

Gold Chapter 361

Fields of Gold Chapter 361 - True Disciple

The ceramic pot of Buddha jumps over the wall not only conquered Princess Consort Jing's stomach but also conquered over the two head chef's hearts. Out of the two head chefs at Prince Jing's estate, one of them was born in the famous Jiang Family. They were from Jiangnan and, in history, had produced eight extremely famous chefs. Their family's recipes and techniques were only passed to their descendants, and only to those born of the legitimate wife.

During the chaos of war, Prince Jing once saved the patriarch of the Jiang Family. In order to heal his wife's body, Prince Jing personally went to the Jiang Family to ask them for a chef. At that time, the Jiang Family sent over the chef that was second only to the patriarch to Prince Jing's estate in order to repay their debt.

The other chef was the chef who was the best at cooking medicinal cuisine in the palace, Imperial Chef Huang. He had previously cooked food for the emperor emeritus. Before the emperor emeritus retired, he had heard that Princess Consort Jing had a weak constitution and required a lot of nursing back to health. Thus, he sent Imperial Chef Huang to Prince Jing's estate to have him especially prepare medicinal cuisines for her. It could be said that without Imperial Chef Huang there, Princess Consort Jing's battered body might not have lasted and she wouldn't have been able to meet Yu Xiaocao. Her soul might have left this earth long ago!

These two illustrious chefs, one world-renowned, and the other an imperial chef, had unexpectedly been conquered by the cooking of a ten to eleven year old little girl. If this came out, no one would believe it.

At this moment, Yu Xiaocao was not aware of any of this. She was currently in the middle of writing and editing the recipe for Buddha jumps over the wall in preparation to sell it at a very high price to Third Young Master Zhou! The popularity of Zhenxiu Restaurant's fruit-scented roasted duck had gradually declined, so it was time to push out a whole new dish! 'Buddha jumps over the wall' was the perfect dish to send out next.

Why was she going to sell it at a high price to Zhenxiu Restaurant? All of the ingredients used in the dish were top-notch delicacies and were quite expensive. Thus, this dish had to be marketed to customers that had deep pockets and a willingness to spend money. Not only could Zhenxiu Restaurant make a pretty penny of this, but they could also boost their own reputation and make connections with wealthy and powerful people. It was a win-win from every side. No matter how high the price, it would be worth it!

The second day after Buddha jumps over the wall came out, Royal Prince Yang had reserved a private room at Zhenxiu Restaurant to celebrate Little Shitou passing the county-level imperial exams. They not only invited Rongxuan Academy's Headmaster Yuan but they also sent out invitations to all of the teachers in Little Shitou's grade. County Magistrate Zhao had also somehow found out that this was going on and shamelessly invited himself in and brought along a very generous gift. Other than the star of the day, Little Shitou, the Yu Family also had Yu Hai and Yu Xiaocao there.

At first, it was with great difficulty that they finally convinced Old Yu to come, but when he got to Zhenxiu Restaurant and found out the headmaster and county magistrate were there, he became frightened and refused to go. He had never interacted before with prestigious personages in his whole life, so he hid in the residence the Yu Family had in town and could not be convinced by anyone to do otherwise. This little episode was only known by the Yu Family and no one else.

Little Shitou had felt a bit embarrassed by all of this. Originally, this was supposed to be a celebration for the whole family, so how did it become filled with a bunch of unrelated people? He acted like a tiny adult and politely said, "I only passed the county-level imperial exams and didn't even get first place. There's nothing worth celebrating!"

County Magistrate Zhao flatteringly said, "You're being too modest. In all of Tanggu Town, there are only two who have passed the exam and get government grain, and you are one of them. That being said, in this batch of examinees who passed, you are the youngest. It's also said that you caught the eye of the Superintendent of the Zhili Province and he personally read through your exam papers!"

Headmaster Yuan was very satisfied with Little Shitou's performance and actions. All in all, the little fellow had only been studying for less than three years. If he didn't have an almost photographic memory to the point where he couldn't forget things and also a mind that grasped concepts easily, it would have been considered fine for a child his age to be able to recognize all of the words he was reading on the exam. Unexpectedly, the little fellow wanted to try for the county-level examinations!

Originally, with Little Shitou's teachers' estimations, it would have been fine for him to just barely pass the first set of examinations. Who would have thought that his path went smoothly and he passed all three sets of the entry-level examinations and received the honor of becoming a scholar who passed the county-level imperial examinations. Furthermore, he managed to do very well and became one of the few scholars who would be granted the privilege of receiving grain from the government. Naturally, other than Little Shitou's incredible innate talent, his success was very much linked with Headmaster Yuan's careful tutoring and training.

None of them knew that Little Shitou's original IQ was only just a little bit better than his Younger Uncle's, Yu Bo. In other words, if he studied hard for his whole life, he would probably only be able to pass the county-level imperial examinations.

However, with Yu Xiaocao transmigrating over and changing the Yu Family's trajectory, everything else changed too. Since the age of five, Little Shitou had been eating food and drinking beverages that all contained mystic-stone water. For a fully grown adult, mystic-stone water could only bring the person to the peak of health and heal any old illnesses or injuries. However, for children, the changes it could manifest was much greater. It had the ability to make the brain undergo a second development and change a person's intelligence.

An ordinary person usually only used three to five percent of their brain power. Even Einstein, the well-known genius, only used up to ten percent of his brain power. Unconsciously, Little Shitou had surpassed this future scientific genius. Not only was his ability to memorize very good but his ability to understand concepts had also increased significantly. Furthermore, he was very hardworking as he wished to also do his part for the family like his second sister, so it would be more surprising if his grades were bad!

Headmaster Yuan, who had already regarded Little Shitou as his last disciple, didn't compliment the boy like other people were. Instead, he stated reasonably, "Yu Fan is right. He only passed the county-level examinations and it's only the first step in a very long journey. He needs to make sure to not get arrogant and stay humble to avoid having the same ending as the main character from 'The Lament of Zhongyong' [1]. Yu Fan, you need to make sure you face forward always and study hard. Furthermore, you can't only rely on books to learn as you have to open yourself to get a better understanding of the world. Next year, I will be going to Jiangnan to lecture and you should come with me!"

When Little Shitou heard this, he became very excited. Many educated scholars longed to travel to Jiangnan. Historically, many scholarly lines of thoughts had originated there and the studious atmosphere there was quite thick. It was said that even the farmers in the fields could also recite a few lines of poetry.

Every year, Headmaster Yuan would get invitations from a few notable schools down in Jiangnan to have him lecture. Being able to go with him and listen to all of these lectures was only an honor reserved for his true disciples.

Although Headmaster Yuan had taken care of Little Shitou and given him preferential treatment these past two years, Little Shitou never expected that he could become a true disciple of the headmaster. All of the headmaster's true disciples had either become notable scholars of merit or respected officials at court helping to govern the country. Regardless, their futures were limitless.

Yu Xiaocao had just come in with a ceramic pot of Buddha jumps over the wall that gave off its signature tantalizing fragrance. When she saw her younger brother foolishly staring, she hurriedly put the pot down and gently slapped him on the back of his head, "What are you doing just standing there, stupidly happy? Quickly kowtow to your master!"

Little Shitou's main teacher also encouraged him, "We have both wine and tea available here. Let's conduct the formal ceremony of you becoming his disciple right now then!"

Headmaster Yuan's full attention was currently on the dense fragrant smell of the Buddha jumps over the wall, so he absentmindedly went through the ceremonial procedures with Little Shitou serving him tea. Like that, the simple ceremony to take in Little Shitou as a formal apprentice was finished. Only after the celebration party ended did he realize that he had just taken a boy, not even nine years old, as his disciple. This disciple was also much younger than all of his other disciples.

The last time Headmaster Yuan took in a disciple was over twenty years ago. All of his other disciples, as well as himself, thought that he wouldn't be taking any more true disciples for the rest of his life. When he said that he was going to take Little Shitou along, it was because he liked talented people and didn't want the boy's innate talents to go to waste. Who would have thought that he would absentmindedly take in another disciple during a banquet? Argh! Good food could truly make a person lose their wits!

However, that Buddha jumps over the wall dish was truly too delicious. Headmaster Yuan, who often bragged that there were no delicacies in the world that he hadn't tried, had also been firmly conquered by it.

The person who was most happy after all of this, other than Little Shitou, was Yu Xiaocao. After Royal Prince Yang explained the situation to her, she understood just how fortunate it was that her younger brother was able to become Headmaster Yuan's last disciple. It could be said, that as long as Little Shitou didn't make any big mishaps in the future, his future could only be limitless and smooth. Not only would he have access to the best education and materials, but he also now had connections to all of the talented and skilled older disciples. They would later be his network! In the future, it was almost an iron-clad guarantee that Old Yu's family's descendants would be bound for officialdom!

"Hee hee! Young Royal Prince, I have to hand it to you; it was a great idea to hold this banquet! I don't even know how to thank you properly!" Yu Xiaocao was filled with gratitude from head to toe. Her eyes shined with light full of gratitude and seemed to glow with an inner radiance.

Zhu Junyang felt his heart skip a beat after looking into her shining eyes and he couldn't help but turn his head away. He had never known before that a person's eyes could look so incredibly luminous and beautiful. They looked as if they were crafted out of the most expensive glass and jade and didn't have a single flaw. It was as if they could see into the depths of a person's soul and purify all darkness within.

“Ahem...then, how do you want to thank me?” Zhu Junyang was also happy for Little Shitou. With Little Shitou around, the court would also have another person there supporting the Yu Family wholeheartedly.

Yu Xiaocao grinned until her eyes turned into crescents and looked like tiny moons, “How about I make you Buddha jumps over the wall every day? What do you think?”

“Eat it every day? No matter how delicious something is, it's always possible to get sick of it!” Zhu Junyang was not very satisfied with her answer.

Yu Xiaocao slanted her head to the side as she contemplated. After thinking a bit, she was in low spirits. Imperial Prince Jing's youngest son was also the person the emperor regarded with the most importance right now. There really wasn't anything that she could take out that would be a proper gift to him to express her gratitude.

Zhu Junyang watched as the little girl nibbled on her fingernails as if she was a little kitten stuck in a bunch of yarn. Her face was full of confusion. He silently laughed and then patted her small head, “If you can't think of anything, it's okay. I'll be merciful and let you have a debt for now.”

Yu Xiaocao hated owing other people the most. She stated with an expression full of dissatisfaction, “Young Royal Prince, tell me what you want the most. As long as I am able to, I'll do it for you!”

Royal Prince Yang revealed an arrogant expression, “A gift you give voluntarily versus something I ask for, can those two be considered the same? No sincerity!” After he finished, he strolled away with large steps.

Yu Xiaocao followed him as if she was his personal tail as she continued to say, “Just tell me ah! You don't lack for anything and it's not as if I can read your mind! I really don't know what you need!”

Zhu Junyang could hear in her voice hints of acting spoiled and being cute, and it felt like a little cat was tickling the inside of his heart. He suddenly stopped walking and turned around to look at the little girl whose head didn't even reach his armpits.

Yu Xiaocao didn't expect that the person in front of her would suddenly stop moving. She was still speed-walking forward as she roasted him in her mind, 'Must be nice to have such long legs, ah! You can walk so fast!'

"Ouch!" The result was tragedy. The little girl bumped her head straight into Zhu Junyang's abdomen and her nose stung after hitting his rock-hard stomach. Tears involuntarily came to her eyes and dripped down her face.

"You didn't even give me a head's up when you stopped. Now my nose is going to be flat after hitting you!" Yu Xiaocao wiped the tears off her face as she loudly protested. Noses weren't very strong to begin with. If her nose got hit a couple more times, wouldn't she have a flat nose for the rest of her life then?

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The feeling of a tiny and soft body hitting his body and being enveloped by his chest made his heart stop beating for a second before it violently started up again. This strange feeling made him feel a tiny bit panicked—was there something wrong with his body? When he got back to the mountain residence, he should have one of the imperial physicians take his pulse.

He lowered his head and saw a pair of large eyes shining with tears. It was as if he was looking into a clear, pure spring that had sunlight pouring into it. Her eyes had the clarity of water melted from the purest snow and ice at the top of a mountain. Zhu Junyang started feeling his heart starting to beat faster and faster. The little lass had a pair of eyes that could speak volumes. Long eyelashes framed them, and it made her seem like a cheerful little spirit. Every time they flickered, he could sense her inner emotions and feelings. Sometimes they would even glitter adorably whenever she came up with a naughty idea. They truly made people either hate or love her.

Zhu Junyang secretly inhaled a deep breath and looked at the bright red nose on the little girl's face. He spoke in a voice that had overtones of tenderness and complaint, "Why aren't you paying more attention when you're walking? Luckily you only bumped into me. If you hit a rock or large tree, you might have had an open wound...you're already not beautiful, so if you had a big wound on your face, how much worse could you look?"

Yu Xiaocao felt flames of fury rise inside her, 'If you didn't suddenly stop moving, do you think I would have hurt my nose ah? You claim I'm not beautiful, hmph! Do you think everyone is like you? With a face so devilishly handsome that you attract everyone around you? Where am I not beautiful huh? I'm a very adorable and sweet looking little girl, okay?'

Yu Xiaocao was quite satisfied with her current looks. Her skin was soft and tender and glowed with health. She had a pair of clever and large eyes and long eyelashes framing them. Her nose and mouth were both delicately shaped. In her previous life, her skin was on the duller side so she looked more average than the average person. She was still young right now and hadn't grown into her full potential. 'A girl changes eighteen times between childhood and womanhood. In the future, my looks will definitely stun you!!' Yu Xiaocao gleefully thought as she threw out any notion of modesty or shyness.

Zhu Junyang watched as the little lass first became furious, huffing and puffing in rage, and then suddenly silently giggling in glee. The only thing he could think now was this, 'A woman's heart is as deep as the ocean. It's impossible to understand a female!'

He thought for a bit and continued with the previous topic, "Xiaocao, didn't you want to say that you wanted to thank me? You wouldn't be only saying that because you felt happy and gave me an empty promise right?"

"My words are as good as gold. Since I said I wanted to thank you, then I absolutely will. Tell me, what do you want? As long as I'm able to fulfill it, I will!" Yu Xiaocao kept thinking about how the young royal prince's actions had inadvertently caused her younger brother to be taken in as the last disciple of Headmaster Yuan. Her heart was full of happiness.

