

Gold Chapter 321

Fields of Gold Chapter 321 - New Year Greetings

Because they stayed up too late playing, the Yu family's breakfast was later than usual but it was still a lot earlier compared to families who normally got up at around 10 in the morning for breakfast.

Madam Zhao estimated the time that Second Brother-in-law and Second Sister-in-law would finish their breakfast before taking the children over for New Year's greetings. Madam Li took a look out the window, pushed her son toward outside signaling with her mouth and said, "Heizi, go with your aunt to your Second Uncle's house to give New Year greetings. Didn't you say that your job as a full-time worker was given to you by Brother Six based on Xiaocao's reputation? Take advantage of the New Year's to go thank them."

Madam Li was very calculating. If she'd really wanted to thank others, why didn't she tell him to go to their house with a gift before New Year's? Instead, she waited until New Year's Day to have Heizi to go to their house to give greetings. Those who haven't married were all considered children and can get New Year's money. Was this thanking them or asking them for New Year's money?

Heizi didn't think that much of it. Having a better relationship with Second Uncle's family wasn't a loss. He opened the door and said to Madam Zhao, "Wait for me Aunt. I'm coming with you guys to go to Second Uncle's house for New Year greetings."

Madam Zhao didn't like Madam Li taking advantage of others to earn easy money. Thus, she didn't like Heizi as a result, even if he already learned to be good. However, since the younger family member already said it, then she would seem too petty if she refused, so she nodded and took her young son back to the room to wait. It was too cold outside, and she didn't want Doudou to freeze.

Heizi quickly washed, put on a half-new coat that didn't have patches on it and went out. Madam Zhao took her child and half-walked, half-slipped to the foot of the West Mountains. There was a slope on the way to the old residence and it had just snowed, which made it harder to walk. Madam Zhao could barely take care of herself, much less a child as well.

Heizi saw that his aunt was struggling with walking, picked up Doudou and placed him on his shoulder and said with a smile, "Aunt, I'll go ahead with Doudou. You take your time behind us and don't fall"

Little Doudou who was sitting on Heizi's shoulders, giggled. Madam Zhao saw this and was frightened, "You be careful, don't slip..."

Heizi ran as if he was flying up the slope and then jogged the rest of the way to the Yu Family's old residence. Normally, he was busy working at the wharf, leaving early and returning late. He seldom had the chance to go to Second Uncle's house. He would take advantage of the break he got for New Years to come more often.

He wouldn't be like his mother or father. One of them only silently listened to his wife, while the other one only wanted to take advantage of others and was refused at the door. As relatives, they should have better relationships. Brother Six had said that Second Uncle's family will definitely flourish in the future. He didn't want to go up and benefit from their association, but who could guarantee nothing would happen in the future? Having one more rich relative was never a bad thing!

Before long, he had taken his little cousin up to the old residence. Before stepping through the door, Little Doudou happily shouted, "Older Brother Shitou, Doudou has come to play with you! Older Sister Xiaocao, can you take me on the sleigh today?"

The two families, who were just about to eat breakfast put down their chopsticks upon hearing the sound. Madam Liu came out of the house and was a bit surprised to see Heizi, but soon recovered with a warm smile, "Heizi came? Come in and get warm. Little Doudou, where your Mother? She didn't come?"

Little Doudou came down from Heizi's shoulders and said, "Happy New Year to Second Aunt! My mother is slow and is behind us! Older Brother Shitou, I'm here..."

Heizi said 'Happy New Years' to Madam Liu and followed Little Doudou silently into the room. He was hit with the unique fragrance of the dumplings. He swallowed his saliva quietly and with a smile said, "Second Aunt, you guys haven't eaten yet. I'll come back later..."

Yu Hai came out of the inner rooms and saw the tan and strong Heizi. He patted him on the shoulders and said, "Why are you being an outsider with Second Uncle? Didn't eat yet? Come in and have a bowl of dumplings. Your second aunt and oldest aunt made a lot." As he said this, he pulled Heizi into the house and pushed him down at the table on the kang bed.

Madam Liu thought that Madam Zhao must've not eaten, so she went into the kitchen and brought in a basket of frozen dumplings. She revived the fire to cook the dumplings. As for the extra bowl of dumplings, she let her husband, who followed her in, to take it to Heizi.

Little Doudou was carried to the edge of the kang bed and put down to sit with the children. Little Shitou picked a dumpling from his bowl and blew on it before putting it in the little guy's mouth. Little Doudou's mouth was bulging and he was chewing hard. His pair of black eyes were bright, "Brother Shitou. It's a pork dumpling, and there's so much meat. It's so delicious!"

Xiaocao took out a small bowl and gave the dumplings in her bowl to the little one. She smiled, "Eat more if it's delicious! If it's not enough, we can make more!"

Heizi, who had been working for nearly a year, had become a lot more mature, so he no longer ate like a bandit like he did when he was a child. He smiled innocently, but his heart wasn't as peaceful as it seemed. 'Second Uncle's family really is rich and the disaster year didn't seem to have any impact on them. They have cabbage and pork dumplings, and pork made up the majority of it with only some cabbage added in. The dumplings with leeks and eggs are so fresh, and there are a lot of eggs in it. It seems that there are sandworms added in too. The fragrance is so tempting!'

When Heizi felt that his saliva couldn't be held back anymore, Yu Hai came in carrying a bowl full of dumplings and said, "Heizi, this is a bowl of cabbage and pork-filled dumplings. Eat this first. If it's not enough, your second aunt is in the kitchen cooking another pot!"

"Thank you, Second Uncle. This is enough for me to eat!" With Heizi's current appetite, a bowl of dumplings would only allow him to be half full. However, he doesn't dare to openly eat and let Second Uncle think he came over to get money.

Old Yu ate the dumplings stuffed with pickles and pork and said to Heizi, "You aren't an outsider, you don't have to be so polite. Eat!"

Heizi restrained himself at first but became more relaxed later. He ate the fragrant and delicious dumplings with big bites and his eyes began to burn. How long had it been since he had such delicious dumplings? In the past, when the conditions were good, the dumplings he had at home were all cabbage and pork-filled dumplings with more cabbage than pork and each person only had so many. In order for him to eat more, he had stolen Xiaosha's and Little Shitou's dumplings. On the second day of the New Year's, when he went to his maternal grandfather's house, he could sometimes eat dumplings, but the taste of those was far inferior to the ones of Second Uncle's.

"Have some soup, don't choke!" Old Yu saw that Heizi was eating so fiercely, he felt bad. He estimated that this year had been rough on them there, so it was good enough that they weren't going hungry. Ai... Although he divorced Madam Zhang, humans were emotional beings. He watched Heizi grow up. Although they weren't blood-related, anyone would have emotions toward a dog once they've raised it long enough.

Madam Liu and Madam Zhao came in with two plates of dumplings each. Yu Caifeng and Liu Hu had already eaten so they gave up their seats. Madam Zhao ate some cabbage and pork-filled dumplings and tried two chive and egg stuffed dumplings. She praised her second sister-in-law's cooking repeatedly

Madam Liu smiled and said, "I dare not take the credit; several of the stuffed dumplings were created by Xiaocao. Especially the chive and egg filled dumplings; she added some sandworms to make them more delicious."

Yu Caifeng also praised, "These pickled vegetable and pork-filled dumplings are more authentic than what we ate in the northeast. Our family's head had two full bowls! Sister-in-law, you eat first, we'll go digest our food! "

At the table on the kang bed, everyone was eating happily. Under the kang bed, there were two small beings who were unwilling, "I don't want to gnaw on bones. I also want to eat dumplings!"

Little Doudou liked Little Black and Little White the most. Upon hearing their pitiful whine, he stretched out his head and gave them two of his dumplings.

Madam Zhao saw this and scolded her son, "Doudou, how can you give the dumplings to the dogs? How wasteful!" In her opinion, people couldn't even get enough to eat, what was the point in raising dogs? What's more, giving dogs meat dumplings to eat was just outrageous.

Seeing that Madam Zhao's body was shaking with anger, Madam Liu hurriedly advised, "It's just two dumplings, don't scare the kids. Doudou hurry and eat. Don't let the dumplings get cold, or you'll get a tummy ache."

Yu Xiaocao was full. Seeing that the two little ones were staring at the table after eating one dumpling, she bent down and patted their heads and said, "Your breakfasts are in the West Room and Big Gray is in there too! Go, I'll take you over there!"

Little Black and Little White, upon hearing the words, finally moved their eyes away from the table on the kang bed. They followed behind Xiaocao with their butts up in the air. Their small steps became brisk as they knew that their little master wouldn't treat them badly.

Yu Xiaocao brought a bowl of dumplings from the kitchen. When she walked into the West Room, she saw that Big Grey was eating a piece of cooked pork. Ever since trying the taste of cooked meat, Big Grey wasn't willing to eat raw meat, especially the dead boar meat, which had been frozen for many days and was hard. Thus, Yu Xiaocao cooked a pot of meat for it and the two little ones every day, putting in a small amount of salt and seasonings. The big one and two small ones all happily ate it.

One bowl of meat dumplings was split in half into Little Black and Little White's food bowl. Little Black couldn't wait to eat it and burned his tongue, making a whine of sadness. Little White was gloating at the side as if he was saying, 'Fool, who dares to eat dumplings just out of the pot without getting scalded?'

Little White was smarter. He first took a dumpling out of the food bowl and put it on the ground to cool for a while. Then he carefully tried it. When he decided that it wasn't too hot, he ate it with relish.

Big Grey smelled the fragrance of the dumplings and suddenly felt that the delicious pork lost its delicious taste. He paced to the edge of Little Black's food bowl, squeezing the little guy out of the way and took one out to slowly try. Mm, the taste wasn't bad! Then he opened his mouth and took half the basin.

Little Black looked at this with tears in his eyes. He dared not be angry, but his eyes were full of complaints, 'Is there a father like you? Taking his kids' food! Why aren't you taking it from Little White and just bullying me? Wuwuwu....'

Yu Xiaocao, who had just turned around and went out, heard Little Black's sad cries and thought something had happened. So she returned to take a look. She saw Little Black watching pitifully and Big Gray lying on the edge of his food bowl, eating all the dumplings in two or three bites. After finishing, he took the piece of meat from his bowl and put it in Little Black's food bowl. He used his paws to pat his son's head telling him to eat.

Little Black stared at the meat in the food bowl with tears in his eyes and endless resentment in his heart, 'I don't want to eat meat, I want to eat dumplings. Wuwuwu! Little master, be the judge. A father picking on his son, are there any heavenly principles?'

Fields of Gold Chapter 322 - Preparing for the Exam

With a head full of imaginary black lines, Yu Xiaocao gave Big Gray a warning glare, and then gave the little guy a few more dumplings. Little Black licked his little master's hands with gratitude, 'Little Master, you're the best! Little Black loves you the most!!' After that, he gobbled up his dumplings for fear that his father would steal them away again.

Big Gray wanted to do the same thing and rob Little White's dumplings. However, Little White wasn't as easy to deal with as Little Black. Not only was he unable snatch the dumplings, but he also ended up being bitten on the face by Little White, leaving a row of teeth marks. Big Gray looked threateningly at his 'unfilial son', 'If master wasn't next to us, I would have smacked you silly! You dared to fight with your father. Just wait!!'

Little White unhurriedly finished his dumplings, and didn't even spare his father a glance, 'If you dared to bully me, Master won't let you drink the tasty water. Humph!!'

Seeing that Xiaocao had gone out the door of the west room, Little White strode out proudly behind her and ignored Big Gray, who was scratching the floor with his claws. When Big Gray turned his head to look at Little Black's bowl, the little guy immediately stuffed the last two dumplings into his mouth and then rushed out of the room at the fastest speed. Big Gray was full of complaints within his heart, 'Master, why don't I get anything good to eat, and yet I'm always being ordered to work?'

In the main room, Madam Zhao, her son, and Heizi had already finished eating the dumplings. Old Yu teased the cute Little Doudou and asked him to do the New Year's greetings, "Doudou, if you wish Grandfather a happy New Year, then you can get a red envelope!"

Under the guidance of his older brothers and sisters, Doudou kneeled down with slight difficulty, lowered his head onto the kang bed several times, and said some auspicious words, "May Grandfather have a happy New Year, and live a long and healthy life!"

In the past, before they had divided the family, the younger generations also kowtowed to the Old Yu couple as New Year greetings. After Yu Hai's family separated from the family, the children just had to bow with their hands clasped in front of themselves. It didn't matter how they did the New Year greetings, as long as they were able to express their sincerely.

After Little Doudou received the red envelope from his paternal grandfather, he was encouraged by his older siblings to open it. Little Shitou said with a grin, "Doudou, why don't you count to see how many copper coins you received as lucky money?"

Little Doudou had learned how to count, so it wasn't hard for him, "One, two, three... ten coins. There's a total of ten copper coins!"

Madam Zhao took the red envelope from her son's hands and prepared to give it back to the old man, "Father, it's too much. The child would be happy with just one copper coin."

In her opinion, her father-in-law relied on her second brother-in-law's family for all the basic necessities of his life. There were so many children, so if he gave ten copper coins to each, that would be at least eighty to ninety copper coins. Didn't it all come from her second brother-in-law? Today, she didn't bring the kids over for New Year greetings with the intention of getting lucky money. She wasn't as greedy as her sister-in-law, Madam Li, who would destroy all the affection between relatives for the sake of a little money.

Old Yu looked at her, took the red envelope, and then put it back into the hands of his aggrieved grandson. He said, "Take it. Everyone gets one! Don't worry, I have money. Your second brother-in-law gives me some pocket money every month, but I usually don't have anything to spend it on." After saying that, he also gave Heizi a red envelope.

