a direction.

Yu Xiaocao was overjoyed and said, "Little White, quickly take us there! Xiaolian, let's follow Little White, he has found something!"

As Yu Xiaocao and her sister followed behind Little White towards a certain direction, not far away from them, a group of senior servants were anxiously looking around.

"Did you find the young master yet?" The person who spoke was a well-dressed senior servant, and she was anxiously questioning the guards who had gathered around.

A large man dressed as a guard shook his head in disappointment and said, "No! There were too many people watching the monkey show. When the show ended, everyone was pushing and shoving as they dispersed. It's unknown where the young master ended up..."

"Then why aren't you hurrying along looking for him? If anything happens to the young master, none of us will escape from punishment!" The senior servant was quite regretful that she didn't bring out more guards with them when she brought the young master out to play. If she had done that, then they wouldn't have carelessly lost the young master.

This senior servant was the wet nurse to the Tianjin Commander's, Commander Sun, only son. It was almost the New Years, so Commander Sun's wife brought her son to Tanggu Town to accompany her husband to celebrate the New Years. It was unknown which servant had blabbed to the young master about Tanggu Town's lively market, but he pleaded with his mother to let him out for a walk. The commander's wife thought that her young son wouldn't face any danger since it was still bright out and the region was under her husband's jurisdiction. Thus, she asked her son's wet nurse and several guards to accompany the young master to take a stroll. Who would've known that they would be the one to lose the young master!

Commander Sun and his wife were currently around forty years of age and they were finally blessed with a child in their thirties. They loved and pampered their son dearly. If the servants really couldn't find the young master, how will they still be allowed to live?

In a desolate and dark alley in Tanggu Town, several sneaky people met up. One of the guys had a large mole on his face, and with one glance, it was obvious that he wasn't a good person. The corners of his mouth drew back into a smile, revealing his uneven yellow teeth as he said, "Our business is doing very well today. We have gathered many goods today."

He looked at the unconscious boy dressed in satin in his hands— with red lips and white teeth, a gold necklace with a valuable jade pendant hung around his neck. With one glance, one could tell that this child came from either a rich or powerful family. A guy with a deer shaped head, mouse-like eyes, and dry hair that was yellowing said hesitantly, "Boss Yin, is this child from a government official's family? If that's the case, we're in big trouble!"

The guy with the large mole, whom he addressed as Boss Yin looked at him in contempt and said, "I have already inquired about Tanggu Town! Besides those with an official background and the county magistrate, the only other family we just can't touch is the Zhou Family! County Magistrate Zhao's children have all grown up. The main branch of the Zhou Family has two sons, and the youngest of the two is already 18 years old. The oldest grandsons of the Zhou Family are only two to three years old. The

age doesn't match up! Third Young Master Zhou from the second branch hasn't even married yet, so why would there be a six to seven year old child in his home? Besides, we will be smuggling these goods out through the waterway tonight, and we'll resell them once we reach the south. Even if he's an official's son, what can he do to us after tonight? Old Fifth, you don't have any courage, that's why you can't achieve anything great!"

Old Fifth relaxed after hearing his explanation, and he glanced at the child in Boss Yin's hand. He chuckled and said, "Boss Yin, the goods are really good this time. Look at his skin, it's as tender as tofu. His appearance is even more beautiful than a girl's!"

If Yu Xiaocao was here, then she would definitely recognize that the child under Boss Yin's arm was Little Shitou, whom they were all trying to find.

These child traffickers would usually put a cloth laced with poor quality chloroform to cover a child's mouth, making them lose consciousness, then quickly take them away. But because Little Shitou usually consumed food or drank liquids that contained mystic-stone water, his body has developed some resistance to chloroform or other poisons.

While Boss Yin was talking to Old Fifth, Little Shitou was already awake. However, Little Shitou was sharp, so when he sensed that something was amiss, he continued to pretend that he was unconscious. He remained motionless as he allowed Boss Yin to carry him in his arms, but his ears were on high alert as he listened in on the conversation between the two.

From the conversation between the two, he knew that he was caught by child traffickers, and that if his family couldn't find him by tonight, he was going to be transported to the south and be sold off. Little Shitou's heart was very anxious. He thought about ways he could leave clues behind for his family without alerting the child traffickers.

He recalled that he had put a few pieces of wolf meat jerky in his sleeve; he was going to eat them when he was hungry. Just as Boss Yin carried him deep into the alleyway, he took out a small piece of jerky and scattered it in the alleyway when he wasn't paying attention.

