

Gold Chapter 391

Fields of Gold Chapter 391 - Ambush

The commander of the bodyguards nodded his head and spoke to the men behind him, "A few guys should set up an ambush in the nearby trees. The rest of you stay with me and help Brother Yu set things up."

The traps that Yu Hai was setting up used rattan ropes to create a type of noose with a slipknot. If the Wokou pirates stepped into the trap, as long as you used a little bit of force they would get pulled up into the air. At that time, the trapped pirates could be easily handled by them.

Putting the traps together wasn't a complicated task. Yu Hai took a few bodyguards and, before long, they were able to set around a dozen or so traps in the areas that the Wokou pirates were most likely to traverse through. At this time, through the thickets of the trees, they could already see the cruel and aggressive pirates who were all gabbling in a foreign language.

Commander Zheng signaled Yu Hai with his hands, telling him to retreat to a safer area. He regrouped his men and they all chose some nearby large trees to hide in and easily jumped up. The bodyguards not only had a long sword with them but they also carried a bow and quiver of arrows. Those who were hiding in the trees took out their bow and arrows. They prepared an arrow and aimed it towards the direction of the pirates.

Within the thickets, they could hear the pirates approaching and it was obvious that these pirates had a lot of people. Before long, a short pirate could be seen by Yu Hai and the others. He was dressed in unfamiliar attire and the top of his head had been shaved bald. The pirate had cruel and malicious looking eyes. Yu Hai, who had hidden in a dense shrub, intently watched where the pirate set his feet. His breathing slowed as he saw the Wokou pirate step into one of the rope traps.

He was in, he was in! That pirate's left foot had already stepped into the middle of the noose! Yu Hai immediately made the decision to lightly pull at the trap mechanism in his hand. The noose tightened quickly around the pirate's ankle and the rope started to fly away using the elasticity of the tree branch above. The pirate only felt something clamp on his ankle before he shot up in the air towards the trees.

The trapped Wokou pirate howled in fear and another pirate, who had been behind him, was stunned for a moment before he turned around to holler something behind him. The other pirates started to pull out their long knives. Among them was a slightly taller man and the clothes he was wearing were also more complex and decorated compared to the other pirates. Nothing needed to be said as it was obvious that this man was the leader of all of these pirates.

The head of the Wokou pirates pointed at the strung up pirate and jabbered a few sentences to his subordinates. It sounded like he wanted the others to bring the man down. After receiving his command, before they had the chance to move, an arrow whizzed through the air and squarely hit the trapped pirate in the throat. The trapped pirate immediately passed away and dangled like a dead dog in the trees.

The expression on the head of the pirates immediately changed. He hastily ordered the other men to protect him. During the chaos, there were a few other pirates who stepped into the rope traps and were now hanging in the trees.

“Guard yourselves! Guard yourselves!” Earlier, the head of the pirates didn't think it would take much effort to run over a small fishing village. He had boasted when talking to General Yamaguchi and claimed that he would be able to fully subjugate this tiny fishing village in half a day and then bring his men to meet up with the general at the harbor.

He absolutely did not expect that this fishing village, which only had a dozen or so families in it, would find out early about their attack and pack up all of their valuables to flee into the nearby mountains. Although the villagers had left in a hurry and there was still quite a bit of stuff left back in the village, the head of this group of pirates was unsatisfied. When he was younger, he had also participated in a raid and had privately gotten a lot of good loot. There were over a dozen other commanders who came up with the general this time to attack. If he had the smallest haul out of all of them, wouldn't that mean he had lost credibility in the general's eyes?

Fury roiled within the head of the Wokou pirates when he saw the empty village. These poor fishermen weren't anything in his eyes. With the skills of his men, why wouldn't they be able to catch up with these fleeing peasants and grab all their belongings?

Who knew that, as soon as they stepped into the mountain forest, they would encounter a hard rock. Apparently, these fishermen had some experienced hunters among them. It looked like he had underestimated these peasants too much.

However, the head of this group of pirates didn't think that the villagers would be able to do much just by relying on a few hunters. Compared to his men, who were well trained and armored appropriately, those hunters were only seeking their own deaths!

