

Gold Chapter 351

Fields of Gold Chapter 351 - Catching Cicadas Under the Moonlight

The night sky appeared very clear after being washed by the rain, and the dark blue sky was covered with stars. A bright moon was hanging high in the sky. Its faint light was like a thin gauze that lightly shrouded the mountain forest, leaving a silver glow on the top of the trees.

A cool breeze gently blew. The cicadas in the forest showed off their clear throats, while the crickets in the thickets sang a long melody. In the dark, the fireflies danced around the small lanterns... Suddenly, the cicadas went silent and the crickets stopped singing. The fireflies also hid within the thickets. The little fairies of the mountain secretly watched the group of people who broke the silence of the forest.

When they passed by the piggery, Yu Xiaocao called Liu Feiyan to come along with them. Little Black, who was responsible for guarding the entrance of the piggery, excitedly played with Little White as they ran in the front. At times, they stopped and turned around to look at their masters with their emerald green eyes.

At the beginning of spring, Big Gray had returned to the mountains. The two wolf pups with different colored fur, Little Black and Little White, were almost one year old. During the past half a year, they grew crazily like inflated balloons. With all four limbs on the ground, they were nearly up to Xiaocao's chest. One was black, while the other white. They had the same emerald green eyes, same tall physique, and the same dense fur. They had very distinctive personalities; one was lively and the other was cool. The children all really liked them. The villagers all thought that Little Black and Little White were dogs that were mixed with wolves. They had also saved their young master before, so the villagers had good feelings towards them. The two little wolves had never harmed the domestic animals raised by the villagers. Everyone lived together in a harmonious and peaceful manner...

Royal Prince Yang and Yu Xiaocao walked in front of the group with glass lanterns in their hands. Little White followed Xiaocao step by step, like a loyal guard. Whenever there was any movement, he would stop in his tracks and quietly listen with his ears pricked up. The others followed behind them gleefully, and occasionally bent down to look for something in the grass.

Yu Xiaocao was very experienced in catching cicadas. She knew that the best time to catch them was between seven to eight in the evening. She took out a pocket watch and checked the time with the help of the lantern. It was about time, so she led the group of excited kids to the foot of the mountain forest.

With her chest proudly thrust out, she began assigning the tasks, "Form groups of two or three and just stay around this small forest. Don't run off too far and shout loudly if something happens. Little Black and Little White will swiftly go assist you guys! Catching cicadas is very simple. Just shine the light

of the lantern on the tree trunk, and when you see it, just catch it! That's all you have to do! Alright, that's it for now, dismissed!”

Liu Fangping, whose hands were held by his older sister, asked with a grin, “Cousin Xiaocao, why do you speak with a northeastern accent? It sounds so close and dear ah!!”

Liu Yaner squeezed his little hands and said, “She must have heard it when you were teaching Little Shitou. She didn't learn it properly, so it sounds nondescript and quite funny!”

Under the dim light of the lantern, Zhu Junyang saw Yu Xiaocao with her hands placed on her hip and speaking in a spirited manner. She looked like a little squirrel that just snatched a large pine nut. She was becoming more and more interesting. Holding the back of her collar, he brought her to his side and said, “Let's form a team. This prince will protect you!”

This big-eyed 'little squirrel' rolled her eyes at him, and then pulled his hands away, saying, “This part of the forest is very safe. At most, there would be some wild hares and pheasants appearing. Would this maiden need your protection?” As she spoke, she walked towards a big tree with a lantern in her hands.

“There aren't any beasts, but snakes would appear in the grass in the summer...”

Before Zhu Junyang had finished speaking, that proud 'little squirrel' screamed and jumped back next to him. She hid behind him and tightly grasped the corner of his clothes with a flustered expression, “Snakes? Where? Where is it??”

[Coward, that kid is tricking you!! With this Divine Stone around, what are you afraid of?] The little divine stone's scornful voice sounded in her mind. A small, golden figure swiftly scrawled on top of Little White's back. It found a place on the top of his head and lay down comfortably. Had it been someone else, with Little White's proud temper, there was no way that he would let others 'beard the lion in his den'. However, the little divine stone used its power to regulate his body in exchange, so he reluctantly stopped himself from shaking the little kitten off.

Zhu Junyang also saw the little golden cat, which was only about the size of his fist. It had been over a year, yet it still hadn't grown at all and it always looked so miniature. He laughed and said, “One will always raise a pet similar to oneself. This little kitten is so tiny ah!”

Yu Xiaocao immediately forgot that he had scared her with snakes, and exploded in anger, "What do you mean? I have grown taller, okay!! Since the beginning of spring til now, I have grown at least 7 centimeters..."

"Oh, I can't tell. You still look so short!" Zhu Junyang measured the top of her head which reached up to his own waist.

Yu Xiaocao stomped her feet like an enraged little rooster. She angrily hollered with her neck stretched out, "You can't tell because you're also growing!! Compared with the measurements that I marked on the wall last year, I have grown this much, this much!!" As she spoke, she made a gesture with her hands to show him that she had indeed grown in height!

Zhu Junyang walked up to a tree and pointed at a black bug that was crawling on the trunk. He asked with slight disdain, "Is this the edible bug that you mentioned? It looks so ugly!"

Yu Xiaocao ran over to hold onto the cicada, and then put it into the jar tied around her waist. She wrinkled her nose at him and said, "You think it's ugly? I reckon you're actually afraid of it, right? Then don't eat it after it's fried ah!"

"This prince has already tried locust, so would I still be afraid of this little bug?" Zhu Junyang proudly snorted. He reached out his arm, picked up a cicada that was high up on the tree, and dangled it in front to her, which resulted in her rolling her eyes at him.

Yu Xiaocao patted Little White's neck and decided to stay far away from this haughty drama queen, lest she get infected. Anyway, she had the little divine stone and the two guards, Little White and Little Black, protecting her, so she wasn't afraid of those creepy-crawlies.

When she moved a few steps to the side, Zhu Junyang also walked a few steps to the side. He followed her step by step, so no matter what she did, she still couldn't shake off this little tail. Whatever! Proper business was more important. Holding the lantern and bending over, Yu Xiaocao searched for larvae of cicadas on the trunks and bushes.

Unlike in her previous life, where cicadas were nearly gone, it seemed like they could catch some every few steps. Sometimes, they were able to catch a few cicadas on the same tree. Yu Xiaocao became

increasingly enthusiastic as she continued to catch the cicadas. The small jar around her waist had filled up unknowingly.

Suddenly, Little White's ears moved, and he shifted into an alert stance. Yu Xiaocao was alarmed and hurriedly moved closer to her little tail, Zhu Junyang. She had accidentally stepped on the young prince's feet in a panic.

Zhu Junyang, who was holding a cicada, strangely asked, "What's wrong? Did you see something?"

"There seems to be something in the thickets, shhh..." It wouldn't be a snake, right? The thing that she feared the most was those slippery and cold animals with smooth skin. But, Little Divine Stone, who was on top of Little White's head, didn't give her a warning, so there shouldn't be any danger. Yu Xiaocao's violently beating heart gradually calmed down.

Right at this time, Little White suddenly jumped onto the thick bushes, and his strong figure disappeared within the darkness. Yu Xiaocao was somewhat worried, "Will Little White be alright?"

Although Little White and Little Black often brought back small game when they frolicked in the mountains, after all, they were still very young and had never encountered fierce beasts. They also didn't have any experience with intense fighting. No one could guarantee absolute safety in the mountain forest at night. Perhaps, one or two fierce beasts might emerge from an unknown corner of the mountain.

"Little White is a wolf, not a dog!" Zhu Junyang wasn't worried at all. It might be dangerous for Little Black, that dumb wolf, to encounter a ferocious beast, but the survival skills of that haughty little wolf, Little White, wasn't inferior to Big Gray. If he encountered a lone wolf or cheetah, he should still be able to fight.

In Yu Xiaocao's heart, she couldn't forget how Little White looked when she first brought him home. He was just a baby wolf that hadn't opened his eyes. She anxiously checked the thickets and refused to walk away. Suddenly, she felt a furry head pushing at her arm. She turned around and was startled by a pair of emerald green eyes. With a closer look, it turned out to be Little Black. There wasn't a single strand of hair that was of a different color on his body, so he was completely hidden in the darkness of the mountain forest. At a glance, only a pair of green eyes could be seen.

Little Black shook his head excitedly and had a look in his eyes that seemed to be asking to be praised and caressed. Yu Xiaocao didn't quite understand, so Little Black touched her hand with his nose. She

knew what he meant and stretched out her hand. From within Little Black's warm mouth, a squirming cicada fell onto her palm.

It seemed like this fellow saw that everyone was catching cicadas so he joined in the fun to help. The dark night was nothing in the eyes of wolves, but it was quite hard for him to hold a thumb-sized cicada in his big mouth without harming it a bit. He had such good control of his strength! Yu Xiaocao continued to stare in the direction that Little White disappeared in as she patted his head in a perfunctory manner.

At this time, everyone had gotten a decent harvest. Those who had filled up the vessels that they brought gradually gathered over. Seeing Yu Xiaocao staring at a cluster of bushes motionlessly, they also curiously looked in that direction. When Little White emerged with a wild hare in his mouth, he was bewildered by those strange humans—why were they all gathered here? The wild hare was for his young master, so no one was allowed to steal it!

Yu Xiaocao checked out everyone's harvest and saw that there were a lot of cicadas in their vessels. It seemed like they got quite a large harvest! In addition, they also got a plump hare. They would definitely have a sumptuous meal tomorrow!

When they got home, Yu Xiaocao got a wooden bucket and filled it with salt water. After she cleaned the cicadas, she put them in the bucket to be soaked for a night. Once the flavor seeped in, it would taste better when fried!

The night passed by peacefully. The next morning, the three siblings of the Liu Family, Yu Hang, and Yu Xiaolian woke up very early. They picked vegetables in the courtyard as they waited for Yu Xiaocao, who was sleeping in, to wake up. The three Liu siblings had never tried cicadas. Allegedly, in the northeast, these things were caught to be fed to chickens. However, Yu Hang and Yu Xiaolian had eaten them before. When the three siblings heard them describe the fragrantly scorched taste of the fried cicadas, they almost drooled. They were filled with even more anticipation.

After much wait, Xiaocao had finally woken up. The group of children didn't need the adults' help as they lit the fire, made the pancakes, and cooked the porridge. With so many people helping, they quickly finished preparing breakfast.

Yu Xiaocao fished out the cicadas that they caught last night from the salt water and cleansed them with clean water. With the different cooking methods of deep-frying, dry-frying, and pan-frying, she different

flavor dishes like 'salt and pepper cicadas', 'spicy cicadas', 'cicadas stir-fried with shredded ginger', 'spicy and numbing cicadas', and so on.

Fields of Gold Chapter 352 - Proving Him Wrong

After Zhu Junyang's morning exercise, he came down from the mountains. As soon as he entered the courtyard, he could smell a strong fragrance drifting in the air. He didn't think that the little lass could actually make dishes with such alluring taste with those unattractive and somewhat disgusting bugs that were dug up from the soil.

"It's time to eat!" Yu Xiaocao held a big plate in each of her hands and walked out of the kitchen unsteadily. The fragrance came from the two plates.

The large plates, which were piled up with fried cicadas, could almost break her two wrists that were as thin as a stick of firewood. Zhu Junyang's feet moved faster than his brain; he walked forward and took the plates from Yu Xiaocao's hands.

Seeing him, Yu Xiaocao grinned widely and said, "Young Royal Prince, your nose is comparable to that of a 'barking alien' [1]. You have followed the smell over as soon as the cicadas are fried!"

If Zhu Junyang knew what a 'barking alien' was, he would definitely be furious. She actually compared him, who was wise and skilled in martial arts, to a canine that only knew how to stick its tongue out and wag its tail to please others. Such disrespect! Fortunately, most of his attention was focused on the fragrantly scorched cicadas, and thus overlooked the meaning of 'barking alien'.

Xiaolian and Liu Yaner, who were helping in the kitchen, each brought out a plate of different flavored fried cicadas. After they put them on the table, Xiaolian said, "You guys eat first. I'll take these to Eldest Maternal Aunt and Older Cousin so that they can also have a taste."

There was a simple kitchen in the piggery. Normally, Xiaolian, Eldest Maternal Aunt and her daughter would cook their meals there. When the family made delicious food at home, they would also send some to them. Since the piglets in the piggery had sufficient food and Xiaocao regularly supplemented them with a light concentration of mystic-stone water, they were all in good health, had good appetite, and grew very well. The first batch of piglets weighed close to one hundred catties after being raised for four months, as if they ate 'four months fat'.

Liu Yaner also delivered a full plate of fried cicadas to the Qian Family next door. After all, the Qian siblings also contributed two jars of cicadas yesterday. Qian Wu didn't take a single one home for this very reason. Who told Xiaocao to be such a good cook? Even if he brought it back, his mother, Madam

Mao, wouldn't know how to cook it. Moreover, even if she did, she wouldn't be willing to waste oil to fry the cicadas as snacks for him. One must admit that this fellow Qian Wu usually seemed quite foolish, but he had quite a lot of tricks up his sleeves!

In the Yu Family's courtyard, the women helping to pick vegetables had arrived. Smelling the scent, one of the women, who usually had a close relationship with Madam Liu, said with a smile, "Dahai's wife, what novel food did your youngest daughter make this time? It smells so good that I'm about to drool!"

Madam Liu took out some and placed them on a small plate for them to taste. They had just experienced a disaster year, so they knew about the importance of food. The matron resisted the temptation of the food and shook her head, saying, "Dahai's wife, please don't lure out the gluttonous bugs in our stomachs. We're going to be the ones suffering if it rebels. Quickly take the plate back. Don't you know that putting such delicious food in front of us is like a cruel torture to us ah?!"