Soon after the group of people disappeared into the rundown house, Little Black appeared. When Little Shitou had fallen unconscious, the rope in his hand fell to the ground. At that time, Little Black had been looking at the monkey with great interest, so he wanted to move closer to have a better look. As a result, he didn't find out in time that his little master had been abducted by bad guys.

Even though Little Black usually appeared to be dumb, he had grown up on mystic-stone water. When he realized that his little master had disappeared, he had raised his nose and began sniffing around for his little master's scent, which led him here. In the dim and narrow alleyway, he picked up the scent of dried jerky that his young master liked to eat, confirming that his young master had been here before. He followed the dried jerky's scent, leading him to the rundown house in front of him. Little Black tried to gently push open the door with his short legs, only to find that the door was locked from the inside. What should he do now?

'Humph! How can such a trifling matter pose as an obstacle to me?' Little Black circled around the edge of the house and finally found a hidden dog hole. Little Black excitedly entered the hole, and quickly found the room where his little master was being held in.

Those child traffickers had a lot of trust in their plans. They had brought back a lot of quality goods today, so they celebrated this happy occasion by drinking next door. The children, who had been drugged unconscious, were all locked together and an iron chain was used to lock the door.

The door locked by the iron chains had a narrow gap, but the children couldn't squeeze out from it. Fortunately, Little Black was not fat, he was able to squeeze through the gap and entered the room.

At this time, Little Shitou had already opened his eyes to carefully look at his surroundings. When he heard some movement from the door, he hurriedly lay back in the position that Boss Yin had left him in.

Little Shitou's hands, which were in his sleeves, were balled into a fist because of how nervous he was. Suddenly, he could feel a warm breath spraying onto his face, followed by a rough tongue licking his face. He slightly cracked opened his eyes and saw Little Black's bright green eyes.

When Little Black saw that his little master had awoken, he excitedly ran in circles as his tail wagged nonstop.

Little Shitou was very surprised to see Little Black. He stroked Little Black's head and in a low voice said, "Little Black, the door is locked, and I can't get out! Hurry up and look for my second sister and let her find a way to save me!"

It seemed as if Little Black understood his words as he licked his hands a few times before quickly squeezing himself out of the gap in the door. It found the hidden dog hole in the grass and quickly ran out the alleyway. However, it seemed as if God was intentionally working against him because on his way back, he actually encountered a group of brats. When the children saw a black puppy running around without an owner, they surrounded Little Black and chased after him.

Had it been an usual day, based on Little Black's nimble movements, how would those children be able to catch him? However, his little master was worried that Little White and him would get lost on their way around town, so he tied a rope around their necks. The rope around Little Black's neck was stepped on by one of the older children. The child bent down to pick up the rope, holding Little Black's rope in his hands.

Little Black struggled desperately, but he was smaller than the child, so how could he escape from the child who was stronger than him? Master Xiaocao had said that if he bit someone, she would pull all his teeth out. How could he eat meat if his teeth were all pulled out? Little Black was at a loss, he couldn't escape, and he couldn't bite anyone, so how could he go find Master Xiaocao to tell her to rescue Master Shitou?

When Little White led the two sisters onto the scene, they saw Little Black having a tug of war with a group of brats. Little Black's neck was red from the rope being pulled around, and his four small claws were bleeding from being grinded against the ground. Yet he continued to struggle without relenting.

When Little White saw the scene, he very bravely and fiercely plunged himself forward, trying to bite the hand of the boy who was pulling the rope. The boy was only ten years old, so he was frightened when he saw a fierce little white dog running towards him, trying to bite him. He loosened his grip on the rope immediately and took two steps back.

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When Little Black saw Yu Xiaocao, he rushed madly to her as if he had just seen his own mother. Yu Xiaocao squatted down and gently stroked his head. There was a sense of wetness on her palm when she touched his neck. With a closer look, it seemed like the little fellow had struggled too hard and gotten injured by the rope.

Yu Xiaocao slowly stood up, and rage flickered in her eyes as she glared coldly at the culprit. The young boy also felt somewhat bewildered as he scratched the back of his head and muttered, "I... I thought that the puppy didn't have an owner, so... I didn't intend on hurting it. I just thought that it was cute and wanted to keep it..."



When the hot-tempered Yu Xiaolian saw Little Black bleeding, she put her hands on her hip and hollered at the young boy, "Are you blind! There's a rope tied around his neck, so how can it be ownerless? You didn't want to hurt it? Then where did the wound around his neck come from?"

The young boy's friends were unhappy and wanted to argue with Yu Xiaolian, but the young boy stopped them. Based on the way he behaved and dressed, it was apparent that the young boy was a child from a well-off family. Looking apologetic, he sincerely said, "I was at fault for this matter. My house is nearby, so I'll go get some medicine for the puppy to apply on his wound..."

