

Gold Chapter 311

Fields of Gold Chapter 311

After the group of traffickers locked the door and left, Little Shitou, who had mixed in the crowd in a low-key manner, stood up and went to the place that Sun Yaoyang was being hung. He lifted his arms and supported the soles of his feet. This caused the pressure on Sun Yaoyang's arms to decrease significantly.

He lowered his head to look at the scrawny young boy under his feet. He was around six to seven years old and had a small stature, yet he worked so hard to support him that his face had turned completely red. Sun Yaoyang felt very moved, and said to him, "Thank you. You won't be able to support me, so don't waste your energy!"

"If you succeeded in prying open the window, it would benefit everyone. If you failed, you would be the only one who gets punished. It's too unfair! It's alright, I'll do what I can. I believe that someone will come save us soon! Let's endure this together!" Little Shitou's body had been nourished with mystic-stone water for two years, so even though he had a short stature, he was stronger than most children.

After wiping his mucus and tears, the chubby boy also got up and went to Little Shitou's side. He gave him a big thumb's up and said, "You are both amazing, and I, Liu Xiaohu, admires righteous people the most. I'll help you, too!"

He was half a head taller than Little Shitou, so he didn't need to raise his hands high to touch Sun Yaoyang's feet. He took one of Sun Yaoyang's feet from Little Shitou's hands and placed it on his own head. With one hand holding Sun Yaoyang's feet, he rubbed his grumbling stomach with his other hand, sighing, "If I'm full, I can support him alone. I'm really hungry right now, so I feel flustered and my legs are shaky..."

Seeing that there were people helping him, the coward, who betrayed Sun Yaoyang, cried in a low voice, "He caused everyone to go hungry, yet you guys are still helping him? Aren't you afraid of angering those people and getting beaten up along with him?"

Little Shitou saw that the others all looked at the coward with disdain, so he fanned the flames and said, "Had you not acted panicky, how would the bad guys notice? If you didn't sell him out, the window would have probably been pried open by now and everyone would have escaped!! It's all your fault. You ruined it for everyone!"

The slightly older girl spat at the coward and said, "Wang Xiaonian, you coward who can't accomplish anything yet spoils the good things. Do you know after tonight, we will be sold to some unknown place? You ruined our last chance to escape. Why don't you go die!!"

The others all showed an angry expression upon hearing this. No one knew who initiated it, but over a dozen boys rushed forward and started beating the coward. The fellow let out an earth shattering scream in hope that someone would come save him.

While Wang Xiaonian shrieked endlessly, Little Shitou and the chubby boy notified Sun Yaoyang before they swiftly let go of his feet and squatted in a corner.

Monkey, who was next door, heard the commotion and went over impatiently to check on the situation. Seeing Wang Xiaonian being surrounded, he gloated and said, "Pay attention when fighting and don't kill him. Otherwise, I won't spare you guys!" He left after saying that.

Wang Xiaonian thought that those people would help him since he gained merit for exposing the escape plan. He hadn't expected that the other party didn't even bother to look at him. He could only hold his head and howl in despair as he endured the beating of the group.

The chubby boy and Little Shitou continued to support Sun Yaoyang's weight. Seeing that Little Shitou and the chubby boy's foreheads were covered with sweat, two taller boys quickly came to take over their place. Children still had relatively simple and lovely hearts, so they could still maintain a kind and righteous side in difficult times.

From time to time, Little Shitou would turn his head to listen to the movement, and constantly glanced at the gap between the door. After the guys next door filled their stomachs and took a short break, most of them went out to look for prey again. Only two to three people stayed behind to guard them.

Among the people who stayed behind was Monkey. He said to the other two people, "With the door locked, the brats won't be able to come out anyways. It's so hard to stand out here on such a cold day. Why don't we, brothers, go gamble next door?" There was no way that the other two would disagree.

An hour later, the three men were too busy gambling to notice that a little black wolf-dog coming in from a doghole in the thicket, and it was followed by a small white puppy. The two little fellows crept to the room where the 'goods' were locked, and carefully squeezed through the gap between the door...

"Little Black, Little White!! You guys finally came!!" Seeing that Little Black had brought Little White with him, Little Shitou knew that they were going to be saved! He was very confident in his second sister. As long as his second sister knew about this, she would definitely be able to rescue them!"

Sun Yaoyang, who was hung on the beam, was delighted to see the two puppies. He whispered, "Yu Fan, are they your dogs? Quickly tear off a piece of cloth and write a message for your dog to send out. Based on my observation earlier, there are at least fifteen to sixteen people in this group, and they are all vicious outlaws. Tell your family to report the crime to the yamen and bring more bailiffs over... No, the yamen should be on vacation now... Ask your family to go to the Tianjin Garrison and look for Commander Sun. Just tell him that his son got kidnapped and ask him to bring his soldiers to save people!!"

Hearing this, Little Shitou looked at him in surprise and said, "Sun Yaoyang, so you're the commander's son ah! Why didn't you bring more bodyguards when going out?"

Sun Yaoyang smiled bitterly and said, "Who would have thought that shopping would bring such a disaster? It's hard to buy foreknowledge even if one has money ah..."

Little Shitou took out a handkerchief from his chest pocket, looked at his finger, and then bit on it mercilessly. Beside him, the chubby boy reminded him, "Are you dumb? You're not using other people's readily available blood, and using your own?"

Looking in the direction that his mouth gestured at, he saw that Wang Xiaonian's nose was bleeding for a long time after being beaten. When Little Shitou walked over, the coward hugged his head with fright and shouted, "Don't hit me. I don't dare, I don't dare to do it again!!"

Little Shitou suppressed his disgust and dipped his finger in the fellow's blood. He thought over Sun Yaoyang's words, and then wrote it down on the handkerchief. After that, he tied the handkerchief around Little White's neck. In his heart, Little White was more reliable than Little Black.

Little White was somewhat averse to the smell of blood, but it understood the importance of the matter. It bared its teeth and endured it. Little White communicated with Little Black and decided to have Little Black guard the thicket while it went back. It carried the life-saving handkerchief outside and returned to Xiaocao and Xiaolian, who were waiting close by.

Xiaocao saw it and said to Xiaolian, "Take Little White and find Eldest Brother. After that, split up to go to the yamen and the garrison. Tell them to quickly send men over to save those poor children."

Xiaolian nodded and worriedly asked, "What about you?"

Yu Xiaocao replied, "I'll guard here in case those traffickers notice and take them to another place!"

Xiaolian looked at her worriedly and said, "Why don't I wait here, and you go find Eldest Brother..."

"Stop wasting time! Just do as I say and quickly go find help!!" The firmness within Yu Xiaocao's eyes was unshakable. Yu Xiaolian knew that it was useless to say anything else, so she followed Little White to find her eldest brother.

Under Little White's guidance, Xiaolian soon reunited with Yu Hang and explained the situation to him. Yu Hang told Xiaolian to report the case to the yamen, while he went to send the message to Commander Sun's residence in Tanggu Town. He knew that he was unfamiliar with the direction to the garrison, and he also didn't have any transportation. It was better to inform the Sun Family and let them think of a solution.

At this time, Commander Sun's family was already in a disorder. Madam Sun nearly fainted when she found out that her only son had disappeared. However, she was indeed the commander's wife. She stayed calm in this critical situation and immediately sent someone to the garrison to tell her husband about the situation.

Tanggu Town was less than ten kilometers away from the garrison, and it would only take an hour for a fast steed to travel to and fro. By the time Yu Hang arrived at the Sun Estate, Commander Sun was getting ready to take a team of soldiers to search for his beloved son on the streets.

Things also went relatively smoothly on Yu Xiaolian's side. Due to Royal Prince Yang, County Magistrate Zhao paid special attention to the Yu Family. As soon as he heard that someone from Dongshan Village's Yu Family reported a case, he summoned her in without delay. After Xiaolian told him about the case, County Magistrate Zhao immediately became serious. Children had been disappearing from Tanggu Town year after year, but there were especially more cases this year! There were over twenty children, and thus, this was a very serious matter. He immediately gathered all the bailiffs in the yamen and asked

Xiaolian to lead the way. He had to personally lead the bailiffs to catch those atrocious human traffickers.

At a location some distance away from the alley, Yu Xiaocao blocked the two groups who came to save people, "Magistrate Zhao, Commander Sun! In my younger brother's message, he stated that there were currently three people guarding there and the rest had gone out! With the commotion that you guys made earlier, some of the criminals must have noticed. If you want to get rid of all the outlaws, we must plan thoroughly!"

With the resourceful Commander Sun here, they quickly came up with a detailed plan to arrest the criminals. First, he told County Magistrate Zhao to aimlessly patrol the streets with the bailiffs, and he would search for his missing son with his men. In this way, the traffickers would think that the authorities hadn't found their hideout. When the criminals let down their guard and all returned to the place that the children were kept, they would catch them all at once.

However, there was a very important role in this plan. They needed a child to pretend to be abducted and secretly check whether all the traffickers had returned. While the children were being transferred, the child had to signal the officers and soldiers, who were lying in ambush outside. At that time, the criminal would be caught in the act and have no other choice but to be arrested! But, it wasn't completely safe for the child, who acted as an undercover agent. If the outlaws were driven to act in desperation, they would very likely hurt the child!

After speaking, Commander Sun turned his gaze to Xiaocao and her sister. Yu Hang hastily stepped forward and said, "I'll go! I'm a boy, and I have the ability to protect myself in danger."

Commander Sun looked at him and shook his head, saying, "Your age and physique will cause the criminals to be on guard. To be able to complete this task more successfully, it must be someone who the criminals wouldn't feel threatened by."

Yu Xiaocao took a deep breath and said, "Eldest Brother, I'll go!"

"Younger Sister, I'm a fast runner and I'm also stronger than you. I'll go!" Yu Xiaolian was eager to protect her younger sister and didn't care about the danger. She very actively expressed her will to be the spy.

Yu Xiaocao looked at her solemnly and said to Commander Sun, "It's decided! I'll go!!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 312

Commander Sun was very satisfied with Xiaocao's weak appearance. He said, "Mhm, compared with this little girl, you are less likely to arouse the suspicion of the traffickers. Rest assured, I will have the archers hide in ambush on top of the houses nearby. We will prioritize the safety of you and the children, and do our best to ensure that you won't get hurt. But, you should also know that scene would become chaotic at that time and that the swords don't have eyes... If you're afraid, you can choose not to go..."

"No! I'll go! My younger brother is still waiting for me to save him!!" Yu Xiaocao recalled the blood stain on the handkerchief. If her younger brother was injured, she had mystic-stone water in her hands that could give her younger brother and the children timely treatment.

Commander Sun revealed an admiring expression and nodded, "Women are indeed not inferior to men! Such a good child!"

After making all the arrangements, Commander Sun led a group of soldiers and anxiously searched around in the market. The child traffickers, who were hidden in the dark, observed their movements.

"Boss, I heard that the young master of the commander's family is lost, so Commander Sun is personally searching for him with his men. As for the people from the yamen, a child was reported missing. Knowing this, the county magistrate sent the bailiffs out to patrol!" Old Fifth entered a dark alleyway, where Boss Yin was waiting with an unconscious child.

Touching the big mole on his face, Boss Yin said to Old Fifth, "Tell the brothers to act according to the circumstances. If things don't work out, then return to the base camp first. There's already a lot of goods, so there's no need to take the risk." Old Fifth replied in assent, probed his head out to look outside the alley, and then walked into the crowd with his hands clasped together as if nothing happened.

Commander Sun took his subordinates and shuttled through the market several times. After that, he had the soldiers split into groups and quietly hid near the rundown house that the children were locked in. They hid on the roofs and waited for his orders.

"Father, Mother..." Yu Xiaocao cried out as she walked slowly on a remote street, weeping. She was playing the role of a child who got separated from her parents. Today, she wore a semi-new cotton garment made of ordinary fabric. There weren't any patches on her clothes, and she appeared clean and refreshing.

When parents took their children to the market, they usually took out their best clothes and put them on. In the eyes of the traffickers, she was a child from a family with decent living conditions in the village. They brought their child to play in the town, but she ended up getting lost in the crowd. How could the trafficker give up on such a good opportunity? She was soon targeted by one of the traffickers.

The trafficker had a fair and refined appearance, and he was dressed in a long robe. If he didn't have a shifty gaze and an evil glint flashing through his eyes from time to time, he looked just like a student from an academy.

He walked in front of Yu Xiaocao with a warm and gentle smile, and softly said, "Little girl, did you get separated from your family?"

Yu Xiaocao blinked her eyes, which had turned red from her rubbing, and sniffed her nose. She glanced at him with a slightly timid gaze, and then lowered her head again. She nodded hastily and replied in a low voice, "Mhm..."

The refined-looking trafficker said, "Which village is your family from? I'll see if any of my classmates came from the same village. Don't be scared. I'm not a bad person. I'm a student from Qingfeng Academy. The school break just started today, so I came to buy New Year goods..."

Yu Xiaocao feigned a relaxed expression and named a village that was about thirty to forty kilometers away from town. She lifted her small face and said, "Our village's Older Brother Li Lei is a student of Qingfeng Academy. Do you know him?"

"Of course I know him!" Seeing that his prey had been hooked, the trafficker quickly said, "It's great that you know someone in our academy! Li Lei plans on going back tomorrow. Why don't you come to the academy with me, and he can take you along when he goes back tomorrow? What do you think?"

"But...I need to find my parents..." Yu Xiaocao wiped the corner of her eyes with a handkerchief that was soaked in ginger juice. With tears flowing down her face unceasingly, she cried very pitifully.