Madam Liu glared at her with a smile and said, "It's fine if the gluttonous bugs are lured out. It's not like these are anything precious. Do you hear the cicadas on the trees? These are the larvae that just crawled out of the soil and haven't shed off their shells. They can be found in batches in the forest at night. After catching them, they need to be properly cleaned and marinated with salt for a while. They are edible when they are cooked!"

During locust plague last year, the Yu Family had spread the news that locusts were edible. Nearly every family caught a large amount back to eat, which saved them a lot of grain. They had already eaten locusts roasted over fire, so why would they be afraid of these cicada larvae?

Seeing that it wasn't some expensive ingredient, the matron stopped acting courteous and picked one up to put in her mouth. A strangely refreshing taste instantly erupted within her mouth. It tasted better than the fried dish they had during the New Year! Her eyes lit up and she had a wide smile on her face as she said, "It tastes really good. Tonight, I'll have my husband and the kids catch some back, and I'll fry some for the kids to eat."

The other women also gave up on holding themselves back and each tried a piece. The group of people catching cicadas in the evening grew even bigger. Madam Liu told them to eat some more, but they refused. The members of the Yu Family and the Liu Family added up to more than ten people. How many cicadas could several children catch? They probably didn't have enough to eat, so even if they wanted to eat more, they had to control themselves. How could they take food from the children?

Moreover, Royal Prince Yang was here. Right now, his existence in Tanggu Town was of someone superior to the county magistrate. All the villages within the vicinity of Tanggu were under his ruling, so they were also considered his people. They had to at least leave a good impression for the royal prince, right?

They were worried about the royal prince, but Royal Prince Yang, who had the innate quality of a glutton, focused all his attention on the different flavored fried cicadas. His favorite was actually the spicy and numbing flavor. Not only did it have a golden color, but it also had a crispy shell and tender flesh. With a dry and fragrant taste and numbingly spicy mouthfeel, he felt as if all the taste buds in his mouth were jumping. This caused him to eat one piece after another, unable to stop.

'Well, it seems like nearly the entire imperial family has the gene of a foodie. The emperor emeritus is a long-time foodie, and Royal Prince Yang doesn't lose out to him. I wonder if the emperor would also disregard his noble and elegant demeanor in front of his favorite food?' Yu Xiaocao thought in her heart.

Zhu Junyang lingered at the Yu Residence and didn't leave until he had lunch. Yesterday, Little White had caught a wild hare, which became the Yu Family's lunch at noon. There were a lot of people eating together, so Yu Hai slaughtered one of the rabbits that they raised at home.

When the wild hare was slaughtered, the Yu Family's little roe deer was still watched happily and ran around gleefully. But, when it saw Yu Hai choose one of its usual companions and skillfully slit its neck and skinned it, it was so scared that it hid in Yu Xiaocao's room, trembling. It didn't even take a single bite of its favorite grass mixed with mystic-stone water, for fear that his master would slaughter it for food like that rabbit.

She didn't know if the little roe deer had a genetic mutation due to its frequent consumption of mystic-stone water, but it had never grown bigger since they brought it back three years ago. It maintained the size of a little roe deer that was less than a month old with a small and thin appearance. It was currently shivering like a fallen leaf blew by the cold wind. It looked cute yet pitiful.

When Yu Xiaocao noticed that the little roe deer hadn't eaten for two meals and was curled up into a ball with a dispirited appearance, she thought that it was sick. After she got a reminder from the little divine stone, she realized that the little guy had been scared silly. She quickly hugged it and comforted, "Tiny, don't be scared! No one will eat you. You're so small and barely have any meat on your body, so you wouldn't even be enough to fill the gaps between one's teeth. I promise you that no one in the family will dare to do anything to you without my permission!! However, you must stay alert outside the house. Be careful not to let others catch you and make you into soup!!"

The little roe deer seemed to understand its little master's position in the family. Since she said that no one was allowed to touch it, it must be safe at home. As for the outside, there was no way that it would let strangers get close to it. It could now run as fast as the wind. Even Little Black and Little White couldn't catch up to it, so who could catch it? But, for a long time after this, the little roe deer would make a detour when it saw Yu Hai. It was afraid that he would dislike it, and thus decide to slaughter it.

In a blink of an eye, it was already time for autumn harvest. Zhu Junyang followed Yu Hai and his daughter to the Yu Family's farmstead. The vegetation on the hill behind the plantation had gradually begun to turn yellow. Occasionally, one or two maple leaves would display their dazzling appearance among the gold and green colors. The pods in the fields were golden and appeared bloated as if their bellies were about to burst. The tenant farmers working in the fields all had bright smiles on their faces.

With a sincere smile on his face, the supervisor, Wang Maocai, accompanied the owners and explained, "We have also planted soybeans in the past, but the pods were only about the length of a thumb. This year, the pods are even longer than one's middle finger. Moreover, the beans are a size bigger than the seeds. With a modest estimate, I reckon that the output of the soybean fields will double the output of the previous years!"

In actuality, Yu Xiaocao didn't deliberately help the tenant farmers cultivate the soybean fields. It didn't rain a lot in the summer, so the hardworking farmers were afraid that the yield of soybeans would be affected. They were also afraid that the owners would have doubts regarding their abilities, and then not rent the land for them to farm next year. Thus, they all worked hard to tend the crops. They meticulously irrigated the fields, weeded the fields, and eliminated pests. There was spiritual energy in the well water, so the fields watered by the well water naturally had a higher output of soybeans.

After four to five days of hard work in the fields, all of the families sent all their soybeans to the granary. After being weighted, the household with the greatest yield had surpassed four hundred catties! The low yield of soybeans was the main reason why farmers were reluctant to cultivate the crop. In previous years, their best output in the fields was no more than 160 to 170 catties. But now, the output had more than doubled ah! The family with the least output had also gotten around three hundred catties! It was about the same as the yield of wheat!!

The tenant farmers, who were originally pessimistic about the owner's daughter's request to grow soybeans, were sincerely convinced by her now. After they got new masters, except for the disaster during the first year, they had gotten a great harvest for the spring and autumn seasons. The tenant farmers believed that the master had good fortune, and thus also boosted the luck of the farmstead. If they continued to work for the master in the future, they would definitely be able to eat to their heart's content, wear warm clothes, and live a fairly well-off life...

The farmlands that Zhu Junyang bought weren't very far from the Yu Family's plantation. After the autumn harvest, he planned on moving the fields next to the Yu Family's fields. In this way, Yu Xiaocao could help him take care of the farmlands, which was much more convenient! Yes, Royal Prince Yang barely knew anything about farming. The steward that he sent to manage the land would consult the father and daughter of the Yu Family for everything, and thus he became a master who only asked others to work and didn't do anything himself.

Right after the harvest of the corn, Royal Prince Yang had gone back to the capital to report the good news. Thus, the steward and Yu Xiaocao worked together to make decisions regarding the plowing, sowing, and management of the more than eight hundred mu of land. With Yu Xiaocao there, he was absolutely at ease that the output of his fields definitely wouldn't be low! That's right, Zhu Junyang was just that confident!

As expected, the average yield of the eight hundred or so mu of farmland was over three hundred catties per mu. People probably wouldn't believe it even if they heard it! He had the steward to make detailed records, organize them into a memorial, and send it to the capital at the fastest speed.

'Didn't that old fogie with the surname Yang say that the rich harvest of corn had nothing to do with the Yu Family and Yu Xiaocao? I'm going to prove you wrong with the data right away! Have you ever seen soybeans with a yield of over three hundred catties per mu? The Imperial Plantation in the capital has also planted dozens of mu of soybeans. If there is a higher output than this prince's eight hundred mu of fields, this prince will give up my title of royal prince!!'

Fields of Gold Chapter 353 - Preparing to Open a Shop

The memorial presented by Royal Prince Yang set off a wave of storm at court. Minister Liu's hands trembled as he took the memorial that the emperor had just reviewed. He carefully looked over the data over and over again. The yield on superior farmland was three hundred eighty catties per mu and the average farmland had three hundred thirty catties per mu. The output of inferior farmland had also gotten a high yield of two hundred ninety catties per mu.

Minister Liu burst into tears, "Emperor, this old official is incompetent! All of the fields in the Imperial Plantation are superior farmland, yet the yield is only around one hundred ninety catties per mu!! This Yu Family is indeed talented, Your Majesty!"

Zhu Junfan looked at Imperial Censor Yang and asked with a spurious smile, "Imperial Censor Yang, do you have anything else to say?"

With facts presented in front of his eyes, Imperial Censor Yang had no other reason to stop the emperor from awarding the Yu Family. He thought for a moment and said, "If what is stated in the memorial is true, then this official will acknowledge it sincerely."

He was speaking as if Royal Prince Yang had made a false record in order to help the Yu Family. All the civil and military officials in court inwardly shook their heads. This Imperial Censor Yang seriously didn't have a very good moral character. At this point, he was still trying to find an honorable way to get out of this embarrassing situation.

He should think about it. Who was the Yu Family to Royal Prince Yang? Why would the cold-hearted and black-faced royal prince be willing to risk the crime of deceiving the monarch to protect them? Furthermore, even if the Yu Family was bestowed a position, they would merely be a minor seven-rank official. They would just be small agricultural officials under the Ministry of Revenue, so how would that affect him, Imperial Censor Yang, in any way? Was it really worth it for him to cling onto them like a leech?

The Minister of Works came out again and tried to smooth things over, "Perhaps, there's a difference in the output due to the difference of the seeds. In my opinion, to truly have fair and just results, the same types of seeds and fields should be used..."

Officials, who knew the situation, all looked at each other with tacit gaze—the Minister of Works' granddaughter and Imperial Censor Yang's grandson were currently in the middle of discussing marriage, so it was no wonder that he would speak up for him.

At this time, the military officials presented a memorial, stating that there seemed to be trouble at the northwest borders. The surviving supporters of the Yuan Dynasty had divided into two major tribes, Dongliao and Siliao. It seemed like they were eager to cause trouble at the borders. The military officials requested for backup in the event that war broke out and so on... As for the matter regarding the Yu Family, it had been left unsettled once again.

At the Yu Family's farmstead on the outskirts of Tanggu Town, it was currently bustling with activity. After the soybeans were reaped, the tenant farmers were busy with fertilizing the fields and preparing for the cultivation of wheat.

Zhu Junyang, who had a tall and graceful figure, stood at the edge of the field and said to Yu Xiaocao, who was handing out wheat to the farmers, "If you plant winter wheat now, you won't be able to plant corn in the spring, right? I must remind you that the emperor attaches great importance to corn and plans to popularize the cultivation of corn as a high-yielding crop in the north..."

Yu Xiaocao smiled at him and said, "I know. If we want to popularize the cultivation of corn, there definitely aren't enough seeds. We should do it step by step! Since we're familiar with growing corn, we'll naturally take up the responsibility of breeding the seeds! But, this doesn't conflict with growing winter wheat ah!"

With a look of surprise, Zhu Junyang asked in confusion, "How does it not conflict? I have asked your tenant farmers. After planting the winter wheat, they can only be harvested at the beginning of next summer. Where would you have farmland to grow corn?"

Yu Xiaocao lifted her eyebrows and smiled proudly, "Who told you that corn must be planted in the spring? After the winter wheat is reaped, we can plant a batch of corn to be harvested in the autumn. After harvesting the corn, we can grow winter wheat again. The timing is just right! If we don't plant winter wheat now, the fields would be idle for at least four to five months. Isn't that a waste of resources?"

After thinking about it, Zhu Junyang felt that it sounded quite reasonable. Yu Xiaocao said that after the popularization of corn, it would at most be considered a type of coarse grain. By growing corn for one season and winter wheat for another season, they would have both coarse grain and fine grain, and the common people would be able to live a better life. Thus, he also handed his eight hundred mu of farmland to her and asked her to help him decide what to plant. He wrote up an imperial memorial overnight and sent it to the capital. Soon, the Imperial Plantation on the outskirts of the capital also began growing winter wheat.

At this time, the method of cultivation for wheat had been relatively improved. Yu Xiaocao just had to let the little divine stone release some spiritual energy into the seeds, and the tenant farmers would take care of all other matters. The father and daughter pair were currently busy dealing with the villagers who came to purchase bean seeds after hearing about good things about them.

The news that the Yu Family's farmstead had a great harvest of soybeans, which had a high yield of four hundred catties per mu, had quietly spread throughout Tanggu Town. After being spread through the word of mouth, people began saying that the soybean seeds that the Yu Family used were a high-yielding crop that Royal Prince Yang brought back from the western hemisphere.

At this time, there had been a gradual improvement of the extraction method for soybean oil. Bean curd, bean sprout, and some other bean-related products had slowly started appearing on the tables of the common people. The soybean cakes left over after being used to extract soybean oil and bean flour milled by beans were all food that the poverty-stricken commoners relied on for survival. The doubling of the output of beans could help improve the lives of many people, so it attracted quite a lot of people.

The soybeans harvested from Royal Prince Yang's fields had to be transported back to the capital. As for the soybeans produced at the Yu Family's plantation, with the exception of the portion saved to be used as seeds for next year, Yu Hai and his daughter decided to sell them at a state-set price. Why were they selling them at a state-set price? The Yu Family was able to earn a good reputation in several nearby villages by selling the soybeans to the impoverished commoner according to the market price of fine breed grain without adding a single copper coin to the price.