Yu Xiaocao looked in the direction that the young boy pointed at and saw a familiar signboard—Tongren Medicine Hall. Was this young boy the child of one of the workers at the pharmacy? Seeing that Xiaolian wanted to say something, she quickly interjected, "Xiaolian, saving people is more urgent!"

Xiaocao untied the rope around Little Black's neck and cleansed his wound with a handkerchief soaked in mystic-stone water, and then said in a soft voice, "Little Black, do you know where Little Shitou is? Quickly bring us over!"

Little Black nodded, and then dashed towards that road that he came from. Yu Xiaocao and her sister quickly followed him. With a puzzled expression, the young boy wondered why the two young girls suddenly ran off. After a brief hesitation, he quietly followed behind them.

While Little Black and his two little masters shuttled through the intersecting alleys, the children, who were locked in an abandoned house by the human traffickers, woke up one after another. Seeing that they were in an unfamiliar environment, they all started crying and screaming.

Boss Yin, who was drinking wine and eating meat next door, heard the commotion. With a chicken drumstick in one hand, he kicked the door open and scolded fiercely inside, "Stop crying!! I'll break the worthless legs of those who disobey me!!"

The twenty or so children in the room were so frightened by his ferocious expression that they stopped crying, and then they began to sob in low voices. Boss Yin was very satisfied with his own deterrence. He locked the door again, and went back to the room next door to drink and eat meat.

A chubby boy, who they had just abducted today, started wailing again, "Father... Mother... Quickly come save me. I'm very scared..."

A slightly older girl hastily covered the little fatty's mouth, looked at the door with fear, and then finally felt relieved when she noticed that there wasn't any movement. She whispered to the chubby boy, who was hiccupping, "Don't cry! If you continue to cry, they will really beat you! Do you see that unconscious boy over there? After being kicked by them, he spitted out blood and hadn't woken up for nearly a day!"

The chubby boy's complexion turned pale with fright. He covered his mouth hard, and tears flowed down his face. He hiccupped as he cried, "Hiccup... Father, Mother... I don't want to die... hiccup... Father, Mother... someone come save me. I won't only think about playing anymore..."

Sun Yaoyang, who was wearing an azure brocade robe, wrinkled his small face and looked at the snot and tears on the chubby boy's face with disgust. He snapped, "Stop crying! What's the use of crying? Will you be able to escape by crying?"

As the chubby boy hiccupped, he wiped his nose with his sleeve, sniffled, and then said, "I don't want to cry either, but I can't stop my tears! I'm scared. I miss my parents... I'm hungry..."

It was already afternoon, and from time to time, the smell of roasted chicken and roasted duck would drift over from next door. The chubby boy sniffed hard and covered his tummy pitifully.

Little Shitou felt speechless. They were already in this situation, yet he still had the energy to think about eating... He still had some dried meat hidden in his sleeves, but he wouldn't be so kind-hearted as to share them with others. Second Sister said that one should hold back a trick or two in critical moments!

The chubby boy sniffled his nose and moved closer to him. He sniffed him like a dog, and pointed at him with an aggrieved expression, saying, "There's the smell of food on you..."

Little Shitou was seriously dumbfounded. Was he a dog? He took out his hand, waved it in front of the chubby boy, and said with a sigh, "Perhaps it was because I was eating jerky when I was abducted?"

The chubby boy sniffed his hand, swallowed his saliva and said, "It smells so good! Do you have any more jerky?"

Little Shitou shook his head and said, "No, I haven't finished eating the piece of jerky. I don't know where I dropped it!" The chubby boy had a look of despair on his face.

Sun Yaoyang, the commander's precious son, felt very speechless. Was this the time to discuss eating? He glared angrily at the two, stood up, walked to the door, and tried pulling on it. Just now he had quietly observed that all the windows had been nailed down with wood. There was a gap in the door. Was it possible to...

The slightly older girl shook her head at him and said in a low voice, "It's no use. Even the youngest and thinnest Hou Xiaoxiao couldn't get out, so you don't even need to think about it. Be careful not to let those bad guys find out—the one over there was beaten because he wanted to escape!"

Sun Yaoyang tried, and then resolutely gave up on the idea of crawling out of the crack in the door. He checked all of the windows again and noticed that they were all nailed down securely. It would be difficult to pry them open without any tools. Fortunately, he always carried a dagger that his father gave him for his birthday. Sun Yaoyang took out a small dagger from his boots, picked a window that wasn't as tightly nailed down, and carefully pried it open.