The only doubt within the trafficker's heart was also dispelled, and he inwardly rejoiced at his luck. He feigned a concerned expression and said, "There's so many people on the street. You might not be able to find your parents even if you search until nightfall. Why don't... we go get your Older Brother Li Lei and go search for your parents with you, okay?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded reluctantly. The trafficker led the way in front, and from time to time, he would turn his head to say a few words of comfort to her. Gradually, there were fewer and fewer people, and the streets were becoming more and more remote. Yu Xiaocao pretended to notice that there was something wrong, and asked with slight panic, "You... where are you taking me? This doesn't look like the way to the academy?"

The trafficker forced out a slight smile and said, "The academy is where students study, so it's naturally not located within the bustling market. We'll reach Qingfeng Academy soon. Do you see that alleyway? It's inside that alleyway."

Yu Xiaocao shook her head and wanted to go back as she said, "When we came out, my father told me that I can't follow a stranger, especially to a place with little people. Big brother, I'll wait for you here while you go get Older Brother Li Lei..."

Seeing that they weren't very far from the base camp and there wasn't anyone in sight, the trafficker revealed a ferocious expression and sneered, "Now, there's nothing you can do! Come with me obediently, or else don't say that I didn't warn you!!"

With eyes full of fear, Yu Xiaocao's complexion was pale and she was about to run away. She was blocked by the trafficker after only running a few steps. He impatiently grabbed her arm, and then covered Yu Xiaocao's mouth and nose with a dirty handkerchief.

[Be careful, there's chloroform on the handkerchief!] The little divine stone warned her in her mind. Just as the handkerchief covered her nose, Yu Xiaocao held her breath, relaxed her body, and slowly fell down. Fortunately, the trafficker was holding her arm, so she didn't fall on the ground.

"To refuse a toast only to be forced to drink as a forfeit!" The trafficker looked around, lifted his prey onto his shoulder, and swiftly entered the nearby alley. Most of the alleyways in Tanggu Town were connected. After making seven or eight turns, he soon reached the base camp where the children were locked.

After he carefully knocked a secret signal on the door, and the door quickly opened from within. Monkey was the one who opened the door. After letting the refined-looking trafficker in, he looked behind him again. Seeing that nothing was wrong, he carefully closed the door again.

"Scholar, good going! You brought another back! You got a total of four goods today, which is the most among the brothers. When you receive the payment, remember to treat us, brothers, to a drink ah!" Monkey laughed as he patted the refined-looking trafficker's shoulder enviously.

'Scholar' chuckled and said, "Rest assured! The quality of the goods is pretty good this time, so they should be able to sell for a good price. At that time, I will treat you guys to a feast at Zhenxiu Restaurant!"

"Valiant! Straightforward! You're indeed a good friend!!" Monkey walked beside him and said, "Among the goods, there's a son of an official. It's pretty risky on the streets, so many of the brothers have come back ahead of time. Only you and Boss Yin successfully caught a prey."

'Scholar' also nodded and said, "There's enough goods already, so it's better to be more cautious. Boss made the right decision!!"

Little Black, who was hiding in the thicket, almost jumped out, 'What's going on? Did Master Xiaocao also get kidnapped? What should I do?'

The chain on the door made a loud noise. The child supporting Sun Yaoyang quickly let go of his feet and squatted in a corner. Monkey opened the door and looked at the huddled children with a frown. He walked in and nudged Wang Xiaonian, who had been beaten unconscious, with his feet. He angrily shouted at them, "Who beat him? Come out!! You beat him until he looks like a pig's head. How am I supposed to sell him?"

The children huddled together, and didn't dare to look at him. Monkey was so angry that he gnashed his teeth and pulled a child out, wanting to vent his anger by hitting him.

'Scholar' put Yu Xiaocao on the ground and stopped him, "We're changing locations tonight. Don't cause unnecessary trouble..."

Monkey threw the child to the ground, and the child fell down. With a pout on his face, he looked very pitiful, as if he wanted to cry but didn't dare to cry. When Monkey and 'Scholar' was about to go out, a timid voice sounded among the children, "The one hanging up there is about to die..."

'Scholar' looked up and saw Sun Yaoyang's white and bloodless complexion. His lips were ghastly pale, and he appeared to be unconscious. Thus, he quickly said to Monkey, "Take him down! He's one of the better-quality goods. If something really happens, then we're the ones at a loss!"

Monkey took out a dagger, which was the one he confiscated from Sun Yaoyang. He cut the ropes around Sun Yaoyang's hands, put him down, and got a bowl of water. He said to the children who were huddled together, "Give him a drink of water! If he dies, I'll make you pay with your life!!" After saying that, he followed 'Scholar' and walked out of the room.

The chubby boy lightly pushed Little Shitou with his body and whispered, "Go, go take a look at Sun Yaoyang. He must feel so uncomfortable after hanging up there for so long... Hey, where are you going?"

Little Shitou crawled on all fours to the young girl, who was quietly lying on the ground, and softly called, "Sister? Second Sister?"

He moved away the strands of hair on Yu Xiaocao's face and saw her face clearly. He anxiously pushed her and called in a low voice, "Second Sister, Second Sister, why are you also abducted here? Second Sister, quickly wake up ah!!"

The chubby boy was about to feed Sun Yaoyang with some water, but when he saw this, he quickly put down the bowl of water and went over to Little Shitou. He patted Little Shitou's shoulders, and said, "Hey, your family is seriously quite unlucky to lose two children at once. Didn't you just say that your second sister will definitely save you? Well, isn't this great? She couldn't save you and ended up getting caught herself. Ay... Can we still get out?"

Seeing that the bad guys had left, Sun Yaoyang stopped pretending to be unconscious. He comforted Little Shitou, "Don't worry. Your second sister is just unconscious due to the drug. She will wake up after a while."

Right after he finished talking, Yu Xiaocao stopped pretending and sat up from the ground. She calmly looked at twenty or so children of varying ages. She said to Little Shitou reassuringly, "It's ok. I was afraid that you would be scared, so I purposely got kidnapped to accompany you!"

Little Shitou became anxious, "Second Sister, if you're also here, then who will save us? Those bad guys said that they will take us away on a ship and sell us to the south!"

Yu Xiaocao gave him a reassuring expression, looked at Sun Yaoyang, who was lying on the ground with a face full of cold sweat, and said, "There seems to be something wrong with that child. Go feed him some water!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 313 - Follow up a Victory with Hot Pursui

t

Yu Xiaocao took out a little bottle and dripped a drop of mystic-stone water into a bowl of water. She said to Sun Yaoyang, "I've studied medicine before; if you trust me, you need to drink this. It will benefit your body!"

Partly because he was also thirsty, Sun Yaoyang downed the water without hesitation.

Yu Xiaocao used the last bits of water in the bowl to clean the wound on his wrist. After that, she dripped the mystic-stone water on the wound and told Little Shitou to tear two pieces of cloth from Sun Yaoyang's underclothes to bandage the wound.

Sun Yaoyang moved his wrist and gasped in surprise, "It doesn't hurt anymore! You're so skillful!"

Little Shitou proudly replied, "Of course, do you know whose second sister she is? My second sister is so amazing she even helped treat the royal prince! She made the medicine in the bottle herself and she even knows how to craft pesticide that can kill locusts!"

Sun Yaoyang looked at Yu Xiaocao in surprise, "So the pesticide for locusts were made by your family! During fall, we also bought some and managed to cultivate a batch of fall vegetables. Otherwise, we wouldn't have any vegetables to eat this winter!"

Yu Xiaocao told her younger brother to support the fellow so he could sit with his back to the wall, and then whispered, "Now is not the time to speak of such things. Commander Sun has already come up with a rescue plan, so all we need to do is to wait for the bad guys to come back to strike!"

Sun Yaoyang's face brightened with glee, and he murmured, "I got it, you must have intentionally gotten yourself caught to become an inside agent, right? You're amazing! But aren't you afraid? I was quite afraid when I initially got here. However, my father said, the more scared I am, the more I shouldn't express it, and the more I should overcome my fears to calm down, only then will I be able to think of a countermeasure! Too bad my dagger was taken away by the bad guys, or else I would've escaped a long time ago."

"Even if you pried the window open, you wouldn't necessarily be able to escape either!" Little Shitou slowly analyzed for him, "Firstly, you're unfamiliar with your surroundings. Even if you got out, you wouldn't know where to run, and it's easy to run into a dead end. Secondly, those child traffickers will definitely have their eyes and ears nearby—you might be discovered the moment you stepped out of here!"

Hearing his words, Sun Yaoyang lowered his head and said, "Now that I've heard this, I suddenly feel like I'm quite stupid. I've exposed myself too early and caused my dagger to be confiscated. Ay...I've gratuitously suffered for an entire afternoon!"

The chubby boy squeezed over while they were talking and complained, "When are the authorities coming to rescue us? I'm about to die of hunger. Could it be that those bad people want us to faint from hunger so that they would even be able to save on chloroform?"

The three of them exchanged glances, and then Yu Xiaocao sighed, "The local authorities probably won't come, I hadn't been able to report to them before I got caught."

With a look of despair, the chubby boy exclaimed, "What? Doesn't this mean that no one is coming to rescue us? We'd be sold into prostitution to sell our butts, wahhh...I don't want to! Father, Mother——"

The others, who strained their ears to listen in, also anguished when they heard the chubby boy's cries. Yu Xiaocao thought: 'Now this is better!' Fortunately, the two people before didn't notice, or else all the children here would've been exposed earlier. Why would a group of children, who got kidnapped, not panic or get upset, but were filled with hope instead? If she didn't lie and tell them that there was no rescue, the child traffickers would definitely be able to detect the incongruity when they returned!

It wasn't known which child started it, but slowly, the cries merged together. The chubby boy cried for a while before turning to Yu Xiaocao, "Big sister, did you bring anything to eat? My father said, even in death we must be a satisfied ghost! Oh, right, I'm called Li Xiaohu. My father runs an armed escort organization in the capital. Nanping Village is our hometown—we came back to worship our ancestors."

So this little boy's father was a martial artist, no wonder he talked with the righteousness of a hero. Yu Xiaocao took out a small bag of jerky and shared among them. The situation could change at any moment--she could at least ensure that they would have the energy to react if they ate.

One by one, the child traffickers returned as the sky turned dark. Boss Yin did a headcount and, after realizing two of his subordinates were missing, he turned his questioning gaze towards the rest of his brothers. Old Fifth's face crumpled, "Wild Boar and Leopard were unlucky. They were discovered just as they took action, and the patrolling bailiff was just nearby, so they got caught red-handed!"

Boss Yin paused in his movements and his face darkened, turning to address his brothers, "We shouldn't stay here for long, let's relocate immediately!"

Old Fifth worriedly replied, "But it has only just turned dark, not to mention we're also bringing children along with us, so we're more likely to attract other people's attention with so many people! The bailiffs on the street haven't even left yet!"

Boss Yin said to 'Scholar', "Go and check if the horse carriage is here. Knock the children out and place them in chests; we'll act as bodyguards escorting cargo. We'll be safe once we're out of the town gates. There's definitely risks, but if we keep waiting, I'm afraid sooner or later Wild Boar will give in to the yamen's torture and sell us out..."

Since they already made the decision to relocate, Monkey brought a few of the brothers to chase the group of children out of the room. They shouted and shoved at them as though they were herding goats. There were a total of 28 children, consisting of both boys and girls.

Seeing that they would be immediately brought away, the unpredictable future and the possibility that they would never be able to see their parents again made the children wail. Monkey was afraid that their wails would alert the neighboring residents, so he strangled one of the children who cried the loudest, menacingly frightening them, "Shut up! I will strangle anyone who cries!"

The child in his hands had already been strangled until his face turned blue and his eyes rolled back. The other children were so afraid that they covered their own mouths, shedding silent tears. Monkey

grinned with satisfaction and dropped the child. He couldn't really strangle him to death—a child could sell from ten to a few dozen taels!

Boss Yin glanced at him and said, “At midnight, a buyer will be waiting nearby the port. Our mission is to bring the 'goods' to the port, so be on high alert. Whether we can get through this year prosperously will depend on this deal!”

Yu Xiaocao had already gotten a rough understanding of the number of child traffickers from the children, so she carefully hid among the children and did a headcount. Subconsciously, she furrowed her brows when she noticed that 'Scholar', who had caught her, was missing. They had to arrest all of these child traffickers in one attempt, or else it would bring danger to her family!

However, Boss Yin ran his gaze over his subordinates and ordered, “What are you waiting for? Get to work!”

Monkey and a few other child traffickers used the handkerchiefs in their hands to cover the mouths and noses of a few children nearby, causing them to fall to the ground unconscious.

Yu Xiaocao grew increasingly distressed as the number of unconscious children continued to increase although 'Scholar' still had yet to return. What to do? What to do?? If she were to send the signal now, she was afraid that 'Scholar' might be able to escape from arrest. But if she didn't send the signal now, she would be knocked out very quickly!

Fortunately, she and Little Shitou were at the far back of the group of children. The children at the front put up a struggle and disturbed Monkey in his work, which was able to buy her some time. But even then, the number of unconscious children kept increasing, and there were fewer and fewer children who were standing...

When there were only six children left, 'Scholar' returned from the outside and said to Boss Yin, “We're set! Everything is prepared, we can start loading the 'cargo'!”

The other child traffickers bent down to pick up the unconscious children and prepared to put them into chests. At this moment, the dirty handkerchief in Monkey's hand moved towards Yu Xiaocao...

Yu Xiaocao whispered to the children by her side, “At the count of three, squat down. One...”

“Two...”

“Three!”

At the instance she counted to the number 'three', Yu Xiaocao triggered the signal in her hands. It was like a firework that shot up into the sky, emitting a sharp whistling noise. Yu Xiaocao, along with Little Shitou, Sun Yaoyang and Little Fatty, who were by her side, immediately squatted down and hugged their heads.