“Bakayarou [1], go look around! Those damned bastards must be in the vicinity. Don't leave a single one alive. Kill whoever you find!!” The head of this group of pirates revealed a cruel and vicious expression and he waved the long knife in his hand as he snarled out his orders.

At this moment, an arrow shot towards his direction. The head of the pirates revealed a frazzled expression but his reaction speed was quite fast. He grabbed one of the subordinates next to him and threw the other man in front of him as his shield. Then, he ducked down and made sure to hide himself completely behind the hapless pirate.

Warm liquid that smelled slightly fishy sprayed onto his face. The hapless pirate that had been dragged over twitched as he dropped down to the ground. The arrow that had almost hit him was pinned firmly in the other pirate's heart. Cold sweat spontaneously erupted onto his head and he silently rejoiced that his reflexes were fast enough. Otherwise, the person lying dead on the ground wouldn't be his subordinate but him!

A burst of violent anger bubbled in his heart. He needed to drag all of these stubborn fishermen out and dig out their hearts before stringing them in the open air to let them become human jerky!

“Find them now! Drag all of these Great Ming pigs out for me now!” The head of the pirates stomped on the ground in fury and sent down a direct order to his shivering subordinates while he hid himself behind his two bodyguards. Occasionally he would reveal his head here or there to observe the situation.

The arrow that had almost taken out the leader of the group of pirates earlier was shot by the commander of the bodyguards who was still hidden in the trees. Although he had never stepped onto the battlefield before, he understood the concept of eliminating the enemy commander first. He felt quite regretful that he wasn't able to kill the head of the pirates. Although he continued to look for a second opportunity to kill the pirate head, he discovered that the fellow was deathly afraid of being offed and was currently sticking very closely behind the other pirates. He could only start targeting the other pirates instead.

The other nearby bodyguards of the imperial prince's estate also started shooting arrows after their captain sent out the first one. Although they weren't as skilled as their commander, they were still able to kill one pirate for every three arrows they shot. The Wokou pirates hadn't been able to even see who their enemy was before their ranks were drastically thinned.

“Retreat! There are too many enemies here, so first retreat!” The head of this group of pirates was a cowardly fellow, so when he saw his men falling one after another, he lost his bravado. He had no idea how many enemies were waiting for them. From the look of things, this didn't look like the work of a few hunters and instead resembled the attacks of experienced soldiers. Was it possible that they had a spy in the ranks who tattled on them and gave the Great Ming soldiers time to prepare? That wouldn't do. They couldn't just stay here like a bunch of sitting ducks. Otherwise, their losses would be too high. They needed to retreat to a safer place first and then decide what to do next.

After getting this new order, the Wokou pirates all started to retreat in a panic. There were quite a few pirates who got shot by arrows in the back as they were leaving. It was quite a chaotic sight.

At this time, Yu Hai had arrived on the side of the group of Wokou pirates. He had a pitchfork in his hands as a weapon. There was a pirate who was on his own, so Yu Hai forcefully threw the pitchfork towards the pirate. The pitchfork hit the pirate straight in the chest and the man's screams resounded in the forest and drew the attention of the other pirates. However, the vegetation was too thick in this area, so they couldn't see anything despite their efforts to try. Furthermore, they were too scared to investigate themselves.

Yu Hai used this opportunity to go up and retrieve the pitchfork. Then he made a few turns in the lush vegetation that was tall enough to hide a man and disappeared into the forest again. By the time the nearby pirates got the courage to investigate, all they saw was the dead pirate on the ground.

Using this advantage, Yu Hai found another area to ambush more pirates. In this way, before long, he managed to kill an additional seven to eight Wokou pirates. Although this was the first time he had killed humans, the enemies he killed were vicious and cruel pirates and were not much different, in his mind, than savage beasts. Yu Hai had already prepared himself inwardly for this, so he wasn't the least bit merciful when he attacked them. He knew that if any of the villagers from Dongshan Village fell into their hands, none of them would have a good outcome!

After killing those seven to eight pirates, Yu Hai returned back to the area where the imperial prince's bodyguards had set up their initial ambush. Commander Zheng had already jumped down from his tree so Yu Hai asked him, “Are we going to chase them further?”