Zhu Junyang's eyes shifted a bit and he smiled, "I also know that I'm not lacking for anything and don't have anything that I particularly want. How about...how about this, you can promise to do something for me as a sign of your gratitude? How's that?"

"What do you want done? Don't make it too hard, my abilities have limits!" Yu Xiaocao silently thought, 'You're a high and noble young royal prince. If you can't do it, how could I, the daughter of a farmer, help you instead? If it's too hard, don't look at me.'

The smile on Zhu Junyang's face had a devilish tint to it, "As for what it is? I don't actually know yet either! You can hold onto this debt for now. When I come up with something, I'll tell you then!"

Yu Xiaocao felt like she could start seeing the outline of an illusory fox behind the young royal prince again. She frowned and gently rubbed her nose that was still a bit tender and said, "It needs to be something that can be done by me. If I can't do it, then when the time comes, don't blame me for being unable to fulfill it ah!"

As he gazed at the little rascal of a girl, Zhu Junyang suddenly felt as if the weather today was very good. The sun seemed to be even more bright and gentle than before and there was a refreshing breeze blowing around. Even the dried up and yellowing grasses and leaves on the ground seemed better looking compared to yesterday. Royal Prince Yang, who was now in a good mood, said, "Don't worry! It'll be something that you can definitely handle!"

Yu Xiaocao didn't take it to heart and only felt like the foodie would only ask for some new delicacies to be made. She had cracked the hard nut that was Buddha jumps over the wall, was there any other dish that would perplex her? At this time, she didn't realize that she had promised herself out in the future...

Zhu Junyang happily went back to the mountain residence. Princess Consort Jing, who was currently in the garden admiring and taking care of the flora, could tell her son was in a very good mood. She placed down the water can in her hands and revealed a gentle and sweet-tempered smile, "Yang'er, did you come across something good? You seem very happy."

Zhu Junyang walked over to his mother and took the water can from her as he described everything that happened today to his mother with a smile on his face. Princess Consort Jing widened her eyes and somewhat unhappily stated, "What? How come you didn't tell me, your lady mother, that you were all going to eat Buddha jumps over the wall? I also really like that boy, Little Shitou. How come you didn't tell me this morning that you were going over to the banquet to celebrate his accomplishments of passing the county-level imperial exams and becoming a county-level official ah?"

Zhu Junyang rolled his eyes at his mother in his heart as he thought, 'Lady Mother, for the sake of eating some Buddha jumps over the wall, you are really too much! How many times have you seen Little Shitou before? Only a few times! Other than Xiaocao, you haven't really seen anyone else in the Yu Family, alright? As the princess consort of an imperial prince, if you showed your face just to eat some food, my father would break my legs if he found out!'

Although this dynasty had repeatedly raised the status of women, most wealthy and noble families followed the traditions and kept women and men apart when they had guests over. The female host would always be behind a screen when she received guests...the banquet that happened today mostly had men over. Naturally, Yu Xiaocao, as a half-grown girl, was the only exception.

Thinking of Yu Xiaocao's clever and adorable personality made his heart suddenly beat fast again. He used a hand to press down on his chest and wondered if he had injured the left side of his chest in the past, which was now causing him problems.

“What's wrong?” Princess Consort Jing noticed that her son had stopped moving his hand, frowned, and was now clasping his chest. The harsh expression on his face made her feel very worried.

Zhu Junyang didn't want his mother to feel anxious and the expression on his face went back to normal. He smiled reassuringly at her and said, “Lady Mother, I'm fine...there were a lot of people today. Other than the principal and teachers of the academy, County Magistrate Zhao also went. Headmaster Yuan ate almost half of the whole pot of Buddha jumps over the wall. I wasn't able to eat as much as I wanted. In a few days, when Lord Father comes over, let's have Xiaocao make us a pot. That way, the three of us will be able to eat a very delicious meal together!”

Once food was mentioned, as expected, Princess Consort Jing's attention got preoccupied by that. She smiled and nodded her head, “Buddha jumps over the wall is a non-vegetarian dish that isn't greasy. Your Lord Father will likely like it very much. You know, how is that lass Xiaocao so clever and lively? Her culinary talents are such that our two famous chefs in the estate have to prostrate themselves in front of her. She also knows how to take care of flora. Last time, my pot of eighteen scholars camellia had dried up and was on the brink of death yet she was still able to bring it back to life. This year, the plant is blooming even more brilliantly...in the future, I don't know who will be the lucky man who will be able to take Xiaocao as his wife.”

Zhu Junyang unconsciously started frowning when he thought of that clever and odd little girl getting dressed up in wedding attire for another man. The desire to destroy and maim things started to rise in his heart. He quickly controlled his emotions forcefully and did his best not to allow those feelings to overtake his reason.

His illness hadn't reared its head for a long time, how come it was suddenly showing up today? That was not okay, absolutely not okay! Right now he was very close to Dongshan Village. If he lost his reason and became the destructive devil again, wouldn't he end up destroying her home and hurting the people she loved?

Just as his heart was about to be swallowed up by the darkness, a pair of warm and limpid eyes appeared in his mind again. It was as if a ray of brilliant light was shining deep within his heart. Although it was weak, it stubbornly left a small illuminating flame in the vast darkness. A single spark had the

ability to start a huge blaze. Zhu Junyang did his best to push against the darkness and the inky blackness slowly retreated. His bloodshot eyes slowly regained clarity and regained their usual dark and calm appearance.

“Yang'er, Yang'er!!” When he opened his eyes, in front of him was the anxious and worried face of his mother, who was being surrounded by a dozen bodyguards protecting her. Next to her was also Head Steward Liu and the head of the bodyguards all in readiness for a fight. It was as if an enemy was going to approach them soon.

“Yang'er, is that you? Yang'er, you need to come back to reality and don't let the darkness within your heart overtake you. Yang'er...” Princess Consort Jing sobbed as she spoke. If Meixiang and Lanxiang hadn't grabbed onto her with a deathgrip, she would have long sped over and hugged Zhu Junyang. She would gladly get injured if it could help her youngest son regain his reasoning faster.

She also knew that, at her son's current martial abilities, it didn't matter how many bodyguards there were to stop him. The whole residence could be destroyed by him, causing destruction and rivers of blood to flow....

“Lady Mother, I let you worry again. I'm fine now!” Zhu Junyang stamped away the last remaining bit of insanity and felt very guilty inside. For many years, his mother had worried herself thin because of him. If he hadn't been able to pull himself back from the precipice, it was very likely that his mother would be one taking the brunt of his fury.

Princess Consort Jing happily wiped away the tears on her face. Her son's illness had gotten much better compared to before and it looked like he was able to suppress and win against the 'evil devil' inside his heart. Didn't that mean that before long, her son's mental demons would finally be completely healed?

Head Steward Liu, who was next to Zhu Junyang, surreptitiously wiped away the cold sweat on his forehead and exchanged a look with the head of the bodyguards. Within his heart, he let out a sigh of relief. His master's skill at martial arts had made great progress in the last two years. In the past, Head Steward Liu was able to restrain his master along with the help of seven to eight other men who were very skilled. Now, he was no longer able to do so. Luckily, in the past two years, his master's outbursts had dwindled. Otherwise, he wasn't sure what he would do.

Today, Princess Consort Jing was nearby. If his master hadn't managed to snap himself out of it, they might not be able to stop him even if they sacrificed all of their lives. If something had happened to the princess consort, the master would likely descend into madness and become reborn as a complete monster...

When Princess Consort Jing saw that her youngest son had truly regained control of himself, she let out a sigh of relief and quietly asked, “Yang'er, didn't you used to say that whenever you lost control and went berserk, it was as if you were stuck in complete darkness, locked up in a pit that was so quiet that it could drive a person crazy? What was able to banish the darkness today and allow you to pull yourself back from the brink of madness?”

Zhu Junyang thought of that small light in his heart. It was simultaneously weak and strong at the same time. A few times it had almost been swallowed up by the darkness yet it persisted in giving off a steady little light and warmth. It was just like her. Always looking as if a small wind would blow her over, yet she always managed to stand up tall after heavy storms and rain had passed.

In the past, the Yu Family had a very hard life. She hadn't even reached the age of eight or nine and had a tiny, weak body before taking charge. Despite that, she held up the sky for her family. One copper coin for a portion of braised food, early-ripening green vegetables, the famous watermelons of Tanggu Town, planting corn and potatoes...

All of the children around eight to nine years old in the capital were still acting spoiled to their parents, yet she had already become the backbone of the Yu Family. The children of poor people matured early; this was a true fact he had witnessed himself. Zhu Junyang vaguely felt his heart hurt at the thought.

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Princess Consort Jing felt very gratified when she thought of how her youngest son seemed to be showing a wider variety of expressions and feelings now. In the past, it was as if he had been crafted of the ice from a ten thousand year old glacier and molded from cold steel. He didn't seem to have any humanity. Sometimes, even she felt a bit scared and frightened whenever she had to interact with him. Perhaps it was because of her own feelings that her youngest son became more and more distanced from her and never went back to the closeness they had when he was young.

However, ever since he came back from his seafaring journey to the western hemisphere, he gradually warmed up. He started to smile more and other expressions gradually became apparent on his face. His attitude when he interacted with his father was no longer as cold and detached as before. He even learned how to tease other people—No, it had to be said, only when her youngest son was interacting with the Yu Family's youngest daughter did he actually seem like a seventeen to eighteen year old youth.

"Son, during that episode, who did you think of?" Princess Consort Jing was in a good mood after remembering the recent changes in her son. Thus, her desire for gossip had risen again.

Zhu Junyang had a warm smile on his face yet he stayed silent. His phoenix eyes shifted a bit as he thought, 'I wonder what that little lass is doing right now. Is she joking around with her mother as they water the vegetables in the courtyard? Or is she at the piggery asking her twin sister how things are going? Or is she helping her older brother calculating the price of seafood...such an industrious little girl, and she always seems to have plenty of energy. It doesn't seem like she ever stops working, doesn't she feel tired sometimes?'

In actuality, Yu Xiaocao was doing the exact opposite of what he was thinking. She was currently reclining on a rocking chair underneath the grape trellis. She amused herself by rocking back and forth in a half-drowsy state. Suddenly, a flurry of knocks at the front gate interrupted her leisurely time. Liu Huifang burst in frantically. The weather in late autumn was cool and relaxing, yet she had a head full of sweat.

"Xiaocao, come to my house quickly and take a look! Our chickens are sick!!" Liu Huifang was so frazzled that tears almost streamed down her face. People raising chickens were always worried about poultry diseases. There weren't any veterinarians in this era, so if an illness came up, it was possible that a whole half years of work could go down the drain!

Yu Xiaocao opened her eyes and sat up straight before she asked, "Don't panic. Tell me exactly what's going and don't leave out any details."

"On the evening of the day before yesterday, my mother and I brought back the chickens from the woods in cages. When we were giving them water to drink, we noticed that there were a few chickens that looked a bit listless. My mother and I didn't take it to heart. However, who would have known that yesterday night, when we did the same thing, an additional dozen were also listless. My mother said the chickens probably had gotten an infectious disease, so she put the sick chickens away in their own cage away from the others. But today, half of our chickens are laying on the ground looking sick..."

After getting Yu Xiaocao's advice, the Liu Family decided to raise their chickens free-range. In the morning, they used cages to bring the chickens into a nearby thicket and had them forage for bugs and seeds to eat. At night, they brought them back to their residence. This method not only conserved the amount of grain they had to feed them but also improved the quality of the meat on the chickens. Half a year had passed and the Liu Family's two hundred and so chickens were all doing well. Who would have thought that after the chickens got to a weight of two catties each, over half had gotten suddenly sick! It was no wonder that the usually calm and steady Liu Huifang was panicking.

"Don't panic! I'll go with you and take a look at them!" Yu Xiaocao was very clear that people who raised a lot of chickens were always fearful of poultry disease spreading. Luckily, she had mystic-stone water on hand. Even if the chickens did have an infectious disease, it wouldn't be a problem.

When she saw Xiaocao seemed calm and confident, Liu Huifang gradually felt her heart relax. She nodded her head and said, "I almost forgot that you know some medicinal arts Xiaocao!"

Yu Xiaocao smiled bitterly inside, 'I learned medicine to treat humans not poultry, okay? Ah forget about it, the Liu Family only started raising chickens for my braised food shop. A hundred or so chickens can be sold for at least a dozen or so days. Right now Uncle and my older cousin are out traveling to buy more chickens and they work from dawn to dusk. It's not easy for them either...it's fine to let the Liu Family believe that I can treat their chickens!'

The two girls quickly arrived at Huifang's home. Shuanzhu's wife was currently sighing and lamenting over the chickens that were currently dying.

"Don't panic Auntie, let me take a look at them!" Yu Xiaocao inspected one of the chickens that was almost at the brink of death. Its crest was dull and dim, and its eyes were weak and watery. Secretions were coming out of its beak, and it was obvious that it was hard for the animal to breathe. Its crop was obviously swollen as if it accumulated a lot of liquid. She then looked at the poop of the sick chickens. The poop was yellow and green in color and was accompanied by a lot of water...this was the perfect example of a viral illness that struck the chickens.

After she finished inspecting the sick chickens, Yu Xiaocao had an idea on how to proceed next. She first spoke to the mother and daughter pair who were besides themselves with worry, "Don't worry, I am able to treat this disease! I need to go to the mountain side to dig up some medicinal plants but I'll be back very soon."

When Shuanzhu's wife heard that her family's chickens could be treated, she silently let out a sigh of relief before she said, "It's already evening right now. Going up into the mountains isn't safe. How about you wait until tomorrow?"

Yu Xiaocao smiled and shook her head, "If we wait until tomorrow, I'm afraid that the whole flock of chickens will be sick then! Don't worry, the herbs I need aren't up the mountain. I can find them at the foot of the mountain too."

"Then have Huifang go with you too ah..." Shuanzhu's wife still wasn't completely convinced.

Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and then said to Liu Huifang, "Older Sister Huifang, go dig up some common purslane and bring it back. It needs to be washed before it's used too."

After she finished, she walked out of the main gate of the Liu Residence. She was only using her need to dig up herbs as an excuse to cover up what she was actually doing. In fact, she only needed a few common herbs that were used to reduce fevers and treat colds. After she finished digging up the herbs, the Liu Family helped her wash them clean. She then mixed them together with the common purslane and pounded them into a medicinal paste. After adding a little wheat bran and corn meal, she formed the mixture into little yellow pill balls. Naturally, she had also added a good amount of mystic stone water to this medicine as well.