Little Doudou's face lit up with happiness. His small hands were full after receiving red envelopes from his second uncle, second aunt, oldest aunt, and oldest uncle. Madam Zhao felt slightly embarrassed, so she decided to go back after briefly chatting with them. Old Yu thought about it, and then said to Madam Liu, "Second Son's wife, are there any more dumplings in the kitchen? Let Third Son's wife take a bowl of dumplings back for her husband." He got divorced, but Third Son was still a descendant of his Yu Family!

Madam Liu didn't say anything and went to the kitchen to get a bowl of dumplings. She placed it in a small bamboo basket, covered it with a cotton cloth, and then handed it to Madam Zhao. Seeing this, Heizi wanted to say something, but in the end, he couldn't bring himself to open his mouth.

After sending off Madam Zhao and the kids, the Yu Family soon welcomed another group of people who came to give New Year greetings. Zhou Shanhu, who had a good relationship with Yu Xiaocao, was in the front, while her older brother, Zhou Shaohua, followed behind her. There were also the Qian Family's Qian Wen, Qian Wu, and Qian Yafeng. The three families lived close by and frequently interacted with each other, so the children had a good relationship.

Qian Wen, who would turn fourteen after the New Year, had already grown up to be a graceful and beautiful young man. He was also preparing for the county-level exams in February. He usually worked very hard, and before the school suspended classes, he rarely came back for breaks and stayed at the academy to study. The academy had suspended classes due to the disaster year, so he stayed at home and studied hard. As a result, it had been a long time since Xiaocao had seen this youth.

Yu Xiaocao took out snacks to entertain her friends. Zhou Shanhu widened her eyes and exclaimed in surprise, "Stir-fried pumpkin seeds, stir-fried peanuts, maltose candy, sesame candy, peanut candy... Xiaocao, you have such a rich variety of snacks at home. And this, it's the seeds of the sunflower that you guys planted in your backyard, right?"

With a smile, Yu Xiaocao nodded and said, "Yes! I sautéed it with salt and pepper. Have a taste and see if it's good!"

Zhou Shanhu didn't act courteous and grabbed a handful of the seeds. She followed Xiaocao, placed a sunflower seed in her mouth, and bit on the shell. Then she clumsily took out the unshelled seed and savored it in her mouth. She nodded and said, "It's quite tasty! The things brought back from the western hemisphere taste quite good! You guys should quickly try it!"

The children excitedly ate the candies, melon seeds, and peanuts as they happily chatted. Before long, the family welcomed another group of visitors for the New Year. Among the group was Uncle Shuanzhu's daughters, Liu Huifang and Liu Yingzi, and second son, Tiedan'er. That Zheng Xiaocui, who always wanted to get closer to the young royal prince, also came.

While eating the Yu Family's rich variety of snacks, Zheng Xiaocui felt envious and jealous within her heart, 'How could the Yu Family live such a good life if they hadn't gotten acquainted with the royal prince? If I can become the royal prince's concubine, my family will definitely live a better life than the Yu Family!'

Ay! One should know one's own limitations. With a tan and scrawny appearance and decent facial features, she might be praised as good-looking in Dongshan Village. However, any random young girl on the streets in town could be better looking than her, let alone the capital. Royal Prince Yang wasn't a womanizer, so there was no way that he would be interested in her!

No matter what intentions these children had, since they had come to give New Year greetings, those with the ability would give the children some dried fruits and snacks. After Madam Liu gave the kids some sunflower seeds, peanuts, and various sweets, the children contentedly went to give greetings to

the next family. The children of the Yu Family were also pulled along by their good friends to pay New Year greetings to other families.

Not all families were like the Yu Family, who prepared a lot of delicious food. In the past years, there were all kinds of nuts and dates on the mountains. In autumn, all the households would gather some for their children to snack on. However, this year, the mountain had been gnawed bare by the locusts. Thus, there were fewer families that could entertain the young guests this year. Families that were more well-off, like the village head's family, Qian Family's, and Zhou Family's, would prepare maltose candy or some sort of nuts. Many people barely had enough to eat, so where would they get snacks to give the kids who came to pay New Year greetings?

However, the simple rural children, whether they could get snacks or not, were very happy to pay New Year greetings to other families. These cute little fellows added some festive atmosphere to the dreary New Year...

After eating the sweet and delicious glutinous dumplings and enjoying the colorful lantern show, the Spring Festival [1] was coming to an end. In order to prepare for the district examination in February, Rongxuan Academy resumed classes after the Lantern Festival [2]. But, eating became a big problem. It was easy to buy grain, but it was difficult to find green vegetables. The cooks in the cafeteria were racking their brains for the sake of the children's meals. At the beginning, there were only salted vegetables and dried vegetables, which were extremely expensive. Fortunately, the sons of wealthy merchants in the south transported some radishes, cabbages, and meat from the south, and thus, alleviated the problem of eating vegetables.

Little Shitou also registered for district examination in February. In order to ensure that her younger brother could eat well before the exam, Yu Xiaocao moved to the house in town. She also brought a portion of the vegetables, which they had stored in boxes at home, to town. During the transportation, she covered them with a thick quilt to prevent them from freezing.

The Yu Family house in town was located close to Rongxuan Academy, which made it convenient for her to cook for Little Shitou. Little Shitou applied to be a commuting student so that he could eat all three meals at home. The food at the school was too simple, and the cooking skills of the chef was also average. How could it be better than the meals made by Second Sister?

Every morning, Yu Xiaocao would cook fragrant corn porridge for her younger brother, along with a boiled or fried egg, and egg pancake. At times, she would make pan-fried chives cake, or steamed meat buns. For lunch, the siblings would eat a meal that consisted of one meat dish, one vegetable dish, and soup. The staple food would be rice or steamed buns. For dinner, it was either dumplings or different

types of noodle dishes. Every meal was different for the whole week. Every day, Little Shitou would go to the academy with a bulging tummy and show off to his classmates.

One day, Little Shitou returned with an expression as if he had done something wrong. Yu Xiaocao was about to ask if he had gotten in a fight with someone at school, but she looked up to see two little tails behind her younger brother—Little Shitou's roommates, Liu Jinye and Little Fatty, Sun Runze. Their other roommate, who was younger, wasn't participating in this year's district examination, so he didn't return to the academy to study.

Little Fatty, Sun Runze, warmly said, “Second Sister, let's eat our meals together. My father gives me ten taels monthly for my meals. I'll give them all to you. If it's not enough, I'll send a letter to ask my father for more!”

Liu Jinye had already turned thirteen years old after the New Year. He explained with slight embarrassment, “The food at the cafeteria isn't very good. If we can't fill our stomachs, then we can't focus on studying. We know that Miss Xiaocao has excellent cooking skills, so we want to come and eat together...”

Whether it was one sheep or a flock of sheep, they needed to be herded. Yu Xiaocao didn't refuse them and only said, “It's a disaster year and the beginning of spring, so the ingredients are relatively simple. If you guys don't mind, then let's eat together. However, you guys need to return to the academy after dinner!”

“Of course!” Liu Jinye and Sun Runze hastily nodded.

Little Fatty was even more elated as he asked, “Second Sister, what delicious food are you making for tonight? I'm not picky as long as it can fill my stomach!”

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes in her heart and thought, 'Not picky? If you're not picky, then why aren't you eating at school and coming here for meals?'

“Tonight, we're eating pork and bean sprouts braised with vermicelli. Since you guys came, I'll add 'sour and spicy shredded potatoes!’” Yu Xiaocao wasn't going to pamper them. She would cook with the ingredients they had at home, and they would eat whatever she made.

Little Fatty, Sun Runze, widened his eyes and asked in surprise, “Sour and spicy shredded potatoes? Is it the 'sour and spicy shredded potatoes' that cost five taels at Zhenxiu Restaurant? The newly imported vegetable from the western hemisphere?”

Fields of Gold Chapter 323 - Eating Together

Seeing Yu Xiaocao nodding lightly, Little Fatty danced excitedly, “Second Sister is the best! We're so lucky to be able to eat delicious food! I have long wanted to try Zhenxiu Restaurant's new dish, but I couldn't get a table!”

Little Shitou couldn't bear to look at him and reminded, “Who's your second sister? Sun Runze, don't forget that you're two months older than my sister!”

Sun Runze's thick face had been well trained. He grinned and said, “We have such a close friendship, so isn't your second sister also my second sister? I'm just following you ah! Alright, alright! This isn't important. Go, let's go study in your room. We need to work hard so that we don't let down our second sister who's working so hard to cook for us...”

Yu Xiaocao, who was cutting potatoes in the kitchen, saw the three half-grown children dressed in scholarly gowns going into her younger brother's room with their arms around each other. Shortly afterwards, she could hear the sound of them reading aloud. She lightly shook her head and smiled. The potatoes in her hands were cut into thin shreds, and then soaked in clear water.

She added a piece of firewood into the stove and poured some oil into the cauldron. After she stir-fried the onion, ginger, minced garlic, and chili pepper to get the flavor, she put in the shredded potatoes that were soaked in water and continued to stir-fry them. She added matured vinegar to enhance the fragrance, and then also added some salt. At the end, before plating the dish, she poured in MSG made from the Zhou Family's seasoning factory. The sautéed shredded potatoes glistened under the light. With a delicious sour and spicy taste, it whetted one's appetite and made one want to eat more rice. Little Fatty could finish half a plate by himself. Yu Xiaocao didn't even eat one mouthful and it was completely devoured by the three little fellows.

For another dish, she used the marbled meat of wild boar and homegrown bean sprouts, which were braised with vermicelli, and made into a home-cooked dish. The wild boar meat was stewed until it was soft and mushy, and melted in one's mouth. The vermicelli had absorbed the fats from the streaky meat, so it was very flavorful when eaten. The bean sprouts also added a refreshing taste to it. This 'pork and bean sprouts braised with vermicelli' received unanimous praise from all three kids.

Liu Jinye really liked the spinach and eggs soup. Although his family was quite well-off, he seldom saw leafy greens for the entire winter. It really aroused one's appetite when seeing the green and yellow colors of the 'spinach and eggs soup'.

These were usually very simple dishes, but they were rare delicacies during a disaster year. Liu Jinye and Little Fatty ate until their bellies were bloated and they couldn't even bend down. After eating, Little Shitou very naturally cleaned up and went to wash the dishes. Upon seeing this, the two little guys also followed him into the kitchen and helped wash the dishes. Yu Fan's second sister had worked hard to cook the meal, so they had to help out with the chores. Otherwise, how would they have the face to come over to eat in the future?

When washing the dishes, Liu Jinye quietly said to the simple-minded Little Fatty, "If we want to eat these dishes that Yu Fan's second sister made for this meal outside, it will cost at least ten taels. The potato and spinach were especially rare ingredients. The snow hasn't melted yet, so I don't even know where Yu Fan's family got the leafy greens. Vegetables are so expensive right now, so us giving ten taels a month, seems too little..."

Little Fatty nonchalantly said, "If ten taels isn't enough, then let's pay twenty taels! Just say that we need more nutrition before the exam. I'm sure our families won't be against that. I know your family well. There's no way that your family can't afford twenty taels, right?"

Liu Jinye nodded and decided to ask his family to send him more money tomorrow. Even with twenty taels, Yu Fan's family would be the ones suffering losses if they ate like this for every meal.

The next day, Liu Jinye and Sun Runze had someone send a letter back to their respective homes. They told their families that in order to not affect next month's exam and to be able to get better food, they were going to eat at their classmate's house. They asked their families to send some more money over.

When their families read the letters, they felt slightly alarmed in their hearts. What kind of meals was it that even ten taels a month wasn't enough? Their sons were too young and naïve, so could it be that they were being deceived?

During the first month, the silk and satin shop had average business. Thus, Liu Jinye's father decisively packed his bags, brought along some of his son's favorite snacks, and went to Tanggu Town. Sun Runze's

father also asked the prefectural magistrate for a few days off to check on the people who his son was eating meals with.

The two had already met since their sons were classmates. When they met on the road, they decided to travel together. Setting out early in the morning, they rushed over and finally reached Tanggu Town in the evening. When they arrived at the entrance of Rongxuan Academy, the students had just gotten out of class. The two fathers waited at the entrance for a while and soon saw their sons coming out with a young student, who looked fair and beautiful.

“Xiaoze!” Sun Runze's father called out first. Hearing this, Little Fatty looked up and saw his father. Then he ran over happily.

Liu Jinye also saw his father. He usually acted in a very stable manner, but he also hastened his pace and asked, “Father, why did you personally come? Isn't it busy in the shop?”

Liu Jingui looked at his son and saw that his son had a ruddy and healthy complexion. He also seemed to have gained some weight, so his heart finally relaxed, “When you first sent a letter back saying that you're eating salted vegetables every day at school, your mother was already very worried. Several days ago, we received news about you eating meals with other people, so your mother told me to come see if you're eating well. Now that I have seen you today, I can finally feel relieved.”

“Uncle Liu, we're eating very well every day!! If we don't have enough time in the morning, then Yu Fan will bring the food over for us. For lunch, there is meat and vegetables. We have a very sumptuous meal in the evening. Yu Fan's second sister has excellent cooking skills, and the dishes are different every day!” Little Fatty, Sun Runze, cuddled with his father for a moment. When he heard Liu Jingui's words, he hastily explained.

Sun Runze's father, Sun Jiaqi, and Liu Jingui looked at each other, and clearly saw 'disbelief' within each other's eyes. If his son said this in the past, he would definitely believe him. However, with the current situation, it was already considered very good if they would eat vegetables, let alone eating different vegetables every day!