The commander of the bodyguards made a few hand signals to his subordinate and all of them jumped down from the trees they were hiding in. He shook his head at Yu Hai and stated, “The Wokou pirates are retreating because they don't know how many men we have here. Because we struck first, they don't dare to just push forward. Although we killed quite a decent amount of pirates, they still have the advantage in raw numbers. Once they get their bearings and come back to find us, it will be just us few against their large group. We're not going to be able to fight against a hundred or so Wokou pirates to a

standstill. Our primary objective isn't to kill all of these pirates but to give the princess consort and the villagers enough time so they can get to the hiding place!”

“Then...what should we do now?” Yu Hai felt like everything that Commander Zheng said made perfect sense. Those Wokou pirates looked like they had undergone training. The only reason why he was able to kill a few of them was because they weren't prepared and panicking when he attacked them on the sly. If he truly confronted them, he wouldn't be a match for any of them!

The commander was silent for a bit before he finally said, “In a moment, when the pirates come back, we should separate and draw the enemy apart. Using our advantage in the knowledge of the terrain, we need to find the right time to strike!”

He had a very good idea of the capabilities of the men under his command. Each one of them would be able to fight three to five Wokou pirates without any problems. He was most worried about Yu Hai, who hadn't gone through deliberate training and had no martial arts skills. He had already promised the Yu Family that he would protect Yu Hai and wouldn't let him face the dangerous situation on his own.

“Brother Yu, in a moment, you should go with me!” Commander Zheng still thought that having Yu Hai next to him was the safest place to be.

Yu Hai shook his head in refusal, “Don't worry ah! In these woods, I have the ability to protect myself with no problems. If I encounter any pirates that I can't fight against, I should have no problem escaping with my life. Commander Zheng, you should do what you need to do and not worry about me!”

The head of the group of pirates was currently discussing the situation with one of his assistants. Both of them were certain that their enemy didn't have a lot of people and that they had used up most of their arrows on the last flurry of attacks. Thus, they shouldn't have enough to whittle their numbers again.

Consequently, the head of the pirates decided to reform the ranks and send them back into the forest. This time, they were a lot more cautious and had split up into small groups of three to five men each. Furthermore, none of the groups stayed very far from each other. If danger approached, they could easily help one another.

The Wokou pirates crept forward and carefully looked around them as they approached the last battlefield. They didn't encounter any enemy attacks the whole way there and, before long, they were

back at the area where they last fought. Other than the dead corpses on the ground and a mess of arrows, nothing else was left behind. The few pirates that had been trapped in the trees had long become the dead. Every dead hanging pirate had his throat cut open by someone using a knife. Their blood had subsequently flowed onto the ground below.

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“Bakayarou!!” The head of the pirates was extremely angry and he slashed his knife down heavily at a tree that was about as thick as the width of a bowl in order to vent his fury. That tree snapped in two. It looked like the quality of the Wokou's knives and swords were pretty good.

At the front, there was a short pirate who had a head shaped like a pig and tiny beady rat eyes paired with a wretched looking mouth. His eyes flickered and he bowed toward the group leader, “Lord Watanabe, it looks like these Great Ming pigs are very familiar with this mountain terrain and have the advantage. We are good at fighting battles at sea and open land and fighting in the forest is not our strength. The forest here is thick and deep and there are too many places to hide. I don't think our enemy is merely a bunch of weak and useless peasants. If we confront them, I'm afraid we won't get much out of it. How about...we first retreat and then decide later on?”

Smack! Before he finished talking, a heavy slap hit his face. Watanabe Hiroshi hadn't vented all of his suppressed anger. He glared at the other pirate with cruel eyes and howled, “You bastard! Are you saying that our fellow brothers just died for no reason ah? We haven't even seen the shadows of our enemies and more than thirty people have died. If the other groups find out, will I have any face left? Not okay! I need to catch these bastards, rip open their bowels and tear out their hearts in order to vent my fury! Chase after them! Not a single one is allowed to escape! Slaughter them all!!”