“Crap!” Boss Yin felt that something was wrong and immediately threw aside the child in his hands. He drew out the blade at his waist and blocked a flying arrow that flew in his direction.

The others weren't as lucky as him. The first ones to go were Monkey and the four other traffickers, who were walking towards Yu Xiaocao the other children. Arrows penetrated their chests and warm blood splattered on Yu Xiaocao and the children's faces. They were still children, after all, so they naturally trembled in fright and their faces paled when they witnessed the death of another person first-hand, especially upon seeing Monkey's bulging eyes. The chubby boy hugged Little Shitou and hid his face in the embrace like a frightened quail.

The arrows continued to storm, and more and more child traffickers were felled. Boss Yin pulled one of the traffickers from his side to block an arrow headed his way. The arrow shot through his chest, and even until his last breath, he still stared disbelievingly at Boss Yin.

The cunning and ruthless Boss Yin, along with Old Fifth and 'Scholar', retreated into the house. Out of 18 brothers, only the three of them were left. Old Fifth ran a hand over his face, wiping his face with blood. “Boss, what do we do?” He shouted in despair.

“Block the door! 'Scholar', see if the alley behind the house is safe!” Boss Yin panted, and it was clear that he was filled with fear.

'Scholar' opened the window and carefully peered outside. His face paled visibly as he said, “Boss, there's an ambush at the back too! It's the people from the yamen!”

Boss Yin shut his eyes, and then opened them fiercely, "Luckily, I've prepared an escape route! Follow me!"

At the same time, some of the criminals in the courtyard died from the arrow storm, while the rest surrendered. Commander Sun glanced at his son, then commanded his subordinates to break open the doors to the courtyard.

Old Fifth took out a bow from the house, held it in his hand, and said to Boss Yin with fierce determination, "Boss, you go! I will hold them down! Damn it! Even if I die, I will drag some of them down with me!"

Boss Yin looked at him solemnly, and then said, "Old Fifth, I will avenge you!"

He brought 'Scholar' into the inner room and removed the mat on the kang bed along with a layer of wooden planks, revealing a dark tunnel underneath. Boss Yin entered the tunnel first, and 'Scholar' followed suit.

Fields of Gold Chapter 314

Old Fifth blocked the door from behind and shot arrows outside when he got the chance. Even the soldiers outside were unable to do anything about it within a short period of time. Commander Sun instructed part of his men to attract the criminals' attention at the front while he led six of his loyal subordinates to the side and entered through a broken window. One of his subordinates fought Old Fifth while another unlocked the door, allowing the soldiers to flood into the house. The stubborn Old Fifth was killed on the spot!

Commander Sun checked the house and realized that the other two people had gone. It wasn't known when, but Yu Xiaocao squeezed her way into the house and pointed towards the inner room, "There must be an underground tunnel inside!" She immediately rushed in.

"Be careful!" Commander Sun was so shocked that he was covered in cold sweat. If there was an ambush set up inside, this little girl would die! He rushed after her into the inner room, but there was no one in there, only Yu Xiaocao looking for something at a corner.

[Idiot! The kang bed!] The little divine stone reminded. Little White also found his way inside and jumped onto the kang bed, using his little paws to claw at it.

Yu Xiaocao took the opportunity to shout, "There's a problem with the kang bed!"

Commander Sun immediately removed the mat and the planks on top of the kang bed to reveal a dark tunnel. Without hesitation, Little White rushed into it, and Yu Xiaocao wanted to follow, but she was held back by Commander Sun who had a firm grip on her arm.

"Little girl, where did you get your guts? What would you do if there was an ambush set up by the criminals?" Commander Sun glared at her, then took the lead by jumping into the tunnel first. Yu Xiaocao followed closely behind him into the dark tunnel.

A few steps in, Yu Xiaocao hit her nose on the jade belt Commander Sun wore around his waist, and the pain made her tear up. Commander Sun lit a flare, then turned around to look at her, sighing, "Be careful, and follow behind me closely!"

The two of them moved forward deeper into the tunnel with only the dim light guiding their way. Footsteps echoed from behind them, indicating that Commander Sun's subordinates had also followed them into the tunnel.

The end of the tunnel was in the next alley. Boss Yin and "Scholar" were in a hurry, so they didn't even fill back the bricks that were supposed to be covering the ground. The alley connected everywhere, and the two child traffickers were already long gone, so which direction should they pursue? Commander Sun felt so frustrated.

"Awoo~" a young howl attracted Yu Xiaocao's attention. "Follow me!" she told Commander Sun, then ran towards the source of the howl. Resignedly, Commander Sun trailed after her.

It wasn't long before Yu Xiaocao saw Little White's figure. He turned his head to look at his little master before turning to run in another direction. Yu Xiaocao, Commander Sun and all of his subordinates followed from behind.

In their escape, those two child traffickers had to constantly be on alert to avoid running into the the bailiffs patrolling on the streets, while also being wary of the soldiers on their tail. They took twists and turns in the alleys, hoping to shake off their pursuers, but they could have never expected that the pursuing soldiers would have the help of a little wolf that was as good as a police dog. So, no matter how they turned, they still could not escape from the fate of being chased down.

Night fell quietly. It was a moonless night as Tanggu Town slowly became enveloped in darkness. Two dark figures cautiously climbed out of Tanggu Town through a gap in the town wall.

'Scholar' peered behind him, whispering, "Big brother, we took so many turns and ran so many circles in town, so we should've lost them, right?"

Furrowing his brows, Boss Yin said, "Better to be careful! Let's go to the port!"

'Scholar' sighed, "We've already lost the 'goods', how are we going to explain ourselves to the buyer? Damn it! Who could've thought that there was a commander's son among them? This is just too unlucky!"

Boss Yin said, "There is hope as long as we're alive. We'll follow the merchant's ship to the south and seclude there for some time while we plan our next course of action."

"You can't run anymore! Surrender yourself!" Commander Sun and his subordinates surrounded the two people in a circle, and told his vice commander, "Bring a group of soldiers with you to the docks and arrest everyone involved!"

Yu Xiaocao, seeing that the two child traffickers had already been tightly surrounded, moved into the side of the wall with Little White while attentively watching the scene.

Although the two child traffickers put up a good fight, they were still no match for the soldiers, and were quickly apprehended. Just as Yu Xiaocao breathed a sigh of relief, she felt a stranger's presence behind her. Inwardly, she shouted, 'shoot!', but she wasn't able to dodge away before a large hand picked her up from the ground and held a cold knife at her throat.

"Stop! Let go of my boss, or else I'll have her life!" The croaky voice from behind Yu Xiaocao seemed to strain in the darkness.

Damn it! How was there a person who was left out? It must be one of the people who were waiting out of town. Sigh, if she had known earlier, she would not have followed them here, now she had become a burden for them. Yu Xiaocao was filled with regret.

Commander Sun furrowed his brows, his fierce gaze seemingly piercing in the darkness, "Put the child down, and I'll let you live, or else..."

"Free my boss and 'Scholar', or else I'll bring someone down with me even in death!" The criminal holding Yu Xiaocao decided to burn his bridges—if he died, the child would die together with him!

Yu Xiaocao really wanted to bravely say 'Don't worry about me!' but she wasn't filming a movie. The knife on her throat had a high probability of cutting a major artery, and with the medical level of this time, she'd definitely be dead!

Commander Sun tried to divert the criminal's attention in order to find an opportunity to rescue the hostage, "You're too ambitious! What made you think one hostage could be exchanged for three lives? There is so much to lose in this deal. Tell you what, if you let the hostage go, I'll let one of you roam free!"

The man behind Yu Xiaocao pondered for a few moments, then said, "Boss saved my life; if there was no Boss, I would not be here today! Let my boss go!"

"Sanzi!" Touched, Boss Yin looked at the blurry figure standing in the darkness, sniffing.

Commander Sun, however, began to negotiate, "Let your Boss go? Sure! But how would I know you will keep to your word once I let him go? Let go of the little girl first, she's innocent!"

The criminal holding Yu Xiaocao laughed coldly, "Innocent? I doubt it. She must be your accomplice—why else would a little girl appear here in the middle of the night? Stop spouting nonsense and quickly free my boss!"

Commander Sun took two steps forward and opened his mouth to say something, but the criminal turned the knife towards him and shouted, "Stop! Or do you not care about her life?"

Just as he finished speaking, a white figure rushed over and ruthlessly bit the wrist that was holding the knife. The criminal screamed as he let go of the knife, and Yu Xiaocao took the opportunity to elbow him

in the weak spot in between his legs. The criminal let out a scream that was even more piercing than the first.

Commander Sun sped forward and he couldn't help but shed a tear of sympathy for the criminal once he saw clearly what had occurred. The little girl's small, white dog was still biting on to his wrist while his other hand covered his important part. The criminal was in so much pain he curled his body like a prawn and couldn't even stand steadily, so he was easily taken into custody by Commander Sun.

"Little White, come over here!" Seeing that the criminal had already been apprehended, Yu Xiaocao backed away to the side and called over Little White that was still fervently holding on to the criminal. The criminal's wrist was so badly injured his hand would definitely be incapacitated.

"Good job, Little White!" Yu Xiaocao took out a piece of jerky from her pouch and offered it to Little White as a reward. Little White sniffed at it with his nose, then turned his head away in disdain, as though saying, "It's wolf meat—so stinky! I won't eat it!"

Yu Xiaocao remembered that he was very particular, just like his dad who disdained the meat of their own kind. They had never refused the wild boar and hare meat that was slaughtered at home. She was rearing such a group of gluttons that the meat at home was barely enough. Fortunately Big Gray would occasionally go hunting in the mountain and he definitely brought back some game every time, so the store of meat at home was still sustainable.

Commander Sun gave Little White a thumbs up, "Little miss, where did you get this small, white dog? It's quite wonderful! With a little bit of training, it could be put to great use! Offer me a price, I'll buy the dog off you!"

"I won't sell it to you no matter how much you offer!" Yu Xiaocao ran her hand through Little White's soft fur, trying to comfort the raging pup that was growling at Commander Sun.

Commander Sun could tell that they were close, but couldn't help himself from teasing them, "I'll give you 100 taels, what about it? 100 taels is more than enough for you to buy a few dozen dogs—enough for you to buy even a Pekingese that comes from the West!"

Yu Xiaocao and Little White headed towards the town gate, saying, "You're better off keeping your money to buy a Pekingese for your precious son to play with! Our Little White and Little Black are from the bloodline of wolves—I won't sell them no matter the price!"

Of course, Commander Sun did not intend to own Little White by all means. He brought his subordinates to open the town gate and led the detained criminals to the county yamen. Inside, Yu Hai, Liu Hu and a few other children were anxiously awaiting their return.

All of a sudden, Little Black ran out of the county yamen and rushed madly into the dark night. Little Shitou happily exclaimed, "It must be Second Sister coming back!" All the people in the county yamen were suddenly very spirited.

County Magistrate Zhao, who had been patrolling with his bailiffs for the entire day, was worried when he had initially heard that the second miss of the Yu Family had followed the soldiers out. There was no need to even mention the fact that she caught the eye of Royal Prince Yang—it was already enough on his plate if she had gotten hurt simply just by the fact that she was General Zhaoyong's goddaughter.

Sigh! Indeed it was like father, like daughter. If the little missies of other families met with this incident, they'd definitely be so scared they hid away. Where would you find one that was like her—someone who would rush to the front? Knives and swords had no eyes, if she was hurt, what would he do?

All the people of the yamen breathed a sigh of relief when they saw the small figure trail behind Commander Sun. Yu Hai quickly walked over and hugged his daughter, examining her from head to toe, "Cao'er, are you hurt? Let me see..."

Little Shitou sharply noticed that there were fine, red marks on Xiaocao's neck, and he screamed, "Second Sister, you're hurt?"

His scream made a lot of people worry. County Magistrate Zhao also came down, asking concernedly, "Where were you hurt? Hurry, let Doctor Sun inspect!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 315

Because some of the children were injured and others had fallen ill from being frightened, the authorities invited Doctor Sun from Tongren Medicine Hall over. His youngest grandson also came along to help him. Yu Xiaocao already knew Doctor Sun's youngest grandson. He was the same child who had

stopped Little Black halfway and tried to take the puppy as his own. After recognizing his wrongs, he had sincerely apologized to her.

Doctor Sun had already diagnosed and treated the other children. The one who was most heavily injured was the child who had tried to escape and ended up getting beaten up by the slavers. The child had two broken ribs but luckily none of his internal organs were harmed. Commander Sun's son, Sun Yaoyang, only had some superficial wounds. Because Little Shitou and some other loyal kids were there, his injuries were not very serious.

When he heard that Yu Xiaocao had gotten injured, Doctor Sun hurriedly rushed over with his box full of medicines. All she had was a faint mark on her neck. Doctor Sun didn't know whether he should laugh or cry. Was this also considered a wound? It was just some minor scratches. However, he still very cautiously checked her pulse. When nothing came up, he said, "Nothing's wrong. As long as you put some wound balm on the wound on your neck, you'll be fine! Do you still have any wound balm that you've made left? Just use that one, it's effect is quite good!"

The rest of the case progressed very smoothly. This group of evil and vicious criminals had either been killed in action or caught by the authorities. Even the slave buyer at the docks had also been caught red-handed and brought in. Before the end of the year, the shocking case of human trafficking in the Jin Prefecture quickly came to an end.

The common people in Tanggu Town, who were all hunkered down for the winter, quickly found out through word of mouth what had happened. Everyone, especially the families who had gotten their stolen children back, were deeply grateful to the county magistrate and the military official, so they erected long-life plaques to them in their homes. None of them knew that a little girl, who had just reached the age of ten, had played the most crucial role in all of this.