Sun Runze also apparently saw the disbelief within his father's eyes. He said indignantly, “Father, you don't believe your son's words? If you don't believe me, then come to Yu Fan's house with us and you will know if I'm telling the truth or not.”

Sun Jiaqi patted his son's head. He didn't know who his son got his hot temper from. He looked at Yu Fan, who stood there with a slight smile, and then asked with a smile, "Xiaoze, is this the Yu Fan who you told me about?"

Yu Fan stepped forward and politely bowed with his hands clasped in front of him, "This fellow is Yu Fan. It's nice to meet Uncle Sun and Uncle Liu."

"Don't stand on ceremony! My family's Jinye has troubled you!" Liu Jingui had an affable smile on his face and said a few polite words.

Yu Fan politely said, "I dare not say that. Brother Jinye and Brother Runze usually helps me a lot. We're close like brothers, so uncles don't need to be so courteous. It's getting late. Uncles haven't eaten dinner yet, right? May this fellow have the honor to invite the two of you for a casual meal?"

"No need. You're being too courteous..."

Sun Jiaqi was about to decline the offer, but he was interrupted by his son, "Father, didn't you not believe what I said? Won't you know the truth if you come with us? Second Sister said she will cook poached chicken for us tonight. Father, do you know what poached chicken is? Have you tried it before? Is it tasty?"

Poached chicken originated in the Qing Dynasty, and was a typical southern dish. It would be strange if Sun Jiaqi had eaten it before! But, chicken was quite expensive recently. At the beginning of the disaster year, in order to be frugal with food, the people who raised chickens had slaughtered all their chickens. When winter arrived, there were barely anyone selling chicken in the market. Occasionally, there would be one or two places that sold chicken, but it would be extremely expensive.

He took another look at the fair-looking and well-behaved Yu Fan, and felt very astonished in his heart. Didn't his son say that Yu Fan came from a farmer's family? Perhaps it was raised by his own family? But that wasn't right ah. From his understanding, all the villagers around the prefectural city barely had enough food to eat. Where would they have the grain to feed chickens?

Liu Jingui also had the same doubts. With a half-believing mindset, he followed his son to the Yu Family's house, which was five hundred meters away from the academy.

"Second Sister, we're back!" As soon as Yu Fan entered the house, he habitually called his second sister.

Yu Xiaocao's voice sounded from the kitchen, "You guys came back ten minutes late today ah! Put your schoolbags down and wash your hands. We will be able to eat soon!"

Yu Fan put his schoolbag back in his room and scooped a basin of water in the kitchen. He hesitated for a moment, and then reminded her, "Second Sister, you should prepare two more dishes because Sun Runze and Brother Jinye's fathers came."

While the chicken was being cooked on low heat, Yu Xiaocao washed her hands and followed her younger brother out. She exchanged greetings with the two fathers. Sun Jiaqi waited for a while and didn't see any adults come out, so he asked, "Are you siblings the only ones at home?"

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, "There are both young and old in the family, so my parents couldn't leave the house. I was afraid that my younger brother wouldn't be able to eat well at the academy, so I volunteered to come cook for him. Please sit down for a while. The food will be ready soon. Shitou, prepare some tea for the uncles."

With two more adults, the food that she prepared wouldn't be enough. Fortunately, they had readily available ingredients at home. She got some lettuce from the west room, two potatoes from the cellar, and cut some pork. She prepared to make 'stir-fried lettuce with oyster sauce' and 'sliced potatoes pot'. In addition, there was also the 'poached chicken' and 'stir-fried chives with eggs'. It should be enough for everyone to eat.

When these dishes were brought out, Liu Jingui and Sun Jiaqi were stunned. Who exactly was this Yu Family? They were actually capable of getting fresh chives and lettuce in this season. And, what was this dish? They were also experienced and knowledgeable people, yet they actually couldn't recognize the ingredient that was sautéed with pork in this dish.

Sun Runze proudly showed off to his father, "Father, you never tried this dish before, right? The ingredient inside is called potato. Last year, Royal Prince Yang brought seed back from the western hemisphere. Even the aristocrats in the capital might not be able to eat it!!"

"Potato?" As the assistant of the prefectural magistrate, Sun Jiaqi naturally knew about potatoes. However, he had heard that Royal Prince Yang had successfully grown several thousand catties of potatoes. The imperial court attached great importance to this matter and prepared to use them all as seeds. The emperor had asked the imperial chefs to try cooking with them and used them to entertain

the meritorious officials. The Yu Family were merely farmers in Tanggu Town, so how were they able to get potatoes? Could they be lying?

As if she could read their minds, Yu Xiaocao said with an indifferent expression on her face, “Uncle Sun lives in the prefectural city, so you must know that the corn and potatoes that Royal Prince Yang brought back to the capital were transported from Tanggu Town, right?”

“You mean...” Sun Jiaqi's eyes widened abruptly, and he looked at her with surprise.

Fields of Gold Chapter 324 - Preparations Before the Exam

“That's right! Thanks to Royal Prince Yang, we were able to get the seeds for corn and potatoes. We lived up to the expectations of Royal Prince Yang and successfully grew the corn and potatoes after many setbacks. Royal Prince Yang is benevolent and let us keep some of the potatoes as a reward.” Yu Xiaocao spoke in a manner that was neither humble nor arrogant.

Sun Jiaqi and Liu Jingui's gaze when looking at Yu Xiaocao and her younger brother had changed. Since they were acquainted with Royal Prince Yang, who was favored by the emperor, it was no wonder that they, who were born from a peasant family, could act in such a generous manner.

If Yu Xiaocao knew about what the two were thinking, she would definitely smile bitterly, 'You two are thinking too much. All the ingredients of the table belong to my family.' The potatoes, chives, and lettuces were all grown by her family. They stored the wild boar meat and chicken last year. When the Zhou Family was getting rid of the last batch of chickens at the end of autumn, the Yu Family bought a lot of them. After slaughtering them, they stored them in the cellar. If they ate sparingly, it was enough to last them until the spring.

Under Yu Xiaocao and her younger brother's warm attitude, Liu Jingui and Sun Jiaqi picked up their chopsticks and first tried the 'sliced potatoes pot'. The main ingredients of this dish were potatoes and a decent portion of streaky pork. The slightly fried potatoes were crispy on the outside and tender on the inside, and with the fragrant and delicious streaky pork, it was really a new taste to the two fathers.

Little Fatty gnawed on a chicken wing and recommended to his father, “Father, try the poached chicken made by Second Sister. It has an authentic flavor and tastes amazing!”

Sun Jiaqi knew that his son had a picky mouth, and he was extremely picky with food. If he said that it was good, then it definitely tasted good. He looked at the so-called poached chicken. With pure white meat and slightly greasy skin, it emitted the faint fragrance of scallion oil. The plating was also very

detailed with the chicken meat placed in a beautiful shape and scallions arranged like flowers around the border. Among the three elements of color, smell, and taste, color had already been achieved.

As he picked up a piece of poached chicken, his son reminded him, "Dip it in the sauce, it will taste even better!" He did as his son said and dipped it into the sauce on the side. After that, he placed the piece of chicken in his mouth and carefully tasted it. The chicken skin had a refreshing mouthfeel, while the flesh was smooth. With a light and delicious flavor, it retained the original taste of chicken meat yet also had a distinctive flavor. Everything was just right. Even the chef of Zhenxiu Restaurant might not have such culinary skills.

The chives were fresh and tender, while the eggs were fragrant and soft. The lettuce had a crisp mouthfeel and the potatoes were very flavorful. The poached chicken was meaty, tender and delicious. The four dishes seemed like they were cooked by an experienced chef. The two pairs of father and son ate until their mouths were covered with grease, unable to stop. Liu Jingui quietly asked his son, "Do you guys eat like this for every meal?"

Liu Jinye replied in a low voice, "When you guys aren't here, we generally have one meat dish and one vegetable dish, which is enough for us. Xiaocao said we shouldn't be partial with food and should eat a well-balanced diet. She has excellent cooking skills, so she cooks different things for us to eat every day. Even Sun Runze, who doesn't like to eat vegetables, eats half a bowl of vegetables for every meal."

While the father and son were whispering to each other, Sun Runze, who had a bloated tummy, thought of something and said, "Second Sister, what about the grasshopper sauce? It's so yummy. Quickly take it out for my father to try ah!"

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him. He made it seem as if she was a miser who was unwilling to let them eat it. She said sulkily, "Who serves grasshopper sauce to guests? Moreover, even if I take it out now, is there still room in your stomach for it? You can just eat it with corn pancakes tomorrow morning!"

Sun Runze burped and said embarrassingly, "Then let's eat it tomorrow morning. I'm already full up to my throat. So full ah... Yu Fan, remember to help me put more grasshopper sauce on the pancake tomorrow ah!"

Sun Jiaqi couldn't help but cover his face. He seriously didn't want to admit that this shameless glutton was his son. However, based on the interactions between his son and the Yu siblings, it seemed like the kids usually had a pretty good relationship. They seemed even more harmonious than a family.

The fathers were especially surprised at the scene of the kids fighting to wash the dishes after the meal. At home, their sons had never done the dishes before and hadn't even been in the kitchen. What 'gentlemen shall stay away from the kitchen'? It seemed like there was just nothing attracting them to the kitchen. For the sake of being able to eat delicious food every day, they were seriously working hard!

After the meal, the two fathers inquired about their sons' meals for the past few days. They noticed that the nutrition was well-balanced for every meal. Furthermore, like what their sons said, every meal was different, and there weren't any duplicates within a week. Based on the current market price and split among four people, a month's worth of ingredients for the meals would cost far more than the twenty taels that their sons stated.

It was getting late. When two fathers bid their farewells, they both took out four silver ingots that were worth ten taels each. Sun Jiaqi said to Yu Xiaocao, who wanted to decline the money, "Little girl, don't refuse so quickly. If it was in the past, we wouldn't even give you ten taels. But, with this year's situation, people wouldn't be able to buy your vegetables even if they had money. Right now, people are willing to fight for a batch of fresh green vegetables even if it cost ten taels. Therefore, according to your meal today, we were the ones who gained a good bargain by giving you fifty taels a month!"

Liu Jingui chimed in, "Brother Sun is right! Miss Yu works so hard to cook three meals a day for these two kids. If we make you guys suffer losses, how can we continue to bother you in the future? If you don't accept it, then Ye'er won't come to bother you anymore!" Sun Jiaqi also nodded in agreement.

Little Fatty had a terrified look on his face, "No! Second Sister save me! I'm used to your cooking now, so if you tell me to go back to eat the pig's feed at the cafeteria, I will die ah!!"

Sun Jiaqi patted his son and scolded, "It's the first month of the year. Why are you talking about death?"

Sun Runze stuck his tongue out at his father, and then immediately pretended to be pitiful in front of Yu Xiaocao, "Second Sister, take pity on me and just take it... My father doesn't lack the money anyways!"

Only a fool wouldn't take the money that was forced into one's hands! Yu Xiaocao also felt the nutritional meals that she made every day were certainly worth the fifty taels. At Zhenxiu Restaurant, fifty taels wasn't even enough for a meal! Under Sun Runze's imploring and Liu Jinye's earnest gaze, Yu Xiaocao 'reluctantly' accepted the eighty taels of silver. In addition to the ten taels that they each gave

her at the beginning, it was a total of one hundred taels for the monthly food expense. She didn't dare think about it in the past, but now, she reckoned it was considered acceptable...

An alluring aroma always drifted out from the Yu Residence, so not only were their neighbors constantly asking about what they were eating, but recently there were also a lot of strangers appearing nearby. With their inquiring appearance, it seemed like they had bad intentions.

With the two siblings being the only ones in the Yu Residence, they were like kids frolicking in the market with golden bricks in their hands, and thus caused certain people to have malicious thoughts. After being warned by the little divine stone, Yu Xiaocao sent a letter to ask her father to bring Big Gray along the next time he delivered ingredients to them.

Most of the people with bad intentions were frightened when they saw the majestic Big Gray wandering around the entrance several times. There were also certain scheming fellows who immediately reported to the yamen that a vicious beast had entered Tanggu Town. They wanted to use the power of the local authorities to get rid of the gray wolf raised by the Yu Family.

After receiving the report, the bailiffs hastily rushed over and instantly realized that it was just the pet that Royal Prince Yang entrusted the Yu Family to raise. It was just a false alarm. After that, the head bailiff informed the neighbors of the Yu Family that Big Gray was a pet wolf that had been raised by people since it was a pup. If people didn't provoke it, then it wouldn't bite people. In recent days, the Yu Family were being harassed, so they specially brought Big Gray over from Dongshan Village to guard their house.

After this, most of the people with ulterior motives had withdrawn their intentions. However, there were also some people who didn't give up and felt that a pet wolf wasn't very threatening. In the middle of the night, they climbed over the walls and entered the Yu Residence...

The Yu Family's neighbors were awakened by a scream in the middle of the night. When they got dressed and came out to check on the situation, they saw a figure rushing out of the Yu Residence while holding his butt and fleeing in a desperate manner. Behind him was Big Gray, who was guarding the house. Anyone could tell that that person had gone for wool and came back shorn. He wanted to take advantage of the fact that the two siblings were the only ones in the house and go in to get some benefits, but he ended up being bitten by the wolf raised by Royal Prince Yang.

Most importantly, he got bitten in vain. Who would dare ask the royal prince to pay the medical fees and compensation? It would be strange if that person didn't get arrested as a thief and get punished! With Big Gray around, the siblings could finally sleep peacefully.