After she finished making the pill balls, Yu Xiaocao helped the mother and daughter pair catch the sick chickens and forcefully open their beaks to feed them the medicine. They only finished catching and feeding the sick chickens when the sky became completely dark.

After thinking a bit, Yu Xiaocao also chopped up the remaining herbs into a fine powder and mixed it into some rice and wheat bran while adding a few drops of mystic-stone water. She then advised the mother and daughter pair, "Tomorrow morning, use this feed to feed the chickens. For the next few days, don't let the chickens out to free range. Instead, keep them in their coops and keep a close eye on them. When it's evening, I'll come over to look again!"

There was a thick layer of clouds tonight, so it completely covered the moon and made the night much darker. Yu Xiaocao lived at the foot of the mountain and was a bit far from the village proper. Thus, Liu Shuanzhu escorted Xiaocao back home with a paper lantern. Originally, the Liu Family wanted to keep Yu Xiaocao over so she could eat a meal with them. Xiaocao, however, refused their offer as she was afraid that her family might be worried about her and decided to head home.

The next morning, Liu Huifang hurriedly ran into the chicken yard to take a look. To her surprise, she found that all of the previously sick chickens that had been isolated from the others had become much more energetic. They clucked eagerly, begging for food to eat. Even the first group of chickens that had gotten the sick, the ones that were on the brink of death, were also moving around and asking for food.

Apparently, the medicine that Younger Sister Xiaocao made yesterday had worked! Liu Huifang took out the specially prepared chicken feed mixed with medicinal herbs that Yu Xiaocao made the previous night and poured it into the chickens' yard. Originally, she was afraid that the chickens wouldn't want to eat

food mixed with medicine. Who would have thought that as soon as she poured the food in, the chickens, which previously had no appetite, suddenly rushed forward as if a flip had been switched. They squawked and flapped their wings as they fought over the food mixed with medicine. All of their necks were stretched forward as they eagerly gobbled down the food.

When Shuanzhu's wife saw the spectacle, her heart was very moved, "This is amazing! Being willing to eat is a good thing! Xiaocao truly has skills; there's nothing that she can't handle!! Huifang, our chickens are saved now!"

Liu Huifang let out a loud sigh and grinned, "Yesterday morning, Auntie Zhou came over to look and said it was truly an infectious poultry disease! She also said, once the chickens get sick, there's no going back! In fact, the first year her family raised chickens, they ended up getting sick and all of them died. Luckily, they didn't raise too many chickens that year and didn't end up losing too much money! Mother, we have over two hundred chickens now and we've been raising them for half a year. If they all got sick and died, wouldn't we lose a lot of money? We're so fortunate that Xiaocao was here!"

There were still a few pill balls that Xiaocao left behind, so the two of them sighed in relief and then caught the chickens that had been the most ill and fed them the pills. They then took out more of the medicinal feed that Xiaocao had made and fed it to the sick chickens that were recovering. The sick chickens hadn't eaten for the past two days but their appetites were not any worse than the healthy chickens.

That night, when Xiaocao came over to visit, the Liu Family's chickens had almost all made a full recovery. Other than the original ten or so chickens that had gotten sick first, the rest of the previously ill animals seemed no different than the perfectly healthy ones. Yu Xiaocao made another batch of pill balls and medicinal feed for them. She then instructed them to feed the sick animals tomorrow with the medicinal feed that had mystic-stone water added to it. After that, they could continue raising the chickens like normal.

Three days later, Liu Huifang went over to the Yu Residence with two hens on hand. When she got there, she found out that Yu Xiaocao had gone with the cart transporting pigs to the prefectural city and Madam Liu was in town sending clothing to Little Shitou. The only one at home was Yu Hang, who was in charge of the seafood purchasing.

The seafood purchasing business was busy right now, so Yu Hang handed over the stall to his Third Uncle and washed his hands before getting some roasted melon seeds and pastries his family had on hand to greet Liu Huifang.

Liu Huifang flushed a bright red and somewhat shyly lowered her head as she softly said, "When did Xiaocao leave earlier? I came over to thank her for helping my family treat our chickens...My mother said that these two hens had already laid eggs, so you guys should keep them. They can either lay more eggs for your family to eat or you could cook them. Either way is fine!"

The thirteen year old Yu Hang already had the air of youth around him. His face was handsome and his body was growing tall. His skin, which was the color of wheat, was the exact shade that young maidens growing up in fisherman villages liked. This was the first time that Liu Huifang had spent time alone with Yu Hang. She didn't know what to do with herself and the words that came out of her mouth were jumbled and a little nonsensical.

Yu Hang spent more time with people on a day to day basis, so, in comparison, he was much more calm and collected. He smiled, "Auntie is being too polite! Let's not even talk about the good relationship between my father and your father. As fellow villagers, we're always willing to help each other when another person comes across a problem as long as we can. You should take these two chickens back..."

Who would have thought that Xiaocao's older brother, who usually looked quite taciturn and quiet, had quite a way with words! When she raised her head to look at him and saw the gentle smile on his face, Liu Huifang felt her face burn even hotter. She silently scolded herself for being a dummy. They were both well acquainted with each other, so there was nothing to be shy about.

"Can't do that! These chickens are a sign of my family's sincerity to yours! If you don't take them, I'll take it as a sign that you want to distance yourselves from us!" Liu Huifang didn't allow him to make any other excuses and marched into the Yu Family's back courtyard to put away the chickens.

The Yu Family's back courtyard had a fenced up chicken coop and rabbit cages. Even Little Black's and Little White's dens were also in the back courtyard. She had a good relationship with Xiaocao, so she often helped them weed the garden and harvest vegetables. Thus, she was very familiar with the layout of the Yu Family's residence.

Despite Yu Hang's attempts to stop her, she placed the two little hens into the chicken coop and closed the gate. When she saw that the rabbits didn't have much food left, she took out two bundles of green grass and placed it in their cages.

"Where's Little White?" Usually when Liu Huifang went into the back courtyard, that little proud white dog would always give her a look of disdain. If she tried to tease him, he would even bare his teeth at her! Little Black had a much better temper. In fact, Little Shitou often pulled on the black dog's mouth here and there and he never got angry. Instead, he would also play along.

"That fellow is quite smart. When he found out that Xiaocao couldn't bring him along to the prefectural city, he got angry and ran up into the mountains to find his father, Big Gray. It's fine. Ever since that pack of wolves came down the mountain last year and got destroyed, there haven't been any savage beasts around the mountain!" Yu Hang watched as Liu Huifang entered the back courtyard and fed the rabbits and prepared the chicken feed. He also hurriedly went up to help as he inwardly exclaimed that Liu Huifang was a hard working little lass.

After adding some water into the chicken coop, Liu Huifang was just about to leave when she saw the little roe deer called Tiny romping about in the vegetable fields. She was afraid that the animal might trample the vegetable and stealthily went over. When the little roe deer wasn't aware, she caught it and held it in her arms.

Perhaps it was because she had fed her home's chickens today with feed containing mystic-stone water, but the little roe deer didn't try to flee when she came closer. It was only after that it was caught in her arms and turned its head back to look that the animal was startled. The little fellow froze for a second before it started to struggle. The little roe deer had a surprising amount of strength and easily broke out of the confines of Huifang's arms.

"Oh no!" Liu Huifang knew that the Yu Family's siblings all adored the little roe deer. She was afraid that the roe deer might hurt itself, so she inadvertently let out a cry of alarm when it leapt out of her arms.

However, it was a false alarm. In midair, the little animal rotated its body three hundred and sixty degrees and lightly landed on the ground. Within a blink of an eye, it ran into its little den and hid behind the building to look at her. If the little roe deer could talk, it would definitely let out a long sigh of relief and say, "Oh my goodness! I was almost caught by a human. The master was truly right— I need to be cautious every moment!"

When Madam Liu got back home, it was just in time for her to see her oldest son escorting a little girl out of the gate. The little girl's face was flushed a bright red and she seemed a bit shy. After looking a bit closer, she realized that it was Shuanzhu's Huifang. Madam Liu went into the back courtyard and saw that both the chickens and rabbits had been fed. Furthermore, last night, the wind blew hard and the trellis for the cucumbers had fallen over. Now, the trellis had been rebuilt and standing tall. After asking around, she found out that Huifang was the person that fixed it.

That night, when Yu Hai got home, Madam Liu couldn't help but ask her husband, "Isn't Brother Shuanzhu's eldest daughter about the same age as Xiaosha, ah?"

"Yup! Our oldest was born at the start of that year, and his daughter was born at the end of that year. Why are you asking about this?" Everyday Yu Hai went back and forth between the prefectural city and Dongshan Village. In addition, he was also in charge of slaughtering pigs, so he was quite busy. His youngest daughter had begged him to hire someone from the village to help. However, he felt like there was nothing much to do these days. The family had Madam Liu and Yu Hang to keep an eye of things, so he was more than able to keep up with the work. Thus, he decided to not take her advice for now.

Once it was time to harvest the wheat next year, he would have to supervise his family's farmstead as well as the young royal prince's eight hundred mu plantation. By then, it wouldn't be too late to hire someone to help.

Madam Liu pursed her lips and smiled, "After the New Years passes, our family's Xiaosha will be fourteen. He's the oldest in the family and in the future will be the head of the family. We need to start considering his future marriage prospects early. Furthermore, we have to make sure our eyes are wide open when picking out brides for him. We need to find a girl who is hardworking and generous and avoid someone like Madam Li or Madam Xiong. Women like them, who only know how to be lazy and take advantage of others, would only cause a lot of unnecessary trouble for the family. We need to make sure the family will be peaceful and in harmony in the future!"

Yu Hai was a bit hesitant, so he asked, "Isn't it a bit too early to start considering marriage for him? Xiaosha is only thirteen years old and we've only had a better situation with our family in these past two years. He's only started hitting his growth spurt and still looks like a large child..."

"How is it too early now? It's not like we're trying to get him married this instant. We first need to look at the prospects among our close friends to see if there are any suitable maidens and give the two children some opportunities to interact with each other. If they end up liking each other, then we can start discussing a possible engagement. This would likely take at least two to three years of work. By that time, our oldest son will be around sixteen to seventeen, which is the perfect time to get married!" Madam Liu silently lamented in her heart. In a flash, all of her children were getting older and she was slowly getting older as well...

Yu Hai scratched his head and said, "How about we wait until I get Xiaosha's opinion in two days? I'm afraid that he's still too young and doesn't see girls that way! Oh right, so why did you suddenly start thinking of this today?"

"Today, Brother Shuanzhu's Huifang came over to give us two little hens. I wasn't home at that time, so Xiaosha was the one who invited her in. That child Huifang is truly a hardworking little lass. When she saw that our family's chickens and rabbits hadn't been fed yet, she quickly made sure to give them their food. She even fixed up the cucumber trellises that had fallen over yesterday night. When Xiaosha was escorting her out, the little lass had her head lowered and looked shyly at our son. Do you think that Huifang is somewhat interested in our son?"

"We can't let this type of talk out as it can affect that little girl's reputation ah!" Yu Hai thought about his son, who resembled his wife. His son had a finely sculpted face and was growing quite tall. Everyone who saw him complimented with the phrase 'a good looking young fellow'. It probably wasn't a lie that his son was a good prospect.

Madam Liu glared at him and indignantly said, "Do I need you to remind me? Aren't we talking behind closed doors right now ah? Our family's Xiaosha has a good height and also handsome looks. Furthermore, his family's situation is not bad. I'm also not someone who would be an evil mother-in-law to my future daughter-in-law. Whoever marries into our family will truly fall into the honey pot ah!"

Yu Hai guffawed, "Are there people like you who compliment themselves so much?"

Madam Liu stretched out a hand to pinch Yu Hai's side as if she was trying to be fierce. However, that image was soon shattered when she couldn't hold back her giggles, "Was there anything I said that was not right ah? However, we really need to make sure we get our oldest son's marriage settled sooner rather than later. Everyone says that the eldest sister-in-law is like a second mother. We need to find someone who will be fair and reasonable, so she'll treat Xiaocao and the other siblings well."

She had already thought about the other girls in the village who were around the same age as her son. The village chief's youngest granddaughter was younger than her son by two years and had been pampered since she was little by her grandfather and grandmother. At the age of eleven, she still had an innocent manner like a little porcelain doll. How could she possibly take up the mantle of being the eldest sister-in-law?

The Zhou Family's Zhou Shanhu was good buddies with Xiaocao and Xiaolian, so they wouldn't have to worry about their relationships with her in the future. However, that lass was a bit carefree and wasn't always careful with her words. She wasn't a reliable girl...

And then there was Zheng Xiaocui, who had recently come over more recently to the Yu Family to play. Although the girl had decent looks, she was full of petty thoughts. In a glance, Madam Liu could tell that she had a selfish nature at heart. Most of the Yu Family's businesses and wealth was all created by her youngest daughter, so, in the future, the Yu Family would not stint on her dowry. If Xiaocao had a selfish eldest sister-in-law, then she would definitely be unhappy by the size of Xiaocao's dowry when the time came.

After weighing all of the possible prospects in the village, it was still Brother Shuanzhu's daughter who was the most suitable. Although she wasn't the most beautiful, she still could be considered quite pretty and cute. She had an egg shaped face and eyebrows curved like willow leaves. Her eyes were also not too large nor too small...her only flaw was that her lips were on the thicker side [1]. However, everyone always said that girls with thicker lips had good personalities and good fortunes.

Outer looks were only secondary. Huifang was also a hardworking little girl. It was said that the reason why the Liu Family decided to raise all of those chickens was because that lass came up with the idea. In fact, she even especially came over to ask Xiaocao for advice! Furthermore, she did almost all of the work in raising those two hundred some chickens and she was very good at handling all of the details. Even Shuanzhu's wife didn't need to do much with the chickens. Before she was occupied with raising chickens, Huifang also brought her younger sister and brother along to cut fishwort for the piggery. Between the three of them, they managed to earn a couple hundred copper coins in a month!

In addition, Brother Shuanzhu had a good relationship with her husband. Both of them were also realistic men and knew where their roots came from...the more she thought, the more Madam Liu thought that the lass Huifang was a pretty good match with her son.

Yu Hai noticed that his wife was tossing and turning on the kang bed as if she was a pancake being flipped around. It was obvious that she was having trouble falling asleep, so he quickly intervened, "Don't think too much! Our son is still young and maybe in a couple of years he'll have his own ideas and find someone he likes, right? Although they say that parents and the matchmaker should choose the child's partner, we also need to consider whether our son wants to marry the girl or not, right?"