Yu Xiaocao, who had become a 'female hero', refused the county magistrate's offer of a reward. In her eyes, she only worked hard in order to save her beloved little brother. The people who were truly taking risks were the soldiers under the military official who had chased after the criminals. She also didn't want to cause any future problems for her family. In her mind, she wasn't as brave and selfless as they said, so she didn't want to become famous for this. Thus, she had the county magistrate conceal her participation in all of this.

However, Fang Zizhen, who was in the distant capital, had somehow learned about this through channels she didn't know about. He braved the winds and snow to rush over from the capital. By the time he got to the Yu Family's residence, he had almost become a snowman.

As soon as he entered, he inspected his adopted daughter from head to toe. Only after he saw no injuries did he let out a sigh of relief. Afterwards, he harshly scolded Yu Xiaocao, but every single word he said belied how much he worried about her.

Yu Xiaocao poured a cup of ginger-sugar water for her godfather and watched as he drank it. She only spoke after he finished, "Godfather, it's almost time to celebrate the New Years. How come you're not spending the holiday with Godmother and little brother in the capital and instead came over to Dongshan Village? Is there something going on at the harbor?"

"All of the workers at the harbor are off for the New Years celebrations, so how could there be anything going on? When your godmother heard about your heroic deed, she was very worried about you. If it wasn't for me stopping her, she would have come along too! You ah, you! How should I, your godfather, scold you? When other people encounter danger, they all run away to hide, but you, on the other hand, run straight to it!! After such a big event, you also didn't send any news to the capital. If it were not for Commander Sun bringing a report to the capital that mentioned your participation, I, your godfather, would still be in the dark!" The more Fang Zizhen talked, the more angry he became. His eyes, which were as round as gongs, were fixed on his goddaughter with a look that was half full of frustration and half full of love. How could this child be so gutsy ah?

Yu Xiaocao let out a couple of dry laughs, "Godfather, aren't I perfectly alright ah? It's time for the New Years, what's the point of mentioning this and making everyone anxious? You weren't aware of the complex situation at the time. If we let the boss of the criminals escape, I was afraid that he would take revenge on us later. Furthermore, Little White could smell where the criminals went. If I didn't follow him, how could Commander Sun catch all of these bad guys so smoothly?"

Fang Zizhen was going to continue when Yu Hai interjected out of pity for his daughter, who was being scolded to the high heavens, "Alright, alright, things have already passed, what's the point of talking about it now? You won't be able to make it back to the capital before the New Years, so just celebrate with us!"

Yu Xiaocao also took advantage of this change of subject, "Godfather, I haven't seen you in such a long time, yet the first thing you do is scold me. Is it because you have Little Brother that you don't care about me, your adopted daughter, anymore?"

Fang Zizhen hurriedly placated his daughter's 'overly sensitive heart' and softly said, "Originally, your godmother and I were planning on coming back after celebrating your little brother's hundred day

banquet. But who would have thought that Xiaolin would get a chronic cough. All of the doctors in the capital saw him yet he still didn't get better. Even the imperial physicians couldn't do anything for him. In the end, it was the Sichuan fritillary bulb with loquat syrup that you concocted that made him better. You didn't know any of this, but prior to that syrup you made, the doctors gave him medicine that was so bitter ah. Xiaolin screamed every time he had to take medicine and your godmother wept with him. Your medicine is still the best as it's sweet so Xiaolin likes taking it..."

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes in her heart as she thought, 'How could it not be sweet? I added a lot of honey and brown sugar to it. I reckon that Little Linlin had gotten whooping cough. Sichuan fritillary bulb, loquat, and pears all have the ability to suppress coughing. The most important ingredient in the syrup is still the mystic-stone water. Otherwise, how could a medicine that was prescribed without looking at the patient work so well?'

Fang Zizhen continued enthusiastically, "Xiaolin didn't even finish the two bottles of cough suppressant syrup before his illness got better. Afterwards, the eldest prince in the palace had gotten a cold and had a bad cough. He also refused to take medication, so the emperor took the rest of the syrup. It's said that after just a few days of using your syrup, the eldest prince stopped coughing. All of the imperial physicians analyzed your syrup and came up with a recipe. However, when they tried to reproduce it, their syrups were a lot more inferior to yours."

A wisp of anxiety rose up within Yu Xiaocao's heart. She really didn't want to attract the emperor's attention ah! She wasn't sure when similar cough suppressant syrups appeared in history but if the emperor really ended up pursuing this, she would just say that she came up with the recipe herself.

Fang Zizhen proceeded with his story, "After Little Linlin got better, it was already the start of winter. Your godmother was afraid that because he was so young, he might get sick again on the road, so she decided to come back to Tanggu Town in the spring. In between, your godmother wrote a letter to you to have you come over to the capital to celebrate the New Years with us but you ended up declining. Xiaocao ah, when are you going to the capital with me? Your godmother and I all want to introduce you to our close friends and family ah!"

"That uh...let's wait until Little Linlin celebrates his first birthday? At that time, I'll go to the capital and participate in his birthday grab [1]." Yu Xiaocao was still a bit wary of the rich and powerful families in the capital. Thus, she always had some hesitation in going to the capital.

Fang Zizhen thought for a bit and calculated that was less than half a year away, so he nodded in agreement, "Then we'll agree on that. Don't try to find another excuse or reason to not go then."

Yu Xiaocao let out a dry chuckle, "How could I...Godfather, you must be hungry! Let me go into the kitchen and make some of your favorite: braised pork knuckle."

Fang Zizhen hadn't been able to eat the food made by his daughter for half a year. He smacked his lips and said, "Okay. I heard that your family is raising a few wild boars. Must be hard in the middle of a disaster year."

Yu Xiaocao smiled, "My family didn't really go through that much. We firmly believed in the words of that white bearded immortal, so we harvested everything in the fields well in advance. We had six mu of sweet potatoes that were half grown then and also had some sweet potato seedlings. In addition, we had corn stalks and some wheat husks and such...ah, we also had locust powder that we made from dried locusts in storage. Using that to feed hogs and chickens makes them grow quite quickly!"

For the evening meal, Yu Xiaocao not only made braised pork knuckle but also stir fried some grasshopper sauce for Fang Zizhen to try. Fang Zizhen really liked the savory and spicy grasshopper sauce. In fact, he devoured five to six flatbreads covered with the grasshopper sauce before he finally took a break to talk, "Daughter ah! How come you didn't send a few jars of such delicious sauce to the capital?"

Yu Xiaocao replied in surprise, "I asked the young royal prince to give you two jars to try. Did you not get any? I thought that you and godmother didn't like it because it was made with locusts, so I didn't bring it up later."

"What? You asked Royal Prince Yang to bring grasshopper sauce to us? How come I didn't hear your godmother mention it ah? Don't tell me your godmother didn't like it and sent it as a reward to the servants? That can't be right ah, she always tells me right away when you give stuff to us!" Fang Zizhen was a bit puzzled now.

Yu Xiaocao silently cursed the young royal prince in her heart and pouted, "Godfather, if you both didn't get any, then the young royal prince must have taken it for himself! That guy is really too much! I specifically told him that two jars were for you and the remaining two jars were for him!!!"

The culprit, who had taken the grasshopper sauce, that the two were talking about, was currently far away in the capital. Zhu Junyang was currently happily eating grasshopper sauce while his lady mother and eldest brother watched him with alarm. Suddenly, his nose itched and he let out an enormous

sneeze. He inwardly thought, 'I'm sure that lass Yu Xiaocao is talking about me. Did she find out that I took the other two jars of grasshopper sauce? Hmph, what does it matter if she knows? It's only two jars of grasshopper sauce. That lass has so many frozen locusts in the cellar, why does she care about two jars of grasshopper sauce? Such a miser!!'

Princess Consort Jing endured the feeling of her stomach roiling as she worriedly said, "Yang'er, is this grasshopper sauce really made with locusts? Will there be any problems with eating it?"

Zhu Junyang spread a thick layer of the savory and spicy grasshopper sauce on a white and soft steamed roll. He took a giant bite and said, "Lady Mother, don't worry. I've eaten it countless times while I was in Dongshan Village. How could there be problems? This grasshopper sauce is very tasty. Lady Mother, Eldest Brother, are you two sure you don't want to try any?"

Princess Consort Jing's mind was currently filled with the images of the dreadful locusts. Insects scared her the most, so she hurriedly shook her head, "How could I have the nerve to fight for it when I can see that you love it so much? You can keep eating..."

Zhu Junyang hesitated for a bit before he asked Prince Jing, who had a solemn look on his face, "Lord Father, do you want to try any?"

Prince Jing was silently thinking, 'You little brat, you've finally thought of me. I've been sitting here all by myself and I'm not tiny. Did you pretend that I wasn't here earlier?'

Prince Jing had a very serious demeanor. Even at home he continued to be dignified and imposing. Normally, all of his sons revered him but weren't very intimate with him, especially his youngest son. Ever since his youngest son turned five to six, his personality changed a lot and he became irritable and angry. His youngest son even injured people frequently. Prince Jing had a headache on his hands and punished him severely a few times. Thus, his youngest son started to hate him. Usually, his youngest son would avoid him whenever they crossed paths. If Zhu Junyang couldn't avoid Prince Jing, then he would just ignore him. Thus, Zhu Junyang normally only talked to his lady mother and eldest brother at the dining table and ignored Prince Jing's existence. The sun must have risen from the west today since Zhu Junyang voluntarily spoke to his father.

Fields of Gold Chapter 316

Imperial Prince Jing felt very touched. His youngest son had finally started speaking to him!! Eating locusts was not a big deal. In fact, even if his son was feeding him poison it would taste like the sweetest candy in the world to him. After his youngest son completed his seafaring journey, he had improved his character a lot and was not as temperamental as before. His son hadn't caused any trouble despite

being back for more than half a year and, instead, had caught the eye of the emperor. Imperial Prince Jing basked in the glory of his son every time he thought of the compliments that were traversing the capital.

Although he was very happy inwardly, Imperial Prince Jing still had his usual solemn and serious manner. He picked up his chopsticks and scooped up a generous amount of grasshopper sauce. He copied his son's manner and spread it on top of a steamed bun. Right before he was about to take a large bite, Princess Consort Jing stopped him, "Lord Husband, that...that is made from insects, are you sure you want to eat it?"

"Not a problem! Imperial Father once said that the people living in the mountainous southwest area of the country all use insects as food for their honored guests. In fact, some insects are quite nutritious and are high in something like...protein? Our son has eaten this with no problem, so as his father, what could happen?" Despite his wife trying to stop him, Imperial Prince Jing took a giant bite and then carefully chewed as he tasted it. The flavor was really quite good and reminded him of the savoriness of small shrimp.

Zhu Junyang ate as he talked, "This grasshopper sauce has been fermented so most people won't be allergic to it. Last time, the Head Steward Su, who is the personal steward of the emperor, ate some grasshopper sauce that hadn't been fermented. He ended up having swelling all throughout his body and it was very itchy. Although grasshopper sauce is very delicious, not everyone is able to enjoy it."

Princess Consort Jing felt her appetite completely disappear as she continued to think about her husband and son eating food that was made of disgusting insects. The locust plague from the coastal areas had also spread into the capital's area. All of the flowers in her garden had been eaten by the locusts. Luckily, the famous and valuable plants she had obtained from Tanggu Town had all been promptly moved into the glass greenhouse. Otherwise, they would have also been destroyed by the locusts.

When she thought about the camellia she brought back from Tanggu Town, Princess Consort Jing immediately felt pleased and proud. There were a lot of people who loved camellias in the capital. Out of those people, Princess Consort Jing and the wife of the imperial tutor, Lady Feng, were the ones who were the most obsessed. At first, these two ladies, who had the same likes, had a very close relationship and often spent time with each other exchanging techniques about raising flowers. Furthermore, they would set up camellia appreciation parties. These parties couldn't be attended by just anybody. Only people with the appropriate rank and right reputation could be invited by Princess Consort Jing and Lady Feng.

All of the noble young ladies and matrons in the capital clamored after invitations for the camellia appreciation parties. Whoever received an invitation could not only raise their heads among the other ladies in the future, but even their clans also felt like they had gained prestige.

Everyone with some status in the capital knew about the camellia parties. However, good things don't last forever. The two organizers of the events ended up having a falling out! Everyone in the capital knew that Imperial Prince Jing doted upon his wife, so he had people seek out famous and valuable camellias for her. This made Lady Feng happy and envious at the same time. She was happy because it meant that there were new camellias every year at the camellia appreciation party and envious because all of these camellias weren't hers to own. She could only admire them from afar.

Lady Feng was someone who truly loved flora. She not only loved flowers but was also an expert at raising them. She even once personally cultivated a new breed of camellias. Princess Consort Jing envied her talents. Thus, Princess Consort Jing also imitated her friend and began to personally take care of her beloved camellias. However, her later nickname of the 'slayer of flora' wasn't given to her without reason. Many of her precious camellias had been sent to their untimely deaths by her. Lady Feng tried to persuade her many times but Princess Consort Jing was now very interested in taking care of her own flowers, so she refused to listen to her friend. After Princess Consort Jing ended up killing a high quality eighteen scholar camellia, Lady Feng felt so heartbroken about it that she couldn't sleep well for several days and ended up having a fight with her. The two people were no longer friends anymore and the camellia parties no longer happened...

"Lady Mother, what are you thinking about?" The heir of Prince Jing was currently being bullied by his father to try the grasshopper sauce. He looked towards his mother to ask for help but discovered that she was staring blankly into space.