The days passed by, and it was getting closer to the district examination in late February. Little Shitou and the other two kids studied even more diligently day after day. Fortunately, Yu Xiaocao was there to prepare different meals for the three children every day. Otherwise, the three little guys would be getting thinner every day like their classmates, who were studying in the academy. Because they got proper nutrition from their meals, the three children had a ruddy complexion and were full of spirit. That fellow Sun Runze had even gained weight. At the academy, the teachers always used him as an example to encourage the other examinees to also prepare for the exam with full enthusiasm.

As the date of the district examination approached, the studying atmosphere in the academy became more and more tense. For the sake of their own future, to bring glory to the academy, and to bring honor to their families, all the examinees, who were preparing for the district examination, did their utmost to study.

Yu Xiaocao, on the other hand, instilled the idea of having a proper balance between work and rest. When studying, one had to alternate between tension and relaxation. Like a rubber band, if one was too tense, one could easily break. Thus, during breaks, Yu Xiaocao would bring the three kids to experience life in Dongshan Village.

At times, they would go catch birds in the mountains. Before the winter, there were a lot of locusts on the mountains. So, even when there was a sharp decrease in the number of other animals, there were still many birds in the winter. Using the method of setting snares to catch birds from the textbooks in her previous life, she brought the kids to experience the sense of achievement of catching birds. The millets that were used as bait were mixed with mystic-stone water, so they had a good harvest every time. They collected all the birds and brought them back to town as food.

Sometimes she would bring them to collect seafood at the beach. The seafood that they collected at the beach was also taken back to town and made into delicious seafood dishes for them to eat.

Sometimes she would also take them to the docks to see dockworkers doing hard labor and help Yu Xiaolian with her business. This helped increase their real-life working experience and experience the hardships of the common people...

Thanks to Yu Xiaocao, they were able to spend their breaks in a pleasant and meaningful way. With broadened horizons, they were able to write more in-depth essays and the teachers frequently praised them. Not only did going out to play not delay their studies, but it also effectively improved the quality of their writings. The three little fellows were full of anticipation for their breaks.

Fields of Gold Chapter 325 - District Examination

The district examination, which was scheduled for late February, was the first stage of the county-level exams. Normally, the date of the exam and series of cumbersome registration procedures would be announced a month before the district examination. Fortunately, Rongxuan Academy always did group registrations, and thus saved a lot of trouble for the examinees.

Tanggu Town's testing location was next to the yamen, which was located in the north and faced the south. It was a decent size. According to the teachers' introduction, in the south side of the examination hall, there was a door on the east and west side, and it was surrounded by wooden fences. The examinees had to line up in two rows and could only enter after a full body search. After entering the wooden fences, there was a large courtyard and the main entrance.

After entering the main entrance, there was a big courtyard. This was the place where the examinees had to wait for their names to be called. On the north side of the courtyard, there were three large halls, in which the examiners sat and called the names of the examinees. There were also numerous rows of simply constructed seats, which was the place for examinees to take their exams.

Unfortunately, in ancient times, there was no such thing as checking out the testing location in advance. Otherwise, Yu Xiaocao would have really wanted to take a look at the examination hall.

Today was the first round of the district examination. The examinees had already arrived at the testing location before dawn and gotten a full body search by the 'inspectors'. Every examinee had an exam basket, which contained the necessities of the examination such as stationary, food, examination identification, and more. The exam basket needed to be thoroughly inspected to prevent prohibited items from being carried in.

Rongxuan Academy's exam baskets were fully prepared by the academy. However, Yu Xiaocao didn't like the simple food prepared by the school, which were only rice balls, steamed buns, and salted vegetables. So, she changed the food in his basket into the specially baked peanut and sesame biscuits and jerky. She also included a copper brazier that could warm his hands when it was cold. The specially made heat preservation water bag contained boiling hot mystic-stone water, and it was tightly wrapped with a small quilt.

Each exam took an entire day and it was still rather cold in late February. Yu Xiaocao hoped that her younger brother could drink some warm water at noon. She had heard that many examinees, who had relatively weak physiques and usually had good grades, were unable to perform well for the exams. The main reasons were the weather and the food. Furthermore, there were people who couldn't endure the five days of exams due to illness and failed in the examination.

Little Shitou waved his hands at his parents and second sister, who sent him to the testing location, and then calmly stood in line. Before entering the examination hall, the 'inspector' looked at clothing, which reflected the characteristics of the academy and was slightly surprised when he inspected his exam basket. After repeatedly checking the small quilt, water bag, and brazier, the inspector let him into the examination hall.

At this time, there were already many students quietly waiting in the courtyard. Although the sky hadn't lit up yet, there were many paper lanterns in the yard, which made it very easy to see. Little Shitou followed the other students, walked in an orderly manner, and then entered when his name was called.

The examinees stood in the yard and faced the examiners as they waited for roll call to enter the central hall to pick up their exam papers. They also had to go through a 'vowing' process. In order to prevent cheating, every examinee, who participated in the district examination, must have a scholar who lived on government grants as a guarantor. After Little Shitou got his exam paper, he sat down on his assigned seat.

After all the examinees received their exam papers, there would be bailiffs walking around to show the exam questions. One of the bailiffs recognized Little Shitou and specially stopped in front of him for two more seconds. After seeing the exam questions and carefully analyzing it, Little Shitou thought about the questions as he grinded the ink. When the ink was ready, he began to seriously answer the questions.

In the early morning of February, the temperature was very low. The limbs of the students, who stood in the cold wind for more than two hours, had become a little stiff. Little Shitou took out the water bag from the small quilt and drank two mouthfuls of the warm mystic-stone water. He felt warmth returning to his body again. He warmed his hands with the brazier, and then began to write with passion. With the heat provided by the mystic-stone water, he didn't feel cold at all. His writing on the paper was the same as usual without any sense of stiffness.

Today was the first round of the exams. The exam was on writing two essays on The Four Books [1] and a poem with 6 five-characters rhyming verses. There was a standardized format for the title, poem, and writing methods, and the maximum word count couldn't exceed 700 characters. Generally, for the first round, one could pass as long as the writing flowed smoothly. Only those who passed the first round could participate in the second round of the exam. For Little Shitou, there was no need to worry about the first round.

At noon, he stopped writing and, as if he was having a picnic, he leisurely ate the delicious biscuits and took a few bites of the pork jerky. After he drank a few mouthfuls of water, he finished all of his writings in one go. He carefully checked it again, slightly revised it, and then transcribed it onto the exam paper. When he finished, he looked around and noticed that most of the examinees were huffing into their own hands while swiftly writing.

It was a cloudy day today, so the temperature was lower than that of previous days. Some of the examinees were so cold that their faces had turned white and their lips were purple. Some of them sneezed and sniffled, and appeared to be in a bad condition. Little Shitou felt somewhat puzzled. Why didn't he feel cold? Could it be the effect of the protective stone that his second sister gave him?

The little divine stone, who was tied around Little Shitou's neck, rolled its eyes endlessly, 'Master actually lent me to others so casually. Isn't that being too disrespectful to me, this Divine Stone?' It thought back to how Yu Xiaocao kept reminding it to take care of her younger brother before they came here. She also said that it was considered a merit, which would help it cultivate its power. Thus, it reluctantly agreed. Yu Xiaocao told Little Shitou that this protective gem was blessed by a great master and could bless him to smoothly pass the examination.

When the exam ended in the evening, most of the examinees were cringing their necks and shivering as they came out. However, Little Shitou, who had tasty snacks to eat and the protection of the little divine stone, was even more spirited than before he went in.

As soon as he came out of the examination hall, he saw his second sister, who came to pick him up. Little Shitou rushed over, like a cannonball, with his exam basket, "Second Sister, what tasty food are we eating tonight? I want to eat Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted duck. Can we go buy one back?"

Sun Runze and Liu Jinye also came out and joined the siblings. Hearing that they could eat Zhenxiu Restaurant's roasted duck tonight, the two really looked forward to it yet didn't have any hope.

Zhenxiu Restaurant's 'one duck three dishes' was very famous in both Tanggu Town and in the capital. It was currently the time when ducks were out of season, so Zhenxiu Restaurant only sold twenty roasted ducks a day. The price of one had increased to fifty taels, yet there was still an excessive demand for it. It was apparent that they didn't believe that Yu Xiaocao was capable of getting the roasted duck.

Yu Xiaocao took the three kids back home first and had each drink a bowl of brown sugar ginger tea to warm up their bodies. The kang bed was so warm that Sun Runze and Liu Jinye quickly fell asleep as soon as they took off their boots and snuggled into the warm quilts.

Yu Xiaocao entered Zhenxiu Restaurant's back kitchen from the back entrance. When she found out that today's roasted ducks had been sold out, she rolled up her sleeves and personally roasted two of them. One was for Little Shitou to bring back to the headmaster of the academy to satisfy his cravings, and the other was for them to eat 'one duck three meals' in the evening. The sauce was brought back from Zhenxiu Restaurant, while the pancakes were made by Yu Xiaocao herself.

As he ate the fragrant duck meat wrapped in pancakes and drank the delicious duck bone soup, Sun Runze immediately felt alive again, "If I can eat such delicious roasted duck every day, I would be willing to take exams every day."

Liu Jinye scolded him, "Aren't you afraid of becoming muddled from taking exams every day!! A roasted duck cost fifty taels, yet it's still hard to get. The money you paid was only enough for one duck. Are you planning on going hungry in the future?"

Generally, the district examination had four to five rounds with an interval of two to three days between each test. The entire district examination lasted for more than half a month!

Fortunately, for more than half a month, the three little fellows were able to eat well and had healthy bodies. They were completely fine even after suffering in the cold wind for a whole day. Before the next exam, Yu Xiaocao made delicious food for the three kids for every meal, for fear that they couldn't make it through the five rounds of exams.

For each of the following rounds, the seating was arranged according to the results of the previous round. Little Shitou performance for the first round was relatively stable and he wasn't affected by the cold wind and the atmosphere in the examination hall, so he naturally received good results. In the second round, his seat was close to the examiners.

An instructor of the Confucianism Department saw the fair and cute appearance of the eight-year-old Little Shitou and said with a smile, "Official Zhao, Tanggu Town is full of talents. Even such a young child has come to take the district examination."

County Magistrate Zhao recognized Yu Fan, so he smiled and said, "Looking at his clothes, he seems to be a student of Rongxuan Academy. Since the teachers of the academy had registered for him, then they must have confidence in him. Based on his seating, it seems like he did very well yesterday."

The official registrar of Tanggu Town smiled and said, “The examinee looks to be only seven or eight years old. He should be the youngest among the examinees, right? To have such achievements at such a young age, Rongxuan Academy certainly deserves their reputation ah!”

Little Shitou didn't know that he had caught the attention of the examiners. Like the first day, he wrote down his student number and name first and carefully looked over the questions. Today, they needed to write one essay on The Four Books and an essay on filial piety. In addition, they had to write down a section from Sacred Edict and Board Instructions [2] from memory. With a minimum of at least one hundred characters, they should not make any mistakes and modifications.

Writing from memory was Little Shitou's strongest ability. The little guy was originally smart, and after drinking mystic-stone water for over two years, his memory had become even better. It was almost to the point of never forgetting after one look. This was one of the main reasons as to why Headmaster Yuan agreed to let him participate in the county-level examination.

The writings for The Four Books and Sacred Edict and Board Instructions were very easy for Little Shitou. He just spent more time on the theory of filial piety. After that, he just had to check his answers, transcribe the writings, and wait for the end of the exam. When the examiners saw that he had finished a long time ago, their impression of him slightly deepened.

For the next three rounds, one round consisted of writing an essay on the Five Classics [3], an essay on rhymed prose, a poem with 8 five-character verses, and writing from memory the first two lines of Sacred Edict and Board Instructions. The last two rounds were focused on classical text, rhythmical prose, the four forms of poetry [4], and so on.

Although the four forms of poetry and rhythmical prose were slightly difficult for Little Shitou, he still finished answering them seriously. As for the quality of the content, different people would have different opinions.

During the exam, Little Shitou also noticed that his younger uncle had also gotten into the fifth round. His younger uncle was under high pressure, and although he ate food that was specially prepared by Madam Zhang, he was unable to eat well normally, so his health had seriously deteriorated. Therefore, the five rounds of exams were the same as a torture for him. At the end of the last round, he fainted as soon as he went out of the examination hall. Yu Dashan and Madam Zhang, who came to pick him up, helped him sit down at a small eatery nearby. After drinking a bowl of hot soup, he gradually recovered his senses.

Yu Xiaocao also saw the scene, but with Madam Zhang's blood-sucking, leech-like personality, she would definitely cling onto them if she helped out, so she didn't go over. Sun Runze's and Liu Jinye's families had also come to the last round, so Yu Xiaocao just took her younger brother home.

Fields of Gold Chapter 326 - Farming Season

Now, they just had to wait for the results to be published. In mid-March, the list of qualified candidates for the prefectural examination was announced. The names of the three kids were all listed in the front. Yu Xiaocao looked through the list and saw that her younger uncle's, Yu Bo, name was also listed on there.

“Brother Qian Wen, you also came to check the results! My second sister squeezed inside, so just ask her to help you check it!” Hearing Little Shitou's voice from behind, Xiaocao looked over the list again and saw Qian Wen's results. His name wasn't too far behind her younger brother's name.

She worked hard to get out of the crowd and found her younger brother. With a smile, she patted him on the shoulder and said, “Well done, you're within the top twenty!! As long as you work hard, our family will have a little county scholar-official soon.”