When Madam Liu heard her husband's opinion, she thought he was right! It didn't matter if she thought the girl was good or not. If her son didn't like her, she couldn't force him to marry her, right? However, at this time her son still wasn't interested in pursuing girls, so she needed to strike early and advise him.

He needed to know that finding a wife shouldn't be based on the girl's looks alone; her personality was the most important part!

The next morning, Madam Liu called her son over and secretly hemmed and hawed over the matter. At first, Yu Hang didn't quite understand what his mother was talking about. Later on, once his mother became more blunt, his face started flushing a bright red. He exclaimed, "Mother, how old am I right now? Before I turn sixteen, I won't even be thinking about finding a wife!"

Madam Liu slanted a look at her son and blandly stated, "I'm not telling you to decide on your future wife right now! I only want you to start considering your options. If there's anyone you like and is a good choice, we can strike when the iron is hot and start negotiating with the other family. That way we can avoid all of the good prospects being stolen by other people in the future!"

"Are there any capable men who are unable to find wives? Even Uncle Ergou was able to find a wife despite his poor character, so why should we worry? Mother, if you have nothing better to do, you can go into the prefectural city to look around. Our family's braised food shop has been open for about two months now yet you don't even know what's happening there!"

When the topic of the conversation came to the prefectural city's braised food shop, Madam Liu's attention was immediately refocused on it. She sighed and said, "It's not as if you don't know either. Our family will be selling vegetables until the first frost comes and your father spends all his time going back and forth between here and the prefectural city. But someone needs to keep an eye at home. If I'm not doing it, how is that okay ah?"

Yu Hang laughed, "Mother, isn't there still me at home? Right now the weather is gradually getting colder, so fewer and fewer people are coming over to sell seafood. Third Uncle alone should be able to handle it. Thus, I can help you keep an eye on things at home. If you don't feel comfortable with me alone, isn't there also Xiaolian ah? Around half of the pigs in the piggery had already been used and we already have two storehouses filled full of fishwort, so Xiaolian can also find some time to help us here. How about the next time Father goes into the prefectural city, you also go along and take a look?"

The Yu Family's vegetables were all more cold hardy than other people's. Other people's cucumbers and string beans all started to freeze right after the start of autumn, yet the Yu Family's vegetables were still able to grow without problems. The front courtyard's spinach, lettuce and mustard greens were still as tender and delicious as before. There were also a few other vegetables that were growing out of season that still flourished in their garden.

There was a limited amount of vegetables the Yu Family could produce, so they were only able to supply Zhenxiu Restaurant and a few other families they were familiar with in town with them. There were a lot of families in town that didn't lack money. All of them complained that the Yu Family didn't plant enough vegetables for them to buy a portion. Yu Hai and Yu Xiaocao discussed this matter together and wondered if they could take a portion of the hundred or so mu they had on their farmstead and use it to plant some vegetables in the future. Although raising vegetables was more tiring than grain crops, it was more profitable as well!

After hearing her son's advice, Madam Liu thought about the family's situation. The front and the back of the west side of the courtyard were all planted with autumn vegetables, while the east side of the courtyard all had the usual matrons helping out to harvest. Normally, she only helped to weigh the vegetables and count the money. Her son should be able to handle everything on his own.

Madam Liu was still not completely convinced, so she stepped back and had her son manage everything on his own for a few days. She discovered that her son was even more nimble than she was and better at calculating receipts. Thus, she relaxed completely. One day, at the end of October, Madam Liu sat on the cart that transported live pigs to the prefectural city and entered the prefectural city for the first time in her life.

Fields of Gold Chapter 365 - Feeling Bad

At around nine in the morning, The Yu's Braised Food Shop in the prefectural city was full of people buying braised food. It had been almost three months since the store opened and the Yu Family's shop was becoming more and more popular with every passing day. At the start, they only braised one pig a day, but now even braising two pigs a day wasn't necessarily enough for the demand...

Every single part of the pig, from its head to its feet, was used in their braised food. Not a single part was wasted, including the head, trotters, and innards. After being braised, each part of the pig had its own unique flavor. The ones that sold the quickest were the braised pig's head meat, pig's trotters, and offal. This was because the price was more suitable for the common people, yet the flavor wasn't worse than the other cuts of meat. Thus, all of the commoners in the area loved those braised ingredients the most.

Although the prefectural city was a large place and didn't lack butchers selling meat, the vast majority of the animals had to be imported into the city. Furthermore, the price of meat had risen compared to previous years. For example, in years past, pork at its highest was only around thirty-some copper coins a catty. This was the year after the disaster, so the price of pork in Tanggu Town had risen to around a hundred or so copper coins a catty, whereas, in the prefectural city, the cheapest pork available was around eighty to ninety copper coins a catty.

The commoners in the prefectural city had a higher standard of living compared to those living in Tanggu Town. However, most of them had to think for a while if they wanted to eat a meal with meat.

Only after grimacing and tightening their belts could they have a dish with meat in it at their dinner table.

Usually, most families wouldn't buy a pig's head or intestines from the butcher even if they really craved meat. This was because no matter how they prepared it, there was always an odd smell and taste to the finished dish that made it hard to swallow. However, the unpopular parts of a chicken and pig, at the Yu Family's shop, were now delicacies that tempted a person's gluttonous monster.

Pig's head meat, trotters, and intestines that had been braised were all immensely delicious at an affordable price. Regular braised pork cost around a hundred and thirty to a hundred and fifty copper coins a catty, whereas the pig's head meat, trotters, and intestines were around fifty to sixty copper coins a catty. This price was definitely affordable for most commoners. Even a normal family could afford to buy some every three to five days to sate their desire. In fact, many people who lived in nearby towns would also buy some when they were in the prefectural city to take back home to eat.

Thus, the Yu Family's braised pig's head meat, trotters, and innards were blazingly popular and people rushed to buy it. There was never enough to satisfy the demand. Furthermore, Yu Xiaocao wasn't in the prefectural city at this time, so the Liu Family could only wait on disappointed customers every day without knowing what to do.

Liu Junping, on the other hand, had a sharp, flexible mind. He secretly investigated all of the nearby butchers and meat vendors in the prefectural city and found out that when their business was good, they could sell around two pigs' worth of meat a day. When their business was not as good, they could still sell out one pig's worth of meat in two days. Furthermore, all of these butcher shops and meat vendors had the pig's head, trotters, and offal left over as well.

He went back to discuss with his parents what he had discovered. The three of them came to a conclusion and Liu Hu went out with his son to make a long-term business deal with these butchers and meat vendors. At the price of three copper coins a catty, they would buy all of the pig's heads, trotters, and intestines from them. One pig had around twenty to thirty catties of meat in its head, trotters, and offal. Thus, the owners of these butcher shops and meat vendors could make an additional hundred or so copper coins in income per pig. Why wouldn't they happily sign such a cooperative agreement?

From then on, Liu Junping was in charge of buying and transporting these extra ingredients back to the shop. Every day, he drove the donkey cart to all of the nearby butchers and meat vendors to pick up the ingredients and was always able to get around seven to eight pigs' worth of heads, trotters, and offal.

Preparing these ingredients wasn't an easy task. Yu Caifeng and her daughter not only had to braise food every day but also roast and smoke ducks, chickens, and geese for the shop's more high-class offerings. They were so busy that they ran around like headless chickens every day. In order to prepare the extra pig's heads, trotters, and offal, they often worked very late each day.

Luckily, Yu Xiaocao didn't spend a long time in Dongshan Village. When she got back, she saw that her oldest aunt and older cousin had sunken in eyes, prominent dark circles, and exhaustion carved into their bodies. Right then and there, she made the executive decision—they were going to hire a few people to be in charge of handling these hard to prepare ingredients in the future.

Yu Xiaocao also reorganized the work at the braised food shop from top to bottom. She first personally made a big batch of braising spices and had them all ground up into a fine powder. The finished blend was then stored in a large ceramic jar. By doing this, it made it easier to weigh out the proper amount of spices needed to braise one catty of meat. That would save her the work of making more braising spices in the future.

As for cooking the roasted duck, roasted chicken, salt-water duck, and smoked meats, Yu Xiaocao taught all of her methods to her older female cousin, Liu Yaner. These foods weren't difficult to make as long as the person doing it had a good grasp on the ingredients and controlled the heat properly. Liu Yaner was also a smart child and was quick with her hands. After half a month, most people, other than the picky old gluttons, couldn't taste the difference between the food that she had made versus the ones that Xiaocao had made. Since she was also in charge of food that they limited sales of every day, she actually didn't have to spend too much time crafting it. Thus, she spent the remaining time in the day helping to sell braised food.

Oldest Aunt, Yu Caifeng, was in charge of braising every single type of braised food every day. There were four giant pots in the store that were simmering from dawn to dusk without rest. After Liu Junping was done bringing back the pig's heads, trotters, and offal back, he also helped his mother wash and chop the meat and light the fire. When the store was busy, he also helped with the cashier's job, weighing meat and handling money.

Liu Hu was in charge of buying pigs in areas that weren't as badly affected by the locust plague. The pigs were slaughtered at the site and then transported back to the shop. Every day he was busy from dawn until dusk. Sometimes, when he traveled a bit further than usual, he had to stay overnight and come back the next day.

They ended up hiring two nearby matrons who had skilled hands and were willing to work hard to prepare the pig's head meat, trotters and offal. Each person got a wage of thirty copper coins a day,

which was the same amount an adult man doing hard labor for a whole day could get. Both of these two matrons had somewhat difficult situations at home. One of them had a mother-in-law who had to take medicine all year long, while the other woman's husband had broken his leg two years ago doing work and was still having trouble walking now.

Although prepping the pig's heads, trotters and intestines was hard and dirty work, the most important factor was the amount of money they made. These two women didn't have the strength and endurance to do a man's hard labor, yet they could get the exact same salary doing this work. Even if they didn't want to do it, there would be many other people standing in line for this job.

When they were picking these two to hire, Yu Xiaocao and her oldest paternal aunt's entire family secretly investigated their backgrounds for a long time. Both of these matrons were honest and simple and their families were the same. The braised food shop's business was very good and there were a lot of people eyeing it. However, when their store opened, the prefectural magistrate and the royal prince were there to show their support. Thus, those jealous people couldn't do anything at the moment. As time passed, it was more likely that they would do more behind the scenes sabotage instead.

The Yu's Braised Food Store had recipes that everyone wanted. Whether it was for the roasted chicken, roasted duck, or braised food, any of those secret methods could help someone make a fortune. Thus, as the braised food shop continued to grow, they would definitely need to hire more people. It was important that they carefully consider who to hire to avoid hiring someone who had ulterior motives.

Next door, the Yu's Pickled Vegetable Store had also opened for business. Most of the salted and pickled vegetables in the shop were bought wholesale from Xiaojiang's pickled vegetable stand in Tanggu Town. Currently, most of the products at Xiaojiang's pickled vegetable stand were made with Xiaocao's recipes, so their taste was guaranteed to be good. In addition, Yu Xiaocao also produced a few more secret recipes for the Yu's Pickled Vegetable Store. These products were all personally made by her and all had unique flavors. Not long after it was first opened, the business at the Yu's Pickled Vegetable Store was doing as well as the braised food shop.

There were also issues with the business doing too well. Yu Xiaocao spent every day in the pickled vegetable shop, weighing the vegetables and handling the money. It got to the point that her voice became hoarse from interacting with the customers and she started sounding like a duck quacking. It wasn't a pretty sound. When Madam Liu came over to the prefectural city for a visit, she also started helping out at the pickled vegetable store. Originally, she was only planning on staying one day before going back. However, she ended up spending more than half a month there helping out and was unable to leave.

When Zhu Junyang was heading back to the capital, he stopped by the prefectural city to check up on her. At that time, Xiaocao, who originally had a small and thin face, now looked as if she didn't have an extra ounce on her. Her chin was so sharp that it looked like it could stab a person to death. Zhu Junyang felt his heart hurt seeing her like this.

He raised his hands to his chest and was puzzled, 'Just when did I get an internal injury here? In the past, I never had problems with chest pangs but why is it happening so often now? That's not okay, when I get back to the capital, I need to have an imperial physician inspect me carefully. I don't want to suddenly die early.'

Zhu Junyang stood silently across the street from the Yu Family's braised food shop and pickled vegetable shop. He mutely watched as the figures inside the stores ran back and forth as if he was spellbound by the sight.

By the time it was noon, the customers at the braised food shop and pickled vegetable shop left. Everyone working there let out a sigh of relief. Yu Xiaocao used a wet cloth to wipe her hands before she took off the flowery apron. She shook out both her arms and legs to relax.

When she raised her head, she saw Royal Prince Yang across the street, so she hurriedly ran out of the shop and grinned in welcome, "Young Royal Prince, when did you come over? Come inside the residence and rest a bit ah!"

Royal Prince Yang silently nodded his head and went through the main gate next to the braised food shop. The front courtyard was now very neat and tidy. There was a small tiled road in the middle of the courtyard and on both sides were gardens. One side was planted with all sorts of green vegetables while the other side was currently growing autumn vegetables. All of the plants were flourishing in the gardens. Zhu Junyang quirked up the corners of his lips, 'I just knew with this lass around that she wouldn't let a single inch of land go to waste.'

He walked in further and the main residence had osmanthus trees planted on both sides of the building. Both trees were dotted with tiny yellow flowers all throughout, resembling tiny stars. The dense, sweet fragrance of the flowers wafted throughout the main courtyard.

As he carefully smelled the air, he detected the pungent and tantalizing aroma of meat coming from the inner courtyard. Zhu Junyang stopped moving and changed his direction to the small gate at the side.

Yu Xiaocao tried to stop him, “Young Royal Prince, we braise all of the meat in the inner courtyard, so it's a bit of a mess back there. How about you rest in the main courtyard ah?”

“It's not a problem. This prince just wants to see just how exactly you guys braise such delicious meat. What? Are you afraid that I'll steal your secret methods?” Zhu Junyang raised an eyebrow and slanted a look from his phoenix eyes at her. A smile graced his lips that made him look devilishly handsome and vaguely seductive.

When confronted with such a stunningly handsome man, Yu Xiaocao was almost unable to control herself and barely managed to keep the saliva from dripping out of her mouth. She chuckled dryly and then said, “Your Royal Highness, if you really want the secret recipe, I will gladly 'present it' to you with both hands!”