The Wokou pirates held tightly onto their knives and swords and crept forward nervously as they looked all around them. At a crawling speed, they slowly advanced through the forest. The trees in the area covered the sky with their canopy and the area seemed very gloomy and dark. Occasionally, a ray of sunlight would come through, casting varied shadows on the ground...

This time, the Wokou pirates were more scattered as they advanced. They had been divided into small groups that went forward slowly. Each group was only around five to six meters away from the next, so that if any group got attacked, the other ones could easily reinforce them.

The commander of the bodyguards was currently hidden on a tree that had a trunk that was as thick as three men. The tree's numerous leaves sheltered him completely and kept him concealed perfectly as he waited in ambush. Beneath the tree was a small trail that a group of Wokou pirates was walking on. The team leader of the group raised his head several times in worry to look at the trees but didn't ever spot him.

When the group of pirates finally passed by the tree, the commander silently slid down a rattan from the tree and crept behind the last pirate in the group. He used his left hand to cover the pirate's mouth and right hand to use a short dagger to slit the man's throat. That Wokou pirate opened his eyes wide and his body twitched as he silently died.

Commander Zheng dragged the pirate's corpse into a bunch of shrubbery that was about as half as tall as a man and the thick vegetation easily hid the dead person. The pirates in the front still hadn't realized that they had already lost one of their members and continued carefully on through the forest with their backs bent over.

The commander continued on with his sneak attacks and managed to kill an additional two pirates. At this time, the captain of the small group suddenly turned back to look and discovered that his group had decreased by half. Surprised, he was about to open his mouth to holler. Before he could scream, Commander Zheng stuck his dagger into his boot and unsheathed his sword to immediately attack the pirate.

The captain of the group didn't have the time to call out a warning now and instead had all of his attention on using his sword to guard. The commander of the bodyguards was highly skilled and an excellent swordsman. His sword whirled in feints and attacks as he confronted the pirate. The pirate was flustered by the rain of attacks and hastily fought back. If he didn't have the two other members of the group helping him, he likely wouldn't have been able to counter even one of Commander Zheng's attacks.

The sounds of fighting drew the attention of two other nearby groups, but Commander Zheng was lightning fast. After striking first like a whirlwind, before long, the three pirates had soon become three dead corpses. By the time the other two groups came over, the commander of the bodyguards had long scrambled up a nearby tall tree. After jumping and traveling a bit, he had disappeared into the thick forest and only left the two pirate groups to confront the gruesome sight of their dead comrades.

Similar situations were popping up throughout other parts of the forest. However, the other bodyguards could not compare to the skill of the commander, so they all quit their attacks while they were ahead. All of them conducted ambush attacks from the back. When they were discovered by the pirates, they immediately fled into the woods to throw off their pursuers. Once free, they approached other Wokou pirate groups and resumed their sneak attacks.

Yu Hai was using himself as bait and started off at a group of pirates that was on the very outskirts of the large group. He first created some noise to attract their attention and then led them to some nearby traps.

Although the villagers of Dongshan Village weren't very good at hunting, there were a lot of small game to be had on the outskirts of the mountain and in the outer forest. All of the villagers, when they had time between farming, knew how to dig some traps to catch animals. Occasionally, they were able to catch a couple animals to add to their dinner tables.

When the villagers made their traps, they would always leave a secret sign next to them to prevent their fellow villagers from falling into their traps. However, the Wokou pirates obviously didn't know what those markings looked like! Yu Hai quickly ran around the trap and then stood next to the trap to provoke the chasing group of pirates.

When the Wokou pirates noticed that he didn't look like a skilled martial artist and instead was dressed in clothes of an ordinary villager, they relaxed. His obvious actions provoked them and the captain of the small group yelled a command and then ran straight for Yu Hai. The other pirates weren't willing to seem cowardly and also followed their captain from behind... The result was pure tragedy! The captain of the small group felt the ground beneath his feet move and then he fell into a very deep pit and was skewered in the leg by a sharpened bamboo stake. He let out a piercing scream. Furthermore, two of the other pirates who came with him weren't able to stop themselves in time and also fell into the pit trap. They weren't as fortunate as the captain. One had been stabbed through his bowels and blood quickly seeped into his clothing. The other pirate had been skewered through his neck and, within moments, stopped breathing.