After she finished with the matters at the plantation, Yu Xiaocao packed her bags and set off to the prefectural city. There was less than a month until the college examination. They had several pigs at home that had already reached the weight of two hundred catties, and thus they could be taken out of their pens. In other words, they should start preparing for the opening of the braised food shop in the prefectural city!

For this trip to the prefectural city, Yu Hai and the Liu Hu couple also came with her. It naturally wasn't that simple to open a shop. The renovation of the shop, purchasing the ingredients, and buying the kitchen utensils were all areas that required manpower.

There were two reasons as to why she had her oldest paternal aunt and oldest paternal uncle come along with them. First of all, they really did lack manpower for the initial preparation of the shop. Second, they were going to collaborate with the Liu Family for the braised food shop. The Yu Family would contribute the money and recipes, while the Liu Family would contribute manpower. The profit would be split 20-80; the Liu Family would receive 20% and the Yu Family would get 80% of the profit!

Yu Caifeng had seen the flourishing business of the braised pig head meat at the docks, so she had no doubts about the braising method of the Yu Family. They could earn 20% of the profit by merely providing some manpower, which meant that they were taking a big advantage of them. After several refusals, under Yu Hai's persuasion, she finally accepted the kindness of her younger brother's family.

They came to Tanggu from the northeast without any money at all. Not only did her younger brother help cure her husband's illness, but he also supported them financially. What's more, just by helping her younger brother sell watermelons for the past two years, they were able to save up more than one hundred taels even after they built a house and sent Little Fangping to school. This was considered a

huge sum of money to them, who had no more than five taels in their savings in the past. Now, her younger brother's family was planning on opening a shop in the prefectural city, and they were the first people they thought of. Moreover, his family also gave them such a generous share. How could she not be grateful and moved?

Before leaving, Yu Caifeng had gathered her whole family together and said to the children, "It's all thanks to your uncle that we can now live a life without worrying about food and clothing. In the future, you guys need to be filial to your uncle and aunt, just like how you're filial to me and your father."

In the past two years, Liu Junping, who was a half-grown child, had clearly seen and kept in mind the kindness that the Yu Family showed them. He nodded solemnly and said, "Uncle is a great benefactor of our family, and we will always remember that!"

Yu Caifeng thought about it and said, "If the shop in the prefectural city is successful in the future, your father and I will surely bring you guys to the prefectural city at that time. If our braised food sells well, there would definitely be a lot of people trying to uncover the recipes. You guys must remember that the kitchen is the most important place. You must never let other people go in!! What's more, you must not leak the recipes, which we rely on to make a living, for the sake of your own benefit. If I find out that any of you have other ideas about the recipes, then don't blame me, as your mother, for disowning you!!"

Little Fangping was frightened by his mother's expression and tone, so he nodded repeatedly. Liu Yaner quickly said, "Mother, rest assured. Us siblings definitely won't be grateful and vicious people! Moreover, our family also has a share of the shop. Who would do such a thing like 'kill the goose that lays the golden eggs'?"

After laying down the law with the children, Yu Caifeng and her husband went to the prefectural city with her younger brother and niece. They had hired an elderly man, who lived nearby to look after their house in the prefectural city, and he would help tidy the courtyard every day. No one had lived in the house for half a year, so the four of them spent an entire day to clean up before they finally put everything in order and settled down.

There were five shops in front. With the storefront in the middle as the divider, three of the shops were used for the braised food shop, and the other two would be turned into a pickled food shop. Yu Xiaocao had a lot of recipes for pickled food on hand and Yu Caifeng was an excellent cook, so it was a waste for such a store to only sell braised food.

Yu Hai and Liu Hu were busily working on the renovation of the shop in the front, while Yu Caifeng and Yu Xiaocao were responsible for supervising the renovation of the kitchen in the back. The kitchen was quite big, so the two stoves in the kitchen were more than enough for a family's regular usage. However, it wasn't quite sufficient for braising food. Therefore, they must first double the cooking area.

Then, according to Xiaocao's idea, they built an oven in the corner of the kitchen. The oven was made of black bricks, and the walls around it were similar to the heated walls [1] that wealthy families used for heating. The open fire underneath heated the oven, and in the middle, there was a place to put the ducks prepared with the secret recipe. The heat would be reflected onto the ducks from the wall to roast the ducks. With this method, the roasted duck would have crispy skin, tender meat, a gleaming appearance, and fragrant smell.

The head manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant, who was presiding over the business in the prefectural city, found out that the Yu Family was going to open a braised food shop in the prefectural city. So he made some time to go over for a visit. When he saw the oven in the back kitchen, the head manager joked, "Miss Yu, you're competing with Zhenxiu Restaurant ah! With your endless new recipes, our Zhenxiu Restaurant can't win against you!"

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, "I dare not! I also have a share in your restaurant's fruit-scented roasted duck. Why would I fight with myself? This type of roasted duck that I'm making tastes completely different to the fruit-scented roasted duck. Moreover, we're only selling ten ducks per day. It won't affect Zhenxiu Restaurant's business!"

The head manager stroked his long beard and said, "What about the price? How much is Miss Yu planning on selling it for?"

"Rest assured, it will only be one tael cheaper than Zhenxiu Restaurant. We won't casually set a price and disturb the market!" Why was it only one tael cheaper than Zhenxiu Restaurant? What kind of place was Zhenxiu Restaurant? No matter if it was their dining environment or reputation, they were much higher in class than a little braised food shop. Would they even be able to sell their food if they set the price to be the same as Zhenxiu Restaurant?

With a lower price, they weren't deliberately lowering the price for malicious competition. In addition, they were doing the marketing gimmick of limited sales... The head manager could already foresee the blooming popularity of the braised food shop after its opening.

Chapter 354 - That Nightmare

Before the opening of the braised food shop, Little Shitou and his classmates were all taken to the prefectural city by Rongxuan Academy . Why didn't Yu Xiaocao privately cook for Little Shitou before the college examination? That was because the academy was doing a group training for all the students participating in the exams!

During the day, the teachers arranged intensive pre-examination training for the students . In the evening, Headmaster Yuan called Little Shitou over to his house . He reviewed the readings, pointed out the pros and cons, and explained the methods of improvement . Little Shitou had made great progress in this period of time, and he felt more confident in the college examination .

After he entered the courtyard from the side door, Little Shitou followed the fragrant smell to the kitchen and saw his second sister and oldest paternal aunt busily working inside . Yu Xiaocao was going to test the oven today . She took out a roasted duck with a golden-brown color and an attractive fragrance from the hot oven . The fire shined upon the contented smile on her face, and her eyes were filled with a sense of satisfaction .

“Second Sister, how did you know that I would arrive at the prefectural city today, and even prepare a roasted duck for me?” Little Shitou had been focused on studying in the past half a year and didn't go home at all during breaks . He didn't even know that the family was going to open a braised food shop, and thus happily asked under the impression that they were preparing the food for him .

Yu Xiaocao put the roasted duck that was on the hook on a plate . When it cooled down, she tore off a leg for him and said with a smile, “Try it . This is the new oven roasted duck that Sister came up with . How is the taste?”

Little Shitou hurriedly took a bite and carefully savored it . Then he repeatedly nodded his head and said, “Delicious! It's not inferior to the taste of Zhenxiu Restaurant's 'fruit-scented roasted duck'! I'm not worried about Second Sister's culinary skills at all!! Let's eat 'one duck three dishes' for lunch . I've been staying in the academy for half a year, so I'm desperately craving it!!”

Although the food at the academy had gotten better in the past half a year, it was still mostly vegetable dishes . At times, when they provided meat dishes, the food would be snatched up by the wealthier students . During the past half a year, visits from family were forbidden, let alone delivery of food . Even when he went to Headmaster Yuan's home for tutoring, he would complain endlessly about missing his second sister's cooking .

As Little Shitou gnawed on the duck leg, he asked, "Did you guys rent out the stores in front? That's not a bad idea . We can at least get some profits . What kind of business are they doing? The layout looks quite neat and tidy..."

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Yu Caifeng, who was cleaning the kitchen, looked at him with a smile and said, "We didn't rent out the shops in front . We're going to open a shop ourselves! Didn't you notice that there are more stoves in the kitchen, as well as an additional oven?"

"Is our family going to sell food? That will definitely make a lot of money . Second Sister has such excellent cooking skills, so if we open a restaurant, there's no way that Zhenxiu Restaurant can compete with us!" Little Shitou blindly worshiped his second sister and was full of confidence in her .

Yu Xiaocao glared at him with a smile, "Your second sister is only good at cooking a few dishes, so how can I compare with big chefs who had devoted themselves to cooking for decades? Don't make such comments outside, lest others laugh at your arrogance behind your back!"

After that, she told the little fellow about their collaboration with Oldest Aunt's family in opening the braised food shop . Making braised food was her specialty . Not only did she have secret recipes, but she also had mystic-stone water as a cheat . There was an absolute guarantee for the taste . Little Shitou was also full of confidence in his family's braised food shop . He repeatedly asked when it would open so that he could promote it to his classmates who lived in the prefectural city .

"You don't have to worry about the shop . The exam will be in three days, so your task is to relax your mind and focus on studying!" Yu Caifeng was afraid that her young nephew would be distracted at this important moment, so she solemnly reminded him .

The Yu Family had been farmers for many generations, so they were all looking forward to having a county-level official in the family to bring honor to their ancestors . In the past, the Yu Family had put all their hopes in Shitou's younger uncle, Yu Bo . Now, they also had Little Shitou and more hope . Thus, they naturally attached great importance to this matter!

Yu Caifeng thought about it and asked Little Shitou, "Shitou, your younger uncle is also participating in this exam, right? Did he come with you? Did he say where he was staying?"

Yu Xiaocao didn't want to be too involved with Madam Zhang and she also didn't really like that selfish uncle of hers, so she interjected, "When we came to the prefectural city last time, Younger Uncle stayed at his classmate's house . There's no need for us to worry so much . Oldest Aunt, try this roasted duck . Is there anything that needs to be improved?"

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Yu Caifeng also wasn't very close with this younger brother of hers . Madam Zhang accepted the Liu Family's betrothal gifts of twenty taels, yet she didn't prepare any dowry for her at all . When she made her utmost efforts to argue for what was right, Madam Zhang told her that the money was used for her younger brother's tuition in a bold and confident manner .

Since she was young, Madam Zhang had been partial to her youngest son . She and Yu Hai didn't have enough to eat and warm clothes to wear, while Yu Bo and Yu Caidie could eat an extra egg or fine grain steamed bun every day . They didn't know that Madam Zhang was secretly cooking a separate meal for her biological children behind their backs . However, they weren't stupid . These matters would naturally be exposed over time . Yu Caifeng had a lot of complaints about Madam Zhang's biasness, so she also didn't really like this younger brother of hers .

In her heart, Yu Hai was her only real brother who was born of the same mother! Hearing her niece's words, Yu Caifeng stopped thinking about Yu Bo's matters . It was getting closer to the opening time of the shop, and she was also getting increasingly busy . The renovation in front could be completed today, so she needed to go over and clean up everything . Last night, her husband and Yu Hai had gone back, saying that they would slaughter two of the pigs first and deliver them over . It was going to be even more busy tomorrow .

There were also a dozen or so vats of pickled vegetables, which were all made by her and her niece . How exactly did her niece's brain grow? She actually had so many recipes for pickled food! The salted vegetables should be ready in the next two days . She must taste them carefully and let her little niece know if they're tasty .

Yu Xiaocao and her aunt were very busy, and Little Shitou wasn't affected at all . He still studied and rested according to his schedule at the school . During his breaks, he also helped them to the best of his capabilities . He laughed and talked every day with no trace of tension .

Yu Xiaocao praised him, "Not bad! Other than one's own knowledge, one's mentality is also very important for exams . You need to learn how to destress yourself! Headmaster Yuan also said that, with your capability, if you perform like normal, you definitely won't have a problem passing the exam to be a county-level official! If you do well enough, you might even receive government grain! You're still young, so even if you don't do very well, you can just wait for the next college examination . Maybe you can place first in the college examination..."

"Pah, pah, pah! The words of a child carry no harm . Deities, please don't listen to her..." Yu Caifeng put her palms together and bowed in four directions, and then she had Yu Xiaocao spit three times . She chided, "Is there an older sister like you? Why are you saying such unlucky words? Our Shitou will definitely pass the exam this time!!"

Yu Xiaocao touched her nose and awkwardly said, "Aren't I just trying to not give Younger Brother too much pressure? One can achieve success if one goes into a battle with a light heart! Younger Brother, do your best on the exam! Show your true capabilities . I'm waiting to show off that I have a younger brother who is a county-level official ah!"

Little Shitou smiled and said, "Second Sister, don't worry . I'm not nervous at all . Thank you for doing so much for this family, and making sure that I can study at ease . For your sake, I will definitely pass the exam to be a county-level official this time . I'll let you know that all your hard work was not done in vain!!"

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Little Shitou understood very clearly within his heart! He couldn't imagine how this family would end up like without his second sister! Since his second sister got her head hurt and toured around the netherworld, she had turned into a completely different person . Her previously timid and cowardly personality was gone .

Before they separated from the family, she dared to play mind games with Madam Zhang and fought for welfare for her family . After the separation, she used her endless recipes to gain the respect and collaboration with Third Young Master Zhou . The family also planted vegetables, watermelons, corn... Outsiders all complimented his father as an expert in farming, but he knew very clearly that all of his family money-making businesses came from his second sister .

He once had a dream, in which his second sister didn't survive and died in the hands of Eldest Paternal Aunt . After his father was bitten by a bear, he didn't get treated for his severe injury and died! Older

Brother was accused of stealing . After he was beaten to death by the shopkeeper, the murderer got away unpunished . His mother worked hard to support the family with her sickly body, and finally spat out blood and died in the winter when he was eight .