When Princess Consort Jing came back from her thoughts, she sighed and said, "I don't know whether the valuable plants and flowers in that mountain ravine that Yu Xiaocao talked about had been destroyed by the locusts. Last time, Xiaocao had brought along Lady Fang's maidservant with her and they said that they had seen many valuable plants there just a few steps in. There were even some aged herbal medications. It's truly a good place ah! If I wasn't afraid that there would be vicious beasts in the area, I would also go there for a look!"

Zhu Junyang thought of that large gray wolf that had been given the name of 'Big Gray' and nodded, "I have also heard of this place. Apparently there's a very large and fierce wolf that lives in the ravine. However, that wolf is quite intelligent and had once helped the Yu Family out!"

When he saw that his mother was very curious about this topic, Zhu Junyang very briefly summarized what had happened when they fought against the starving wolf pack. Princess Consort Jing exclaimed in admiration, "Xiaocao had previously helped that wolf, so the wolf ended up saving her father. I never would have expected an animal could also be affectionate and true. But, wouldn't raising a wolf at home cause problems for the Yu Family?"

Zhu Junyang replied, "I told all of the villagers that the wolf was a pet I had raised from its infancy to adulthood and that it was inconvenient to bring back to the capital, so the Yu Family was taking care of it for me. That wolf can understand human language and as long as it doesn't sense any malice, it wouldn't attack people. Oh right, are we going into the palace this year to have the New Year's Eve family dinner?"

"The emperor has already proclaimed that it is bitterly cold this year so there's no point in making people suffer. So we'll just eat the New Year's Eve family dinner at home this year." Imperial Prince Jing was enjoying the taste of the grasshopper sauce. He took out another scoop and spread it on another steamed bun.

Over half of the jar of grasshopper sauce had already been eaten, so Zhu Junyang somewhat unhappily packed it up. When Prince Jing saw his son's actions, he laughingly scolded his son, "Stinky brat, you're the one who roused this man's appetite, yet you're trying to hoard the rest of the grasshopper sauce for yourself? No manners! Quickly, give your father a jar to show your filial respects..."

Zhu Junyang had only brought back four jars of grasshopper sauce this time and two of them were the jars he had stolen from General Fang. His royal father had a rascally expression on his face that said, 'If you don't give your father grasshopper sauce, then you're unfilial.' Zhu Junyang tolerated the pain within his heart and begrudgingly gave the remaining half jar of sauce to his father with a stone-faced expression on his face.

Prince Jing let out a laugh in exasperation, "What sort of expression is that? It's just some food yet you act like I'm cutting pieces of flesh off of you! If you like it, then just buy the recipe off of the person and have our chefs here make some for you ah!"

"How can they make it without the ingredients?" Zhu Junyang remembered that the Yu Family still had a few sacks of locusts in their ice-cellar and decided that when spring started, he was going back to Dongshan Village so he could properly 'inspect the sowing and maintenance of the corn fields'.

Zhu Junyang had already told County Magistrate Zhao to be on the lookout for some good land to buy in Tanggu Town. Tanggu Town had been hard-hit by the locust plague this year and not every family was as lucky as the Yu Family to survive without any losses. Many villages around the area had fields that didn't even have a single grain left to be harvested. Thus, before the grain for the disaster relief came by, the vast majority of commoners had to buy highly priced grain to survive. There were very few people who would be able to afford the land tax after the winter and start of spring. At that time, there would be many people selling fields, land, and children.

Since he wanted to use Tanggu Town as the base for cultivating improved corn, then he needed vast amounts of farmland. The Yu Family's a hundred and seventy or so mu was not even enough to start. Thus, Zhu Junyang had the County Magistrate Zhao start buying fields and land since autumn. The best pieces of land were the ones that all connected in one piece. However, even plots of land that weren't interconnected were not a big deal. When the time came, all he needed to do was to swap with other people. Since the imperial court was using this land, they would also compensate the owners with some extra money. Those who were prudent would definitely agree to the trade.

While Zhu Junyang was silently making his plans for next year, the Yu Family was already starting to happily start the New Year's preparations.

The final little wild boar that had been raised in the rear courtyard was just slaughtered a few days ago. They were planning on sending ten catties of wild boar meat, twenty catties of wheat flour, and a few bundles of bok choy to Xiaocao's maternal grandparents from Xishan Village and Old Yu's older brothers' families.

Most families had more difficult circumstances now. Although grain prices had stabilized and gone down, the majority of villagers had slaughtered all of their animals at home because they ate precious grain during the disaster year. Furthermore, pork prices had shot up prior to the New Years and most of the pork had all been frantically bought out by those rich families in town well in advance. Thus, most commoners couldn't buy any meat now.

Naturally, commoners were unable to afford to buy pork that was now a few hundred copper coins a catty. Thus, many families were using dried vegetables as the fillings for the dumplings needed for New Year's Eve family dinner just so they could have them. In the past, those who were unable to afford meat still had cabbages and radishes to eat. This year, being able to have dried vegetables to eat was already considered quite good!

The gifts that the Yu Family sent out were like adding charcoal to the families in cold weather. Ironically, when they were sending them out, they managed to do it on a day after a big snowfall came. The snow

came up to a person's calf, so most carts had difficulty going through it. Yu Xiaocao excitedly took up the task of sending the family's New Year's gifts. Ever since they had finished constructing the snow sled, she didn't really have a chance to use it other than running a few loops through the nearby forest. Now her sled that was pulled by a wolf could finally be put to good use.

Ever since Big Gray came to live at the Yu Family's, he was able to drink water that had mystic-stone water added to it every day. His originally strong physique had become even more large and mighty. When he sat on the ground, Xiaocao wasn't tall enough to reach the top of his head. Although Big Gray looked quite fierce, he was more gentle than the most docile dog in the world when he was in front of Xiaocao. As for other people, they only saw his indifferent side. If any of the other members of the Yu Family wanted to command him, they'd be out of luck! Thus, only Yu Xiaocao could go out to send the New Year's gifts. After all, no one else was able to direct the wolf pulling the sled.

Yu Xiaocao sat at the front of the sled, which wasn't very large, while the back was packed with pork and wheat flour. The back of the sled had slats so she didn't have to worry about the goods sliding off halfway.

Yu Xiaocao was bundled up in her warmest set of clothing and had a hat made of rabbit fur that could cover her ears on her head. Her neck was wrapped in a rabbit fur muffler and the inside of her boots were lined with thick and soft rabbit fur as well. Yu Hai was afraid that his daughter might freeze so he also wrapped her up in his coat made of wolf fur. Only a pair of bright eyes could be seen in the end.

"Let's go!" Yu Xiaocao waved her hand at her family and ordered Big Gray to leave. Big Gray slowly walked on the snow-covered ground. Once he exited the village, he gradually sped up until the trees on the sides of the road were whipping by.

At first, Little Black and Little White also wanted to follow along but their short legs were hampered by the thick snow, so they couldn't run very fast. Before they exited the village, they had already been left behind by their father and could only resentfully turn back home.

In the middle of winter, it was bitterly cold, so there wasn't a single soul to be seen as they traveled along the road. This meant that no one had to be frightened by the sight of Big Gray. Yu Xiaocao first went to her grandfather's second older brother's home. Yu Lixia lived in a large village that was even more west than Xishan Village. This village wasn't near the mountain or the seas and had a larger abundance of good agricultural land. Yu Lixia's family had more than a dozen mu of good farming land. After taxes, they only had enough grain remaining to survive the winter without starving. However, since this year was a disaster year, they still had to ration out every speck of grain carefully even though the court had waived taxes this year.

When Yu Xiaocao entered the village, she didn't encounter a single person because most of the people were hunkered down for the winter. She directly drove the sled to the entrance of her second granduncle's residence and knocked on the door. The person who opened the door was her second granduncle's oldest son, Yu Yang. When he saw Yu Xiaocao, who had been wrapped up until she resembled a tiny ball, he was surprised for a moment before he said, "Is this...Xiaolian or Xiaocao?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 317

Because the two families lived far apart, they usually didn't see each other very often. Thus, Second Granduncle's sons weren't very familiar with Yu Xiaocao. She pulled down her muffler and chuckled dryly at Yu Yang.

Luckily, Yu Lixia walked out of the inner courtyard at this time. When he saw Yu Xiaocao, he revealed a surprised expression, "Xiaocao, why did you come out on such a snowy day? Is there something going on at home?"

"Nothing's going on! My family slaughtered a pig and my father told me to give your family some meat." Yu Xiaocao's nose had been frozen until it was a bright red and a layer of frost had frozen on her long eyelashes. This contrasted with her pale white skin and made her look like a snow fairy.

"This year everyone's having a rough time and pork is so expensive. You guys could take the pork and sell it for money to buy more grain, so why are you giving us some pork? Quickly take it back..." In the past, Yu Lixia's family had the best circumstances out of all the three brothers. Yu Hai's family had been squeezed dry by Madam Zhang yet he, as the Second Granduncle, couldn't do much. When Yu Hai's family had split from the family, he also didn't help much. Thus, how could he have the nerve to take things from the younger generation?

Yu Lixia's eldest daughter-in-law saw the large slab of meat and the sack of grain on the sled and she couldn't move her eyes away. She hurriedly interrupted her father-in-law and said, "Father, Niece had traveled from afar and must be freezing. Quickly let her in and warm up."

Yu Xiaocao hastily shook her head, "No need, I still need to go to Xishan Village to send more New Year's gifts ah! Second Granduncle, let me wish you a Happy New Year in advance and I hope that this year is smooth and auspicious!"

She unloaded the meat and grain set aside for her second granduncle's family and then climbed back on the sled before telling Big Gray to leave. Yu Lixia had wanted to have her stay to eat lunch, but she had

refused with the reason that she needed to go to her maternal grandparents' home. She wasn't very familiar with her second granduncle's family and didn't want to make awkward conversation with them.

Yu Lixia's eldest daughter-in-law impatiently opened the sack. When she saw that it was full of white flour, she cried out in astonishment, "Father, Dahai's family is really generous. There's so much white flour here, at least twenty or so catties. And this pork, it must be around a dozen catties too. If we took it into town, we could sell it all for a couple taels ah!"

Yu Lixia leveled a glare at her and said, "How could it only be worth a couple taels? This is wild boar meat!! Yu Hai's family is truly benevolent and kind. My third brother is now living a comfortable life with them!! Eldest son's wife, this meat is the New Year's gift that Dahai gave to us. No matter how much money it's worth, we cannot sell it!"

His eldest daughter-in-law smiled, "Then we will have to enjoy such delicious food! Tsk tsk, Dahai's family truly has skill to be able to get ahold of such fresh cabbage! We will be able to eat cabbage and pork dumplings for the New Year's Eve dinner! Our family is probably the only family in the village who will be able to eat cabbage and pork dumplings this year ah!"

Yu Lixia grinned until the wrinkles by his eyes became more pronounced, "We're enjoying the fortunes of my third brother! Next year when we have a harvest of grain in spring, don't forget to send some to your third uncle. As relatives, we can only become closer to each other if we work on our relationships."

Yu Yang was the youngest son of Yu Lixia. He stared in the direction that the snow sled disappeared and abruptly exclaimed in fright, "Father! Did you see clearly what was pulling the

Yu Lixia looked at the prints that were left in the snow and smiled, "What else could it be? It must be one of the dogs that your uncle is raising at home ah! Your uncle is truly odd. During a disaster year, there's nothing for people to eat yet he still raises a few dogs that eat precious food!"

Yu Yang wasn't convinced. He thought for a bit and decided it seemed a bit absurd before he softly said, "Father, I don't think that animal looked like a dog, I think it looked more like a wolf..."

"Nonsense! Have you seen wolves before? If a wolf doesn't eat a person, that's already considered a great blessing. Who would have the guts to have one pull a sled?" Yu Lixia roundly scolded this excitable

youngest son of his. This fellow really had the craziest imagination. How could a wolf pull a sled for humans?

Yu Yang muttered somewhat resentfully, "I think it looks like a wolf. Its ears are perked up and its tail droops down. If it's not a wolf, then it must be a mix between a dog and wolf! Hm! When I have time, I should go visit Brother Dahai's family and look. If they have some puppies, I'll ask him to give me one."

Yu Lixia slapped a hand on his son's head and said, "Get a dog? Are you going to feed it your own rations ah? Right now no one can even fill their own stomachs, so how can we have any extra to raise a dog? Just forget this idea of yours ah!"

Yu Xiaocao traveled swiftly down the snow covered roads and finally made it to Xishan Village at noon. When she entered the village, she came across a matron who was puttering around doing nothing outside. The woman was frightened at the sight of Big Gray and fell on the ground as she shouted, "Oh my goodness ah! Wolf, a wolf is in the village!!" Before Yu Xiaocao could say anything, she scrambled off fearfully towards her residence.

Big Gray slowed down and turned his head around to look innocently at Yu Xiaocao. Xiaocao helplessly said to the wolf, "Let's leave quickly and avoid any people she may bring around. They might think you're a wild animal and try to kill you."

Big Gray showed off an arrogant expression. Humans were all so small and weak, how could they possibly harm him?

However, in order to avoid any unnecessary ruckus, Yu Xiaocao still urged him to accelerate and get to her maternal grandparents' residence. The gate to their residence was wide open. She knocked a few times and then unloaded the sled. She first unharnessed Big Gray and led him to a secluded place to rest to avoid people from being scared by him.

Her eldest maternal uncle heard the noise outside and came out of the house. When he saw Yu Xiaocao, who looked like a small snowman, with a large gray wolf, the sight scared him so much that he hurriedly picked up a wooden pole at the side of the wall to prepare for a fight.

"Eldest Maternal Uncle, it's me! Xiaocao." Yu Xiaocao noticed his actions and knew he had been frightened by Big Gray, so she hurriedly explained.