After hearing the little lass's flattering remarks, Zhu Junyang suddenly felt like the weather and surroundings were incredibly pleasing today. He deepened the smile on his lips and snorted, “What would this prince do with your secret recipe? I have no interest in making small change like you are!”

This was the guy who had brought back countless treasures from the western hemisphere. Every single item from the west was worth quite a bit of money. For example, the pocket watch that Zhu Junyang gifted Xiaocao was priced at five thousand taels at his Treasure Pavilion, yet they had all been sold out within half a year. The cost of buying one of these pocket watches in the west was only around a dozen taels. This meant that every item that was sold at the prince's Treasure Pavilion made a few hundred-fold in profits. There weren't many people in the capital who could compete with Royal Prince Yang's personal wealth at this point! In comparison, the Yu Family's braised food shop made around a hundred to two hundred taels in profit every day. This wasn't a small sum, but in the eyes of the prince, it was merely 'small change'!

When he entered the inner courtyard, he looked through the wide open kitchen door and saw four giant pots simmering over the fire. The dense smell of meat wafted out of the room and was even able to overcome the sweet scent of the osmanthus flowers.

After noticing Yu Caifeng and her son sweating buckets as they labored over the pots, Zhu Junyang frowned a bit and asked, “Have all of you been working like this every day for all this time? With no time to rest?”

Fields of Gold Chapter 366 - Buying People

Looking at how much thinner her oldest paternal aunt had become, Yu Xiaocao whispered guiltily, “The pickled vegetables shop is doing well. We just need one person to man the shop, and from time to time,

we need to import some goods from Tangu Town. As for the braised food shop, Oldest Aunt must braise several hundred catties of meat every day. We would help her whenever we have time, but Oldest Paternal Aunt is still the one who is the most tired..."

Zhu Junyang glanced at Yu Xiaocao. She was already thin to begin with, but now she was as thin as a toothpick. His expression was full of anger as he said, "You can just get a few more people to work in the shops. How much more would it even cost to get a few more people? Are you unwilling to spend a little extra to get more people?"

Yu Xiaocao shook her head and said with a bitter smile, "The problem doesn't lie in the money. As you know, in our braised food business, the most valuable item is the recipe for the braised food. Since our business is booming, it will inevitably attract people with ill intentions. Therefore, my oldest paternal aunt would rather tired herself out than hire someone."

Zhu Junyang looked at her as if she was an idiot, "When did this prince say you should hire people? I'm talking about spending some money to buy a few servants. It won't cost you a lot of money either! If you aren't willing to spend, then I will buy some and send them to you!"

Buy people? The expression on Yu Xiaocao's face looked as if she had just seen a ghost; she was horrified at the idea of buying human beings. Oh, right! She wasn't in the 21st century right now. In this era, the selling and buying of humans was legal. During times of disaster, the sales of children and women was very common... After someone was bought and a life contract was signed, they would be servants of the buyer. During this era, the servants were treated harshly. Even if their owner beat them to death, the owner will bear no responsibility or suffer any consequences.

Zhu Junyang frowned lightly as he stared at her; he didn't understand why she had such an expression on her face. He asked, "You don't have to worry about it. If you don't want to give them a monthly salary after buying them, then you don't have to. You can just provide them with three meals a day. Or could it be that you're not even willing to part with this little amount of money?"

Yu Xiaocao smiled embarrassedly, "Do you think of me as such a stingy person? Money isn't the problem, it's just...I never expected that my family would be the ones to buy people one day."

Zhu Junyang reprimanded her gently and said, "Look at how unconfident you are! This prince will send you a few maidservants later! In the future, when your business grows bigger, how can you manage everything by yourself? It's better to train some helpers early on!"

“Yes, yes! Young Royal Prince is good at thoroughly examining the situation and thinking about the future. Thank you for reminding me! This little one will go to the kitchen and make a few delicious dishes to thank you...” Yu Xiaocao put on an appeasing expression on her face.

Zhu Junyang poked her forehead lightly with his finger. He jokingly scolded her, “Naughty girl! I won't be having my lunch here. I need to stop by the prefectural yamen!”

“Then...this little one won't delay Young Royal Prince any longer. When you return from the capital, this little one will free up some time and make you Buddha Jumps Over the Wall again to thank you for your favor!” Xiaocao acted like the palace eunuch in old palace dramas; she smoothed out her sleeves and bowed to him.

Head Steward Liu's mouth twitched at the scene. If Miss Yu was a guy, she would definitely be able to make a name for herself if she entered the palace as a eunuch. Her expression and portrayal of palace eunuchs was perfect. Could it be that she had learned these things last time when she was summoned to the palace for the young imperial prince? Miss Yu was truly odd. She was a young lady, but instead of learning from the way the palace maids and the imperial concubines acted, she learned these useless things.

There were a lot of people present when he ate Buddha Jumps Over the Wall last time, so there wasn't enough for everyone. This was especially true for Great Scholar Yuan, who acted like a hungry ghost. He scrambled around madly to rob people's food, regardless of the other party's identity. When he got back to the capital, he must visit Prime Minister Yuan and tell him that no matter how difficult their family situation was, he couldn't treat his father so harshly! With Great Scholar Yuan, that old gluttonous foodie present, how could he have an enjoyable meal? Therefore, Zhu Junyang was very happy about how 'tactful' Yu Xiaocao was being. He was so happy that even his footsteps became lighter.

In the afternoon, business was so busy that they didn't even have time to rest. When it was time for dinner, everyone was so tired from working that they had no appetite. They just boiled a pot of noodles, got some braised meat and pickled vegetables from the store, and ate a simple dinner. It had only been three months since the grand opening of their shops, but Yu Xiaocao could see that everyone had lost a lot of weight. They had to be on their feet from morning to night, performing high-intensity physical labor that even Iron Man couldn't do! She was more resolute on her decision to buy a few people!

“Shopkeeper Yu, is Miss Yu here?” She had just put down her bowl, when a stranger's voice could be heard from the front courtyard. Yu Hai had returned to Dongshan Village, so Yu Xiaocao could only reinvigorate herself and drag her tired body to the front courtyard.

The man was dressed in an indigo robe and had a goatee on his shrewd face. When he saw Yu Xiaocao, he smiled and said, "Miss Yu, I wonder if you remember this humble servant? This humble servant is a steward working for the prefectural magistrate."

Yu Xiaocao revealed a surprised expression, no wonder this man seemed familiar. She had seen him when he handed over the shop. This man was originally the shopkeeper for a shop owned by the prefectural magistrate. If she recalled correctly, his surname was Xu.

"So it turned out to be Shopkeeper Xu! It's already quite late, why did the prefectural magistrate send you here?" Yu Xiaocao asked politely as she secretly pondered over his motive for coming here.

When Shopkeeper Xu stepped to the side, Yu Xiaocao noticed that there were two men and two women standing behind him. Yu Xiaocao appeared even more confused as she looked at Shopkeeper Xu with a puzzled expression.

Shopkeeper Xu finally revealed his motive for coming here as he deepened his smile and said, "This afternoon, the royal prince came to my master's estate to inquire about the most well-known trafficker matron in the city. He said he wanted to buy a few people! This family of four was personally chosen by Royal Prince Yang for you. The older two are a couple, and they have two children. The husband is thirty-three years old and the wife is thirty-one years old. Their older daughter is fifteen years old and the younger son is thirteen years old. Royal Prince Yang has already investigated their background; they have a clean background. They're used to hard labor and can endure hardships. Try to use them first, and if you feel that they're unsuitable, then you can just sell them off. He will pick a few useful ones from Prince Jing's Estate..."

For Royal Prince Yang to treat the Yu Family with such kindness by personally helping them pick out a few people, it seemed that the Yu Family held an important place in Royal Prince Yang's eyes. The prefectural magistrate told him they must have a good relationship with the Yu Family, and they mustn't slight them.

While Shopkeeper Xu was speaking, Yu Xiaocao had been observing the family standing behind him. Although the man wasn't tall, he looked like an honest man with good strength. The woman also had an honest expression on her face as she stood there with her head down and hands slightly shaking. The little girl had a nice appearance. Her eyes were crystal clear, but her hands were rough. At first glance, it seemed like she was accustomed to hard work and labor. The thirteen year old boy was almost the same height as his father, he also appeared honest and simple.

“Can you tell me why you would sell yourselves?” Selling themselves meant that they would be second class citizens for their entire life. They had to obey other people's commands. In addition, their grandchildren and future generations cannot participate in the imperial examinations. This was equivalent to burying the future of their future generations...

The man stepped forward and replied, “My name is Huang Dachui. We lived in Linda Village, which is more than fifty kilometers south of the prefectural city. Originally, our family had ten mu of poor land, so we were able to barely make ends meet. But this spring, a steward working for Old Master Wang in our village had taken a fancy to my daughter and asked her to be his concubine. We were unwilling, so he found a group of local ruffians to destroy our house. The ruffians had beat my father until he was seriously hurt, and my mother is now bedridden from anger. Last year was a disaster year, and my family endured until spring with much difficulty. But who would've thought we would encounter such trouble! In order to treat my parent's illness, I sold all the land that my family owned. However, my father and mother still didn't make it. After taking care of my parents' funeral, I took my family to the prefectural city to rely on some relatives and to avoid the steward from the Wang Family. When we arrived here, we found out that our relatives' family had moved away. The steward from the Wang Family brought a group of people and chased after us...we didn't have any choice, so we decided to sell ourselves...”

Huang Dachui was ashamed that he was unable to protect his family and also for making this decision.

“Father! It's all Daughter's fault for causing the downfall of the whole family. Daughter is willing to be Steward Wang's concubine...” The girl's delicate and pretty face was filled with tears. The rims of her eyes were red, and her fists were clenched tightly.

“Shut up! How many times have I told you not to mention this matter again! None of Steward Wang's concubines had a good ending! If a father sold off his daughter to save his life, is he still considered to be a human?” Huang Dachui frowned and appeared mournful.

The young girl looked at her younger brother who was slightly taller than her and cried, “But if we sell ourselves, then Younger Brother can't continue studying. Younger Brother's teacher said that he is very talented. If he continued studying hard, then he might even be able to receive a high rank in the imperial examination! I don't want to ruin my brother's future because of my selfishness!”

“Sister! Don't talk about it anymore. Haven't we discussed this before? Do you think I'll be able to feel at ease if I used your life to exchange for my future? I don't want that kind of future!” No wonder the young boy's hands were less calloused, and his skin was much fairer than his family's. It turned out that he had been studying for a few years!

Yu Xiaocao carefully observed the family for a while and realized that the people the Young Royal Prince had selected were quite reliable. She was finally able to cut in their conversation, "Why don't you...discuss the matter again as a family and then give me a definite answer?"

Huang Dachui's son looked at her firmly and said, "There's no need for further discussion. We have been bought by your family and we have already signed the slave contract. In the future, our family will be your servants. You can use us as you please!"

Shopkeeper Xu hurriedly delivered the slave contract to her and said, "The seller said that these people haven't been trained yet. They don't know how to properly speak or do things according to the rules, how about...let me send them back and find a few people that are more suitable for you?"

Yu Xiaocao took the contracts and shook her head gently, "There's no need! They are good enough! Listen, my family doesn't have many rules, but we need people with good character, capable of working, and listens well! If you work honestly, then we definitely won't maltreat you. If you steal or act dishonestly, then I can only apologize and ask you to return from where you came from!"

The four people listened and promised that they would work hard. Shopkeeper Xu's mission was completed, so he left first.

"Huang Dachui, I want you to follow my father first and get used to the process. In the future, I will leave the job of transporting things from Dongshan Village to you! Dachui's wife, I want you to follow my oldest paternal aunt and help her out with her chores. Huang Xiaomei, you can follow me and work at the pickled vegetables shop!"

"...Young...Young Miss, what about me?" Huang Xiaohu asked softly.

Yu Xiaocao glanced at him and said, "My younger brother had just passed the county-level exams this year. He doesn't have a book boy. In two days, I will bring you to Tanggu Town. But, I don't know if Rongxuan Academy allows their students to bring their own book boy.

Fields of Gold Chapter 367 - Determination

Huang Xiaohu was excited. His master turned out to be a county official! He was even a student studying at Rongxuan Academy! If he was a book boy for his young master, wouldn't he be able to stand on the side and listen to the lectures at Rongxuan Academy? Rongxuan Academy was a place that all students

from all around the world yearned to study at. He didn't expect that he would receive such a great honor to listen to a lecture at Rongxuan Academy!

But his eyes suddenly dimmed again. So, what if he could go to Rongxuan Academy and listen to their lectures? He had sold himself off as a slave. There was no way he could take the imperial exams and gain scholarly honor for the rest of his life.

Yu Xiaocao seemed to know what he was thinking and said softly, "If your family works hard, then I will try to find a method to restore Xiaohu's status if he intends to take the imperial examinations in the future!"

The four people of the Huang Family were not stupid. They clearly understood the meaning behind the young miss's words. If they could satisfy the young miss through their hard work, then the young lady would never treat them badly. Huang Dachui glanced at the ten big pots of braised food in the rear court. Although Yu's Braised Food Store had just opened three months ago, even he had heard of how delicious and fragrant their braised food was.

The most important thing for making braised food was the secret recipe. Since they were bought by them, that meant they will probably find out the secret recipe for the braised food. In short, this meant that there was a slim chance their masters would release them. However, their son would be able to follow the Yu Family's son to Rongxuan Academy as a book boy to study. If they could win the appreciation of their masters, then the best outcome would be that their young son will recover his status and continue his dream of studying.

They were bought by the royal prince from the prefectural magistrate, which meant that the royal prince and the prefectural magistrate were backing this shop! The young miss appeared to be around ten years old. Her younger brother was able to pass the county level imperial exam at such a young age, and he was even studying at Rongxuan Academy which had produced many top scorers and second placers in the imperial exams. His future achievements were boundless. As long as they were committed to their duties and stayed loyal, then their younger son's future wouldn't be worse off than right now as long as he studied hard.

Huang Dachui was an honest and considerate man, but he wasn't wooden or inarticulate. His heart was full of excitement as he took in a deep breath and determinedly said, "Young Miss, please be at ease. We definitely will live up to your trust and benevolence!"

Yu Xiaocao took in their expressions and was very satisfied with his response. She smiled slightly and said, "Your family can live in the rear side building in the back. The rear side building is separated in the

middle. The west side is where we process the raw materials and it also functions as a warehouse. You can choose one of the three rooms on the east side and live there! Oh right, you still haven't eaten lunch yet. Put your things down and come eat first!"