For his sake, Eldest Sister sold herself to be a maidservant . Afterwards, she was 'promoted' to be the master's concubine by the mistress . After she got pregnant and gave birth to a child, they killed the mother and kept the child . She died at a young age .

As for him, since the age of twelve, he had been doing manual labor at the docks, barely earning enough for a living . But, when the two factions on the docks were fighting for territory, he was injured by mistake and broke his legs . Without any money for treatment, he ended up being disabled for life and could only beg for a living . On a cold winter day, he froze to death on the streets . That year, he had just turned twenty years old...

When he woke up from the nightmare, he couldn't stop himself from crying, for fear that his current happy life was just a mirage . He feared that it was just an illusion he had before he froze to death . That morning, for the first time in his life, he, the headmaster's favorite pupil, skipped class and fled to his family's farmstead . He knew that, during the busy farming season, his father and second sister would stay at the plantation to supervise the autumn harvest and autumn planting .

From afar, he saw the thin and delicate yet very energetic figure of his second sister . Under the radiant morning sun, his second sister was full of energy as she directed the tenant farmers to take all the grain to the granary . Her ruddy and lively face, as well as her sweet and bright smile, warmed up his frightened and cold heart .

So fortunate . It was so fortunate that the miserable life was just a nightmare . His second sister was still alive . With her around, that nightmare definitely wouldn't come true! At this moment, Yu Xiaocao became the pillar of support within his heart . Upon seeing her, all the black clouds instantly dispersed .

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That day, he just watched his father and second sister from afar . While everyone was busily working at the farmstead, he just stayed there motionlessly for the entire day . He didn't eat lunch, but he wasn't hungry at all . It wasn't until the evening that his heart finally calmed down completely, and he quietly left the plantation . When he got back to the academy, he was scolded severely by the headmaster . The next day, the teacher had even hit his palm with a ruler .

Holding his swollen palm, he felt incomparably calm within his heart . In the following days, he studied even harder . Second Sister changed their lives, so he also had to work hard for his second sister and support her in the future...

“Hey, why are you in a daze!!” Yu Xiaocao smacked the back of her younger brother’s head and shouted, “Tomorrow is the exam, so you need to completely relax for today and don’t read books! The glass windows that we ordered have arrived, so come check it out with me!”

Little Shitou grinned brightly at her and nodded, “Alright! Second Sister, if there’s anything that I can help with, just tell me!”

“What can you do with your thin limbs? Stay on the side and don’t cause trouble!”

“Second Sister, I can work! I have strength...”

“Go away, go away! Stop hindering our work...”

‘Second Sister, thank you!!’

Fields of Gold Chapter 355 - Free Food Tasting

“Did you hear? Over on the east side of the city, someone opened a...what was it called...braised food shop. They have free food tasting and half-price sale for the first day of their opening!”

“Braised food stop? What's a braised food shop? I've never heard of it. Is it edible?”

“Won't we know if it's edible after trying? It's free anyway!”

“Who would do a business that doesn't earn money? Won't they lose all the money that they invested in the business?”

“That's right, that's right! Is the manager a fool? They won't trick us to try it, and then ask for money, right?”

“That can't be, right? The shop isn't very far from the prefectural yamen. Would a swindler dare to scam right in front of the prefectural magistrate?”

“Come, let's go check it out! It doesn't cost any money to take a look...”

...

In the Jingwei Prefectural City, everyone was talking about 'The Yu's Braised Food Shop'. Like a cool autumn breeze, the opening of 'The Yu's Braised Food Shop' had spread to every corner of the city.

Yu Xiaocao, who came up with the gimmick of free food tasting, was currently busy giving out the braised food to the people waiting in line for tasting! There was a very long line in front of The Yu's Braised Food Shop. Liu Hu and Yu Hai were busy keeping order.

Originally, these people were watching from afar with the mindset of a bystander. At the beginning, there were very few people in front of the braised food shop. Most people didn't believe that there would be such a good thing as a free meal. However, when Little Shitou's classmates who lived in the prefectural city, like Little Fatty and Liu Jinye, heard about the soft opening of the braised food shop, they hurriedly sent their servants to line up. They, on the other hand, huddled in front of the glass window to look at the roasted duck, roasted chicken, smoked chicken, smoked duck, and smoked pork, drooling.

The first person in line was the steward in charge of the kitchen in the Sun Household. Yu Xiaocao pointed at the slices of braised meat and smoked meat on the plate and said with a smile, “Feel free to have a taste!”

The Sun Family's steward looked at his young master, and then raised his voice to ask, “Can I try it even if I don't buy anything?”

“Yes!! It's our soft opening today, so we have free tasting and half-price sale for all our products! You can have a taste even if you don't buy anything, but each person can only try one piece of each dish!” Yu Xiaocao replied with a smile.

The Sun Family's steward tried each of the dishes and had high praises for the braised meat. His young master had already selected the roasted duck, roasted chicken, salted duck, and a large braised pork knuckle that he wanted to buy. If Yu Xiaocao didn't stop him, he might have bought all of the different dishes!

“It's a little warm now, so the food can't be out for too long. Just buy the ones you're eating today. Wouldn't it be a waste if you buy too much and they end up going bad?” Seeing his intention, Yu Xiaocao promptly stopped him.

The steward of the Sun Family looked at the price of the braised meat. With the fifty percent discount, it was even cheaper than the raw pork sold on the market now. It also tasted very good. He couldn't help but quietly ask his young master, “Young Master, my mother likes to eat meat, but she has bad teeth. The braised pig head meat is fragrant and soft, so this servant wants...”

“You have money in your pocket, so if you want to buy it, then buy it! There's no need to ask me!” Little Fatty used a toothpick to pick up a piece of 'crispy skin roasted duck' and savored the taste in his mouth. Then he said to Yu Xiaocao, “Second Sister, your roasted duck isn't inferior to that of Zhenxiu Restaurant, and it's also cheaper. If Zhenxiu Restaurant's business plunges because of you, the Zhou Family definitely wouldn't let you off!”

“Look carefully. Five taels is half price. It will be back to the regular price tomorrow!! Moreover, for products such as roasted duck and roasted chicken, our shop is only selling ten per day and we don't accept reservations. It won't affect Zhenxiu Restaurant in any way!!” Yu Xiaocao quickly packed the food and collected the money. Then she swiftly sent away Little Shitou's classmates.

At this time, there weren't any customers in front of the shop again. She raised her voice and yelled, “The Yu's Braised Food Shop is having a soft opening today. We'll have free food tasting for half a day. Come over quickly if you want to taste it. You can have a taste even if you're not buying anything. Free tasting will be over at noon! Don't walk by and miss out on this opportunity!!”

Today was the second day after that examination, so there were still a lot of students who hadn't left yet. A student, who was in his twenties and dressed in a long blue robe, came over to the window and asked Yu Xiaocao in a soft voice, “Excuse me... did you guys used to sell braised food at Tanggu Docks?”

Yu Xiaocao looked up at him, nodded with a smile, and said, “Yes! Our 'one copper coin braised food' is very famous at the docks. Not only the locals of Tanggu Town, but a lot of foreign merchants are also full

of praises for our braised food. Older brother, since you have heard about our braised food, have a taste to see if you like it.”

With a flushed face, the student quickly shook his hands and said, “I didn't come for the free tasting. In the past, my father had brought back your family's braised food from the docks for me. It's very tasty, and my whole family really likes to eat it! It's a pity that we haven't been able to buy it anymore since last autumn. I'm going home early tomorrow morning, so I wanted to bring some braised food back...”

“We have many different varieties of braised food. I don't know which one will suit your taste, so why don't you try all of them?” Yu Xiaocao understood why he didn't want to taste it. He was afraid that his classmates would ridicule him by saying that he liked to take advantage of others, so she tried to persuade him to try the taste.

The blue-robed student looked at the prices of the different braised food through the window and picked two of the cheaper ones to taste. He probably didn't even have a proper taste of the food before he swiftly weighed the half catty of pig's head meat, paid for it, and left.

“I heard that there's free food here? Give me some of each!!” A fat, old woman with drooping, triangular shaped eyes came up to the door of The Yu's Braised Food Shop and arrogantly instructed Yu Xiaocao to weigh the meat.

“Aiyo! Isn't that Cripple Wang's wife? This old lady really likes to take advantage of others. Moreover, she was extremely stingy and unreasonable. We're going to have a good show to watch ah!” The onlookers saw that the people who had tasted the food had more or less brought some back, so they were still uncertain if the food tasting was free or not. They continued to watch from afar but slowly came over when they saw the fat matron come over.

Looking at her attitude, Yu Xiaocao felt that she was the same type of person as Madam Zhang. However, judging from her clothes, she probably wasn't so poor that she couldn't afford to buy food. No matter how stingy one was, there must be times when they have to entertain guests. Also, during the New Year and special holidays, they would still have to prepare some meat dishes for their families. In Yu Xiaocao's opinion, as long as they weren't beggars on the street, they were her potential patrons.

With a warm smile, she explained in a sweet voice, “Auntie, it's free to taste! You can try a piece of the dish that you like!”

“One piece? How would I know what it tastes like with just one piece? Since it's free, don't be so stingy.” As she said that, she took a toothpick with her plump hands and pierced fiercely at the plate, bringing up four or five pieces of braised meat.

Yu Xiaocao stopped her hands, pointed at the bulletin-like poster on the wall, and loudly said, “Auntie, you're welcome to participate in the free food tasting event, but please abide by the rules of the event! It's written very clearly that you can only try one piece of each dish. Our purpose is to give everyone who is interested in 'The Yu's Braised Food Shop' a chance to taste the food. It's not to let you eat to your heart's content!!”

“I have a big mouth, so I can't tell what it tastes like with one piece!! Do you guys want to do business or not? You say that it's free food tasting, yet you're not letting people taste the food. Do you think that we're fools? If you can't afford it, then don't use these insincere tricks!!” Cripple Wang's wife smelled the tempting fragrance of the braised food, and she couldn't help but swallow her saliva. She tried hard to free her hand that was holding the toothpick from Xiaocao's grasp.

With a firm gaze and attitude, Yu Xiaocao said, “My answer is still the same. If you want to participate in the event, then please follow the rules!! Otherwise... we will have to invite the prefectural magistrate to help us judge whether we're deceiving the consumers or you're causing trouble without reason!!”

A voice sounded among the crowd, “Cripple Wang, you're also here? Hurry up and take your wife home. Don't let her continue making a fool out of herself here. The little girl has already said it and it's also posted on the notice. Each person can only try a piece. Look at what your greedy wife has done.”

Cripple Wang's wife's hand, which Xiaocao was holding, trembled and the expression on her face instantly changed. She hastily put down the toothpick and lowered her head, acting like a quail. Cripple Wang was considered quite a good person, but he had two problems—he was sensitive about his reputation and he beat his wife. However, most of the time, it was his wife who did something to provoke him.

“What are you doing?” Cripple Wang squeezed out of the crowd and looked at her with a sinister gaze, as if he was an injured old wolf staring at his enemy.

The fat matron's entire body shivered for a moment, and she replied in a trembling voice, “No...nothing...I heard...that a braised food shop opened here, so I wanted to buy some novel food for you to eat with your drinks...”

The fat matron knew that her husband was very concerned about his reputation. If he found out that she was fighting with them in order to eat a couple more pieces of meat, she would definitely receive a beating when she got home!

Seeing this, Yu Xiaocao pointed at the promotional poster on the wall and said, "Uncle, our braised food shop is having a soft opening today. We're doing a free tasting and half-price sale event. Please have a taste and give us some advice!"

When he was younger, Cripple Wang's family had decent living conditions and he had gone to school for a few years. After he carefully read the rules on the wall twice, he went up to the window and carefully tried each of the dishes. He looked at the price again, and then said, "The crispy skin roasted chicken, roasted chicken, roasted duck, and salted duck taste about the same as Zhenxiu Restaurant. The price is also slightly cheaper. However, it's still not something that commoners, like us, can afford. The braised meat and smoked meat taste quite unique... Give me two catties of braised pork knuckle."

"Okay! One catty of braised pork knuckle cost two hundred sixty copper coins, so the total for two catties is five hundred twenty copper coins. With a fifty percent discount, it will only be two hundred sixty copper coins..." After Yu Xiaocao signaled her oldest aunt with her eyes, Yu Caifeng quickly weighted the meat, packed it up, and waited to collect the money.

Cripple Wang looked at his wife and said with a frown, "What are you still waiting for? Quickly pay up..."

The fat matron touched her money pouch and said with a sad face, "I... I didn't bring money when I came out..." She said that she wanted to buy braised food for him to eat with his drinks earlier, but now she claimed that she didn't have money. How was she going to buy food without money? The onlookers burst out in laughter.

Cripple Wang looked at his wife with even more gloomy eyes. He glared fiercely at her, and then said to Yu Xiaocao, "Little girl, keep the two catties of braised pork knuckles on the side for me. We'll go back to get the money. Don't worry, my house isn't very far from here. I'll give you the money in a moment."

Fields of Gold Chapter 356

Needless to say, the prideful Cripple Wang fiercely beat up his fat wife when he got home. Only when the queue for taste-testing in front of The Yu's Braised Food Shop had stretched long and far did she return, limping, to get the braised pig's knuckles.

The fat matron with her droopy triangular eyes squeezed her way to the front, then quietly picked up a toothpick and tasted all the dishes on display. Behind her, people who did not understand the situation and felt unhappy that she jumped her queue said, "Line up, line up! We all have to wait; how can you jump the queue!"