Liu Pei stared fixedly at the scene. The person leading the big gray wolf was unexpectedly his beloved little niece. He then looked at the small snow sled behind them and immediately felt like he had fallen into a dream. His youngest brother-in-law was truly too odd to let a wolf pull a snow sled and even let his daughter Xiaocao bring stuff over by herself.

"Xiaocao, why are you here right now? Quickly go into the rooms and go on the kang bed to get warm!" Eldest Maternal Aunt also came out of the house and started to pull on Xiaocao's hand to bring her inside.

When Big Gray saw that his little master was being pulled away by a stranger, he hurriedly squeezed through and attentively observed Madam Han. Eldest Maternal Aunt let out a scream and pointed at Big Gray with a hand that trembled, "Xiaocao, what is this thing?"

Yu Xiaocao quickly placated her aunt, "Eldest Maternal Aunt, this is the pet that's being raised by the young royal prince, he's called Big Gray! Don't judge him by his fierce looks, he's actually very docile. He never bites people randomly!"

The wolf didn't bite people randomly? That still meant he could bite people ah! Who knew whether the wolf would decide to not be random and still decide to bite a person?

"Wow! Is this a dog or a wolf? It looks so impressive ah!!" Third Maternal Uncle's youngest son, the thirteen year old Liu Zhimin, rushed out of the house. He stopped about three steps in front of Big Gray and racked his brain on how to get closer. He was a bit afraid, so his face betrayed his mixed emotions.

Yu Xiaocao used her fingers to comb the fur on Big Gray's chest and pushed all of the snow off the animal. Then she spoke to Liu Zhimin, "Big Gray should be a wolf! However, he's already been tamed and is even more obedient than some dogs!" Big Gray gave her a sidelong glance and a flicker of arrogance shined through his eyes, 'Why are you comparing me to those dumb dogs? Such an insult to this wolf's character, right?'

Second Maternal Uncle's youngest son, Liu Zhiqiang, cautiously got closer and closer until he was about a step away from Big Gray. When he noticed that Big Gray didn't pay him any attention, his courage rose and he reached out a hand towards Big Gray. Second Maternal Aunt, Madam Hu, screeched, "Zhiqiang, you want to die ah!! Your younger cousin already said that it's a wolf, a wolf!!"

Big Gray felt irritable at the sound of Madam Hu's shrill voice and impatiently stamped on the snow covered ground. Xiaocao softly petted him and managed to soothe him back down.

"Second Older Cousin, Third Older Cousin! Unload the stuff on the sled quickly, we can't let the cabbage freeze outside!" Yu Xiaocao hurriedly used a tactic to distract them in order to avoid those two from continuously provoking Big Gray. Big Gray's temperament wasn't that good. After spending so much time with the Yu Family, he still ignored most of them. So what would he do to these two strangers he had never seen before?

Xiaocao's maternal grandmother, Madam Yao, slowly walked out of the residence and rebuked her two daughters-in-law, "Xiaocao came over, so why hasn't she been led inside? The poor child will freeze! Xiaocao, come inside and go to my room."

Xiaocao brushed off all of the snow on her body and took off the wolf coat to hang in the hallway to let dry. She entered the room and finally took off her muffler and hat. Big Gray copied her and shook off all of the snow off his body before he gracefully and haughtily followed Xiaocao into the room. Madam Yao's room only had two people in there talking quietly and there weren't any other people. Most importantly, there weren't any annoying children so Big Gray was very pleased.

"Aiya! When did this guy suddenly come in? Xiaocao, tell him to lay on the side somewhere so he doesn't end up scaring anyone!" Liu Cunjin, Xiaocao's maternal grandfather, knew Big Gray was a wolf and had heard the animal had saved his son-in-law's life. However, a wolf would always have a wild nature so keeping a safe distance was always better.

Liu Zhimin had finished bringing all of the cabbage into the kitchen and now entered the room. He smiled, "Grandfather, Younger Sister Xiaocao gave our family a lot of pork, wheat flour and cabbage!"

Liu Cunjin said, "We haven't even finished the pork you guys gave us last time, so why are you giving us more? We'll take the cabbage but you should take the wheat flour and pork back home!"

Yu Xiaocao pouted, "I braved through the winds and snows to come and give Grandfather and Grandmother these presents, yet you want me to bring it back? If I go back, my mother will definitely scold me for not doing things well. I don't want to take them back!"

Madam Yao tenderly wiped her granddaughter's face that had turned red from the cold and said, "Your father and mother are truly too much. On such a cold day they made their child go do such errands, and for what? If they end up making you sick from this, just watch if I'll forgive them!"

Madam Han had already stored away the wheat flour. She entered the room and asked in concern, "Xiaocao, did you eat lunch yet? Let me make you some dough dumplings made with half wheat flour and half coarse grain. The soup and dumplings will whet your hunger and warm you up."

The Liu Family ate two meals a day. At this time, they had just eaten breakfast not long ago. If Xiaocao hadn't come over at noon, they weren't going to cook anything. Madam Han knew the Yu Family had the habit of taking three meals a day and that Xiaocao must have left the residence very early in the morning, so she must be hungry by now.

Yu Xiaocao nodded and said, "Eldest Maternal Aunt's dough dumplings are the best. Thank you Eldest Aunt!"

At this time, her three maternal uncles and three maternal aunts and all of their children had entered the room to greet Yu Xiaocao, their young guest. Big Gray, who was originally lying down next to the kang bed, had been squeezed out of room and had nowhere to go. He ran out of the room to find a more quiet place to lie down.

Xiaocao's grandmother saw that the room had been filled with so many people that there wasn't any space to put a foot down, so she spoke to her sons and daughters-in-law, "You all should go do what you were doing earlier. No one's an outsider here. Just leave a few of the younger generation here to keep Xiaocao company."

Out of Eldest Maternal Uncle's three daughters, his oldest, Liu Feifeng, had already been married. During her wedding, the Yu Family had given her a big present for her dowry, which caused all of the villagers in Xishan Village to gossip enthusiastically about it for a long time after. His second daughter, Liu Feiying, was going to turn seventeen after the New Years and had already been betrothed. Her wedding was scheduled at the beginning of spring. His youngest daughter, Liu Feiyan, was almost fifteen years old. It was said that Eldest Maternal Aunt was currently looking at suitable families for her.

Fields of Gold Chapter 318

Out of everyone in Second Maternal Uncle's family, only Liu Zhiwei was somewhat familiar with Xiaocao. His other siblings included a brother and a sister. The sister was named Liu Feixu and was already fourteen years old. She had a gentle and quiet personality, and wasn't a bit like her mother, who had a more abrasive character. The youngest brother was Liu Zhiqiang and he was about the same age as

Xiaocao's oldest brother. He still had a bit of a childish air, so he was currently in the outer room trying to get closer to Big Gray.

Liu Zhimin was Third Maternal Uncle's only child. He had a temperament similar to his father's: straightforward and open-minded. He had already studied at a school in town for two years and it was said that his grades weren't bad. No one at home was hoping that he could pass the prefectural or county exams; they only wanted him to be literate enough to not be cheated. In the future, he could become an accountant in one of the stores in town, which wasn't a bad career to have.

The female cousins were all on the kang bed chatting harmoniously with Xiaocao, while all of her male cousins were further away, surrounding Big Gray. They wanted to get closer but they were also somewhat afraid. Liu Zhiqiang was the most foolishly brazen out of all of them. Despite his older cousins trying to dissuade him, he stepped closer and closer to Big Gray. Big Gray gave him a warning look yet the boy wasn't afraid at all and extended a hand to touch Big Gray's fur.

Big Gray had no desire to indulge him. He first exposed his long teeth in a vicious expression to scare the boy. However, Liu Zhiqiang remembered his younger cousin's words that this wolf, Big Gray, didn't bite people, so he heralded his courage again...

The people chatting inside the room suddenly heard a loud scream and Liu Zhiqiang's subsequent plaintive wails. All of them rushed out to see what had happened. The sight that greeted their eyes made everyone drip cold sweat down their bodies. Liu Zhiqiang had been pressed into the ground until he couldn't move by that giant gray wolf. The gray wolf's sharp teeth were all revealed and they were only a centimeter away from Liu Zhiqiang's neck. Liu Zhiqiang had been so frightened that he had forgotten to struggle as he could only close his eyes and lay there. Big Gray's emerald green eyes fixedly stared at the boy as he thought, 'Repulsive human, who gave you the guts to try to touch this wolf's head?'

A helpless expression showed up on Yu Xiaocao's face. Big Gray only knew how to scare people. When he first arrived at the Yu Residence, he had used the exact same method to frighten Liu Fangping, who was always hanging around him. The little fellow had been so frightened that he wet his pants and had a high fever for a few days. Big Gray must have felt impatient after being chased around by her older cousins and wanted to make an example out of one of them!

"Xiaocao, quickly restrain that wolf of yours and don't let it bite your Older Brother Zhiqiang." Madam Yao was about to explode from anxiety. If the wolf bit down, how could that youngster Zhiqiang still live?

Madam Hu had been inside doing needlework. When she heard her son's sobs, she came over to look and almost fainted from the sight. Her legs faltered and she sat down on the ground as she let out an ear-piercing wail. The shrill sound made Big Gray even more irritable and his expression became more fierce.

Yu Xiaocao knew that Big Gray's vicious nature was being goaded up and hurriedly advanced to hold onto his neck. She quietly placated him. Madam Hu's piercing screams continued, so she couldn't help but scold the older woman, "Second Maternal Aunt, don't you know that wild animals hate noise the most? If you want Older Brother Zhiqiang to die faster, then continue to cry and scream ah!"

Madam Hu acted as if someone had pinched her neck and immediately stopped weeping. She looked at her son, who had been squished onto the ground and had lost all of his color. She repressed her worry and fright and softly said, "Quickly take away this dumb beast! If it hurts my Zhiqiang, then I don't care whether you're family or not!!"

Madam Yao was also worried about her grandson but when she heard her second daughter-in-law's impolite words, she became a bit unhappy, "As his mother, you should know what your son's personality is like ah! If you're unable to keep an eye on him, who can you blame?"

"Mother, Zhiqiang is your full-blooded grandson ah. If he gets bit by the wolf Xiaocao brought over, as his mother, how could I not say some harsh words? Xiaocao's surname is Yu not Liu, so how could you treat an outsider better ah?" Madam Hu was displeased and she wasn't someone who would easily let something go.

In the past, her in-laws always gave money to her younger sister-in-law, who had already married out of the family. She always felt resentful about this. Although she never overtly made a big deal about this, she would always say a few words in front of her husband. Afterwards, when she was able to get a job at the Zhou Family's factory due to her relationship with the Yu Family, she found out the job wasn't too difficult yet she made as much as the dockworkers in town. Her own husband had also joined hands with his older brother and sold watermelons from the Yu Family, which made them a small fortune. Only then did she finally become closer to her younger sister-in-law's family that she used to look down on.

However, when she saw her youngest son being pinned down by the giant wolf Yu Xiaocao brought along, she thought he had already been bitten. Thus, all of her previous grievances exploded. The fact that she didn't make Xiaocao pay more for this was already considered quite good.

Yu Xiaocao patted Big Gray's neck a couple of times and said, "Big Gray, didn't I warn you before that you're not allowed to scare people anymore? How come you didn't remember? I'll have to punish you; you're not allowed to drink any more water for today and all of tomorrow!!"

Everyone in the Liu Family didn't know whether they should laugh or cry. There was a thick layer of snow outside. If the animal got thirsty, it could just eat some snow, so how was punishing it to not drink water considered a punishment? A true punishment would be to forbid it from eating any meat! However, how could they all know that the water Yu Xiaocao was referring to was the mystic-stone water that Big Gray loved the most? Big Gray would rather abstain from meat for three days than to forego mystic-stone water for a single day ah!

Big Gray moved his paws and allowed Liu Zhiqiang to leave. He hung his head down in sorrow and dispiritedly circled around the corner of the wall. From the backside, he looked quite pitiful. Liu Zhiqiang crawled up from the ground and was panting heavily. He brushed the dust off himself and pointed at Big Gray, who looked very sad, and asked Xiaocao, "What's wrong with it? It looks a bit unhappy!"

"He got punished because of you! In the future, stay far away from him to avoid him from taking his revenge!" Yu Xiaocao deliberately tried to scare him. Liu Zhiqiang was a simple-minded guy. He had just escaped the jaws of the wolf and was thinking to get closer to the wolf again.

Madam Hu pulled her son towards herself and inspected him carefully from head to toe. He didn't have any injuries and even his clothing didn't have any rips or holes. She thought about the impolite words she said earlier and her aggressive manner. It made her want to flush. She slapped the back of her youngest son's head and glared at him fiercely, "How could you be such a troublemaker? That's a wolf, not a dog. If it bit you, it'd serve you right!"

Liu Zhiqiang covered the back of his head and retreated a few steps as he argued with his mother, "Younger Cousin already said that Big Gray won't bite people. It was only trying to scare me earlier...Mother, I almost peed my pants out of fright, yet you don't even try to comfort me and hit me instead. Am I really your biological son?"

Madam Hu hit him a couple more times and then placed her hands on her hips as she scolded, "You little brat. If you weren't my biological son, I wouldn't care if you died!! You're coming back with me to the room and just watch how I punish you!"

"I don't want to go; I want to play with Big Gray ah!" Liu Zhiqiang was a tenacious little cockroach and had more guts than sense.

Madam Hu went up and got a grip on his ear. She pulled him away as she scolded him non-stop. When the two of them left, the room finally became quiet again.

Liu Zhiwei somewhat sheepishly said to Xiaocao, "My mother just has this type of personality, please don't take it to heart."