Some of the children in the room were huddled together, trembling. Some of them looked at him with hope, while others had a blank expression...

Suddenly, there was a sound of footsteps outside the door. Sun Yaoyang alertly put away his dagger. He swiftly walked over to sit beside Little Shitou, and like everyone else, he hugged his knees with his head lowered.

The person who opened the door had come to deliver food. This group of human traffickers were relying on this 'batch of goods' to make a lot of money, so they naturally wouldn't let them starve. However, it was just to ensure that they wouldn't starve to death. They definitely wouldn't serve them with good food.

As soon as the guy who came to deliver food entered the room, he carefully looked around the room and noticed that there was something wrong with the atmosphere. With a frown, he pointed at a child with a terrified expression and shouted, "What's going on? Are you guys trying to escape? If you don't tell the truth, I'll beat you to death!"

The child's face turned green with fright, and he shrunk himself into a smaller ball. He shivered and screamed hysterically, "It wasn't me! It wasn't me!! It was him. He was the one who wanted to pry open the window and escape!!"

Little Shitou was alarmed in his heart and thought, 'This is bad! Sure enough, Second Sister was right. One shouldn't be afraid of an excellent opponent, but one should be afraid of having a pig-like teammate instead!' The child's finger was pointing at Sun Yaoyang.

The child trafficker, who came to deliver food, keenly noticed that half of the nails on one of the windows had been pried off. He inwardly broke out in cold sweat! If the kid really broke the window, not to mention that this deal would be wrecked, but their whole business would be completely ruined...

"Monkey, what's going on?" The commotion attracted the attention of the people next door. Boss Yin came over impatiently and shouted at the guy, who was responsible for delivering food.

"Boss, this kid wants to escape! Half of the window has been pried open!!" Monkey lifted Sun Yaoyang and threw him in front of Boss Yin.

Boss Yin bent down and clasped Sun Yaoyang's chin, forcing him to look at his eyes. With a grim voice, he said, "Kid, no goods have ever escaped from the hands of me, Boss Yin! Tell me honestly, what did you use to pry open the window?"

Sun Yaoyang spat at him, and then turned his head to the side. Boss Yin tilted his head and avoided it. With his large, palm leaf-like hands, he brutally slapped Sun Yaoyang twice. Sun Yaoyang instantly felt a moment of dizziness and his ears started buzzing. There was a burning sensation on his cheeks, and a bloody taste within his mouth.

"Are you going to say it? Where's the tool that you used to pry open the window?" Boss Yin pulled him forward, lifted him off the ground, and shook him hard. Sun Yaoyang gritted his teeth and continued to turn his head to the side.

Boss Yin raised his hand and wanted to hit him again, but he was stopped by Old Fifth, "Boss Yin, this is a high-quality good. If his face is injured, you won't be able to sell him for a good price!"

Old Fifth turned towards the kid who betrayed Sun Yaoyang at the beginning, and hollered at him with a fierce expression, "You! Yes, you! Say it, where did he hide the tool??"

Without waiting for Old Fifth to walk over, the coward broke down and shouted, "Don't hit me!! I'll say it. There's a dagger hidden in his boots!!"

Sun Yaoyang glared ferociously at the youth who sold him out. The kid cried, "What are you looking at? It was you who wanted to escape, so why do we have to take the risk with you? If I don't say it, then they will beat me to death!! I don't want to die. I want to go home..."

Smack!

His cry came to an abrupt stop, and there were five clear fingerprints on his face. Old Fifth spat phlegm on him and said with disdain, "What are you shouting for? Coward, if you shout again, I'll hang you up and beat you!!"

The coward didn't dare to even make a squeak. He hid his head between his legs like an ostrich, and his body quivered incessantly.

Boss Yin found the dagger from Sun Yaoyang's boots. He told Old Fifth to get a rope, tie Sun Yaoyang's hands, and hang him on the beam. After that, he threatened the other children, "If anyone wants to run away again, I'll cut him alive!! Kid, aren't you really tough? I'll let you have a taste of what it's like to go against me!"

The weight of his entire body was concentrated on the rope that was tied around his wrist, and the rope deeply penetrated into his flesh. It was quite easy to imagine the feeling of being hung on the beam.

Boss Yin said to the twenty or so frightened children, "Since you guys still have the energy to think about escaping, it seems like I, Boss Yin, have been too benevolent. Monkey, only send them one meal a day in the future. It's fine as long as they don't starve to death! We don't have to worry about them causing trouble after filling their stomachs!!"

Monkey replied in assent and took away the blackened steamed bread that he brought in.