"Line up? I've already lined up before to order the meat, and I only went back home to get more money! What are you whining about, huh? Do you need to rush back to cry at a funeral?!" Without Cripple Wang around, this fat lady quickly resumed her outrageous and unreasonable behavior.

The person who she had refuted was not willing to back down, "Who needs to rush back to cry at a funeral? With that ominous mouth of yours, Cripple Wang must've collected eight lifetimes of misfortune to have married you! You didn't bring money? What meat do you want to buy if you didn't bring money? I think you just need a good beating! Where's Cripple Wang? Are you not going to control your own wife? If anything happens to my bedridden mother, it's definitely because your wife cursed her! See if I won't bring the body to your house!"

The fat matron abruptly stopped talking once he mentioned Cripple Wang. She took the pig's knuckles that Xiaocao handed over and hurried home in silence.

Most of the people who came to attend the taste-testing event were still quite disciplined and followed the rules. They were immediately attracted by the taste of the braised food store's dishes once they had a bite. Moreover, the dishes were sold at half-price today, and thus the cost of many of the dishes were even enough to make a profit! Majority of the tasters would buy a few braised dishes home, and even the people whose families faced financial difficulties would also buy some braised dry tofu and kelp. The dry tofu and kelp had been braised in the braising sauce used to braise pork, so it was filled with the flavor of meat. The price was also cheap, so people bought some of it to sate the children's cravings.

Nevertheless, there were still some who wanted to take advantage of the activity and brought their entire family to queue up just to taste all of the dishes. The Yu Family did not discriminate against these people, but instead warmly welcomed them to taste-test and earnestly listened to their opinions until these people began to feel ashamed themselves. It had to be said that the people of this era were quite simple and adorable.

At noon, the taste-test event ended. After hearing the people, who had tried the food, sing praises about the food, many of the people, who had heard the news and rushed there from the west and south of the city, regretted not taking the new store seriously when they first heard news about it. Their

attitude had now caused them to miss the opportunity to eat free food. Many also went up to enquire if there would be a chance for a free food tasting the next day.

In a single morning, the people had tasted two roasted chickens, two roasted ducks, two salted ducks, two smoked sausages...and half a braised pig. Yu Caifeng's heart ached so much that she stomped her feet at her niece's generosity. Just like this, she had gratuitously given out a few dozen taels!

Fortunately, more braised dishes were sold today compared to the dishes they offered for free. Even though the dishes were sold at about the same as the cost of making them, the pigs were reared by themselves, so they had saved up a little on the cost. After a rough calculation, they still earned a little profit.

The second day was the official start of the business. Yu Xiaocao had requested for her brother to write a new flyer overnight using a large and eye-catching font: Grand Opening Promotion! Half-price Sale for Three Days!

This time, even her little brother did not understand her. Holding a free taste-test event on the first day was a gimmick to attract new customers for the shop. The event was quite successful, so why did they still need to do a half-price sale for three days? How much profit would they lose in these three days?

Yu Xiaocao met everyone's disapproving gaze and explained with a smile, "Our free food tasting event is quite successful, but the prefectural city is huge, and the people who had tasted our braised dishes were mostly the people nearby. This half-priced event lasting for three days would definitely be able to attract more customers from far and wide. I strongly believe that as long as they've tried our dishes, they would become our regulars and supporters!"

Taking a breath, Yu Xiaocao continued, "The poultry in our store are sold in limited numbers and the price isn't low, so we'll still be able to make up for the cost. We also use our own pigs for the braised and smoked meat that will sell in larger volumes. Look, we'd let them have a free taste of half a pig today, but we still made profit in the end. Trust me, even if we sold our dishes at half-price, we'd still be able to profit!"

Yu Caifeng, who had been the strongest opposition, sighed in relief after hearing her explanation, "As long as we don't suffer losses, you can do whatever you wish! Oh, right, should we prepare a feast tomorrow to celebrate the grand opening?"

Liu Hu and Yu Hai turned their gazes to Yu Xiaocao. When it came to running a business, Yu Xiaocao was much more capable than the whole family of simple folk. Just like this, a young twelve year old girl had become the mainstay of the family.

Yu Xiaocao pondered on it, and then said, "Everyone has been busy preparing for the grand opening these past few days, so let's book a table at Zhenxiu Restaurant tomorrow afternoon to celebrate the grand opening of The Yu's Braised Food Shop!"

Yu Caifeng had already made a habit out of saving, so she immediately had her opposition, "Zhenxiu Restaurant? How much would a table cost ah! We ourselves run a business of food, we have roasted duck, roasted chicken, and even all types of braised and smoked meat, why would we need to spend that money? Moreover, there's no one else but us, why not just prepare our own feast in the inner courtyard?"

The entire family thought that they might as well eat in the inner courtyard since there was no one else they were acquainted with in the prefectural city, and the grand opening was also just a process in which they lit the firecrackers and removed the red cloth on the plaque. Not to mention, they already had the ingredients and the cooking was not really troublesome. Seeing that everyone agreed to her oldest aunt's opinion, Yu Xiaocao did not continue to press the matter.

At dawn the next day, even before the braised food store had opened its doors, someone had knocked on the courtyard doors. When they opened the door, a grumpy Royal Prince Yang met them. Huffing in annoyance, he lectured Yu Xiaocao as soon as he saw her, "You never told me about such a big event as the grand opening. Am I nothing in your eyes? If I hadn't come to the prefectural city for business and dropped by to have a look, I wouldn't even know that the grand opening of your family's store is today!"

With a flattering smile on her face, Yu Xiaocao laughed drily, "I was just afraid that you, the Young Royal Prince, would be busy. If I knew that you were going to visit the prefectural city around this time, I would definitely convince you to agree to unveil the store plaque! It's not just the prefectural city, even in the capital city, it would be a great honor to have Young Royal Prince help us unveil the store plaque. Other people wouldn't dare to even dream of it!"

"Hmph! Unveiling the store plaque? You wish! You want me to unveil the store plaque even when you didn't inform me of the grand opening? Dream on!" The young prince's arrogance bared itself again. He turned his head to one side, but his captivating phoenix eyes secretly kept watch of Yu Xiaocao's every move. His entire body screamed, 'Beg me, come beg this prince!'

Head Steward Liu held in his laugh, solemnly nodding, "My master has yet to give anyone face and help them to unveil their store's plaque. Even for Her Highness the Princess Consort's own shops, my master had only graced them with his presence before he left..."

"Oh wow, I must be really lucky then—to have the sole honor in the entire Great Ming Dynasty, to invite Royal Prince Yang, the emperor's most trusted aide, to unveil the plaque of our store!" Yu Xiaocao circled him while she tried to flatter him.

Zhu Junyang acted haughty, "When did this prince agree to unveil your store's plaque? Stop dreaming!"

"Oh, Young Royal Prince is still grumpy over the fact that I didn't inform you of the grand opening! Please be forgiving and don't lower yourself to my level! After these few days, I will personally make 'Buddha Jumps over the Wall' for you!" Seeing that the young prince's clothes were damp from the morning dew, Yu Xiaocao was touched as she figured that he had relentlessly hurried over once he had gotten the news. After the young prince sat down, she served him a cup of mystic-stone water to relieve fatigue. Then, she massaged his shoulders and his arms like his little attendant.

Hearing 'Buddha Jumps over the Wall', Zhu Junyang was immediately intrigued and pushed away her hands that massaged him, seemingly to please him, and said solemnly, "Men and women should not be so close to each other, keep your distance! Now tell me, what is 'Buddha Jumps over the Wall'? Why haven't I heard you mention this before?"

Yu Xiaocao inwardly rolled her eyes, 'He was indeed a closet foodie. Such a pretty lady at his side offering her attention, yet he had only kept his focus on his appetite and ignored her efforts completely. Sigh...Young Royal Prince, you're so dense that the princess consort must worry herself sick over your marriage...'

"The fragrance spreads far and wide; upon smelling it, Buddha will stop meditating and jump over the wall. Even Buddha cannot resist the temptation, would it be possible for it to taste bad? However, I've never made this dish before, so I'll have to ponder over it for a while..." Would she be able to make 'Buddha Jumps over the Wall' if she followed the recipe that she learned on Baidu [1] in her previous life...

"Xiaocao, the head manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant has come to congratulate us!" Yu Hai had not expected more people to come with felicitations aside from the royal prince, so he hurried forward to greet him.

The head manager smiled, "Brother Yu, with the relationship of our two families, how can you not tell us about your grand opening!"

Yu Hai smiled back, frankly replying, "It's just a small store. We hadn't planned to inform anyone at all and just celebrate amongst ourselves..."

The manager replied in disapproval, "Our third young master is in the capital and can't make it here on time, so I, as his subordinate, will represent him to congratulate you. Do forgive him!"

"Nonsense!" Once Yu Xiaocao took care of the young prince, she moved over to address him, smiling, "Uncle Manager, you're currently the manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant, even a lot of nobles in the capital will need to hold you in a higher esteem. It is our braised food store's honor to welcome you! Please, come in. Little Shitou, serve Uncle Manager the good tea we bought a few days back!"

Little Shitou complied, leading the manager to the inner courtyard and serving him good tea and refreshments. A few moments later, Little Shitou's good friends and roommates, Sun Runze and Liu Jinye also arrived with their fathers to celebrate the grand opening.

Between the two of them, one of them was the prefectural magistrate's secretary, while the other was the boss of the largest silk and satin store in the prefectural city, and both held quite a high standing in the prefectural city. Little Shitou hurriedly invited them inside. The two men were surprised to see the head manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant—it seemed that the Yu Family was quite well regarded by the Zhou Family.

Following that, the two were even more shocked to see that the prefectural magistrate had lowered his status to come and congratulate the Yu Family. The prefectural magistrate only came because he had received news of Royal Prince Yang's arrival. For the royal prince to hurry over just for the grand opening of Yu Family's small braised food store, it was enough to see his favoritism towards them. According to the rumors, the royal prince even went so far as to ask for the Yu Family to be rewarded in court!

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This residence with the attached shop-front was bought from him by Royal Prince Yang, but the name on the deed was the name of a member of the Yu Family. For the cold-faced royal prince to go to such great lengths to obtain a mere residence, it was enough to see the standing of the Yu Family in the royal prince's heart. Prefectural Magistrate Ning [1] would naturally not miss the opportunity to make connections with him.

Yu Hai was astounded that the prefectural magistrate personally came to give them his congratulations, and respectfully led Prefectural Magistrate Ning towards the main hall of the inner courtyard. Prefectural Magistrate Ning sharply noticed Royal Prince Yang sipping tea in the hall and quickly greeted him. Seeing his arrival, Royal Prince Yang's brow twitched in surprise, but it lasted only a split-second before he reverted back to his usual cool expression and faintly nodded towards him.

Even if he only nodded at him, Prefectural Magistrate Ning felt extremely honored. Royal Prince Yang was exceptionally known in the capital for being cold and distant, and usually acted as if nothing was of his concern. Even when he met his father, Imperial Prince Jing, Zhu Junyang would only spare him so much as a glance.

If someone angered him, he would definitely not consider if they were related to him before he acted. When he was 12 years old, he beat the heir of Marquis Dingyuan until he was nearly dead. Marquis Dingyuan was quite influential in court at that time, so he had bemoaned about the incident to the emperor.

When the emperor asked him why he beat the heir of Marquis Dingyuan up, he dragged, "Ask Zhang Qingfeng himself! If he says he doesn't know, then I will beat him until he knows the reason!" Zhang Qingfeng was the name of the heir of Marquis Dingyuan.

When the heir of Marquis Dingyuan recovered slightly, Marquis Dingyuan had asked him about how he had offended this devil. The heir of Marquis Dingyuan was afraid of being beaten again, so he honestly confessed that he had tried to scheme against Royal Prince Yang in hopes of causing an accident and disabling him from participating in the martial arts competition that the emperor was hosting...

At 12 years old, Zhu Junyang had already displayed a great talent in martial arts, besting all the wealthy children of the capital. And all the wealthy children did not dare to fight against him for the championship, because he was tougher on himself than on his opponents, and gave his all once a fight was initiated. It was how he earned the title of 'black-faced devil' so young!

Back to the scene, Prefectural Magistrate Ning respectfully sat down below Royal Prince Yang and sipped the tea that Little Shitou had served him. He peered into Royal Prince Yang's cup and was shocked to find the royal prince drinking plain water. He hurried to bring his cup of fragrant tea to Royal Prince Yang, whispering, "This cup of Longjing tea that was plucked before the Qingming Festival [2] is still considered quite mellow, would you like to try some, Your Royal Highness?"

Zhu Junyang glanced at the cup of tea, inwardly saying, 'How could I not know it's Longjing tea harvested before the Qingming Festival? The tea leaves were even extorted from me by that little lass!' He did not know why, but the plain water he drank when he was in the Yu Family's residence tasted better than the top quality Da Hong Pao tea [3] in the imperial palace. In the Yu Family's residence, the only drink he would recognize was plain water.

"I like plain water!" Since Official Ning was Imperial Prince Jing's subordinate, out of respect for his father, Zhu Junyang graciously replied to him.

Although it was just one half-hearted sentence, it was enough to surprise Official Ning. All along, Royal Prince Yang was aloof to even his own father, so it was indeed a great surprise to receive a reply from him! Official Ning took a mental note: Royal Prince Yang liked to drink plain water, not tea. Many years later, Zhu Junyang, who was then already an Imperial Prince, accepted Official Ning's invitation to be a guest at his residence. Official Ning, a second-rank official at that time, served him plain water...