With a gentle smile, Qian Wen said, “Congratulations, Little Shitou!”

Yu Xiaocao said with a smile, “Qian Wen, I saw your name, too. So, congratulations to you, too!! When you guys go to the prefectural city for the examination, please help us take care of our Little Shitou.”

As if he had already expected this result, Qian Wen didn't show an overjoyed expression. He nodded and said, “With the relationship between our families, I would do so even if you didn't ask me.”

After chatting with Qian Wen for a while, Yu Xiaocao brought her younger brother back to Dongshan Village. There was less than a month before the prefectural examination. After the results for the exam was announced, Rongxuan Academy only gave the students two days off. It was already mid-March, and she needed to go home to cultivate the early-maturing vegetables. It would be too late if she delayed it any longer. She planned on using these next two days to sow all the vegetables fields, and then let her father and the rest of the family handle tending the fields afterwards.

When they got back to Dongshan Village, they saw a lot of horses parked in front of their house. Upon entering, they confirmed that it was indeed Royal Prince Yang.

Zhu Junyang drank the fragrant tea, which was top-quality biluochun that he brought over himself. Even if it was the same tea leaves, tea made from the Yu Family's water would taste more fragrant than other places. It was the same for the Yu Family's food. Even the rice had a much better mouthfeel. Could it be that the water in the Yu Family's well was different than that of other places?

His elegance when tasting tea with his eyes lowered, his graceful disposition, and his indifferent and beautiful face... This simple courtyard seemed to have also become more vivid. Yu Xiaocao was amazed once again!

Hearing the movement, Zhu Junyang lifted his eyes and looked over. Seeing the glow within Xiaocao's eyes, his heart suddenly felt more relaxed and comfortable. With a faint smile, he softly asked, "How was Little Shitou's results for the exam? Is he on the list for qualified examinees?"

Little Shitou interjected, "I passed! I'm qualified to participate in the prefectural examination!!"

A bright smile appeared on the faces of Yu Hai and Madam Liu, who were originally worried. Yu Caifeng and her husband also quickly congratulated them. Yu Hai humbly replied, "This is just the first stage. We don't know how the next two stages will turn out. Don't be so happy yet. Little Shitou, you can't be too proud ah. You need to continue to work hard."

Little Shitou nodded hard. Madam Liu couldn't help but smile, and said, "You guys must be hungry. Mother will cook something yummy for you guys!!"

Yu Xiaocao wanted to go help, but Madam Liu said to her, "Yan'er can help me. You should go work on the vegetable seeds. Since you weren't home, we just plowed and fertilized the fields. Now we just need to plant the seeds."

Yu Hai also said, "We should also pre-soak the watermelon seeds. I originally wanted to do it myself, but your mother was afraid that I would mess it up and delay the harvest. These past few days, we have been continuously receiving orders from the prefectural city, hoping that we can grow more watermelons."

Yu Xiaocao thought about it and said, "Then let's plant watermelons in our over ten mu of farmland in the village. We can grow the corn in the plantation located on the outskirts of Tanggu Town. By the way,

Father, not a single grain was reaped in the plantation last autumn. The tenant farmers must be having a hard time, right?"

Yu Hai nodded and said, "Yes, it hasn't been easy. It's not only our plantation, but it was also the same for others. It was just slightly better at our Dongshan Village. The only thing that I could do was to waive their rents."

The majority of the common people had no extra grain at home. They all relied on their autumn harvest to get through the cold winter and the period before the new crops were ready. Although the imperial court had distributed food for disaster relief and there was average-priced grain for sale in town, there were still many people who couldn't afford grain. As a result, there was an increase in people selling their houses, land, and children at the beginning of spring.

Yu Xiaocao thought about it and said, "After Younger Brother takes the prefectural examination, let's also plant the corn. The plantation has over a hundred mu of land, so we'll need a lot of people to plow, fertilize, sow, and manage the fields. The tenant farmers definitely don't have enough food to last them until the corn is ready to be reaped. Why don't we hire the tenant farms as long-term workers? Those who work more will be paid more, and those who do a good job will get a bonus. What do you think?"

"That's a good idea. Let's work out the rules first. In a couple of days, I'll go to the plantation with your oldest paternal uncle and ask for their opinion." Yu Hai felt that this was a very good idea.

Zhu Junyang interjected, "This prince has also bought some land around Tanggu, so I need to hire some people to manage them. I'll entrust this matter to you, too!"

Yu Xiaocao curiously asked, "Young Royal Prince, why do you suddenly want to buy farmland in Tanggu Town? Are you also planting corn?"

"It's the emperor's orders! Last year, the locusts destroyed all the corn in the plantation at the capital. However, the output estimated by the Minister of Revenue was far less than that of your family's. The emperor and Ministry of Revenue wants to experiment in both the capital and Tanggu Town to see which land is more suitable to grow corn." Zhu Junyang took the imperial order and planned a long-term stay in Tanggu Town. The experimental fields in the capital were handed over to the group of old fellows in the Ministry of Revenue to take care of.

Yu Xiaocao lifted her eyebrows and thought, 'Without this maiden's mystic-stone water, no matter how hard they work, the experimental fields in the capital still won't be as good as the fields in Tanggu Town.' Was this considered helping the young royal prince again?

But she still honestly replied, "Corn is very easy to grow since it has good adaptability to different types of soil. Last year, we planted them in sandy soil, and there was still quite a high yield."

Zhu Junyang nodded. He slightly looked around and said, "The emperor said that your family is experienced in growing corn, so we'll need your family's help with the experimental fields in both locations. Of course, we won't let you guys work for nothing. If this task is done well, then you will definitely be rewarded!"

"What kind of reward? Gold, silver, and precious gems? Silk and satin? Fertile farmland and beautiful houses?" Yu Xiaocao's eyes were shining brightly, and with her fist holding up her chin, she appeared like a kitten that caught a little fish. She looked quite cute.

Zhu Junyang couldn't help but ruffle her hair with his hands. He answered, "You can get all of them! Even if they're not within the emperor's rewards, this prince will compensate you. Can you rest assured now?"

Yu Xiaocao shook off his hands, glared at him, and said, "Men and women should not casually touch each other. I'm already eleven years old, so I'm not a child anymore. Please pay attention to your actions!"

Yu Hai's eyebrows were almost twisted together, and his eyeballs were about to pop out. If the other party wasn't Royal Prince Yang, he would have already snapped his hands in two! What was up with this Royal Prince Yang? He wouldn't be interested in his family's Cao'er, right? No way, he must keep an eye on her. His daughter was only eleven years old, so he couldn't let her be taken away by this big wolf. So what if he was the royal prince? Even the royal prince shouldn't casually touch other people's daughters!!

Zhu Junyang didn't know that her father had started to guard against him. He looked at Yu Xiaocao from top to bottom, and said, "Eleven years old? I can't tell ah! You need to eat more in the future, so that you can grow taller and not end up becoming a little shorty!"

Yu Xiaocao was very distressed about her short stature. She had been consuming mystic-stone water for more than two years, and Doctor Sun said that she had already recovered from the illness that she

carried since she was a fetus. She had been eating very well for more than a year, but despite eating so much, she still couldn't gain much weight. Moreover, she hadn't grown much taller either. Xiaolian was almost half a head taller than her! Could it be due to the lack of natural endowment?

Seeing Yu Xiaocao looking dejected like a defeated kitten, Zhu Junyang felt bad and said, "Don't worry too much. Some people grow up earlier, while others grow later. The youngest grandson of the mayor of the capital was only a little taller than you when he was fifteen, but after not seeing him for over a year, he was almost the same height as me. You're only eleven years old, so you still have six to seven years to grow."

Yu Xiaocao glared at him and thought, 'Who's the one to stab other people in the heart first? You want to give me a red date after slapping me? This maiden will remember this. From now on, I'm going to make dishes that you don't like to eat!!'

She turned around angrily and went into the storage room to get the mystic-stone water used to breed vegetables. She called it breeding, but it was actually a very simple process. She just needed to soak the seeds in the mystic-stone water, and the seeds would be ready to be planted in a couple of days. The reserved watermelon seeds needed to be soaked until a small bud sprouted, which would increase their likelihood of survival when planted. Thus, they needed to be soaked for a few more days. That was just right, since they could plant the watermelons when they were done planting the vegetable seeds.

This year's vegetables had been delayed for nearly half a month. In order to not delay the farming season, Madam Liu asked for the help of her close friends, paying them thirty copper coins per day. There was a total of four to five mu of vegetable fields, so with seven to eight people, they could finish the work in a day.

After sowing the vegetables seeds, it was about time for Yu Xiaocao to go back to town to be a cook for her younger brother. In order to not affect the growth of the vegetables, Yu Xiaocao decided to just throw the multi-colored stone into the well in the backyard and asked the little divine stone to release its spiritual power into the water. After that, she solemnly instructed her father that he must use their family's well water to irrigate the land and watermelons with the reason that she discovered that there was something special about the water in their family's well.

After being reminded by his daughter, Yu Hai also noticed that rice tasted better when cooked with their family's well water. It remained to be seen whether it was good for the vegetables and watermelons seedlings. There was one thing that was very good about Yu Hai, which was the fact that he firmly believed and followed his daughter's words.

Of course, he also performed a small experiment. He selected a small portion of vegetable field to irrigate with the pond water behind the house instead of the well water. He soon noticed the difference. The vegetable field watered with well water did indeed grow faster and better than the portion that was irrigated with pond water.

How did his daughter notice this? Did the immortal tell her in her dream? Or did the immortal cast magic in the well water? Yu Hai buried this question deep within his heart and never told anyone. As for the matter of the well water in their backyard being different from that of other places, he held a small meeting with the family and told them not to mention this matter to others, lest it attract unnecessary trouble.

With her father and oldest uncle at home, Yu Xiaocao didn't have any worries and concentrated on being a chef in town. After the result of the exam was published, the fathers of Sun Runze and Liu Jinye came over again. They each gave her fifty taels as food expense and asked her to please take care of their children. With the same mindset of 'whether it was one sheep or three sheep, she still needed to herd them', she didn't decline their requests.

Fields of Gold Chapter 327 - Sulky

In the courtyard of the residence in town, she freed up a small area of land to plant various kinds of vegetables. With the little divine stone, the vegetables that they wanted to eat were made to mature faster, and it was alright since the other two little fellows knew nothing about farming and only thought that the vegetables planted by Yu Xiaocao grew quite fast.

Zhu Junyang stopped going to Dongshan Village once he found out that Yu Xiaocao was acting as a cook for her little brother, who was preparing to sit for the prefectural examination. He bought a house near their residence in town and brought Head Steward Liu along to visit them every day so that he could join in on the meals.

Every day, Yu Xiaocao struggled to come up with new ideas for their meals. Spring was about the time when the ingredients were lacking—the Yu Family still had vegetables, but meat was a different matter altogether. The pork, chicken and duck meat that they had stored from last year were nearly finished, but the three children loved meat, so if she made them go vegetarian, they probably would not stand it after a few days.

When the children went off to the academy, Yu Xiaocao began to loiter around in the market, looking to see if there were meat or eggs to buy, but she was only met with disappointment. The people were all afraid to waste food during the year of disasters, so everyone had quickly taken care of their livestock and poultry. Wild game was also out of the question as wildlife on the mountain had also decreased massively in number.

While she was loitering around town, she met Third Young Master Zhou, who was rushing back from the prefectural city. The elegant youngster who wore bright clothes and paraded through the streets on his horse saw her looking perturbed, and asked, "Xiaocao, are you troubled? Our families are so close; what's stopping you from sharing your problems?"

Yu Xiaocao remembered that Zhenxiu Restaurant never seemed to be lacking in ingredients, so Third Young Master Zhou must have his ways. As such, she told him her problem.

"I might not be able to help you on other issues, but this problem isn't even a problem to me! My Zhou Family has our own ship and we head south twice every month to stock up, so we're never lacking in meat and eggs. You can just get them from the back kitchen whenever you want to...or rather, I'll just let Qian Xiaoduo deliver meat and eggs to you twice every week. That's a deal!"

Third Young Master Zhou knew Yu Xiaocao was too polite, so if he let her take from the restaurant herself, she'd definitely be ill-at-ease. Since he had already come this far, he might as well have someone deliver it to her.

Embarrassed, Yu Xiaocao replied, "Thank you so much. However, I must compensate you for the ingredients, otherwise..."

"Why must you regard me as an outsider? I'll deduct the cost of the ingredients from your share of the profit, will that do?" Displeased, Third Young Master Zhou said as he glared at her. Sometimes, Yu Xiaocao was just too polite as if she did not take him for family! If he did not take her money, she would definitely not accept the ingredients. He would claim to have deducted the cost from her share of the profit, but she would not actually know if he did it or not anyway.

At the end of every year, Yu Xiaocao would pop up to get her deserved profit from her share of the dividends from her roasted poultry recipes and the factories they shared. She never counted the banknotes she was given and instead left immediately. She never took a look at the accounts, too—seemingly not even afraid of being cheated. Of course, he would never mistreat his own people!

Yu Xiaocao laughed dryly, changing the topic, "I heard you've been busy with the Zhenxiu Restaurant in the prefectural city. How is it going? When will it be open for business?"

“It's set at the start of next month...oh, right, how are your family's vegetables? If we could create a vegetable feast as a gimmick when the Zhenxiu Restaurant in the prefectural city opens for business, it'd definitely be a huge success!” Thinking of this, Third Young Master Zhou's eyes lit up, staring unwaveringly at Yu Xiaocao.