Huang Dachui took his wife and children through a small door in the east and arrived at the rear side building. He selected the room closest to the east side and put their spare clothes on the kang bed inside the room. The room was very simple; there was only a kang bed, a wooden table, and two small round stools. An empty wooden box was placed at the end of the kang bed. It was probably used for storing clothes.

Seeing his wife and children's overcautious expressions, Huang Dachui felt his heart constrict for them. He felt that he needed to remind his wife and children, "In the future, we will be the servants of this family. We must adhere strictly to the rules when we talk or do things. What our seller said was very reasonable; the most important thing is to stay loyal to our masters and not give in to greed. We need to work hard and fulfill the duties that our masters give us. We definitely won't be used to it at first, but you must remember to do more than you talk. You need to know what you're doing!"

Dachui's wife nodded her head honestly. Huang Xiaomei smiled excitedly and said, "Father, I understand what you just said! The young miss also said, as long as we work hard and satisfy our masters, then Younger Brother can continue to study. Perhaps one day, he might be able to receive scholarly honors and bring honor to our ancestors! Father, you can be at ease! I won't drag my younger brother down!"

Huang Xiaohu's eyes were filled with tears. He sniffed his nose and said, "Father, actually...I don't mind if I'm able to study or not. You need to act within your strengths, I don't want you to work until you're exhausted because of me!"

Huang Dachui walked over, patted his son's shoulder gently, and said, "The young miss has already assigned us our tasks. The tasks are less tiring than the bitter hard labor in town. You can rest assured. Our master's family doesn't seem to be the type that would mistreat their servants. Our family is relatively lucky! You should relax your mind and just serve their young master well! Come, let's not make our masters wait for us!"

When they returned to the rear courtyard, a pot of braised meat had just been served. The thick, fragrant scent of the meat entered their noses. Huang Dachui, who usually had good self-control, couldn't help but secretly swallow his saliva from the delicious scent. It was very fragrant; the rumors were indeed true!

Huang Xiaomei quickly stepped forward to help Yu Caifeng when she saw Yu Caifeng exiting the kitchen with a pot of freshly braised meat. The two carried a large pot of braised meat to the front of the store. Yu Xiaocao secretly nodded her head when she saw this scene as she exited the kitchen carrying food.

“Let's eat! It's late, so there's not much left. I had just taken some food from the store, so please bear with it for now!” There were two dishes; one plate was braised seaweed with firm tofu and the other one was a platter of sliced braised pig head's meat and offal. The steamed buns were made from corn and white flour. Each steamed bun was as large as an adult man's fist, and there were around a dozen of them on the table.

Huang Dachui hurriedly received the food from her hand and said in a terrified tone, “How can we make our young miss serve us food? You could've just ordered Xiaomei's mother to go get the food!

“That's right! Let me do it!” Xiaomei's mother responded immediately.

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head at her and revealed a soothing smile, “There is also a plate of braised food in the kitchen that is already sliced. The steamed buns are in the basket next to it. You can bring them out and serve it together! Most of the pots are being used, so there's no soup. I will have to wrong you guys by making you guys drink water for this meal!”

“This is already very good!” Xiaomei's mother went into the kitchen for a moment, but she only came out with a basket of steamed buns. She didn't dare touch the plate of braised food because in her opinion, such fragrant braised food was not something people like them could eat. If she had taken the dish meant for her master's family, then wasn't it blackening her son's future?

“Isn't there another dish? Why didn't you bring it out together?” Yu Xiaocao asked casually.

Xiaomei's mother's eyes widened in surprise, “That...that plate of meat...is for us?”

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head and said to Xiaohu, “Yes! Xiaohu, go and bring the dish out!”

The plate piled high with braised food left a trail of fragrant and enticing aroma as it was taken from the kitchen and placed on the stone table in the courtyard. The four people in the Huang Family felt their saliva secretion speeding up. They could no longer swallow their saliva fast enough.

Huang Dachui rubbed his hands together and said in embarrassment, "This plate of food is quite costly, so it's a waste if you give it to us to eat. Young Miss, we can just eat vegetarian dishes. Isn't it best if we leave this plate of meat to sell?"

"I've already sliced the meat into pieces, how will I be able to sell it still? Let's consider this dish as our welcoming gift to you. Come and eat, you'll need to work later!"

Huang Xiaomei knew at first glance that the young miss had a pleasant personality. After she heard the young miss's explanation, she hurriedly put a steamed bun on her father's and younger brother's plates. She even helped them pick some meat to put on their plate. She said to Yu Xiaocao, "Young Miss, this steamed bun is very beautiful. It has a golden color and it emits a slight fragrant scent. It doesn't look like it's made with bean meal."

Yu Xiaocao smiled and replied, "It's made from a mixture of cornmeal and white flour!"

"Cornmeal?" Huang Xiaomei pulled apart the steamed bun and sniffed the insides gently. Her face was full of confusion.

"Yes, Royal Prince Yang from the imperial court brought some corn seeds from the west. My family planted a few acres of corn seed, and the harvest was bountiful. After handing the seeds over to the imperial court, we still had some left. So, we just ground it and made it into cornmeal. We use the cornmeal to make steamed buns and porridges; the taste is pretty good. You guys eat, I'm going to the pickle shop to take a look." Yu Xiaocao knew that if she stayed, then the family would feel uncomfortable, so she used an excuse to leave.

They waited until Yu Xiaocao's figure disappeared from the view. Huang Xiaomei excitedly took a big bite of the steamed bun and chewed it carefully. She didn't even wait until she swallowed it before she said, "It's delicious! It's more fragrant and delicious than the steamed buns we made from white flour for the New Years! Father, Mother, try it!"

Huang Xiaohu picked up the steamed bun and looked left and right. He muttered to himself, "Corn? Our master's family is truly generous to use something as expensive as corn to make steamed buns!"

Huang Dachui thought about it for a while and said, "These must be the food our masters eat. Since we arrived here so suddenly, they probably had no time to prepare."

Xiaomei's mother said, "Husband, is it appropriate for us to eat the food our masters eat?"

Huang Xiaomei picked up a piece of braised pork belly and put it in her mouth. It was so delicious that she almost cried. After she swallowed the food in her mouth, she smiled and said, "How is it not appropriate? This is the food the young miss rewarded us! I heard that in big households, the masters reward their leftovers to their servant girls and senior servants! Xiaohu, try this. It's so soft and fragrant!"

After hearing what her daughter had said, Huang Dachui finally relaxed. He picked up a large piece of pig head meat with his chopsticks and put it in his mouth. His daughter wasn't lying, it was delicious! No wonder the Yu Family's business was so good!

"Father, the young miss is very generous. Just one plate of braised meat could be sold for quite a sum of money, yet she rewarded it to us! It seems that we shouldn't worry too unnecessarily. Our master is a good person!" With just one meal, Yu Xiaocao was able to win over Huang Xiaomei's heart. She decided to work hard for her master's family!

Xiaomei's mother ate some braised food and braised seaweed with firm tofu. She chewed the food carefully and sighed. She said softly, "This meal is even better than our family's New Year's meal! There are vegetables, meat, and even rice! The rice is not coarse. Is this our blessing?"

Yu Caifeng came out of the kitchen and overheard Xiaomei's mother's words. She smiled and said, "What are you saying? Rest assured, as long as you work hard, your days will only become better!"

The young miss had introduced this woman who was wearing a strange smock earlier. She was the young miss's aunt. All the delicious braised food from the shop was made by her.

They stood up and greeted her. After she left, Huang Dachui said to his wife, "In the future, when you work under the aunt, you must be diligent. You need to rush to do all the dirty and tiring jobs. When the aunt is making braised food, don't go into the kitchen unless she tells you to! Don't talk about the braised food recipe. What's more, don't even think about stealing their recipe. Do you understand?"

Seeing how solemn and serious her husband appeared, Xiaomei's mother nodded her head and said, "Husband, don't worry, I won't ask or even mention the secret recipe!"

After they finished eating supper, Xiaomei's mother cleaned the dishes and brought the clean dishes back into the kitchen. There was a burst of noise from the side gate. Liu Hu and his son had butchered a pig and carried it in.

Fields of Gold Chapter 368 - Crybaby

"Xiaocao, these people are..." When Liu Hu entered, he noticed the Huang Family of four, so he was a bit perplexed.

Yu Xiaocao smiled at him, "The young royal prince saw that we've been extremely busy and sent us some helpers over. These people will reside in the small residence in the back. Uncle, let's first have Huang Dachui follow you around for a few days. When he becomes familiar with the route, you can give the task of buying and slaughtering pigs to him. Our shop should also have a head manager around to handle issues!"

Huang Dachui already called over his son and they both went up to start preparing the live pigs that Liu Hu and his son were working on. Liu Hu gestured with his head towards the horse cart outside, hinting that they should bring it to the back.

Liu Hu observed that Huang Dachui looked honest and hardworking and was also very strong. He chuckled, "Oh ho, our little boss gave me a promotion ah! From a procurer of goods to the head manager. I need to do my job well, otherwise I won't be able to live up to our little boss's expectations!"

Yu Caifeng laughed and leveled a glare at him, "Are there any other elders like you ah? Stop speaking so much nonsense!"

Yu Xiaocao started giggling, "Uncle, what you said is wrong! This braised food shop is the cooperation between our two families, so you are also considered one of the bosses. Doing the head manager's work is only natural!"

These words were said for the sake of the Huang Family. Before they bought servants, their stores were considered family businesses and they took care of everything. Now they had to make it clear to the four members of the Huang Family who was considered an owner and manager to make sure they were respected properly.

Her uncle was in charge of Huang Dachui and his son, who were both working very hard. From time to time, he would give them some pointers. Yu Xiaocao turned her attention to Huang Xiaomei, who was

cleaning up the bowls and chopsticks, "Let's go, I'm going to tell you the prices of all of the pickled vegetables and you need to memorize them. In the future, you'll be in charge of selling pickled vegetables...do you know how to do arithmetic?"

Huang Xiaomei was two steps behind Yu Xiaocao and blindly followed her as she nodded her head, "I know how. My father taught me how to use the abacus."

Yu Xiaocao glanced at her in surprise. There weren't a lot of girls who knew how to use the abacus! In a moment, when there were more customers in the store, she planned on testing this girl's ability.

"Half a catty of beans brined in wine and a catty of sweet and crispy radishes will be a total of thirty-eight copper coins. Take good care, and if you think the food is good, feel free to come back next time!" It wasn't a busy time in the store right now, so Madam Liu was able to handle the flow of customers by herself. After two years of practice, Madam Liu's gentle personality had been worked on and now she was an old hand at calculating totals.

Yu Xiaocao poured a cup of water for her mother and gave it to her as she smiled, "Mother, it's been hard on you! You should go into the residence to rest a bit, Xiaomei and I will take over for you!"

"There's nothing hard about this type of work. All I have to do is weigh out the pickled vegetables and handle the money. The tall chairs here in the shop are pretty good. When there's no one around, I can sit around and rest my legs. It's quite comfortable! Oh right, the shop's sweet and crispy radishes and pickled cabbage are very popular, so the vats are almost empty. The next time your father comes over to transport goods, have him bring two more vats over from Tanggu Town!" Madam Liu was quite used to managing businesses now and was able to think for herself.

Yu Xiaocao looked at every single vat of pickled vegetable in the store and nodded her head, "It's not only the sweet and crispy radishes. The marinated cucumbers, garlic pickled in sugar, and assorted pickled vegetables are all running low! It's too hard for Father to go back and forth between Tanggu Town and the prefectural city every day! If it was summer, he definitely wouldn't be able to keep up. How about...we hire someone from the village to help? What do you think?"

Xiaocao originally planned on having Huang Dachui take over her father's job, but when she saw that the shops here needed a person to personally manage them, she changed her plans. It looked like they still didn't have enough people to help out so they needed to hire one more person.

Madam Liu thought for a bit and then said, "Yangfan's wife once told me that your Uncle Yangfan had been fired by his previous boss and was looking for some suitable work. When I go back, I can ask if he's willing to do this job."

"Alright!" Uncle Yangfan is an honest person and he works very hard! If he's willing to do the job, we can give him a salary of eight hundred copper coins a month." The two matrons who were helping out in the back to clean and prepare the pig's head meat, trotters and offal got around twenty copper coins a day, so eight hundred copper coins a month...shouldn't be too little, right?

Huang Xiaomei's eyes were wide open in shock and her mouth opened and closed a few times. Yu Xiaocao asked, "What's wrong? If you want to say something, just say it. No need to stay quiet!"

"Isn't a monthly salary of eight hundred copper coins a month a little too high? My father had once worked in town helping to do work for someone and only got around four hundred to five hundred copper coins a month." Huang Xiaomei thought that the young miss was being a bit too generous.

Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and then said, "Eight hundred copper coins a month isn't considered too much. After all, he has to travel regardless of what the weather is like. Transporting goods isn't an easy job. Xiaomei, your family will also get a salary. If you guys do well, you'll also get a bonus at the end of the year."

In the capital, her godmother's head maidservants received a salary of eight maces a month and the junior maids got three maces a month. The Huang Family had just started, so they would each get three hundred copper coins a month for now!

A look of surprise crossed Huang Xiaomei's face. She had previously thought that since her whole family had been bought as servants, they could only do what the masters told them too. Since they were all considered the master's people, they couldn't even receive a salary! She never would have thought that even she could earn three hundred copper coins a month as salary! The young miss was truly too generous and kind hearted. However, the young miss didn't discuss this with the master, so would the master be angry when he found out they were going to get paid each month?

"Young Miss, we're servants that were bought by your family. Are we really able to get paid too?" Huang Xiaomei couldn't help but give her a reminder.

Yu Xiaocao gently nodded her head and stated, "All of you will be doing work, so naturally you will all get paid! Don't think of yourselves as a lower status. Have you seen the servants and stewards of the rich and wealthy? Although they are also servants, they are all incredibly proud and arrogant! That Steward Wang, who was trying to force you, wasn't he just waving around his master's power and status for his own benefit ah? What does that Wang Family have anyway? They just have a little extra bit of stinky money that they used to bribe a few officials and yamen, that's all. Nothing to be impressed with! In the future, we'll open more branches of our braised food and pickled vegetable shop in the prefectural city and the capital. At that point, we don't even have to consider Steward Wang, even the Wang Family themselves will be coming over to fawn over us!"