"Young Royal Prince, Prefectural Magistrate Ning, please try these desserts made by this commoner girl. Please be understanding if the reception is bad!" If it had been just Royal Prince Yang, Yu Xiaocao would still act casually, but she acted demurely seeing as a seemingly dignified prefectural magistrate was around.

Zhu Junyang looked at the oddly-shaped biscuits and the cakes that were cut into triangles, then casually picked up a biscuit that he wasn't sure whether it was circular or oval shaped and popped it in his mouth. Although it was not much to look at, the taste was quite nice. It was fragrant and sweet, with a crunchy texture.

"It's about time, right?" After swallowing the biscuit and drinking a mouthful of water, Zhu Junyang asked.

Yu Xiaocao nodded and smiled, her dimples apparent, "There's still about half an hour. Both of you can still rest for a while..."

Zhu Junyang nodded and said only a moment later, "Official Ning and I will unveil your shop's plaque later..."

Shock flashed across Prefectural Magistrate Ning's face, but it was immediately replaced with pleasant surprise. He was about to modestly comment when he was stopped by Royal Prince Yang's glare. Internally, Prefectural Magistrate Ning lamented, 'The experiences of Royal Prince Yang for the past two years have made his gaze sharper than even that of Imperial Prince Jing's gaze. No one can refute him now.'

When a problem occurred, rather than finding the high authorities, it was better to look for the person in charge instead. Yu Xiaocao understood this reasoning, and understood that Royal Prince Yang involved Prefectural Magistrate Ning in this because he wanted to find a backing for Yuji Braised Food Store. Yu Xiaocao was confident that the braised food store's business would definitely be successful, but if the Yu Family did not have backing in the prefectural city, a successful business could still mean trouble. If the prefectural magistrate were to personally unveil the plaque of their store, then those with ulterior motives would have to think twice before they strike.

Yu Xiaocao looked at Royal Prince Yang, her gaze filled with gratitude, "To have the prefectural magistrate unveil our shop's plaque would be our absolute honor. Would it be convenient for you, Prefectural Magistrate Ning?"

Since Royal Prince Yang had already agreed to help them unveil the plaque, even if Prefectural Magistrate Ning did not want to, he would still have to agree. Prefectural Magistrate Ning hurriedly replied, "Of course! It's my pleasure to help, you don't need to mention it!"

Once the firecrackers were lit, Royal Prince Yang and Prefectural Magistrate Ning appeared at the doorstep. Although the people who had surrounded the shop did not recognize the royal prince, there were only a few in the prefectural city that did not recognize the prefectural magistrate. They watched as the prefectural magistrate personally removed the red cloth on the store's plaque, revealing the golden words, 'The Yu's Braised Food Shop'. After a moment of silence, the crowd erupted into applause.

Among the crowd, whispers arose—

"Who's behind The Yu's Braised Food Shop? They even managed to invite the prefectural magistrate to help them unveil the store's plaque."

"I heard that this shop used to sell satin and was originally owned by the prefectural magistrate, but then it suddenly closed up shop in spring. Half a year later, they started renovations and then this

braised food store was born. Could it be that the satin business was making losses so the prefectural magistrate turned it into a braised food store?"

"I don't think so. I heard the neighbor say that this residence with the shop attached was sold at the beginning of spring. The location of the shophouse is good, so even if the satin wasn't bringing in money, he could still earn a lot every month if he closed the business and rented it out..."

"Perhaps an official of higher rank than the prefectural magistrate had set their eyes on this shophouse and bought it? Look at the man unveiling the plaque with the prefectural magistrate. His aura is so different, so he mustn't be of a normal standing. Also, the prefectural magistrate is so courteous with him; could it be that he is the true owner of this store?"

"Regardless of the reason, this store now has the backing of the prefectural magistrate and this unknown noble. No wonder that little lass did not cower even though Cripple Wang's wife made a ruckus here yesterday and even said to have the prefectural magistrate be the judge of things..."

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Even as the crowd speculated, everyone was certain that this store had the prefectural magistrate's backing and was not something any ordinary person could get their hands on. In the prefectural city, those who were interested in the Yu Family's braised recipes secretly snuffed the idea.

Following this, a few officials in the prefectural city who were not associated with the Yu Family also came to the scene to congratulate them. When noon came, it was impossible to simply pass off the celebration in the inner courtyard with the prefectural magistrate and all the other officials around. As for Royal Prince Yang, although he was of high status, the Yu Household did not take him as a stranger. Even when they were back in their old and simple residence in Dongshan Village, he had never failed to show up during mealtimes.

In the end, lunch was held in Zhenxiu Restaurant. Yu Xiaocao ordered a whole table full of appetizing dishes, which also included a few dishes that were sold at limited quantities every day. Secretly, the prefectural magistrate and the other officials that came to congratulate them were shocked. Although Zhenxiu Restaurant was a new restaurant that only opened up shop this spring, the degree of the business's success was well-known throughout the entire city. They would have to book in advance and wait for a whole month before they could dine in a private room like this!

What kind of background did the Yu Family have in order for them to be able to obtain a private room at any time, moreover, be able to order the limited dishes? So many prestigious and wealthy families in the capital city did not have this privilege in the capital's Zhenxiu Restaurant, not to mention the prefectural magistrate. Even if you were royalty, you would still have to wait in line to be able to dine in the famous Zhenxiu Restaurant!

The meal passed happily for both hosts and guests even though everyone had their uncertainties. The officials became especially enthusiastic and eager after they found out that the person sitting at the main seat was actually the Royal Prince Yang, who had been quite an influential person in court for the past two years. Later on, even the slightly nervous Yu Hai, who had been conversing with them, was put at the back of their minds.

The Yu's Braised Food Shop made an excellent impact on the prefectural city on its first day of business and got itself a strong backing at the same time. Even when its business boomed until it nearly caught up to Zhenxiu Restaurant later on, no one dared to make a commotion. Are you kidding? Who in the prefectural city did not know that the prefectural magistrate was backing The Yu's Braised Food Shop? Besides, the shophouse was diagonally opposite of the prefectural yamen. Making a commotion? Did you think you've lived for too long?

All of the dishes were half-priced for the first three days of business! The people who had participated in the taste-test event yesterday had become the living advertisements of the braised food store: the braised food store's meat was so fragrant, the braised food store's vegetarian dishes tasted better than the meat, the braised food store also had roasted poultry like Zhenxiu Restaurant, the braised food store...

Additionally, Yu Xiaocao had set up a metal stove at the entrance and stewed braised pig's head meat and internal organs...The fragrance of the meat wafted into the air of the entire street. Almost every passer-by stopped to find the source of the smell.

Their business boomed in these first three days. Yu Xiaocao and her oldest aunt were so busy that they had to recruit the help of Liu Junping and Liu Yaner. Liu Hu and Yu Hai were in charge of the delivery of the raw ingredients and had to travel back and forth between Dongshan Village and the prefectural city every day.

Even with the dishes at half-price, their turnover from the first day was more than three hundred taels. If they removed the operating costs, the net profit would be around more than a hundred taels. On the second and third day, their turnover kept increasing, until they had a profit of around five hundred to six

hundred taels. It had reached the point where even slaughtering two pigs a day could not suffice the demand.

The dishes that sold the quickest were still the cheaper dishes such as the pig's head meat and internal organs, along with the vegetarian dishes of braised dry tofu, kelp and tofu skin. They had to make several pots of those in a day to make up for the demand, and the pots they used were not the small ones used for ordinary cooking, but rather the big ones that could cater for the meal of one or two dozen people.

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On the fourth day of the store's opening, the braised food store's dishes were restored to their original prices. After these few days of free taste-testing and half-price promotions, The Yu's Braised Food Shop had successfully established its reputation in the city.

The fragrance of roasted chicken had seeped into the bones, and the smoked chicken had charred skin with a crunchy texture and tender meat. The roasted duck was delicious yet not greasy, while the white-skinned salted duck was tender and delectable. The appetizing smoked sausages also held its own unique flavor. There were also all types of braised meat that burst with flavor...and among them, the braised pig's head meat that was the most popular dish of all.

The Yu's Braised Food Shop offered a variety of flavorsome dishes. If Zhenxiu Restaurant was the food heaven for the wealthy, then The Yu's Braised Food Shop would be the affordable equivalent. The middle-class families in the prefectural city would head over to the braised food store once in a few days to take away a braised meat dish to satisfy their own cravings. When they had guests around, or if it was during festivities, even the poorer folk would grit their teeth and buy a braised dish home for appearance's sake. The more prestigious families of the prefectural city would also send their manservants to queue up for the store's limited dishes.

'The Yu's' roasted duck, roasted chicken and salted duck were cheaper, and definitely did not lose to Zhenxiu Restaurant in terms of taste and flavor. The store's smoked poultry, rabbit and the likes were unique in flavor, and could not be found in even Zhenxiu Restaurant. Unfortunately, these dishes were sold in limited quantities—only ten of each daily. Moreover, it was based on a first come, first served basis; no reservation allowed.

Those self-proclaimed wealthy foodies naturally would not miss these delicacies, so they sent their servants to queue since the middle of the night. They were determined to get their hands on a dish to sate their cravings. There was no shortage of wealthy people in even the small Tanggu Town, not to mention such a big place as the prefectural city.

As the prefectural city was not lacking in wealthy people but there was a limited number of dishes, the demand was naturally higher than the supply. This situation caused people to line up in front of the store earlier and earlier, until eventually there were those that brought their blankets and camped in front of 'The Yu's' closed doors just as soon as the sky turned dark. These people became a sight to see in front of the shop's doors, and they never stopped coming even on rainy and snowy days.

Once they had a chance to taste The Yu's Braised Food Store's braised dishes, those wealthy children, who thought that eating pork was undignified, would also secretly send a lesser-known servant to queue up in front of 'The Yu's' doors to buy some of the limited quantity dishes along with some braised dishes like braised meat, pig's trotters and pig's head. Then they would enjoy them in secret.

The sales of the Yu Family's braised meat were so good that simply a pig a day would not suffice the demand. Between the period of time before and after the Mid-Autumn Festival, they slaughtered two pigs a day, but their braised meat would still be sold out even before the evening arrived. The Yu Family's pig farm housed more than a hundred pigs, but they would probably run out of pigs around New Year's. As such, Liu Hu and his son traveled to disaster-stricken villages and towns to buy and secure live pigs. They offered a reasonable price and gave hope of a long-term partnership, so many people were willing to sell their pigs to them.

The weather slowly turned colder. Time passed unknowingly for the busy Yu Family until it was suddenly the day of the announcement of the results for the college examination. After finishing his examination, Little Shitou had rushed back in time to help his family out during the braised food store's grand opening, but once the business had stabilized, Xiaocao had rushed him back to the academy to continue his studies. Becoming a county official was not Little Shitou's ultimate goal—it was to display his talent at the metropolitan and palace examinations!

Once the results of the college examination was announced, there would be specialized people acting as the informant who would travel to each village and town to spread the news. After that, the local county yamen would then carry the good news to the associated families. For this college examination, there were a total of 13 county officials in Tanggu Town. Among them, two were from Dongshan Village—Qian Wen and Yu Fan! As for Xiaocao's younger uncle, he still did not become county official as Madam Zhang had wished because he had been eliminated from the college examination at its second stage.

Only Yu Xiaocao's oldest aunt's family was left to care for the braised food store during the time before and after the announcement of the results, as Yu Hai and Xiaocao had returned to Dongshan Village to await the news. The prefectural magistrate had already sent a person to hint to them about Little

Shitou's results beforehand, but on the day of the announcement, the whole family still eagerly waited for the results.

The person who came to share the news was the head bailiff of the county yamen. Usually, a task like this would be handled by a normal bailiff, but among the examinees, there was a person from the Yu Family. Who were the Yu Family? They were one of the few in Tanggu Town that could speak directly to Royal Prince Yang, the master of the town. So even if they were of lowly birth, the county magistrate would still have to be courteous with them.

Aside from the fact that he was extremely capable, the reason Head Bailiff Yue could still maintain his position even after County Magistrate Wu had left was mainly because he was a meticulous person. He eagerly volunteered to relay the news to Dongshan Village. When he arrived at the village, a crowd of children immediately surrounded him, asking about the results.

Once they knew that Yu Family's eight-year-old son Little Shitou was a county official, the crowd of children ran towards the Yu Family's residence in order to be the first person to relay the good news.

The Yu Family had grown in popularity in these past few years. They started a piggery this year, and no one knew what they fed their pigs, but their piglets grew exceedingly fast and were already ready for slaughter after just merely half a year. There were also rumors going on about how the Yu Family's braised food store was booming with business in the prefectural city. How they would slaughter five or six pigs every other day to be transported over. Just by this, it was not hard to imagine how successful the sales were. Liu Shuanzhu and his family also earned a lot from the Yu Family's business as they no longer had to worry about not being able to sell their chickens. They were also offered a price that was no less than that of Zhenxiu Restaurant's offer.

The Yu Family members were not cheapskates, so naturally, they would not be stingy with the people who relayed the good news.

A fellow villager, Li Yangfan's son, Li Xiaogui ran breathlessly into Yu Family's courtyard and, without waiting for his panting to subside, shouted to the eagerly awaiting Yu Household, "Uncle Dahai, Little Shitou made it! Little Shitou is a county official!"

As soon as Old Yu heard the news, he burst into tears. 'Thank the ancestors for their protection! A descendant of Yu Family has finally yielded good results! Shitou's nominal age is only nine years old but he's studying in the most reputable academy in town and has already become a county official—his

bright future most definitely won't stop here! After so many generations of farmers, we finally have a scholar in our family!

Madam Liu and Xiaolian embraced each other tightly, crying tears of joy. They were so grateful that they had divided the family back then, or else with Madam Zhang's stinginess, she would definitely not be willing to pay for Little Shitou's education. How would Little Shitou be able to become a county official, then?