Yu Xiaocao pondered over it, then smiled, “When the Zhenxiu Restaurant in the prefectural city opens for business, I should be able to harvest a little, although it won't be a lot, or of much variety—it'll consist mostly of green leafy vegetables...”

Zhu Junyang stared at Yu Xiaocao who stood not far away, smiling happily; and by her side, Third Young Master Zhou who had a look of joy and focused his gaze solely on her. The harmonious sight made him boil with rage. A violent urge to tear everything apart surged in him.

Head Steward Liu who stood behind him could feel his master's emotions start to spin out of control, and he tensed up immediately. He followed his master's cold and violent gaze and saw Yu Xiaocao. She was like a life saviour to him as he hurriedly called out, “Miss Yu, how coincidental!”

Yu Xiaocao who was busy discussing the prices of the dishes with Third Young Master Zhou turned towards the voice. Her heart trembled when she saw a cold-faced Royal Prince Yang who exuded an unapproachable aura. She remembered that Princess Consort Jing had once hinted about Royal Prince Yang to be seemingly possessed by a demon when he was in a temper—a person without sense or reason. She cursed silently in her heart, 'Which idiot angered this bad-tempered cheetah? Nonsense aside, let's quickly calm him down!

"Young Royal Prince, how have you had free time to come out for a stroll today?" Although Yu Xiaocao was reluctant, she still slowly inched towards him with a slightly tense smile. The closer she got with Royal Prince Yang, the colder it seemed to get. Yu Xiaocao felt that her hairs were about to stand at attention.

Royal Prince Yang stared coldly at her with his bloodshot eyes, not speaking a word. Innocently, Yu Xiaocao blinked, “What's the matter? Who offended you? I'll help you to beat him up so you can feel better. Don't let out your anger on innocent bystanders, ok?”

“You!” Royal Prince Yang squeezed out a word and the surrounding air seemed to freeze. Head Steward Liu secretly prepared himself while he cried on the inside, 'The master teaches the disciple but dies of hunger. Ever since Master turned 15 years old, I've never been able to best him. In a moment, when

Master's temper flares up, I need to do my best to restrain him even if it takes all of my strength. Hopefully Miss Yu will be able to successfully douse the fire!

“Me?” Yu Xiaocao's eyes widened as she pointed to herself, confused, “What did I do? ...You mean...I offended you? When? How did I not know?”

Zhu Junyang still stared frostily at her, making Yu Xiaocao feel as though she had been targeted by a starving leopard. She was in imminent danger and unable to escape. Inwardly, she laughed bitterly, making the decision to act cute after a bit of thought.

Yu Xiaocao's big eyes brightened, then she hit the back of her left hand twice with her right hand, saying, “You don't have eyes and offended the young royal prince! You deserve to be hit...”

“Alright, I've already 'beat up' the person who offended you, is it ok now?” Yu Xiaocao blinkingly watched Royal Prince Yang as the mischievous dimples at the edge of her lips flickered.

Head Steward Liu wiped his face, 'Miss Yu, do you think you are coaxing a 3-year-old child? Who are you trying to fool?'

Zhu Junyang's gaze traveled slowly from Yu Xiaocao's try-hard cute face to her left hand that was hit. The fair and tender skin on the back of her hand now had a spot of red, and it was such an eyesore to look at. He could not help but furrow his eyebrows as the red in his eyes slowly faded, although his gaze stayed on the little hand that had turned red from a few hits.

“What? Is the punishment unsatisfactory? I'll hit a few more times until your anger dissipates!” Yu Xiaocao was slightly relieved when she felt the oppressive aura around her start to lift. She raised her right hand and aimed towards her left hand. She actually did not hit hard—her skin was just too fair and tender, so even a light touch would cause it to redden, although it would also fade quickly.

A large hand caught her right hand and prevented it from hitting her left hand. Following the big hand, she raised her gaze to see Royal Prince Yang's creased brows, seemingly displeased. Finally, he showed expression, albeit, one of displeasure, but it was enough to feel as though they had gone from the South Pole to the warm town in spring.

“Since when was it your role to teach a lesson to the people that offended me?” The irritated beast in Zhu Junyang's heart seemed to have settled into hibernation after he saw the red patch on the small

hand. He looked at Yu Xiaocao and wanted to hit someone, but at the same time he was also afraid of not being able to control his strength and seriously injuring someone. He felt so ambivalent and irritated.

Head Steward Liu finally put his heart back into his stomach. As long as his master spoke normally, it meant that he had his senses back. He was filled with gratitude towards Yu Xiaocao: Miss Yu was indeed a professional at dousing fires—she successfully extinguished a fire again.

Yu Xiaocao's face crumpled in fear, "Then...you'll do it yourself? But please be gentle, I'm scared of pain...if my hand is swollen, I won't be able to cook delicious meals for you."

Zhu Junyang glanced at the ignorant Third Young Master Zhou who had moved over and his irritation flared. He dropped Yu Xiaocao's hand, unpleasantly saying, "When did I say I wanted to hit you? There are many forms of punishment, I'll have to think about how to punish you..."

Yu Xiaocao's courage increased when she noticed that the danger was eradicated, "Before you punish this commoner girl, can I be informed of the offense I have committed, so that I can die with a clear conscience?"

Zhu Junyang huffed coldly, "Even until now, you still don't know your offense--that's one more fault..."

Third Young Master Zhou could finally speak up, "Royal Prince Yang, Xiaocao is still young and there will definitely be areas where she will not be so thorough, please have mercy..."

"Hmph! Someone is pleading for you—another fault!" Zhu Junyang was even more infuriated. 'I'm the one talking here, so what business is it of yours? Go back to wherever you came from!'

Third Young Master Zhou still wanted to say something but he was stopped by Head Steward Liu. Head Steward Liu could faintly feel that his master's temper this time had something to do with Miss Yu and this fellow. He would not be able to guess the outcome if he allowed Third Young Master Zhou to continue interfering!

Head Steward Liu hurriedly changed the topic while smiling broadly, "Miss Yu, you're going somewhere?"

Yu Xiaocao felt absolutely no pressure when she spoke to Head Steward Liu. She smilingly replied, “The ingredients left at home aren't enough. Third Young Master Zhou said that he could give me some from Zhenxiu Restaurant. I was just about to head over to the restaurant to get some ingredients.”

“Why didn't you tell me if there aren't enough ingredients? What kind of ingredients can't I get for you, until you have to beg for them from a restaurant?” Zhu Junyang got even more displeased and grumbled cholericly.

Yu Xiaocao maintained her smile, “Young Royal Prince, poultry, meat and eggs are a bit hard to buy in Tanggu Town, and it would take too long if I sourced from other places. Zhenxiu Restaurant will restock their ingredients every month, so it's just as though they're helping me to buy ingredients at the same time. It's also because my family has been in a partnership with Zhenxiu Restaurant for many years, otherwise I wouldn't trouble Third Young Master Zhou.”

Chapter 328 – Jealousy?

Zhu Junyang was even more upset that he had not been thorough in his consideration—why had he not thought of sending over more ingredients? He turned to Head Steward Liu and ordered, “Go, have Wu Deshun quickly send some people to the prefectural city to purchase some ingredients—especially all kinds of meat and eggs. If they can't be bought in the prefectural city, go to the capital city!”

Yu Xiaocao's lips twitched, mumbling, “Even if you go buy now, it would still take a long time. Are we just going to eat vegetarian dishes for lunch and dinner like a rabbit?”

“This prince will treat you to Zhenxiu Restaurant for lunch and dinner!” After eating so many meals at Yu Xiaocao's, it seemed he still had not treated her to a meal!

Yu Xiaocao fluttered her big eyes and complained, “We probably wouldn't be able to get a table if we went now...”

Zhu Junyang lifted his chin and glared at Third Young Master Zhou, “You... what do you think?”

Zhou Zixu wiped sweat off his forehead, laughing along, "It's Zhenxiu Restaurant's utmost honor to have Royal Prince Yang dine in our restaurant. This commoner will treat lunch, so please honor us with your presence, Royal Prince Yang!"

The Zhou Family were imperial merchants, but if the Zhenxiu Restaurant was to be successful in the capital city, they would still need to get themselves a strong backing. Royal Prince Yang was currently one of the most influential people in the capital city, and also the emperor's most trusted officials—it would be great if they could get his support, and even if they couldn't, he must also leave a good impression on him.

Unexpectedly, Zhu Junyang did not appreciate the gesture. Instead, he proudly said, "Does this prince need to repeat myself? Lunch and dinner will be my treat! Am I unable to even afford two tables at a restaurant?"

Royal Prince Yang was indeed a member of the imperial family—he was as moody as the rumors said! Third Young Master Zhou really could not grasp his temper, so he turned his pleading gaze towards Yu Xiaocao.

Yu Xiaocao, who got his signal, spoke to Zhu Junyang, "At this moment, Zhenxiu Restaurant wouldn't have any fresh vegetables. Why don't we go back to harvest some to bring over? Or you could head over to Zhenxiu Restaurant first and wait for us?"

Zhu Junyang spoke without thinking, "How important are you to have this prince wait for you? Go back and harvest the vegetables! The three little fellows should be finishing their lessons; send someone to notify them to head directly to Zhenxiu Restaurant."

Yu Xiaocao looked around him. The only servant he brought with him was Head Steward Liu, who had already been sent off, so it was only the two of them left—who was to go and notify the trio? 'Young Royal Prince, can you harvest vegetables, or can you do errands?'

Zhu Junyang glanced at the manservant beside Third Young Master Zhou. He did not even need to speak before Third Young Master Zhou offered, "I'll send Simo. He has met the little brother of the Yu Family and he knows the way to Rongxuan Academy. Royal Prince Yang, you should go back and rest for a little while, this commoner will make the arrangements at Zhenxiu Restaurant."

Zhu Junyang arrogantly nodded. It seemed that only when he was around the Yu Family—or, more specifically, Yu Xiaocao—would he show his friendly and approachable side.

The three little fellows jumped for joy when they received the news—especially Sun Runze, who had always regarded it as an honor to be able to dine in Zhenxiu Restaurant. Just because one was rich, it did not guarantee them a table at Zhenxiu Restaurant, as their tables required a long waiting time. His family did not live in Tangu Town, so naturally, his father would not spend so much time or money just for a meal in the restaurant.

Fortunately, they ate in a private room and not in the hall, or else Yu Xiaocao would definitely attract the attention of the rest of the customers by bringing her own vegetables. Even though Head Chef Wang had gone to the capital, the head of Zhenxiu Restaurant's kitchen was his direct disciple, and his culinary skills were even better than his master's. They were very satisfied with their meal.

The only person who was unsatisfied was Zhu Junyang. His eyes shot daggers at Third Young Master Zhou: 'Why is this fellow so untactful? Must he unashamedly join them—does he not know that he's annoying?'

Zhou Zixu expressed his innocence and bewilderment: 'Royal Prince Yang doesn't seem to like me; when did I offend him?'

In the room, Zhou Zixu asked about the three kids, who were going to sit for the prefectural examination, "Including the rest time in between, it'll take about half a month to complete all three stages of the prefectural examination. Have you all thought through where you will stay?"

Sun Runze was eating a roasted chicken drumstick and his mouth was covered in a layer of oil. He swallowed his food and replied, "Of course we'll stay in my house! My house is near the prefectural yamen, so it's very convenient!"

Liu Jinye, unwilling to be outdone, said, "My family has a residence that's opposite the examination courtyard—staying at my place will be even more convenient!"

Yu Xiaocao had already decided beforehand that she would see her brother off to his examination in the prefectural city, but she was reluctant to stay in the homes of other people. However, it was more

inconvenient if she stayed in an inn, as it would be too noisy, and she also would not be able to cook for her little brother.

Third Young Master Zhou could sense her hesitation, so he said, “If you don't want to stay in their houses, I also have a residence in the prefectural city. However, it's further away from the examination courtyard—about half an hour's walking distance.”

He had not even finished his sentence before Royal Prince Yang glared at him. In his heart, Zhu Junyang mumbled: 'He definitely has evil intentions to contribute without reason! This guy always sticks close to Yu Xiaocao—he must have an ulterior motive. Xiaocao is as pure as a piece of white paper, so he must prevent her from being tainted by others!'

“What's there to hesitate? You're not lacking in money—just buy a house near the examination courtyard! If you're reluctant to spend the money, I'll sponsor part of it!” Zhu Junyang did not want Xiaocao to have any affiliation with Third Young Master Zhou.

Yu Xiaocao thought about it with her head lowered: 'It's not a bad idea to buy one if there's a suitable house. There will always be students who will sit for the prefectural examination every year, so if the house is near to the examination courtyard, she won't worry about being unable to rent it out. However, who would sell a house with such a good location?'

After she expressed her concerns, Zhu Junyang took on everything as he said, “Don't worry and just leave this matter to this prince. I guarantee that I'll find a suitable one for you before the prefectural examination.”

He wasn't saying this blindly. He knew that Jinwei Prefectural City's prefectural magistrate had a few residences and shophouses in the prefectural city. There was one shophouse near the examination courtyard. It was a shop in the front, while there was a small three-sectioned compound at the back. Xiaocao should be very satisfied with it.

He was not at all worried that the owner would not sell the shophouse. The prefectural magistrate worked under his father, Imperial Prince Jing, when he was younger. It was only with this connection that he managed to become the prefectural magistrate. His term as the prefectural magistrate was almost up, and his promotion depended completely on Prince Jing's mood. Zhu Junyang also would not take advantage of the prefectural magistrate—he would pay whatever the cost of the shophouse.