Eh? How did the conversation get more off topic the more she talked? Regardless, everything she said was the truth. There was nothing special about the Wang Family. If they dared to come over to cause trouble, the prefectural yamen was just across the street and they were no pushovers! That being said, apparently the prefectural magistrate's wife's 40th birthday celebration was the day after tomorrow. She needed to prepare some roasted ducks and roasted chickens for it.

The prefectural magistrate had made it obvious that her family was under his protection. Although he was only doing this for the sake of Royal Prince Yang, she couldn't just take his good will for granted. She heard that the prefectural magistrate had originally planned on holding his wife's birthday celebration at Zhenxiu Restaurant. Unfortunately, Zhenxiu Restaurant's popularity had been sky high and he wasn't able to reserve enough tables there. Thus, he could only invite a chef over to his own residence to hold the banquet there instead.

Tomorrow, she needed to inquire the prefectural magistrate's head steward just how many tables they were having. Then, the day after tomorrow, she needed to work a bit harder. She wanted to give them a roasted duck and chicken for each table. Was that enough to show her gratitude? Perhaps she also needed to personally make a cake for the prefectural magistrate's wife too?

Yu Xiaocao was just considering how to best return this debt of hers when a carriage stopped right in front of the Yu's Braised Food Store. Two charming girls around the age of fourteen to fifteen stepped down.

"Oh my! This is the store that our young miss opened? It smells so good ah! It's truly the work of our young miss." The young woman who was clothed in green raised her head to look at the sign at the front of the store and cheerfully blabbered.

Next to her was a young woman dressed in pink who glared at her, "Yangliu, how many times do I have to tell you? Stop chattering so much about everything! We are currently the personal maidservants of our young miss, so we need to be more steady and not lose face for our master!"

Yangliu grinned at her and her eyes suddenly landed at the pickled vegetable shop behind the other girl. Her eyes opened wide when she saw Xiaocao, who was wearing an apron, bustling around the shop. She yelled in surprise, "Yingtao, look! Isn't that our young miss ah? The Yu's Pickled Vegetable Store. Every time I eat pickled vegetables that our young miss has made, I can eat an extra two bowls of congee!"

Yingtao scolded her in amusement, "You're such an embarrassment!"

She followed Yangliu's line of sight and, when she saw the familiar face, Yingtao also couldn't stay calm. She immediately forgot that she was previously scolding Yangliu for not being steady as she lifted her skirts to run inside. She leaned over the counter to yell in a voice full of emotion, "Young Miss!"

Yu Xiaocao lifted her head and saw Yingtao standing there, holding back tears. She was a bit flabbergasted, "Yingtao? Yangliu? When did you guys come over to the prefectural city?? Did Godmother come over too?"

Yingtao used a handkerchief to wipe the tears of her face as she replied in a voice that slightly trembled, "Milady didn't come...Young Miss, you're so cruel. You left us servants back at the residence and haven't even asked about us. It's been more than a few months since you left. We are your maidservants for a reason. In the future, wherever you go, we will go too!"

When their young miss left the capital, she didn't bring a single maidservant along. This caused them, her personal maidservants, to guard an empty courtyard while earning their wages. The other maids, who weren't previously chosen to be personal maids, always came around to say some sour remarks. They claimed that the young miss disdained them and that the young miss couldn't refuse the lady's good intentions, so she left without them. Furthermore, they opined that they weren't sure whether they could keep their positions the next time the young miss came back to the capital! If it wasn't for Linglong coming over often to supervise the courtyard and harshly scolding those other maids, they probably would have had to endure a lot more criticism!

The last time the general came back to the capital, he mentioned that Xiaocao had opened a store in the prefectural city and was so busy that she ran around all day and had gotten significantly thinner. He recommended that his wife send a few people over to help her. Yingtao and Yangliu voluntarily came out to take on this task to go to the prefectural city to help their young miss. Yingtao had previously gone with her young miss to the Imperial Plantations and had described everything that had happened there to the other maids. Everyone was envious that she was able to go there with the young miss. This time, if she didn't strike first to grab the position, she might not be able to go to the prefectural city.

Yangliu had also been chosen to go because she had talent in cooking and had learned a few recipes from their young miss. The lady loved the young miss and decided to have Yangliu be in charge of her daughter's food and drink, while Yingtao was in charge of everything else...

"Alright ah! Look at you, you're sobbing just like a little crybaby. If you keep crying like that, you won't be pretty anymore! Quickly wipe those tears!" Yu Xiaocao was also very happy to see Yingtao and Yangliu.

Yingtao suppressed her emotions and wiped the tears off her face. She noticed that there was a young girl behind Yu Xiaocao and had a bad premonition, "Young Miss, who is she ah?"

"I'm a servant that Young Miss bought!" Huang Xiaomei regarded Yingtao and Yangliu with unabashed curiosity. Both of these young women were dressed in such beautiful clothing and they had silver ornaments in their hair and silver bracelets on their wrists. In fact, they were dressed more grandly than the Wang Family's young miss. The thing she found most surprising was that these two called themselves servants in front of the young miss. Were they, two girls dressed more beautifully and with more jewelry than the young miss herself, truly servants of the young miss?

When Yingtao heard this, her emotions overtook her and tears gushed out of her eyes again, "Young Miss! Do you really want to throw us away? You would rather buy a maid than bring us along with you?"

Yu Xiaocao wanted to slap her head in exasperation. She never knew that Yingtao, who always looked lively and cheerful, was actually a crybaby. She explained somewhat tiredly, "Xiaomei was given to me by Royal Prince Yang. I'm training her so that she can take over the pickled vegetable store in the future. Don't worry, there's no one here who will try to take over your duties!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 369 - Adding Color

After finding out that Xiaomei wasn't going to be the young miss's personal maidservant, the feeling of crisis within Yingtao's relaxed by more than a half. She wiped the tears off her face and asked, "Young Miss, did you also give Xiaomei her name too? She also has a name related to trees [1]!"

When Yingtao and the rest of the personal maids got promoted, they all asked their young miss to give them names. Yu Xiaocao felt that her own name [2] was based off of a tenacious plant, so she also decided to give plant-based names to her personal maids. Thus, the names were: Yingtao (cherry), Pipa (loquat), Yangliu (willow), and Wutong (Chinese parasol tree). Of the names, two of them were related to fruit-bearing trees and two were related to wood-bearing trees. In fact, all of the names given to her maids seemed a lot more elegant than her own...

Yu Xiaocao refuted her guess, “No, Xiaomei was a name given to her by her parents...you two must be tired after sitting so long in the carriage ah! Make sure to rest well today and prepare yourselves. You guys will probably be very busy tomorrow and the day after tomorrow!”

Yangliu somewhat timidly stated, “Young Miss, do you want us to help you make braised food? Although this servant had learned a few dishes from Young Miss while we were at the general's residence, my skills are nowhere near as good as your own. However, I will definitely do my best to learn and get better!”

Yingtao seemed to have set her sights on Xiaomei and stared at the other girl blatantly, as if she was trying to skewer her. She thought for a bit and then said, “I'm not very good at cooking, so I shouldn't help in the back kitchen with the food. Usually, this servant manages Young Miss's monthly finances and her clothes, so sums are no difficulty to me. I personally volunteer to help out at the pickled vegetable store!”

At first, Yu Xiaocao took Yingtao's request at face value and felt that since Xiaomei was new to everything, having Yingtao helping out was a good thing. Thus, she also agreed to Yingtao's request.

Prior to dinnertime, the business at the Yu Family's two stores became hopping again. With Meizi's mother watching the four large braising pots in the back, Yu Caifeng was a lot more free now. She noticed that Liu Yaner was incredibly busy at the shop front, so she went to the counter to also help receive customers.

Although the business at the pickled vegetable shop was not as popular as the braised food shop, there was also a continuous line of customers there. The orders all asked for half a catty of this and a catty of that. At first, Xiaomei was a bit frazzled from the work, but later on she became more and more familiar with the flow of work in the store. Her abacus was soon clacking without stopping.

However, the person next to her seemed to want to join in on the fun. Every time Xiaomei was just about to finish her calculations on the abacus, that person already stated the total to the customer. That person was Yingtao.

Yu Xiaocao's plan was to let Huang Xiaomei practice for a few days. Once Xiaomei had a good grasp on how the business at the pickled vegetable store worked, then she could work independently. At first, she was just observing how Xiaomei's calculating skills were. Although Huang Xiaomei's ability at doing

arithmetic in her head was on the poorer side, she was a skilled hand at using the abacus and very rarely had errors come up. As long as she continued to practice, Xiaocao would be able to hand the store's daily affairs to her and go off to do other needed tasks.

However, the girl Yingtao seemed to be purposely making it more difficult for Huang Xiaomei. The maid showed off her skills at calculating sums in her head, which she had learned from the young miss, and never gave Huang Xiaomei the chance to reach the answer on her own. After this happened a few times, Huang Xiaomei started to get angry. She could also tell that this maid, who was dressed in clothing that was more fancy and beautiful than the young miss, was targeting her on purpose!

“Just what are you trying to do?” Huang Xiaomei took advantage of a time when the shop didn't have any customers and turned around to confront Yingtao somewhat heatedly. Yingtao had an innocent look on her face, “What's wrong ah? I'm just helping out in the store like the young miss said I could! You're too slow at using the abacus and there were so many people in the store. Isn't it right that I help you calculate the totals ah?”

“If you were sincerely trying to help me, you could help with weighing out the pickled vegetables or handling the money and change...I admit that you are faster at calculating the total than I am, but I am only starting out at this type of business. Practice makes perfect and with familiarity you learn the trick. Don't you understand this type of reasoning?” Huang Xiaomei was barely able to restrain her desire to rush up to Yingtao's face and rip off that innocent expression. She was definitely doing this on purpose, a hundred percent!

Yingtao quirked up an eyebrow. It was as if the angrier Xiaomei got, the happier she felt. She arrogantly replied, “I'm sorry, I didn't bring a change of old clothing over. This set of autumn clothing was just made at the residence. If I got it dirty and needed to accompany young miss somewhere, I can't possibly wear dirty clothing and shame her right? So, I can only stand far away. However, I can't just stand here and do nothing, so I can only help you calculate the sums. Who would have thought you wouldn't be grateful? Truly a waste of my good intentions!”

In terms of arguing, how could Huang Xiaomei be her opponent? Within a moment, she became so angry that her entire face turned red and tears of frustration welled up in her eyes. She managed to restrain her emotions as she angrily glared at Yingtao.

Yingtao delicately patted her lips with the handkerchief in her hands and acted out a surprised expression, “Oh my, oh my! I'm doing my best to help, yet you resent me for this? Are you going to be a tattletale and tell on me to the young miss? Although I haven't spent a long time with the young miss, I still have a closer relationship than someone like you who was just bought as a new servant! What do you think, do you think the young miss will believe you or believe me?”

“I will believe whoever is right!” Yu Xiaocao came in with Yangliu as they struggled to transport a large ceramic vat inside. After switching out the old vat of savory and spicy pickled tofu for the new, she raised her head to look at the two girls in the store and calmly replied.

Yangliu gave Yingtao a look that said, “Just what trouble are you causing now?”. Yingtao secretly glared back at her and then smiled at Yu Xiaocao, “Young Miss, this servant is helping Younger Sister Xiaomei calculate sums yet she seems a bit unhappy because she thinks I'm stealing her work. Young Miss, I only discussed this a bit with her but she suddenly started crying. Please punish me!”

Huang Xiaomei breathed heavily for a few times before she shrilly rebutted, “That's not true! Young Miss wanted me to practice more on the abacus to calculate sums yet she likes to show off how good she is at doing arithmetic in her head. Every time I'm about to finish calculating, she says the total out loud! She's doing this on purpose!”

Yingtao replied in surprise, “Oh my! I only helped you because I saw there were a lot of customers here earlier and I was afraid that they would have to wait too long. It really wasn't out of malicious intentions! That being said, if you didn't tell me, how could I know that the young miss was trying to help you to become better at calculating sums ah?” Yingtao even had a look of 'why didn't you tell me earlier' on her face.

Yu Xiaocao somewhat helplessly gave Yingtao a look before she interjected, “Normally you are quite generous and open-minded. How come you're causing trouble for Xiaomei today?”

When Yingtao heard this, her eyes turned red and she squeezed out a reply, “Young Miss, you have a new servant now. Doesn't that mean you don't want me anymore?”

“How could that thought possibly cross your head? Didn't I explain it to you earlier ah? Xiaomei will be solely in charge of the day to day management of the pickled vegetable store in the future and doesn't have any conflict with your current duties ah. Yingtao, you and Yangliu and the other two are all my personal maidservants that I selected myself! What does 'personal maidservant' mean? It means that wherever I go in the future, you will all go with me! You and Xiaomei are different. One of you will be helping with my daily needs while the other one will be helping my family take care of the shop. Everyone has their own duties, so why do you need to strive for favor?”

Although Yu Xiaocao's body hadn't reached the age of twelve, the soul inside of her was over thirty years old. Seeing through Yingtao's inner thoughts and fears, who was only in her teenage years, was quite easy.

After hearing the young miss's explanation, Yingtao felt her face turn bright red and sheepishly looked at Huang Xiaomei. She lowered her head and said, "Xiaomei, I was the one at fault earlier. Let me apologize to you! In a bit, when more customers come, you only have to handle calculating the totals and handling the money, I'll weigh the pickled vegetables!"

Huang Xiaomei also wasn't a petty person who held onto grudges. She finally understood why Yingtao kept targeting her; it was because she was afraid of losing her position. Huang Xiaomei smiled openly at her and said, "Now that I know what was the issue, it's not a problem! If we're not busy, Older Sister Yingtao you can check if the sums I'm calculating are correct. If it's more busy, then you can help handle the money and give the change to the customers. You're wearing such a beautiful set of clothes. If they got stained with soy sauce or other things, it'd be hard to wash off!"

Yingtao shook her head and said, "It's okay! Young Miss, I believe your cousin has a set of working clothes that she's not using. This servant will change into that and help. I will truly be helping this time!"

With enough people manning the shop, Yu Xiaocao could finally do other tasks. After Yangliu pleaded to her, she took the maid to the kitchen and taught her a few more recipes. That night, the Yu Family and their servants were all able to eat at a much more sumptuous table.