Yu Xiaocao smiled and didn't say anything in return. She poured a cup of warm water from the kettle and slipped a few drops of mystic-stone water inside. She handed the cup to Liu Zhiwei and said, "Eldest Cousin, earlier Older Cousin Zhiqiang was drenched in cold sweat from being frightened. If something else happens, I'm afraid he'll catch a cold. This is a cold prevention medication I made myself. Please give some to him."

Liu Zhiwei took the cup of water out of the room. Liu Zhimin had been watching Big Gray from afar earlier and glanced at Big Gray, who was resting in the corner, with lingering fears. He said, "Earlier Big Gray was quite fierce, he really scared me!"

Just as the words came out of his mouth, there was the sound of knocking on the Liu Family's gate. When they went out to look, there were a lot of villagers outside all holding hoes and spades as they aggressively surrounded the residence.

Liu Cunjing draped a large coat on his shoulders before he went out. He looked at the village chief and other villagers with a perplexed expression and asked, "What's going on here?"

The village chief replied somewhat nervously, "Brother Cunjin, earlier Erdan's wife said that she saw a wolf enter the village. We followed the footprints on the ground and discovered that the wolf entered your residence. Did you guys see anything weird lately?"

Xiaocao's eldest maternal uncle, Liu Pei, hurriedly interjected, "How could there be a wolf? Erdan's wife's eyes must be getting worse. Earlier it was my younger sister's Xiaocao who came over with a snow sled to bring us stuff. Could it be that Erdan's wife thought that the big gray dog pulling the sled was a wolf instead?"

From behind the crowd, Erdan's wife squeezed through and asserted, "How could my eyes be growing dim? I know the difference between a wolf and dog ah!! I swear that I saw a wolf and it looked quite fierce, as if it could eat a person instantly!!"

Yu Xiaocao heard the ruckus outside, so she tied a small rope around Big Gray's neck. She walked up with the wolf behind her, "Grandfather, Eldest Maternal Uncle, what's going on? I heard that it sounds like a wolf entered here? Not a problem, my family's Big Gray is very strong and wolves aren't his opponents! This year, my family had gotten attacked by a pack of wolves and Big Gray even saved my father's life!"

All of the Xishan villagers and the village chief looked toward the sound of her voice. They saw a slightly-built, fair little girl leading along a large dog that was taller than her. The dog was covered in gray fur from head to toe and had its head down with its tail tucked between its legs. It looked as if it had just been roundly scolded earlier.

Erdan's wife pointed at Big Gray and blurted out, "That's it, that's it!!"

The villagers all burst into raucous laughter and they lowered the 'weapons' in their hands. Everyone could tell that although the big gray dog behind the Yu Family's little girl was on the larger side, it looked very docile and obedient. How could it be a wolf? If it was a wolf, wouldn't it eat the Yu Family's little girl in one bite?

The village chief leveled a glare at Erdan's wife and scolded her, "And you said your eyes haven't gone dim? Are the wolves in your family this obedient too? Erdan, can't you keep a hold of your wife? She'll spread any baseless rumor! The facts are right in front of us, yet she still tries to quibble!! Sorry about that, Brother Cunjin!!"

"Let's go back, all go back!! Only a false alarm!!" The village chief waved his hand at everyone and took the lead in leaving. It was such a cold day, so who wanted to spend time outside doing useless tasks? All of the villagers made Erdan and his wife the butt of their jokes as they walked back to their own residences. They even said that Erdan's wife was as timid as a mouse to be scared silly by a dog.

When the Liu Family's gate closed, Big Gray restored his majestic demeanor. Arrogance glittered in his emerald green eyes as he looked at the Liu Family members with a disinterested eye. He snapped the rope in two and gracefully walked back into the room so he could sulk by himself about not being to drink mystic-stone water for the next two days.

Eldest Maternal Uncle clicked his tongue in wonder, "This wolf is too uncanny. It really acted like a dog earlier!"

Eldest Maternal Uncle's youngest daughter, Liu Feiyan, grinned, "Younger Aunt's family's animals are all a bit uncanny. Xiaolian told me that their family's little roe deer never did its business inside. In fact, in the winter, it sleeps indoors and knows how to exit to go to the bathroom!"

Liu Zhiqiang squeezed out from behind his mother and remarked in envy, "Mother, can we also raise a little roe deer? When it gets big, we can also slaughter it for meat!!"

Madam Hu rolled her eyes at him, "We can't even afford to raise you, let alone a roe deer. All of the hares and roe deer in the mountains are about to die of starvation, where would we find one to take home? Stop having these daydreams!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 319 - Some Families are Happy, Some Families are No

t

Eldest Maternal Aunt came out of the kitchen with a bowl of dough dumplings in her hands. She looked at her sisters-in-law and then spoke to Liu Zhiqiang, "Zhiqiang, there's still a lot of dough dumplings left in the pot. Go call your older brothers and sisters over so that everyone can have a bowl!"

Madam Hu looked at the pure white dough dumplings floating in the bowl of soup held by her older sister-in-law. Inside the soup were also some stir-fried onions and the food smelled delicious. She knew the wheat flour used in the dumplings had been brought over by Yu Xiaocao and stated in embarrassment, "Our family just ate breakfast, just give Xiaocao a bowl. No need to waste that wheat flour!"

Eldest Maternal Aunt revealed a faint smile, "Mother already said that we don't lack the food to give the rest of the children some! We can't just have Xiaocao eat and have her older cousins just watch her. How much food can Xiaocao eat anyway? Xiaocao, you must be hungry, let's go into the room so you can eat!"

In total, there were seven other children in the house, so there was enough to give each child a bowl of dough dumpling soup. Liu Feiying and Liu Zhiwei considered themselves to be adults already, so they wanted to give their portions to their grandfather and grandmother. After bickering for half a day, the soup was about to get cold without an end to this argument. Yu Xiaocao took out another two bowls from the kitchen and split the seven bowls brimming full of dough dumplings into nine bowls that were

more than half full. The Liu Family's bowls were large and crude, so more than half a bowl's worth of soup was more than enough to stuff a little belly full.

The two elders and the seven grandchildren all sat around the kang bed's table as they harmoniously ate the dough dumplings. Madam Han's dough dumplings didn't contain any eggs yet the dumplings were tasty and fine and the soup thick and filling. It suited Yu Xiaocao's appetite a lot. After Xiaocao finished her bowl of dough dumplings, Madam Yao wanted to give the remaining half of her bowl to her. Xiaocao was truly full at this point and she didn't have the habit of sharing half-eaten food with someone else. Thus, she resolutely declined her grandmother's offer.

By the time she finished her simple and comforting lunch, the snow had stopped falling outside. Yu Xiaocao took advantage of this break in the weather to don her snow gear to head back home. The Liu Family didn't have any good presents to send back, so Liu Cunjin took out the remaining ten catties of green wheat and gave it to his granddaughter. He remembered that both his daughter and granddaughter loved to drink porridge made from green wheat, so he had especially left this green wheat over for those two.

After they finished exchanging New Years gifts, the actual New Years Day quickly arrived. On that day, small flakes of snow floated down and it made the outside world look like it was crafted of white powder and glowing jade. Inside the residence it was piping hot and full of celebratory joy.

The Yu Family and Liu Family celebrated New Years Eve this year. The dinner this year was very rich and sumptuous. The meat dishes included sweet and sour fish, which embodied the hope of 'abundance year after year', braised meatballs in brown sauce, meat sandwiched tofu, red braised pork, pork stewed with vermicelli, and a basin of boiled spicy meat slices. There were also a lot of vegetable dishes, such as: green vegetables sauteed with shiitake mushrooms, spinach stir fried with sprouts, lettuce with oyster sauce, mapo tofu, dry-fried potato slices, and cabbage seasoned with vinegar. There was also spareribs soup and savory seafood and meat soup. Vegetarian and meat dishes abounded and everyone could choose their favorites. As for the main starches, there were white and plump steamed rolls that emitted the sweet scent of fine wheat. Even if someone didn't partake in the other dishes, they would still be able to finish two rolls on their own.

In the midst of a disaster year, most families didn't have an abundance of either meat-containing or vegetarian dishes. Very few rich families in the prefectural city were able to have a table full of dishes like the Yu Family did for their New Year's Eve family dinner. Zhenxiu Restaurant in Tanggu Town had advertised a New Year's Eve family dinner that cost several hundred taels. In preparation, the head

steward had bought several chests full of green vegetables from the Yu Family at a high price and a few hundred catties of potatoes.

The fact that the restaurant had fresh vegetables for sale and, in addition, had the newly recommended food ingredient—potatoes, was more than enough to make the wealthy people in town, who liked to compete, flock to the restaurant to get a table. Over twenty tables for the New Year's Eve family dinner menu had been booked within moments. There were many people who were unable to make a reservation, so they even asked if there would be a later menu similar to this one. They did all they could, including using their own connections, to get the restaurant to leave a table for them in the future...

However, for the vast majority of commoners, this New Years celebration was miserable and wretched. Those who were able to eat some wheat flour were already considered fortunate. Most people had to fill themselves with flatbreads made of coarse grain. As for vegetables, that was a pipe dream. Before the locust plague hit, not all of the villages were like Dongshan Village and had harvested their crops early, which could be made into dried or salted vegetables. Later on, with the locusts still around, no other vegetables could be planted. Even money couldn't buy vegetables. As for meat, normal families couldn't afford to buy it ah! Thus, the vast majority of people spent the time with their families around a table, sadly eating their pathetic coarse grain flatbreads with some thin salty soup on the side to finish bringing in the New Year.

As for the villagers in Dongshan Village, most of them had dried vegetables at home. They could put the dried vegetables in a pot, add some extra oil, and stew them for a passable meal. Thus, they were able to eat something decent for their New Years Eve dinner. As for eating dumplings to push out the old and bring in the new, most of them didn't have any. Without any meat or vegetables, how could they make dumplings? They needed to save whatever could be saved.

Compared to the comfortable and exciting atmosphere in the Yu Family's old residence, the Yu Family's new residence seemed a lot more cold and cheerless. The cleverest housewife was unable to cook without any rice. Although Madam Zhang was competent, she couldn't magic up food from nothing. At the time, Madam Zhang didn't believe Yu Hai's words and thought that he was trying to trick people. Thus, she didn't try to harvest any of the crops that were growing on her land. Subsequently, all of it had been eaten by the locusts. Luckily, Madam Zhang usually dug up some clams when she went out digging for sandworms, so she had made some dried clams in the past. In addition, she had also picked up some kelp and seaweed along the way and dried them under the sun. All of that was being stewed together in a pot. Furthermore, Yu Dashan had went out to sea a few days ago and had come home with a fish that wasn't large or small. Thus, they were able to cook up two dishes to eat.

Fishermen who lived by the sea had long gotten sick of eating seafood and fish. Furthermore, Madam Zhang was very reluctant to add a lot of oil when cooking, so most of her food was cooked in plain water with a pinch of salt. Obviously, the flavor of the resulting food was just so-so.

Madam Li frowned as she swallowed the clam meat that didn't have much flavor. Her eyes roved around as she said, "Mother, looks like Yu Hai truly has broken off all relations with us!"

Madam Zhang raised her eyes to look at her for a second and didn't reply. Madam Li continued, "I heard that Yu Hai gave Eldest Uncle a piece of pork that weighed at least a dozen catties and was about as thick as three fingers. He also gave them a bag of wheat flour that must have weighed at least twenty catties. They also received a bunch of cabbage and radishes. I'm sure Eldest Uncle's family's New Year's Eve family dinner is quite delicious and sumptuous right now!"

"Mother! I told you that we should have gone to Second Uncle's house to buy a few catties of meat, yet you refused to agree. Now you're envious of other people being able to eat meat..." Heizi frowned as he gnawed on his coarse grain flatbread as he complained.

He had already become a regular worker at the docks, so he was earning around ten taels a year. Although his grandmother was reluctant to use money to buy meat, he could use his own money to buy some instead. What was the point of calculating things so clearly when they were all one family? However, his mother refused his suggestion and said that she was afraid that if he bought meat, they wouldn't be able to eat any. Instead, it was likely all of the meat would go to his younger uncle's family. Argh! If they could split from the family like his second uncle did, then everything would be better. His father could go out to sea and fish while he went to the docks to work. His mother could stay at home and manage the household. A life like that would definitely be better than their current circumstances, where they were stuck eating coarse grain flatbreads every day and had to go hungry!

Little Doudou gnawed on his flatbread sullenly and moved his head away when his mother tried to feed him fish, "I don't want any, smells too fishy!"

Since they had been living together for a few months, Madam Zhang couldn't always give her youngest son's family preferential treatment. Ever since the locust plague happened, the family didn't have a good income anymore and they had to spend money to get grain to eat. Coins flowed out of their household continuously. Her eldest son had been urged by Madam Li to save a secret purse, so he only gave her half of what he earned from selling his fish. He didn't earn a lot of money to begin with, so now she received even less money.

All of the fishing villages relied on the ocean to provide for them in this disaster year. Most villagers went to the beach to dig up sandworms and oysters. The Zhou Family's factories were also buying these seafoods at a good price, so people from not only the fishing villages but also those who lived slightly further away would all rush to the beaches as soon as they could to gather seafood. Most of the sandworms had been dug up in the vicinity, so now Madam Zhang needed to go to even farther away beaches to find some. Furthermore, it wasn't a guarantee she would be able to dig up any. With three additional mouths to feed at home, Madam Zhang fretted every day about money as her stash dried up. The stress caused canker sores to form in her mouth.

But what was she to do? Her youngest son spent every day by his books and almost didn't leave his room. Her youngest daughter-in-law was watching over a child as she embroidered handkerchiefs, insoles, and other small items to sell in town. The money her daughter-in-law made from selling her items was all given to her. However, embroidery took too much time and these small items couldn't be sold for much. With so many mouths to feed at home, that little bit of money was like trying to use a cup of water to put out a cart of burning firewood. As the months passed, Madam Zhang's head of hair had turned completely white and her back became more crooked. She looked as if she had aged a decade in the past few months.