Although she was doubtful of Royal Prince Yang's words, Yu Xiaocao stayed silent. If she could not buy a suitable residence, she would just shamelessly live in Third Young Master Zhou's residence. He did not stay there often anyway.

Zhu Junyang could tell that Xiaocao doubted him. In a fit of anger, he rushed to the prefectural city the following day and explained his purpose to Prefectural Magistrate Yan. Prefectural Magistrate Yan knew that his term was up in less than a year, and although the location of the shophouse near the prefectural examination courtyard was excellent, it was still not as important as his own future. Without hesitation, he immediately sold the shophouse to Royal Prince Yang at a very low price.

Pleased with his actions, Zhu Junyang wrote a letter to his father once he got back to Tanggu Town and put in a good word for Prefectural Magistrate Yan. A year later, Prefectural Magistrate Yan became the mayor of the capital city. Although he was still a fourth-rank official, could the officials in the capital city be compared to those outside? As mayor, he controlled the government of the capital and the areas around it. He was considered to be quite a high authority!

Since Zhu Junyang took on the duty of providing the ingredients, and the location in the prefectural city was also set, Yu Xiaocao's only duty everyday was to feel comfortable, and ensure that the three little ones and the young prince were satisfied with their meals.

Time passed quickly. Unknowingly, the prefectural examination was only three days away. It was about time that they left for the prefectural city. Originally, Yu Hai was worried about the brother and sister duo heading to the prefectural city by themselves. Even though Yu Xiaocao was capable, she was still just a child. But it was currently the busiest time in the fields. A portion of the vegetables that they planted was ready to be harvested. Moreover, the few dozen mu of melon fields also needed to be cared for. They could not afford any mishaps. During this time, he was so busy he could not help but wish there were two of him to do all the work.

The prefectural examination was an important matter for his son and the entire family. No matter how busy he was, he must still make time to send his children to the prefectural city and see to it that they had settled in comfortably—only then would he be able to rest his worries.

Although, before they set off, Royal Prince Yang told him that he was also heading towards the prefectural city and that he could accompany Yu Xiaocao and her brother. Yu Hai was quite reassured to know that Royal Prince Yang was following them, so he only reminded them of the important details before readily putting them in Royal Prince Yang's care.

It was not because he was trusting, but that Royal Prince Yang still depended on his daughter to cultivate corn—how could he dare to let anything happen to her?

The horse carriage that they took was also prepared by Royal Prince Yang. It was the kind of comfortable big carriage pulled by three horses that was extremely suitable for long distance travel. It felt spacious even if Yu Xiaocao and her brother were to roll around in it.

Before they set off, Qian Wen, who had agreed to travel with the siblings, was both stunned and disappointed when he saw the glamorous horse carriage. No matter how hard he tried, he still could not catch up to her footsteps. Was the distance between him and her ever increasing?

Horse hooves clacked against the ground, and the carriage started to move. Inside the carriage, only Little Shitou blabbered non-stop.

Just as they exited the village, they were stopped by someone. Yu Xiaocao lifted the curtain only to see the Madam Zhang who she hated the most. The coachman was obviously a person trained in martial arts as he pointed the whip in his hand at Madam Zhang and shouted, “Stop! I won't be courteous to you if you come any closer!”

Royal Prince Yang said with slight annoyance, “What's the matter? Just ignore irrelevant people! Hurry up!”

Madam Zhang quickly pointed towards her youngest son, who stood behind her, saying, “This commoner greets Your Highness, Royal Prince Yang. I've heard that this carriage is headed towards the prefectural city. This is Yu Xiaocao and Little Shitou's younger uncle. He's also headed towards the prefectural city to sit for the examination. Can you please bring us along out of convenience?”

Madam Zhang was going all out for her youngest son; she knew that Royal Prince Yang was not easy to talk to, but still shamelessly made a request. If they could not make it onto this carriage, they would still need to walk to town to catch a ride. The horse carriage from town to the prefectural city was not as comfortable as the royal prince's, not to mention it was bumpy and extremely slow. Even the Yu Family's horse carriage was better—at least they used rubber tires!

Royal Prince Yang was aware of how Madam Zhang treated Yu Hai's family, especially when she refused to give them money to pay for Xiaocao's treatment when she was sick. Every time he recalled this

matter, he could not help but want to kill Madam Zhang with a slap. But there was no legitimate reason now! No matter what, she was still the biological mother of Xiaocao's younger uncle. Yu Bo would definitely not dare to do anything against him if he killed her, but what if he directed his hatred towards Xiaocao's family? Although he was confident that he could protect Xiaocao, he could not always be in Dongshan Village. Thus, he could not take this risk!

As he was inwardly grumbling and about ready to sternly refuse her, Zhu Junyang noticed Yu Xiaocao waving at him. Nudging his horse towards her, he bent down to listen to Xiaocao whisper two sentences to him. Then, he pointed at Yu Bo, "He can get on the carriage, but you can't!"

Chapter 329 – Back to the Prefectural City

Madam Zhang looked at the situation and silently cursed Yu Xiaocao for causing trouble. If that little brat wasn't here, how could the royal prince not allow her to get on the carriage? One had to admire Madam Zhang for her self-confidence!

Madam Zhang was about to say something but Zhu Junyang had long lost his patience, "You have two choices. The first is that he takes the carriage alone. The second is that neither of you are allowed to sit in the carriage!!"

Yu Bo noticed that the royal prince had already become angry and hurriedly spoke to his mother, "Mother, I'm not a child anymore so I don't need you to escort me! I'm already familiar with the prefectural city and I have an old schoolmate there. We've already come to an agreement that I'll lodge at his house. Don't worry! Just wait at home for the good news."

Madam Zhang hatefully glared at the carriage as if she could see through the exterior and look straight at that brat, Xiaocao.

Fury rose up in Zhu Junyang's heart, so he snapped the whip in his hands towards Madam Zhang with a loud and crisp snap. Madam Zhang retreated a few steps out of alarm and her legs softened beneath her. She sat on the ground stupidly and the cruel expression on her face immediately changed to frightened.

"Let's go!" Zhu Junyang commanded the driver. 'This prince was helping your son out of the merciful kindness of my own heart because Yu Bo is Xiaocao's younger uncle, but this old woman still dares to glare at Xiaocao. Are you trying to court death here?'

Although Madam Zhang wasn't sure why Royal Prince Yang suddenly became angry, she knew that if the carriage left now, her son would need to spend an entire day to get to the prefectural city. Furthermore, he would have to spend money to do so. She didn't know where she got the courage and strength from, but she flung herself at the carriage and grabbed the wheel with her two hands. She shouted loudly, "Royal Prince, it was this old woman who was greedy. We'll do as you say and only my son will go along..."

"I've changed my mind. Neither of you two are allowed to sit on my carriage! Unless..." Zhu Junyang looked at Madam Zhang with disdain as he waited for her to react.

"Unless what?" When Madam Zhang saw that there was still leeway, she hurriedly asked.

"Unless you apologize to Xiaocao!" Zhu Junyang remembered her previous poisonous glare and felt hate bubble up.

Madam Zhang wanted to refuse and asked, "Why?"

"We can set aside what you were thinking about earlier, but don't tell me you don't remember how you treated her whole family in the past? Do you truly believe you don't owe her an apology?" Although Zhu Junyang really didn't want to talk to this old woman, he had a ball of resentment in his heart towards her.

Madam Zhang opened her mouth to reply when her youngest son pulled on the corner of her jacket. Yu Bo was speechless in front of his mother, who had no idea of the gravity of the situation. Royal Prince Yang could just lift one finger and destroy their family. They should be doing all they could to follow his wishes, yet his mother kept wanting to press her luck. Was there any benefit to be had if they offended Royal Prince Yang?

Only now did Madam Zhang recall that she was asking for a favor from the other person. People needed to learn when to bow and submit and when to stand tall. For the sake of her son, she was willing to back down, "Xiaocao ah, in the past, it was Grandmother's fault. However, our family was poor, so we didn't have a lot of food. We had many mouths to feed, so we couldn't just do things for the sake of you and let everyone else starve ah! After all of these years, now your family is doing very well, so please just let bygones be bygones ah!"

Was this an apology? From the words that she used and the odd intonation in her voice that sounded vaguely of jealousy, this was words of dissention disguised as an apology, right? Yu Xiaocao wasn't someone to take a loss for nothing, "Old Lady Zhang, we don't have such a malicious grandmother in our family. Don't forget, my grandfather has already peacefully separated from you!"

"In addition, don't try to pull the wool over everyone's eyes as if we're all stupid, okay? When I was ill, you were able to use the excuse that the family was poor so you couldn't take out any money for me to see the doctor. That was somewhat acceptable. However, when my father's leg was savaged by a bear, the three hundred taels that Uncle Zhao gave us after selling the bear had all been given to you. We didn't hold back a single copper. But what did you do? You were so miserly that you couldn't bear to spend a single tael to let the doctor treat my father's leg. When we split from the family, you were even more cruel. We were thrown out of the house as if we were a bunch of beggars and were given next to nothing. If it wasn't for my grandfather insisting on it, I reckon that we wouldn't have even gotten the few taels that we did! That was three hundred taels ah! At the time, we had the injured, the sick, the weak, and underage children with us! Anyone with a speck of morality within them wouldn't have hogged all of the three hundred taels without giving us even a little bit!!"

'Weren't you trying to use your connection with us to gain an advantage ah? I'll broadcast it loud and clear to everyone around us, so they can discuss who is right and wrong.' Popular opinion was turning as people's hearts generally knew what was fairness and justice. At this moment, there were quite a number of people surrounding the Royal Prince's luxurious carriage to send the Yu Family's brother-sister pair off. All of them were giving Madam Zhang dirty looks.

Yu Bo felt his face heat up in embarrassment as shame settled into his heart after hearing what his mother had done.

Yu Xiaocao continued, "The horrible things you've done to us can be somewhat explained as my father isn't your biological son. After all, people will always be selfish. However, a married couple is a different story. My grandfather had spent over twenty years with you and helped you raise your oldest son, who's not blood related to him. In his old age, for the sake of supporting your family, he went out to sea every day, in rain or shine, to fish without rest. But how did you end up treating him? You couldn't bear to spend some money to treat a minor illness and let it become a serious infection. Then you threw him into a cramped, damaged room to let him die. You didn't even give him any water to drink. If I didn't come by to visit in time, my grandfather wouldn't have died from his illness but would have perished of thirst or starved to death!"

“If the heavens didn't pity us, my whole family along with my grandfather would have all been bankrupt and perished from your actions! But you just easily say that we should 'let bygones be bygones' to forgive your sins. But isn't that covering everything you have done?” Everything that Yu Xiaocao mentioned was giving Madam Zhang a giant slap on her face. Her dirty deeds had finally been let out into the open.

Madam Zhang's face turned bright red as she saw her fellow villagers all pointing and whispering. If there was a crack in the ground right now, she would have jumped into it already!

Yu Bo's face became painfully flushed. With such a mother pulling him down, what could he do? His head hung down as if it had a thousand catties hanging from it. His voice was as quiet as the buzzing of a mosquito as he said, “Xiaocao, let me apologize on the behalf of my mother. I've spent most of the years studying outside and didn't know my mother had done so many horrible things. I'm truly sorry...”

Even after hearing his apology, Yu Xiaocao didn't have much of a good opinion of her younger uncle. Everything that Madam Zhang did was for the sake of money. Wasn't the old woman so stingy for the sake of one person? Obviously, Madam Zhang did everything for Yu Bo's studies and future. Now, Yu Bo pushed all of the blame onto his mother as if he was oh-so-innocent and pitiful as well. These two people were definitely truly mother and son. Their selfish personalities were exactly the same.

However, in the end, Yu Bo was still her younger uncle, and he had never done anything to harm them directly. For the sake of her grandfather, she wouldn't make it too ugly, “It's getting late. If Younger Uncle plans on taking the carriage with us to the prefectural city, then come up ah! The carriage is too small and seating four people is already pretty crowded. As for everyone else, we'll have to say no!”

Qian Wen was only fourteen years old and could go by himself to the prefectural city for the examinations. Was Yu Bo like a five to six year old child and still needed his mother to come along?

Although Yu Bo wanted to resolutely refuse for the sake of his face, it would take him almost an extra day to transfer from the town to the prefectural city. Time was money and having extra time could be the difference between a good or bad result. Therefore, time was of utmost importance! He had no choice but to lower himself! Yu Bo took the luggage from Madam Zhang's hands and silently climbed up the carriage. After he got on, he didn't enter the inner area and instead sat next to the driver outside.

Zhu Junyang gave him a look full of disgust, 'If you resolutely refused to sit on my carriage, then I would have seen you in a different light! However, you ride my carriage yet sit on the outside. Are you trying to throw a temper tantrum? Who cares about you?!

Yu Xiaocao was also thinking the same thing as she sat on the inside. It was better that he didn't come in! Less room to waste!

The inside of the carriage was quite spacious and could actually hold a fold-down table in the middle. There were also nooks that could hold some extra snacks and other items. The three of them had just eaten breakfast, so they weren't interested in snacking at the moment. However, it would take them many hours to get to the prefectural city. If they just sat there the entire time, wouldn't it be too boring?

Qian Wen took out a book and prepared to silently read aloud. However, Little Shitou got his attention, "Older Brother Xiaowen, the carriage will be swaying a lot, so it will injure your eyes to read here. Second Sister, think of a fun game for us to pass the time ah!"

Yu Xiaocao took out a deck of cards that she had made herself and smiled, "I've already made preparations! Come, let's play 'three peasants against the landlord' [1]!"