The next evening, Yu Xiaocao took out a bunch of already slaughtered ducks and chickens from the ice cellar to thaw and brine for a night. On the morning of the prefectural magistrate's wife's birthday banquet, she especially woke up early and instructed her two personal maidservants to prepare the ingredients needed to make longevity peach cakes.

That's right, she was preparing to make a longevity peach cake for each table at the birthday banquet. She even called her uncle, Liu Hu, and cousin, Liu Junping, over to do hard labor. It was unavoidable. If she and the two other girls were in charge of making the whipped cream frosting, it would take them too long and their arms would die from the effort.

During the slow times of the farming seasons of summer and autumn, Yu Xiaocao had made quite a few cans of preserved peaches, preserved strawberries, rose jam, strawberry jam and other sweet treats. When she came to the prefectural city, she also brought quite a few of these over with her to use as snacks. At this time, it was the perfect time to use them.

The cakes were baked and shaped such that the bottom was wider than the top, which made them have the shape of a peach. A knife was used to cut slices across the peach-shaped cakes that were about as wide as two fingers. They added preserved peaches and strawberries between each slice and then covered the whole cake with a layer of whipped cream frosting to make it look like a whole longevity peach. A bit of strawberry and rose jam was used to color the tip of the peach and a bit of whipped cream frosting was squeezed out at the bottom of the peach cakes to resemble little leaves, which were dyed green using spinach juice. Thus, each beautiful and perfect peach cake was finished.

In the inner courtyard of the prefectural magistrate's residence, all of the guests were exchanging pleasantries and idly talking. Just as the prefectural magistrate and his wife invited the guests to take their seats to start the banquet, the head steward of the residence hurriedly came over and spoke a few words into the prefectural magistrate's ear.

The prefectural magistrate's eyes immediately lit up and the smile on his face became more broad. He gave a few instructions to the head steward and then stood up to address the guests, "For my wife's birthday celebration, I had originally wanted to have it at Zhenxiu Restaurant and enjoy the atmosphere with all of you. However, who would have thought that Zhenxiu Restaurant is too popular and we weren't able to reserve enough tables. I am truly regretful that we weren't able to properly serve everyone."

No matter whether it was the male guests or the female guests behind the screen, all of them replied that the prefectural magistrate was being too courteous.

Prefectural Magistrate Ning's smile did not abate and he raised his voice to continue, "I have a little friend whose ability to make roasted duck and roasted chicken is not in any way inferior to Zhenxiu Restaurant. However, the store that she opened only limits their sales of roasted duck and roasted chicken to ten a day. I'm sure many of the guests also know about this?"

The people who were at the prefectural magistrate's banquet were all mostly people with some standing in the prefectural city. They naturally had heard that when the Yu's Braised Food Store had opened, the prefectural magistrate himself had gone to the opening ceremony. Who would have thought that the prefectural magistrate really regarded these people with importance.

Fields of Gold Chapter 370 - Getting Face

"When this little friend found out that today was the birthday banquet, she personally made some roasted chicken and ducks for us. I also heard that she also prepared a lot of beautiful longevity peach cakes to finish the meal as a sweet."

As he was talking, the head steward led a bunch of servants out who were all carrying roasted duck and roasted chicken. The dense fragrance of the meats immediately enveloped the whole banquet area. Yu Xiaocao deliberately made a bit more than was needed, so every table was graced with a duck and chicken with some extra roasted fowl left over!

It was obvious that the roasted ducks and chickens had just come out of the oven. Puffs of hot steam billowed out of the roasts. Roasted duck that had just come out of the oven had thin and crispy skin, tender meat, so it had a very good mouthfeel! Roasted chicken had tender skin, flavorful meat, and even its bones were soft. A single bite melted in people's mouths and conquered their taste buds. No matter whether it was the guests at the men's tables or women's, all of them started out their meals with these two roast fowl.

After they finished eating most of the meal, the head steward came out again with servants who were holding the longevity peach cakes. The cakes were vivid and lifelike, resembling real peaches. Furthermore, the coloring on the cakes was very attractive to the eye. Yingtao also came out, wearing her new set of pink clothing, and gracefully stopped in front of the prefectural magistrate's wife. She revealed a beautiful smile and crisply said, "When our young miss found out that it was your birthday, she personally made these longevity peach cakes for you. We hope that the madam will have a fruitful and enjoyable life and be blessed with many more years to come!"

"Oh ho, which family is this maid from? She looks quite smart and lively ah! How come I feel like this maid seems very familiar to me?" The prefectural magistrate's wife was very happy and complimented Yingtao a few times. Earlier, the roasted ducks and roasted chickens gave her quite a bit of prestige and face in front of her close friends and acquaintances. These lively longevity peach cakes also added quite a bit to her birthday banquet.

Yingtao smiled appropriately and stated, "Thank you for your kind compliments. This servant is a maid from Zhaoyang General's Estate. I am currently serving under the young miss!"

The daughter of Zhaoyang General? The adopted daughter of General Fang? The prefectural magistrate's wife was suddenly enlightened. She had also been invited to the celebration of General Fang's heir's first birthday. During the banquet, the most memorable thing was the last dessert: a cake that was as tall as a person and had many layers. Not only did the cake look beautiful and delicate, but it also tasted delicious. None of the famous dessert shops or pastry shops in the capital were able to create such a fantastical dessert.

Unfortunately, there were a lot of guests and not enough cake. Every person only got a tiny piece. The prefectural magistrate's wife didn't even get to taste a few bites before she had finished her slice. It was said that the cake was personally made by General Fang's adopted daughter. When the chef from the most famous bakery in the capital, Daohua Village's Pastry Shop, heard about the whipped cream cake, he personally came over to the general's estate to ask to see General Fang's adopted daughter. Unfortunately, the lass had already left the capital and couldn't be found!

Everyone in the capital knew about Daohua Village's Pastry Shop. It was a popular bakery with a very good reputation. Rumors said that the head pastry chef was the descendant of an imperial pastry chef from the previous dynasty. When the current emperor was young, he liked to leave the imperial palace and go to Daohua Village's Pastry Shop to buy pastries. Their pastries were so popular that the business at the shop was as busy as Zhenxiu Restaurant.

The head pastry chef at Daohua Village's Pastry Shop had a rather weird personality. There were scores of high-ranking and wealthy families clamoring for him to make cakes for them. However, he only took the orders that interested him. If he wasn't interested, it didn't matter how much money the person threw at him, he wouldn't even bat an eye. Furthermore, he had caught the emperor's eye. Every month, Chief Steward Su personally left the imperial palace to pick up pastries for the emperor. Therefore, it didn't matter how much power or money a person had in the capital; no one could force this chef to do anything!

Since even he personally went over to see the little lass who made the cake, it meant that General Fang's adopted daughter truly had a special talent at crafting desserts.

The head maidservant, who was currently presenting these longevity peach cakes to everyone, had stated that she was the maid of General Fang's adopted daughter. So didn't that mean that these longevity peach cakes were made by someone more talented than the head pastry chef at Daohua Village's Pastry Shop? The prefectural magistrate's wife really looked forward to these cakes!

“Your young miss has worked hard and is very thoughtful. I will personally come over and thank her another day!” The prefectural magistrate's wife had one of her personal maid servants present a well-crafted silver bracelet to Yingtao. After Yingtao took it, she said a few more pleasantries and then left.

All of the longevity peach cakes had been served to every table at the banquet. The prefectural magistrate's wife had the servants take out knives and carefully cut the cakes into small slices for each table. These slices were then served to all of the guests. On the inside, there were yellow peaches and red strawberries, which really made the cakes seem quite appealing.

“It's so delicious! I don't think I've eaten anything more delicious in my entire life ah!” The daughter of the sub-prefect's family had a pure personality. After tasting a bite, she couldn't help but proclaim her thoughts as she genuinely sighed over the cake.

“The cake is tender and soft and melts in one's mouth. The fruit filling is also colorful and delicious. Even the capital's Daohua Village might not be able to create such beautiful and delicious cakes!” The wife of the local magistrate had grown up in the great tutor's residence. Although she was only the daughter of a concubine, she had seen more things than most other women from other families. If she even stated this, it truly meant that these cakes were special beyond regard.

Hearing all of these noble madams and misses praising these cakes, the prefectural magistrate's wife felt that this all reflected good on her. Who would have thought that her husband, who had thought he was only doing a favor for Royal Prince Yang, had actually ended up selling his residence to the adopted daughter of Zhaoyang General? The Yu's Braised Food Store? Oh right! During the birthday celebration of General Fang's son, Lady Fang had introduced her adopted daughter and said that her surname was Yu. How could she only think of this now?

The prefectural magistrate's wife couldn't help but share her experiences at Zhaoyong General's son's celebration. During that banquet, she was able to sample the birthday cake and the taste and beauty of the cake was exactly the same as these longevity peach cakes. The local magistrate's wife also chimed in. She stated that General Fang's adopted daughter not only knew how to craft fantastic cakes but she was also very proficient at medicine. When the empress's little prince was ill, this girl was the one who cured him. The medicinal cuisine she concocted had also rejuvenated and healed Princess Consort Jing's body...

The male guests were only separated from the female guests by a wooden screen. When they overheard the 'gossip' from the women's side, all of them started thinking quickly. Someone who was able to catch the eye of the empress and Princess Consort Jing had to be extremely talented. They could only try to become friends and avoid offending her!

For the following days, Yu Xiaocao had started mysteriously receiving a bunch of calling cards and invitations. Other than the prefectural magistrate's wife, she didn't know any of these people let alone be familiar with them. After having Yingtao and Yangliu handle a few of these, things got even more odd—why were all of these wives and daughters of officials, as well as wealthy merchant families, trying to make a connection with her? She was only the daughter of a farmer who had a good hand at cooking and baking.

As this continued to happen, Yu Xiaocao almost couldn't take it anymore. Luckily, after Huang Dachui's family started working for them, all of the work at the kitchen and storefronts had gradually decreased for the rest of the family. After practicing for a bit, Huang Xiaomei was also able to handle the work in the pickled vegetable store by herself. Thus, Yu Xiaocao took her two personal maids and went back to Dongshan Village.

Ever since Yingtao purposely made things difficult that one time, Huang Xiaomei trained hard to become good at calculating sums in her head. Now, she almost never needed to use her abacus and she was still able to get to the total quickly. It was only when there were larger totals that she had to still use her abacus. Yingtao had observed her for a few days and discovered that Huang Xiaomei had gotten to the point where she never made mistakes.

Yingtao and Xiaomei's relationship had started off rocky but they were now extremely good friends. Yingtao had noticed that Xiaomei didn't have any other clothes other than the two sets that the young miss had bought her when she first started. Thus, she had given a few sets of her old clothing from last year that she had worn in the residence to the other girl.

Lady Fang was quite generous to the servants in the residence. Every season, she would give the maids and senior servants an additional two sets of clothing. For the personal maidservants, they received even more as they often appeared next to their masters and essentially represented their master's status. The clothing that they received, from the type of cloth used to the patterns on the cloth, were all considered to be of decent quality that most people in the capital could use.

When Yingtao first arrived, Xiaomei had mistakenly thought that she was the young miss of a wealthy family in the prefectural city! Yingtao's clothes from the previous year were all about eighty-percent new, so they still were very usable to give to someone. Xiaomei was very happy after receiving the clothes and repeatedly said that she had never worn such beautiful clothes in her entire life!

In order to hide from the misses and madams from the wealthy families, Yu Xiaocao went back to Dongshan Village. Without much warning, winter had begun.

In early winter, a large snow storm had covered the whole village and mountain. The older folks and young children, who had weaker bodies, all couldn't handle the change in weather and had fallen ill. Thus, Yu Xiaocao became busy again.

Ever since Doctor You found his nephew, he only stayed at Dongshan Village for a short period of time before he decided to go back to his hometown. After saying his farewells to the villagers, he moved for

good. As the 'direct disciple' of Doctor You, Yu Xiaocao had become the only person in the village who had any medical skills.

At this time, most of the villagers were not in good financial condition, especially right after the disaster year. Those who were only mildly ill didn't bother to see the doctor and only endured until they got better. Those who couldn't endure would borrow a ride on a cart to go to the medicine hall in town. Most people had forgotten that Yu Xiaocao had medicinal skills.

This year, the weather had changed abruptly and Old Yu had fallen victim to it. He got a headache, fever, and his whole body ached from head to toe. In addition, he acquired a cough and had become short of breath. At first, he only thought he had a cold and could get over it by drinking some ginger soup and sweating it out. Who would have thought that after two days had passed, he couldn't get out of bed?

Yu Xiaocao took out some herbs from her medicine box that were used for treating colds and concocted them with some mystic-stone water. Then, she had her grandfather drink a few bowls of medicine. Very quickly, his condition got better. Before three days had passed, Old Yu was back to his old energetic self and was back at the foot of the mountain gathering firewood. Old Yu was someone who couldn't stay idle. In fact, if you stopped him from working, he would start feeling bad. Winter had come and the weather had suddenly turned cold. There wasn't enough firewood at home, so he went out every day with a basket on his back to pick up firewood at the foot of the West Mountain.

That night, Old Yu was taking his usual walk and had gone into his older brother's residence. As soon as he entered, the strong smell of medicine hit his nose. After asking, he found out that his older brother, Yu Lichun, was also unable to escape from the sudden change in weather and had fallen ill, just like he did earlier. He had taken five days worth of medicine but still hadn't gotten better.

Furthermore, Yu Jiang's youngest daughter had also gotten a fever. She was a pitiful tiny girl that had to drink a few bowls of bitter medicine every day. She had cried until her throat had gone hoarse. Most of the time, even if they were able to force the medicine down her, the little lass would throw it all back up until her whole body was sticky. She seemed to be in a constant state of drowsiness and her periods of lucidity shortened. The doctor from the town had looked at her and shook his head and said that it didn't look good.

After taking care of his father as well his daughter, Yu Jiang had markedly become thinner in the past week. This year he had earned quite a bit of money with his second brother, and he wasn't greedy for money. When his father and youngest daughter had fallen ill, he had called a doctor from town over and spent over a few taels to buy medicine for them. However, neither of them had gotten better.

Yu Jiang's older sister had come over to see their father when she heard the news. After finding out their symptoms, tears streamed down her eyes. She stated that her village's Old Han wasn't as old as their father but had also gotten a high fever and couldn't leave his bed. His family's sons and daughters were all filial and had paid for a doctor and medicine. Despite spending quite a bit of money, he ended up dying in the end. Yu Jiang's older sister couldn't help but cry when she saw how haggard her father's face looked.