Yu Hai was so elated he had no words, and could only laugh foolishly. It took only a while before the Yu Family's courtyard was filled with fellow villagers who came to congratulate them. After he calmed down from his excitement, Yu Hang took out sunflower seeds, peanuts and candy to serve their guests.

Yu Xiaocao took out a small pouch containing several pieces of silver which were worth one tael each, and placed the pouch in Li Xiaogui's hands as a thanks for relaying the news. When he left the Yu Family's residence, those children who were a little slower than him scrutinized the light pouch and jealously asked him to reveal the content of the pouch so they would know just how much the Yu Family had rewarded him. In their opinion, such a small pouch could barely hold a few copper coins—was it worth the effort to fight for such a measly amount?

But the children lost their composure once they witnessed Li Xiaogui pour out shining silver pieces that looked like peanuts from the pouch. Silver! Yu Family's reward for relaying the good news was actually silver! A tael of silver was equivalent to a thousand copper coins ah! The children could only hate their parents for giving them a pair of short legs, which allowed Li Xiaogui to overtake them! For a moment, they were overwhelmed with envy.

At this time, Head Bailiff Yue got down from his horse in front of the Yu Residence. Yu Hai, who had already regained his composure, greeted him and invited him inside for tea. Head Bailiff Yue only laughed, "I will be forward and call you Brother Dahai! Brother Dahai, I've come to congratulate you. You've got a good son there, becoming a county official at such a young age—with high distinction, too! He's become our Tanggu Town's youngest granary student!"

Granary students were the top scorers of the college examination, and even in the whole of the prefectural city, there were only about thirty of them. Once one became a granary student, they could receive six pecks of rice monthly and four taels annually from the government. For a poor family, the help given to granary students could easily ensure that the entire family would not have to suffer from famine.

Although this measly sustenance was not much to the Yu Household, but the title of 'granary student' was regarded as an honor to the entire family—something they could take pride in.

Whenever the Yu Family sent away one crowd of congratulators, they quickly welcomed another, and they did not stop coming even after dark. At noon, the Yu Family had prepared a grand meal for Head Bailiff Yue, and then they proceeded to stuff a fat pouch filled with ten taels in his hands. Head Bailiff Yue's original intentions was only to forge good connections with the Yu Family, but this errand had unexpectedly earned him a small fortune, too.

The neighboring Qian Residence was also bustling with life. Two county officials in one village—this was a situation never before seen in Dongshan Village. The last time someone came to relay the good news was eighteen years ago, when the village head's youngest son became a county official. It was also the first time in history that a person from Dongshan Village became a county official. Back then, it was considered good enough if the villagers did not die of starvation. How could they afford the extra expenses for their children's education? Now, they actually had two county officials in the village! All of Dongshan Village felt so proud they could boast about it for a long time to come.

Some families were happy, while others were not. While Old Yu was laughing jubilantly among his old friends, Madam Zhang was dismal and depressed.

Madam Zhao, however, was not disheartened. Her father had to sit through the examinations time and time again until he finally managed to become county official when he was nearly forty years old. Last year was a year of disasters, which had led to the academy her husband was attending letting them off for quite a long while. Thus, the delay of his success was completely understandable, considering that their family was also not of an educated background. Since he did not become a county official this year, all he would have to do was try again two years later! Madam Zhao gently consoled the dispirited Yu Bo until he picked himself up and continued to study hard.

Madam Zhang felt extremely gloomy. Her son had been studying for more than a decade, and yet he still could not compare to Little Shitou, who had only attended a little more than two years of lessons. This had caused her fixation to waver. Back then, the fortune-teller had said that someone of the Yu Family would eventually become a high-ranking official, and since among all of Yu Family, only her son was studying at that time, she naturally thought that he would become the high-ranking official that was mentioned. Now that she looked back on it, perhaps it was not as she thought!

Discontentment filled Madam Zhang's heart. She witnessed the hard work her son had poured into his studies, especially the past six months, when the light in his room was barely snuffed. He had pulled all-nighters until he became thin, and he nearly collapsed in the examination courtyard.

And what was that brat Little Shitou doing? Every time he returned home from the academy, he would follow Xiaocao, that wretch, and run around in the wild and the hills. They would catch some fish and trap rabbits, never settling down for even a moment. God was not fair, why was it him who had become a county official instead of her son? Was it possible that since the two of them were of the same surname, that the examiner had confused the two of them? Or...that little brat was blocking her son's fate of becoming an official?

Fields of Gold Chapter 359 - Evil will be Rewarded with Evil

'Yes, it must be! Her son had been doing just fine before that little brat Shitou was sent to the academy. Yu Hai's whole family is conniving, they must have done something to transfer her son's fate to Little Shitou. They must have!'

If that little brat did not exist, the person who would have been accepted into Rongxuan Academy and given special treatment by the principal of the academy would definitely have been her son! The person who became a county official and had gotten the government grain allowance would also be her son!

The more Madam Zhang thought about it, the more fixated she became. The next day, she went to create a fuss in front of the old residence of the Yu Family, saying things like how Yu Hai was evil and used black magic to switch the fate of his son. She also claimed that everything Yu Hai's family owned should have belonged to her, and Little Shitou's county official title was also supposed to be Yu Bo's. She cried as well, threatening to hang herself in front of the old residence in an effort to force Yu Hai to switch the two families' fortune back.

The villagers of Dongshan Village surrounded her and watched her like a circus show. No one stopped her even as she pretended to take off her belt and acted as if she wanted to hang herself in front of the Yu Residence doors. Old Yu was so mad he trembled, shouting loud and clear while he pointed at her, "You say Dahai had altered Xiaobo's fortune? Bah! If fate and fortune was so easily exchanged, why don't you find someone to alter your fate into that of a noble-titled lady? You're just jealous that Dahai's living a good life, aren't you? Do you regret your actions now? And what have you done previously? You should've known this day would come when you hid away those 300 taels and chased them away without giving them a single copper! And you dare say that it's the fault of the examiner that Shitou became a county official instead of Xiaobo! Your words will ruin the child's future! If this matter was spread, the authorities will have you arrested and charged with crime!"

Madam Zhang now sobbed sorrowfully. It had been getting harder and harder to pass every day for the past two years, so she had counted on her son to become a county official so she could finally walk with her head held high again. Who would have known that Yu Bo did not end up passing the examination and Little Shitou, who she had not thought highly of, would become a county official instead? The greater her expectations, the greater her disappointment; she felt as though her heart had been

emptied. Unable to find any excuse or reason to vent on, the pent up frustration in her threatened to explode!

“Old man! Xiaobo is also your son. The blood of the Yu Family also flows within him! You can't completely side with Yu Hai; you need to think about your youngest son too! If they hadn't switched out Xiaobo's fortune, how could that little kit, who barely knows his words, manage to become a county official after only a few years of studying instead of Xiaobo, who had studied for many years? If it were that easy, wouldn't everyone be a county official?” Madam Zhang held on to this absurd excuse as she continued to cry.

The people of this era were still quite superstitious and believed in fengshui, fate and fortune, so once they heard her reasoning, a few of those easily-muddled people in the crowd started to believe in her words and their gaze was filled with skepticism as they looked upon Yu Hai's family. Some of them even thought, 'What if the reason the Yu Family was earning a lot of money through this and that for the past two years was also because they had stolen some of their own fortune...'

Yu Xiaocao walked out from the courtyard, coldly speaking, “If it were truly like what you said, then wouldn't it mean the good fortune of all those 80 year old candidates who qualified to take the county-level examinations had been stolen by all the successful young scholars? You're implying that Headmaster Yuan's son, a 20 year old top scholar, also stole someone else's good fortune? No matter how beautiful you carve a piece of elm wood, at the end of the day, it is still elm wood, and cannot become high-quality jade! This should be common sense!”

“Who are you comparing to elm wood? Is there anyone who speaks of their younger uncle like you? Such a rude and disrespectful brat, we'll see who will want to marry you!” Madam Zhang was akin to a lit firecracker and was so loud she didn't sound human anymore.

When Madam Liu heard someone curse her daughter for not being able to get married in the future, she lost her temper, "How is my daughter rude? What did she say wrong? It's stealing your good fortune if our Shitou excels in the examinations, but well-deserved if he doesn't? What kind of logic is that? Even the headmaster of Rongxuan Academy could see his talent and accepted him as his true disciple. It'd be weird if Shitou didn't excel, considering all the late-night study sessions that the principal gives him every day! Stop spouting nonsense and go home! Your son and daughter still want their dignity even if you don't!"

Seeing that the usually meek Madam Liu had even dared to shout at her, Madam Zhang dropped to the ground on her butt, wailing, "Heavens! Why do you turn a blind eye? Why do you not strike this unfilial thing? No matter what, I still brought up Yu Hai and let him marry his wife. Not only does he not remember my efforts in bringing him up, but he also egged his wife on to criticize me...How am I supposed to live? All of you should be struck by lightning!"

"If the heavens weren't blind and were going to strike someone, it would still first strike those people who've committed heinous crimes. The kind of person that plotted the murder of her own husband and was charged with murder!" Yu Xiaocao paid no heed to Madam Liu, who had tried to stop her, and stepped forward again. She did not care about her good name, since she had never planned to marry anyone in the first place.

When the time came, she would not obstruct both of her brothers' future. She would withdraw herself from the family and start her own household with only herself. Besides, she had her limbs and she had the skill, so she was not afraid of not being able to feed herself. At that time, she would adopt a few children, then leave all her assets to the ones who were filial to her and took care of her at an old age. It was definitely better than marrying a man who had different opinions and could not cross the gap between their different eras.

Every single soul in Dongshan Village knew of Madam Zhang's attempt at murdering her own husband. Old Yu almost died in the hands of this woman, and, if Yu Hai had arrived two days later than he did, Old Yu would only be a skeleton lying in his grave now. But a murder charge? What were they talking about? Had Madam Zhang also harmed someone else's life? Although the villagers of Dongshan Village were sometimes a bit selfish and mean, they were generally not immoral or odious people, so when they heard the words 'murder charges', their expressions changed drastically.

Madam Zhang's heart skipped a beat. Only now did she remember that Yu Hai still had leverage against her. If they were to expose her misdeeds from that time, she would also not be able to stay in Dongshan Village anymore even if the yamen did not come for her. Her eyes darted around, seemingly trying to find an excuse to free herself from this predicament, when all of a sudden, lightning shot down from the clear sky. Madam Zhang could only feel a numbing pain across her entire body before she fell unconscious and dropped to the ground.

"Oh my goodness! The heavens are angry and struck her with lightning!" Someone in the crowd exclaimed.

Madam Zhang's face was burnt black, while her hair looked like it had exploded and now resembled a porcupine! She collapsed on the ground, with white smoke faintly escaping through her open mouth. Her eyes had rolled into her head, and her limbs were still convulsing. It was a terrifying sight to witness.

The villagers that surrounded her earlier now pushed each other, backing away from her. They were afraid that they might be implicated by her and mistakenly struck by lightning.

“The heavens only strike the evil. It would seem that Madam Zhang had many misdeeds! She must've been lying too when she said that Yu Hai stole her good fortune. Even the heavens couldn't stand it! She's too evil!”

“When Xiaocao said 'plotted the murder of her own husband and charged with murder', could it be that she meant Madam Zhang? Oh my goodness, I originally thought that this Madam Zhang was only a little mean and unkind, but I never thought that she would turn out to be this evil!”

“Madam Zhang had murdered someone? Who? It couldn't be one of our villagers, could it? We should keep away from her in the future, or else who knows when we'll be harmed by her.”

“I remember now. At that time, I was close with Yu Hai's mother and often visited her when she was sick. At first, she was already on her way to recovery and the physician said she only needed a few more doses of medicine, but when Madam Zhang arrived, her illness immediately took a turn for worse, and she died not long after...Say, could this be Madam Zhang's doing?”

“Could it really be? Wasn't Yu Hai's mother Madam Zhang's older cousin? She took her in when she had no one to turn to, so Madam Zhang wouldn't be so ungrateful as to turn against her, right? What was she after?”

“Tsk tsk! What else could she be after? At that time, Old Yu was still standing tall and looked quite similar to Dahai. Moreover, he was good at catching fish. She was a widow with a child to take care of, and later she became Yu Hai's stepmother...What do you think she was after?”

“If it's like this, then Madam Zhang is not only evil, but she's also an ungrateful wretch. Killing her cousin so she could replace her! Does she have no dignity? Would she have died without a man ah?!”

Madam Zhang was originally only unconscious for a short while, but when she heard the crowd's speculations, she was so scared she had not dared to move and played dead on the ground. It was only when Yu Bo received news that he and Yu Dashan both carried the 'unconscious' Madam Zhang back. Otherwise, if she continued to lie on the cold, late-autumn ground, she might actually die from the exposure.

Despite their efforts, Madam Zhang still suffered from a high fever that same night, and even after they hired a physician and fed her the prescribed medicine for a few days, she still did not fully recuperate from the illness. Rumors spread within the village that it was Yu Hai's mother taking revenge on Madam Zhang. Others said that because she had committed so many evil deeds, her youngest son had to suffer the punishment. That was the reason why he could not pass the college examination.

Yu Bo could not stand that the villagers pointed and talked about him whenever he went out, so he disregarded the still-recuperating Madam Zhang, picked up his bags, and left for the academy in the prefectural city. He would study hard and get good results in two years to wash away the shame of today!

A few more days passed, and Royal Prince Yang returned from the capital. When he heard that Little Shitou had managed to become a county official, he suggested celebrating the success of the little fellow in Zhenxiu Restaurant, while also insinuating to Yu Xiaocao to fulfill her 'Buddha jumps over the wall' promise.