Madam Zhao lightly sighed and gently persuaded her son, "Doudou, you can grow taller if you eat more fish."

"Then...I'll just eat one mouthful! When I'm older, I can be like Older Brother Shitou and help do some chores around the house!" Little Doudou reluctantly took a mouthful of fish and didn't even chew much before he swallowed it. He even drank a mouthful of coarse grain porridge to get rid of the fishy taste in his mouth.

Madam Li started to sourly remark again, "You say 'Older Brother Shitou' with a pretty familiar tone ah! You see him as an older brother but he may not see you as his younger brother. He's probably eating food with generous amounts of meat and fish, how come he didn't invite you over to eat some?"

Madam Zhao leveled a displeased look at the other woman and pointedly said, "Second Brother-in-law had split from the family a long time ago. No matter how good our relationship is with him, we are still considered two separate families. I don't have such thick skin to try to take advantage of him."

Madam Li slammed her chopsticks down and pointed at Madam Zhao's nose, "Who are you calling thick-skinned? If your skin isn't thick, then who's the one always going to cadge a meal off of them? You claim that you're teaching them how to embroider, but who are you trying to trick ah? Everyone else at home is eating coarse grains and salted vegetables, yet you bring your son to their house to eat delicious foods

all the time. You've become fat and plump from eating there, yet you don't even care about your own husband's health. Are there truly wives like you in the world?"

In terms of quarreling, Madam Zhao was definitely not Madam Li's opponent. Her eyes became red from fury as she hatefully replied, "Second Brother-in-law's entire family invites me and Doudou over for dinner as a way of relaying their gratitude to me for teaching Xiaocao and Xiaolian how to embroider. Older Sister-in-law, there's no point in being jealous! People's relationships are built through mutual assent. You can only get rewards if you pay for them. Only someone like you can sit around doing nothing, hoping for a free meat pie to drop from the skies!"

Madam Li was about to reply when she was interrupted by Madam Zhang banging on the table ferociously.

"Why are you all arguing now? We're celebrating the New Years! Eldest Daughter-in-law, when has Third Daughter-in-law ever eaten or drunk anything that belongs to you? The fact that she can make other people gladly feed her is her own ability. If you have the skills, you can go over and try too, right? I'd be surprised if they didn't chase you out with a large stick!!" The more time passed, the less patience Madam Zhang had for Madam Li, who only knew how to seek out problems in others and didn't know how to do any work.

Madam Li sneered, "Mother, you're always biased towards your youngest son and youngest daughter-in-law. Have you ever thought of your oldest son's and oldest daughter-in-law's feelings? There's a reason why Second Brother-in-law's whole family doesn't like us. Isn't it because you acted too harshly and hurt their feelings to the bone? If we didn't split the family, wouldn't our family have everything that Second Brother-in-law has? Such as that large house and all of the land?"

Madam Zhang glared viciously at Madam Li, "So who was the one that said that Yu Hai's leg was unsavable and that his whole family was sick and weak, so that they'd end up bringing us down? Who was the one who wanted me to think of a method to split them out of our family? Without you behind my back instigating everything, how could I take the risk of being a social pariah and split them out?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 320 - New Year's Money

"Then what about Father's situation? If Mother had treated Father better when he was sick, would he have divorced you? As long as Father was still here, Second Brother-in-law would still provide us with some resources every year to show his filial piety. Now, Father has gone to live a leisurely life with Second Brother-in-law's family. What about our family?" Madam Li looked at the table of food that could be fed to the pigs and sadly sighed.

Madam Zhang instantly pulled a long face and she slapped her chopsticks on the small table on the kang bed. She stared viciously at Madam Li with her slanted eyes and said nothing. Madam Li's blood froze from her stare and her gaze became dodgy, not knowing where to look. Yu Dashan slightly pulled on the sleeve of his wife and signaled for her to quit plucking at the tiger's fur. He knew his mother regretted not treating Old Yu well at that time he was sick and for being so heartless. But, what was the use of being regretful? It already was too late.

Yu Bo set down his chopsticks and blamed himself, "One shall not travel far away when one's parents are still alive. As their child, when the parents are sick, I should have come to take care of them no matter what. However, when father was seriously ill, I was in the prefectural city and unable to be filial at their side..."

Madam Zhang's expression suddenly changed again. She glared at Madam Li and comforted her son, "Xiaobo, it's not your fault! Mother didn't tell you in fear that it would delay your studies. You aren't your father's only son. Dashan and Dashan's wife, what were you doing then? Did you guys make a single meal for your father, or carry water and wash his clothes once? You guys say I mistreated your father, but what did you do? If you had helped, would your father have become that ill?"

When someone was wrong, they were always trying to push their mistakes onto others. Yu Bo had given Madam Zhang the best reason to shirk her responsibilities!

Yu Dashan opened his mouth yet he didn't know what to say. Madam Li, on the other hand, grumbled, "I'm his daughter-in-law. How can I go into my father-in-law's room? Besides, doesn't he have a biological son? If Mother had called Dahai over to help the moment father got sick, would things turn out the way it did? Although Second Brother-in-law has separated from the family, he couldn't have ignored his father, right?"

Madam Zhang coldly snorted and said, "People just don't know when to be grateful. Dashan, since you were a child, everything that you ate and used belonged to the Yu Family. Right now, your wife is saying you aren't a biological offspring of the Yu Family, and thus you're unwilling to take care of the elderly. Aren't you afraid that others will call you an ungrateful and vicious person when you go out? Dashan, a virtuous wife won't cause so much trouble for her husband. You need to take charge and discipline your wife!"

'How am I not virtuous? No matter how bad I am, I am still better than you, the old hag who is ruthless to her own husband! It's not me who got divorced by my own husband!' Madam Li thought. In Madam Li's point of view, although her mother-in-law said that she had a peaceful separation, in actuality, she

was just cast off by her husband. It was just that Father-in-law was kindhearted. He pitied his son who was studying afar, so he left all his wealth to Madam Zhang.

Yu Bo spoke at this time, "Mother, let's not talk about this during the New Year's. Besides, what use is it to argue about who should take the blame now? Mother, don't be reluctant to spend the money. When spring comes and I pass the county-level exams, our family's situation will improve."

After passing the county-level exams, scholars could be exempt from taxes. Therefore, those with farmland would put their lands under the name of the scholar in order to avoid taxes. The scholar would also get some benefits from this. However, in Dongshan Village, there were fewer fields and more mountains. Most of the villagers depended on the sea for food. Even if Yu Bo were to pass the county-level exams, his plans may not come true.

Madam Zhang's family's New Year Eve dinner was so upsetting that they all eventually left. At midnight, there were no dumplings to bid farewell to the old and welcome the new. The family didn't even stay up for New Year's Eve and went to bed early to avoid being hungry in the middle of the night.

At the Yu Family's old residence, the family sat around together merrily and ate melon seeds, dried meat, and snacks such as French fries and chips. Yu Xiaocao also made poker cards with thick paper and taught the children to play cards. The adults watched cheerfully on the side.

Fang Zizhen, who was worried about his goddaughter because of the incident with the child traffickers, braved the snowstorm to come before the New Years. If he rushed back on New Year's Eve, then he would most likely pass away on the way back. Thus, he stayed with the Yu Family for the New Year. He watched the children play 'Fight the Bully' (Author's note: This is the present-day card game 'Fight the Landlord'). Feeling tempted, he asked Xiaocao to give him her place and let him enjoy the game.

There were many children in the family, so after learning how to play, everyone took turns playing. Therefore, there were many people watching and only four people playing. Yu Xiaocao gave up her position and drew another set of cards for the adults to play.

Hence, Liu Junping, Yu Hang, Liu Yaner, and Yu Xiaolian happily played cards on one side of the kang bed. Fang Zizhen, Liu Hu, Yu Hai, and Old Yu battled at the end of the kang bed. Yu Caifeng and Madam Liu watched the games from the side with a smile, while munching on melon seeds. As for Little Shitou and Liu Fangping, they pestered their older siblings to let them play for a while.

Fang Zizhen didn't know if he was lucky or not at playing card cards. He always drew the bully (landlord) card yet he never won once. The loser had to stick a piece of paper on his face. Like a curtain, his face was filled with slips of paper that Little Shitou practiced his writing on. Old Yu was a slow learner, so Yu Xiaocao sat next to him and helped him out from time to time. Thus, he was able to win more often. Fang Zizhen became braver the more frustrated he was and shouted, "I don't believe in this bad luck! One more time! I will definitely win this round..."

The occasional laughter from the room added a touch of life to the silent night. At midnight, the dumplings that were made in the evening were put into the pot. The fillings of the dumplings included cabbage and pork, pickled vegetables and pork, chives and egg, and seafood... Other families couldn't even eat dumplings, yet the Yu Family had such a rich variety. The comparison would make people angry ah!

After midnight, the family ate the dumplings, and then went to bed. The children had sweet dreams in which they received lots of New Year money...

On the next day, the children got up early without anyone calling them. First, they wished their grandfather a 'Happy New Year' and received a red packet filled with lucky money from the old man. After Liu Fangping kowtowed, he excitedly opened the red packet. Seeing that there were ten copper coins inside, he couldn't help but smile—it was enough for him to buy lots of maltose candy!

When they celebrated the New Year in the past, his parents only gave him one or two copper coins as lucky money. Last year, they were refugees fleeing on the road who didn't even have food to eat, much less New Year's money. He got ten copper coins just as New Year's money from Grandfather alone. His parents definitely wouldn't give any less, and there were also his aunt and uncle...Liu Fangping calculated with his little fingers and reckoned that he would surely get lots of lucky money this year!

Liu Fangping saw his father walking over from the West Courtyard, so he rushed towards him in a hurry. As a result, he slipped on the ice and ended up sprawled out in front of Liu Hu. His elder brother, Liu Junping, covered his eyes and couldn't bear to look at him. The other children couldn't stop laughing.

Liu Hu bent over, picked up his youngest son, and laughed, "Oh! Although it's New Years, there's no need for such a big bow!"

Liu Fangping wore many layers, so he didn't feel any pain when he fell. Without even patting off the snow on his clothes, he bowed with his hands cupped together and smiled until his eyes turned into a

line, saying, "Father, Happy New Year! May all your wishes be fulfilled! May you have a prosperous New Year, and now give me the red packet..."

Liu Hu slapped his bottoms and then took out a red packet. He lightly poked on his little head and said, "You little money-grubber!"

Liu Fangping took the red packet given by his father and ran to the kitchen to pay New Year greetings to his mother and aunt, who were putting the dumplings in the pot. He reaped two small red packets. He secretly counted and now he had forty copper coins! For ordinary families, it would already be considered very good if they give their children one or two copper coins as lucky money. It was very rare for a family to give out ten copper coins in one go like the Yu Family.

Yu Hai had wanted to give the children one silver bit each, but upon considering the financial situation of his brother-in-law, the two families discussed it and set the New Year money at ten copper coins per person. Before the dumplings were placed on the table, the children had already greeted everyone for New Year's and their hands were full of red packets.

Yu Xiaocao gathered her siblings together and murmured something to them. When Fang Zizhen stepped into the Yu Residence, he was surrounded by a group of kids who were all shouting, "May you be prosperous and happy! Hand over the red packets!" Fang Zizhen's ears buzzed from the noise and he threw out the red packets.

After getting the red packets, the children swiftly dispersed, leaving a completely bewildered Fang Zizhen with a blank expression. Yu Hai came over with a smile and said, "Xiaocao called the children together just now and plotted something mysteriously. It seems like the target was you!"

With lingering fear, Fang Zizhen said, "When there are many children, it's quite scary! Thinking back to the days when I was surrounded by dozens of enemies on the battlefield, that wasn't even as scary as the sudden attack I just experienced. Fortunately, I was well-prepared, or else I would've been disturbed for a while!"

After getting their red packets, the siblings all ran into a room. Little Shitou felt the contents of the red packet. It was round and didn't seem to like a copper coin. Liu Fangping couldn't wait and had already opened the red packet. "Brother Shitou, what is this? Silver?" As he asked, he wanted to put it in his mouth and take a bite to verify.

Little Shitou also took out a thumb-sized and realistic-looking silver peanut. It was known to be used by the wealthy and influential families as rewards or New Year's money. A small silver peanut was worth at least five mace, which was equivalent to five hundred copper coins! Second Sister's godfather was very generous ah!

"Eh? Second Sister's New Year's money seems to be different from ours!" Little Shitou saw the golden sheen in his second sister's hand and hurried over to take a look.

Yu Xiaocao had watched a palace drama in her previous life called The Legend of XX. One of the concubines in it rewarded Su Peisheng [1] a handful of golden melon seeds, which looked like the ones in her hand. Small as they were, each one was at least 20 to 30 grams. After all, it was gold, which was more valuable than the silvers her siblings received.

She carefully put them away and explained to her curious siblings, "These should be the golden melon seeds that the emperor rewarded Godfather. It only appears in the Imperial Palace. Its value isn't just in its monetary worth, but it's also an honor."

Liu Junping, who was a few years older, carefully put away the silver ingots and advised his younger siblings, "These golden seeds and silver ingots are very valuable. Don't go showing it off outside, or you will be swindled! Fangping, give all the silver peanuts to Mother for safekeeping later. It's worth a few hundred copper coins, so it's better to be careful than to lose them!"

Liu Fangping held on to the silver peanuts and whispered unwillingly, "Can't I wait till later to give it over? The silver peanuts haven't even been warmed by my hands yet!"