"Oh, so 'fight the landlord' can also be done with three people ah!! Older Brother Xiaowen, 'fight the landlord' is a lot of fun and really easy to learn. I'll teach you!" As Yu Xiaocao dealt the cards, Little Shitou explained the rules of the game to Qian Wen.

Since Qian Wen was a good student, he naturally wasn't stupid, so he figured out how to play the game very quickly. Within moments, the three of them played excitedly in the carriage. Peals of laughter and delighted shrieks could be heard from time to time from the inner carriage.

Zhu Junyang was also quite young and was at the stage in his life when he was interested in everything. From time to time, he would lift the curtain in the carriage and look around. Luckily, he had good horsemanship, so even when he was crouching down, his horse was still obedient. Otherwise, he would have been thrown off long ago.

Head Steward Liu felt as if he was on tenterhooks as he watched his master repeatedly raise the curtain in the carriage. Finally, he spoke up, "Master, there's quite a bit to travel before we get to the prefectural city. How about you go inside to rest a bit?"

The road from Tanggu Town to the prefectural city could be finished in four hours if Zhu Junyang spurred his horse at top speed. On a military mission, he could sit on a horse all day without getting

tired, so why would he need to rest now? However, this gave him the excuse to enter the carriage. He had the driver stop the carriage while he swiftly entered inside.

With another large body inside, Xiaocao naturally couldn't just leave him out to dry as the three of them played. Thus, the four of them started playing 'fight the landlord'. Zhu Junyang's luck was quite bad and he always pulled the landlord card without ever winning once. Before long, his handsome face had been stuck completely with scraps of paper. If you agreed to bet, you must accept the possibility of losing as that was part of the rules of the game. Although Zhu Junyang was a noble and respected royal prince, he still played by the rules.

Head Steward Liu stayed outside and could hear his master's cheerful laughter from time to time. His spirits also rose. Miss Yu was truly incredible to be able to find ways to make his master happy. Many years had gone by and this was the first time in a long while since his master was able to laugh with such delight. His master was currently like a simple and happy child, similar to how he was more than ten years ago. It brought him back to when he first came to serve his master. At first glance, he saw his tiny master, running around the garden with delight and laughter...

With an entertaining card game, the usually long and monotonous journey became merry and short. Before they knew it, the carriage had already passed through the large gates of the prefectural city.

Fields of Gold Chapter 330 - Settling Down

His master and the Yu Family's siblings spent the whole journey there playing cards. For lunch, they only ate a few bites of the snacks that were in the carriage to whet their hunger. Everyone was in the midst of having fun, so Head Steward Liu directed the driver to go to the Zhenxiu Restaurant branch that had just opened recently in the prefectural city.

The prefectural city's branch had only been open for ten days, so business was booming. Currently it was past the usual time to eat lunch, but when they entered to look, the restaurant was still completely full of diners. Luckily, the manager of this branch was the old head manager of the Tanggu Town branch. The new manager at Tanggu Town was now Qian Xiaoduo.

The head manager had long been informed by his master that the Yu Family's siblings were going to the prefectural city. If they came to Zhenxiu Restaurant, they could use the reserved private room to dine. Thus, the whole group of people went up to the third floor's private room under the envious gazes of all of the other customers.

Yu Bo had long heard about Tanggu Town's Zhenxiu Restaurant's exquisite food. The food was known to be incredibly delicious but the prices were also very high. In addition, getting a table there was very hard. He naturally never had the chance to even try one of the dishes there. However, he would not

have expected that he would have the opportunity to dine at Zhenxiu Restaurant after bumming a ride off of the royal prince.

Under the warm reception of the head manager, the group of people entered the private room. Yu Bo had originally thought that the head manager was only treating them so politely because the royal prince was with them. However, after silently observing for a bit, he discovered that the head manager's demeanor towards his niece was even more warm and welcoming than his demeanor towards the prince.

He had also heard rumors that the young master of Zhenxiu Restaurant had a pretty good relationship with his second older brother's family. Perhaps...the Zhou Family's young master fancied his niece, so the head manager was being welcoming and polite to his future mistress? That couldn't be true, right? Although his second older brother's family now had some assets, they were still very far from the wealth and status of the Zhou Family. If the family backgrounds were not the same, how could the Zhou Family permit this marriage?

Yu Bo, ah Yu Bo, your thoughts are going in the completely wrong direction!

The meal consisted of both meat and vegetable dishes, and all of them were pleasing to the eye while tasting incredible. Yu Xiaocao took a single bite and could tell this was the product of Chef Wang's hands. She was pretty sure that the Zhenxiu Restaurant in the capital was now stable and had been taken over by one of Chef Wang's disciples. Thus, he could personally come over here and supervise the prefectural city's branch!

After they finished the meal, before Yu Bo left the group, he first asked whether Yu Xiaocao and her brother had a place to stay. Once he found out they did, he left with a lightened heart to meet up with his schoolmate.

“Older Brother Xiaowen, did you already make arrangements for your stay?” Little Shitou asked.

Qian Wen lightly shook his head, “I was planning on finding an inn near the prefectural city's testing facility to rest in tonight. Then tomorrow I was going to go search for a more suitable living space...”

Little Shitou somewhat excitedly replied, "His Royal Highness helped us rent out a small residence. I heard that it's pretty close to the examination area. How about you live with us ah?"

Qian Wen glanced at Yu Xiaocao, who was currently talking to Royal Prince Yang. He hesitated for a second before he said, "Let's first get you two settled and then we can talk about me ah!"

Behind the two youths were Yu Xiaocao and Royal Prince Yang. They were currently discussing that residence. Yu Xiaocao looked at the deed that was given to her and it also had a transaction certificate with it. She was shocked beyond words and didn't quite dare believe what was in front of her as she said, "The houses in the prefectural city are really this inexpensive? A three-sectioned residence only costs a hundred taels?"

What she didn't say was this: 'Such a big residence must be broken beyond repair if it only cost a hundred taels ah! Is it even livable at this point?'

Royal Prince Yang's eyes seemed to be able to see into her heart as he resentfully said, "This residence used to belong to someone I know. The family had to return back to the capital in a hurry and knew I was out looking for a residence. Thus, they went with the flow and half-sold it half-gave it to me. What, you have a problem with that?"

Yu Xiaocao replied with a bit of embarrassment, "You didn't need to do this. As long as the location was good, we would be able to take out the money to buy it at market price."

"If you can get it for cheaper, what's wrong with that?" What Royal Prince Yang didn't mention was that the prefectural magistrate was planning on giving him this residence and the land around it. However, he refused the gift. There wasn't really a difference between him receiving it as a present and him buying it. This residence was worth at least seven hundred to eight hundred taels. By buying it for one hundred taels, it was pretty much the same as getting it for free.

Yu Xiaocao gave him a cold glare and stated, "I'm only thinking of you and the debt you might have incurred ah! It's easy to repay a debt of money but it's hard to return a debt of gratitude. I was concerned that he might have ulterior motives and want you to do something that makes you feel uncomfortable!"

When Zhu Junyang heard her explanation, a cool refreshing feeling fell into his heart, as if he had just taken a sip of iced water on the hottest day of the year. This little lass had improved and knew how to think about him!

He proudly replied, "Not a problem! I know what he wants and it's nothing difficult. Not a big deal at all!"

Yu Xiaocao finally relaxed. However, she still had to exhort him a bit, "Problems that can be resolved with money are all not a big deal. I advise you to rely less on using connections. It's hard to fathom a person's mind. Who knows what other people are thinking!"

"So long-winded! Do you really need to state the obvious? However, if you have absolute power, you will have countless people coming up to fawn over you. At that point, even if you take their things, they will take it as the ultimate honor! This is what power is!!" Royal Prince Yang was giving Yu Xiaocao a lesson on how 'a society that relied on hierarchy' worked.

Only now did Yu Xiaocao remember that the person in front of her was a royal prince who was born into the imperial family. He was also someone the emperor himself looked highly upon. So, how could he be afraid of anyone?

She took the deed for the residence and fished out a banknote worth a hundred taels. She stuffed it into the young royal prince's hands and said, "Alright, then I'll take it that I'm basking in your glory and received a big advantage. In the future, I'll make more delicious food to compensate you!"

Zhu Junyang wanted to give the money back to her but he knew her stubborn personality. If he didn't take the money, she would refuse to take the deed to the house. It didn't matter. The future was long and he could gradually compensate the money she gave him through other methods.

Zhenxiu Restaurant was located pretty close to the examination yard, so the group of them walked there as they chatted. This was the first time Little Shitou had been to the prefectural city. Thus, the entire way there he acted as if he wished he could have another pair of eyes to take in all of the sights. Yu Xiaocao thought he looked quite funny, "After you finish taking your exam, we can spend a few more days in the city so you can play to your heart's content. The most important thing right now is to settle down as soon as we can!"

Before long, the group had arrived at the newly bought residence. Facing the street was a small shop that still had people going in and out of it as they packed away the last of the goods. When the people there saw them approach, a middle-aged man, who looked like a shopkeeper, walked towards Head Steward Liu. He smiled, "We're a bit behind schedule, so the shop hasn't been completely cleaned yet.

Could we possibly get a couple more days? The residence behind the shop has already been completely cleaned so everyone can go in whenever they want!”

Head Steward Liu turned to look at the current new owner of the residence——Yu Xiaocao. Yu Xiaocao nodded, “My younger brother will be taking the prefectural exam in three days and needs some peace and quiet to study. Please quickly clean up everything!”

Qian Wen felt a bit confused so he asked in a questioning tone, “Shitou, the house you guys are renting has a shop in front ah! It must not be cheap, right?”

Little Shitou scratched the back of his head and let out an awkward laugh, “My second sister was in charge of everything in regards to renting a place to live. I'm not really sure. However, we are right across the street from the examination hall, so it's quite convenient. I guess this store fell behind on rent and so they're taking this opportunity to rent it out to students taking the exam, right? Let's go, we should go look at how big the residence is!”

The residence was the perfect example of a three-sectioned house. The front section had been renovated into a store. After traversing through the main gate next to the store and turning past the screen wall, they passed through the inner main gate into the courtyard.

Little Shitou remarked with slight disappointment, “The courtyard is a lot smaller than the one at home. It's also completely bare and only has two trees...”

Qian Wen silently thought, 'Your family's front courtyard and back courtyard combined must be a few mu in area. A courtyard that big in the prefectural city must cost at least a thousand taels, right? That being said, you're only renting for half a month before leaving. Does it really matter how big the courtyard is?'

The main building in the courtyard had three rooms with a side room on each side of the building. The two side wings also had three rooms each. Qian Wen thought for a bit and decided that if Yu Xiaocao had rented the entire courtyard, they wouldn't have enough people for all of the buildings. That would be a massive waste of money ah!

Yu Xiaocao leisurely wandered through the courtyard. The courtyard had been cleaned up quite neatly and nothing in the rooms had been moved around. Thus, this residence was move-in ready and came already furnished. Even the quilts and articles for daily use had been changed into new ones. The utensils in the kitchen had clearly never been used before.

“Miss Yu, is there anything else you need us to acquire?” Head Steward Liu was quite pleased with the work his underlings had done, so he casually asked her.

Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and then replied, “Everything looks good. I just don't know if it's hard to get food ingredients in the prefectural city or not!”

Head Steward Liu eyed one of his underlings who was next to them. The servant hurriedly replied, “All of the food has been bought according to the list that the Head Steward gave us. Everything has been stored in the cellar downstairs. Head Steward, please inspect it!”

“Alright, you can leave! Tell the rest of them that if they don't have an order, they're not allowed to disturb us...” Head Steward Liu knew that his master didn't like other people besides Miss Yu hanging around him. There was no need for any maidservants or senior servants.

As for the prince's personal safety, that also wasn't an issue. Head Steward Liu was the best of the best. Furthermore, all of the bodyguards that came with them were housed in the two residences next to this one. That's right, his master not only bought this residence but also the two next to this one. Ah, was doing all of this worth it for the sake of Miss Yu's younger brother taking his examination?

In the end, they had successfully persuaded Qian Wen to stay with them. On one hand, this courtyard was large and spacious, and there were a lot of rooms. Royal Prince Yang resided in the main building and the two Yu siblings were housed in the east wing. Thus, the west wing was still empty. At this time, it was hard to say whether they could find another house that was suitable to rent. Inns were loud and full of people, how could they be as peaceful and calm as this place?

Although Qian Wen decided to stay, he insisted on paying his portion of the rent. Blood-related brothers would make sure to split the bill, so how could two neighbors, who only had decent relations, not?

The next day, Little Shitou went out to pay a visit to his two good classmates in the city. When he came back, he brought back two little tails along. Sun Runze and Liu Jinye were trying to bum a meal off of them. Little Shitou had traveled a long way, so technically it should have been those two taking him out for a meal. However, they were unable to reserve a table at Zhenxiu Restaurant and all of the other restaurants in the area served food that was nowhere near as delicious as the food Yu Fan's second sister made.

Consequently, the two of them somehow managed to get some food ingredients and shamelessly wiggled their way in to bum a meal. The food they brought along was only stuff that was available in the season. Among the ingredients was some fresh shepherd's purse that looked quite good.

Yu Xiaocao accepted her fate and began to cook a table of delicious food. She also wrapped a bunch of pork and shepherd's purse filled dumplings. Thus, after the two stuffed little fellows were sent back home, they finally had time to roam the nearby streets.

On this walk, she discovered that the residence that her family bought was quite a steal. The location was perfect. Because it was very close to the prefectural yamen, a lot of wealthy families liked to live in the area, meaning it was safe ah! The stores next to the residence had steady business. This showed that all of the people nearby had plenty of money to spend!