It was late fall. The business in the prefectural city was going smoothly, and the winter wheat plantation in the farmstead was growing healthily, so Xiaocao was finally free for a few days. For the past few days, Zhu Junyang kept mentioning 'Buddha jumps over the wall'. Furthermore, Tanggu Town was near the sea, which made the ingredients easier to acquire, so Yu Xiaocao began her attempt at creating this complicated dish.

Of course, the expensive ingredients required to make 'Buddha jumps over the wall' like shark's fin, abalone, sea cucumber and shark's skin would be provided by Royal Prince Yang. Prince Jing's Residence was not lacking in these ingredients, as their storehouse kept quite a lot of even just the top-notch delicacies that were rewarded from the imperial palace.

'Buddha jumps over the wall' consisted of eighteen ingredients: sea cucumber, abalone, shark's fin, scallops, shark's lips (shark's skin), fish maw, razor clams, ham, pork belly, lamb knuckle, pig trotters, pig tendons, chicken and duck breast and gizzard, shiitake mushrooms, and winter bamboo shoots.

The process of creating the dish was also extremely complicated. The eighteen ingredients must first be made into their own unique dishes through different methods, then layered dish by dish into a large ceramic pot. Following that, a suitable volume of soup and Shaoxing wine must be poured in and mixed until the soup, wine and dishes combined together. The opening of the ceramic pot must then be covered and sealed tightly with lotus leaves and put over a fire to heat.

The fuel for the fire was also specific. Only the white coal, which was fine and did not produce any smoke, would do. The ceramic pot must first be put over a large and blazing flame to boil, before simmering on a small and warm fire for 5 to 6 hours. Only then would the dish be successfully created.

Fields of Gold Chapter 360 - Buddha Smells the Food and Jumps Over the Wall

The process of making Buddha jumps over the wall was very complicated and Yu Xiaocao didn't have any experience in her previous life in making it. She only knew the concept. After preparing ten sets of raw ingredients for the dish, Yu Xiaocao continually experimented with her cooking methods to find the correct way. The first few times, either the ratio of the ingredients were off or the ratio of the seasonings were off. Thus, the taste of the final dish was not as good as she would have liked.

However, even the failed attempts at Buddha jumps over the wall were delicious as it used top-notch delicacies. Yu Xiaocao was talented in cooking and her food was addictive. Thus, to the Yu Family members, the products of her failed attempts were still incredibly tasty. Therefore, before the day of the celebration that Royal Prince Yang had prepared for Little Shitou had arrived, the Yu Family's old residence constantly had tantalizing smells wafting out of its walls. The fragrance of her cooking caused their two neighbors, the Qians and the Zhous, to drool constantly. Qian Wu, the little youngster, couldn't stop himself from going over to the Yu Family's gate to take a look. He really wanted to see what sort of delicious dish Xiaocao was making.

With each attempt, Yu Xiaocao wrote down what she learned in a small notebook using charcoal. The notes described what had gone wrong with the cooking process and proposed solutions to fix it. If she also discovered the most optimal way to cook an ingredient, it was also recorded down into her notebook...

Many attempts had passed and she finally failed eight attempts. On her ninth attempt, she finally hit the perfect ratios and cooking methods for all of the ingredients. The scent of the food wafted around the residence in a diameter of five kilometers, causing everyone who inhaled the fragrance to be intoxicated by the 'Buddha jumps over the wall' dish.

Every time Yu Xiaocao attempted to make Buddha jumps over the wall, Zhu Junyang was always there to taste it and give his opinions. He actually proposed quite a few useful opinions and propositions. After all, a true foodie's mouth could taste all of the details. However, he managed to eat quite a lot of the attempts that were even deemed failures. Even the failed attempts were incredibly delicious that other dishes couldn't even hope to compare.

When this ceramic pot of Buddha jumps over the wall was just finished, the smell that came out was incredible and could not be compared to the previous attempts. Even Royal Prince Yang, who constantly boasted that there were no delicacies in the world that he hadn't tried, was also spellbound by the food's fragrance. In fact, he almost lost his senses in the euphoric sensation of the smell.

When the ceramic pot was opened, the whole courtyard was bathed in its aroma. Zhu Junyang praised the food unceasingly after taking a bite and couldn't think of any criticisms. Sure enough, Xiaocao hadn't been boasting when she said, "When the lid opens and the scent of food permeates the air, Buddha smells the food and jumps over the wall!" Basically, even Buddha himself couldn't help but violate his religious precepts to take a few bites when faced with the sweet smell of this dish.

The Yu Family members could only smell the first successful batch that was made and didn't even get to taste one bite. Royal Prince Yang, who had an icy exterior but an inner core that was very filial to his family, had taken that ceramic pot of Buddha jumps over the wall after wrapping it in some cloth and brought it to the mountain residence where his mother lived. There, he and his mother were able to enjoy the dish together.

When the construction on the residence finished, Princess Consort Jing had moved in. After her second day there, she invited Yu Xiaocao over to have some fun. With Royal Prince Yang as her escort, Xiaocao 'looked around' at every nook and cranny of the mountain residence. She pointed out the small well that was in the main courtyard's little kitchen and said that it contained water from a top-notch mountain spring. She claimed that using the water from this well for all of the Princess Consort's food and tea would help her body. In actuality, she had the little divine stone help her to transform the well water into mystic-stone water.

At first, Senior Servant Su, who had served Princess Consort Jing for a long time, only half-believed Xiaocao's words. Under the persistence of Princess Consort Jing and the royal prince, Her Royal Highness only ate food and drank tea that was prepared with the water from that well. Only a few days passed, yet her royal highness's health began to take a turn for the better and her appetite improved a lot. Her skin became more tender and she had a healthy flush on her cheeks. In fact, she even looked a lot more youthful compared to before. Senior Servant Su, who was a loyal servant, repeatedly said that Dongshan Village's environment was good for healing people!

After spending half a year in the mountain residence, Princess Consort Jing's body recovered to the point where she was able to wear a hiking costume and go outside. With a few maidservants and senior servants accompanying her, she hiked the mountain, went hunting, or even went to gather some wild fruits herself. She had Yu Xiaocao use those wild fruits to ferment some wine. Her days were full of rich activities to do. Even Imperial Prince Jing, who came over on his breaks, was disregarded by her as she was too busy. It made him quite sulky.

When Yu Xiaocao had free time, she would, from time to time, cook some light dishes for the princess consort and send them to the mountain residence. Princess Consort Jing once laughingly said that the homestyle food that she made was even better than the food that the best chefs in the prince's residence made.

At first, the self-important chefs in the residence were quite offended by this and thought that the princess consort had merely gotten tired of eating sumptuous food, so she believed that homestyle food tasted better. However, after they tried the food Yu Xiaocao made, they realized how wrong they were. These simple ingredients could be crafted into incredibly delicious dishes. Was this the legendary 'returning to one's true self' cooking method? They had never thought that the cuisine that they pursued for over half their life could be produced by a ten to eleven year old girl!

The head chef at the residence along with the imperial chefs that were bestowed onto the estate all put away their arrogance and self-importance to ask Yu Xiaocao for her advice. Xiaocao didn't have anything to hide and also didn't have any lectures to pontificate. Instead, when she cooked, she allowed two of the famous chefs to observe her.

The famous chefs at the residence both felt grateful. All head chefs had their secrets that they wouldn't disseminate to others. By being so magnanimous, the two of them esteemed and respected Yu Xiaocao even more. From their observations, the two of them both had their own takeaways. After being inspired by what they saw, both of them managed to make breakthroughs in their own cooking.

When Royal Prince Yang brought back the Buddha jumps over the wall, it was already time to eat dinner. The two chefs had both made their specialties and were waiting for the two masters to try them. Royal Prince Yang was picky and was always able to find some aspect of the food that was lacking. Thus, whenever the masters were eating, the two chefs stayed at the side to hear the royal prince's opinions or the princess consort's requests.

“Yang'er, what sort of treasure are you holding onto today?” Princess Consort Jing looked at the table full of light dishes and couldn't bring up her appetite. What had that lass Xiaocao been up to lately? It had been a long time since the little girl came over to spend time with her. Princess Consort Jing felt that her body was pretty much as healthy as a normal person's and wanted to relax her dietary restrictions. She really wanted to eat roasted chicken, roasted duck, and smoked sausages...

Suddenly, Princess Consort Jing sat up straight in her chair as her nostrils gently flared. Her eyes lit up, and she stared fixedly at the ceramic pot that her son had just unwrapped. The ceramic pot looked like nothing special but there was a tantalizing fragrance coming out of it.

Unconsciously, a brilliant smile blossomed onto Princess Consort Jing's face as she quietly said, "Yang'er, what did that lass, Xiaocao, come up with now? It smells like meat. Can I try some? I just want to try one bite!"

When Zhu Junyang saw how his lady mother was acting like a child, he almost wanted to laugh while simultaneously feeling sorry for her. Her face was full of anticipation as she kept her eyes on the pot containing Buddha jumps over the wall.

His lord father had previously told him that when his lady mother's health was better, she was also a true foodie. She could be arguing passionately with Prince Jing and vow that she wasn't going to speak to him for the rest of her life. Then, seconds later, when Prince Jing took out some pastries from the Imperial Palace, she would change her tune and run over like a little dog who had smelled the scent of meat. Her metaphorical tail would be wagging too!

Unfortunately, later on, his lady mother was injured while birthing him. Furthermore, during her recovery, there was someone who interfered with her healing. It was only after she encountered Yu Xiaocao that her body slowly recovered. For the longest time, his lady mother ate more medicine than she did food. She was also someone who loved eating meat yet she was restricted to eating light and non-greasy foods due to her health.

"Yang'er! My body has completely recovered. Even the imperial physicians say that eating a few pieces of meat is okay!" This wasn't the first time that Princess Consort Jing claimed that the doctors said something they didn't in order to eat delicious food.

After seeing the obvious desire on his mother's face, Zhu Junyang placed the ceramic pot on the table and thought for a bit before he said, "This dish uses mostly seafood ingredients, so it should be quite nutritious. Lady Mother, you can eat some. However, you're not allowed to eat too much tonight in order to avoid indigestion!"

When she heard that she was allowed to eat it, Princess Consort Jing was so happy that she acted like a child. She impatiently opened the ceramic pot and an intoxicating, rich fragrance wafted into the air. The two chefs nearby immediately opened their eyes wide and craned their necks forward, wishing that they could crowd around the pot to see just what exactly was causing such a tantalizing smell. They had cooked for most of their lives yet they had never come across a dish that was able to emit such a dense and rich aroma before.

When the lid was completely off, the entire residence was filled with the addictive smell of Buddha jumps over the wall. All of the maidservants, senior servants, and stewards who were busy working

immediately stopped what they were doing and lifted their heads to sniff the air. They then had to silently swallow down the saliva that pooled in their mouths.

The two servants who were the most tortured right now were Princess Consort Jing's personal maidservants, Meixiang and Lanxiang, who often served her during the meals. They had undergone stringent training as palace maids and had also served Princess Consort Jing for a long time. Thus, they were very proud of their self control. However, after encountering the tempting Buddha jumps over the wall, both them kept their mouths shut tightly. They didn't dare to say a word as they were afraid that their saliva would dribble out and down their faces.

Luckily, Royal Prince Yang took over Meixiang's duties and scooted next to his mother. He picked up her porcelain bowl, which was made in government kilns, and scooped up a ladle full of shark fin, abalone, and sea cucumber from the ceramic pot and put into her bowl before placing it before her.

Princess Consort Jing impatiently snatched her utensil and delivered a small taste into her mouth. The fragrant taste of seafood and the rich taste of meat erupted inside her mouth. For a moment, she was so happy that she felt like she was soaring gleefully in the sky and drifting among the fluffy white clouds. Her entire bowl was cleaned of food in two to three bites. She didn't wait for her son to serve her and instead went to get another helping herself. After trying every single ingredient in the pot, she felt her stomach starting to bulge with fullness yet she didn't want to stop eating.

Meixiang surreptitiously swallowed down another mouthful of saliva and quietly reminded her mistress, "Your Highness, you've already eaten more tonight than you have for most meals. If you continue to eat, you won't feel well when you go to sleep..."

Zhu Junyang, who was in the midst of enjoying delicious food, only now realized that his mother had an expression full of want and desire as she rubbed her belly. He quickly moved the ceramic pot away from her and said, "Lady Mother, Xiaocao also said that it's best to eat until you're seventy percent full at night. That's the best way to treat your body."

"But, the food in this pot is truly too good! I really can't bear to stop!" Princess Consort Jing felt that it was a shame as she pursed her lips. She pathetically watched as her son continued to eat and silently cursed her stomach for being an abject failure. If she could be like her son, who was able to eat three large bowls at each meal, that would be the best ah!

Zhu Junyang increased his speed of eating. After finishing over half of the food in the ceramic pot, he finally felt like his stomach was too stuffed to eat more. Only then did the two chefs waiting at the side impatiently ask, "Your Highness, Royal Prince, may we try some?"

Other than the Buddha jumps over the wall, the rest of the dishes on the table hadn't been touched at all. All of the food on the table was usually stuff that was very hard for servants and maids to have the opportunity to eat, yet none of it had any attraction over the remaining pot of Buddha jumps over the wall. The food leftover after the masters ate was often rewarded to the servants and maids beneath them. Meixiang and Lanxiang had already been wondering if this pot would be given to them to eat. However, there were now the two chefs eyeing the leftover food. Lanxiang couldn't help but give the two chefs a scorching glare!