The remaining two pirates in the group stood at the side of the pit, stunned by the recent events. Yu Hai, who was standing on the other side of the pit, took advantage of their hesitation and thrust the pitchfork in his hands into the chest of the captain, who had a surprised look on his face. The originally injured captain had also lost his life in seconds.

Yu Hai's face was cold as he stared at the remaining two Wokou pirates. His calm expression did not betray the fact that his heart was actually beating very fast in his chest. He was wondering whether these two pirates would chase after him. If they did, he absolutely could not confront them head on and he was currently considering the best way to escape.

Who would have thought that these two pirates had lost all of their courage? They threw down the knives in their hands and sped back away to flee, as if Yu Hai would kill them immediately if he caught up with them...

At this time, the commander of the Wokou pirates was incredibly irate and furious. In about an hour's time, he had lost an additional third of the men under his command. If he added on the previous losses, over half of his men had already been killed with this excursion. The sticking point was that he still hadn't seen what their enemy looked like!

The aide next to Watanabe Hiroshi opened his mouth again, "Lord Watanabe, we can't continue on like this! We should retreat from this mountain forest and then decide what to do next! These villagers all left in a hurry so they absolutely do not have enough food on hand. In less than three days, they'll need to come out to find food to eat. At that time, we can strike when it's advantageous for us and capture all of them!"

Watanabe Hiroshi had a frosty look on his face and he was obviously not happy about this idea. The aide's eyes flickered a bit and he continued, "Lord Watanabe, this aide had already researched this area. This village is called Dongshan Village. Although it's not very large, it's very wealthy and prosperous. When we first arrived, I noticed that these villagers didn't bring a lot of things along with them, especially the very heavy grains. What was our purpose in coming? It was to get loot and grain ah! Let's first return back to the village and round up everything that is worth money and all of the grain to take back to the ships. At that time, when we have the most loot in our holds, won't you still be looked upon highly by the other groups here?"

After Watanabe Hiroshi heard his aide's thoughts, he decided that it was probably for the best. He coldly huffed and said, "Let's watch and see how long these Great Ming pigs can last! Let's go, retreat!"

"Hai—Lord Watanabe is wise! I heard that there are quite a few ferocious beasts in these mountains. If these villagers don't die of starvation, they will probably end up dying under the jaws of some savage beasts!" The aide flatteringly smiled at the commander of this group of pirates.

Commander Zheng had been secretly following this entire group of pirates from behind. When he saw them leave the woods and start setting up camp outside of the village as if they were going to stay there for a long time, he couldn't understand their reasoning. He frowned a bit and wondered, 'Are these Wokou pirates too secure in their own superiority now? Are they not afraid that the authorities and army will come over and capture them all at once?'

However, he couldn't know that the authorities and soldiers were currently under the command of Commander Sun and Fang Zizhen and were being used to encounter the attacks of thousands of Wokou pirates. General Yamaguchi was very perplexed by this turn of events. He had originally thought that this mission was top secret and he'd be able to strike suddenly and obtain a certain victory. How did the

Great Ming authorities react so quickly and defend at such a good timing for them? Was there someone in his ranks who had let out this secret and allowed other people to warn the docks in time?

In actuality, once Yu Hang got the news, he rode the little gray donkey at a speed that rivaled a Ferghana horse's to the docks. At this top speed, he was able to get to the docks before the ships of the Wokou pirates arrived. Currently, the construction on the Tanggu Docks had almost been finished.

The almost completed harbor had wide streets paved in basalt and there were neat little rows of two-story shops on either side of the streets that all had white walls and tiled roofs. These shops all looked very tidy and sturdy. There were some shrewd merchants in the area who saw an opportunity and decided to buy some of the shops that had good locations. They were currently in the midst of nervously decorating them for their opening. Among these merchants included the Zhou Family, who had already bought five to six shops. The plan was to renovate all of these into one large building so they could build a branch of Zhenxiu Restaurant right at the harbor!

Originally, the Yu Family had been planning on using their connections with the Zhou Family to buy some shops at the harbor. Later on, once they had a godparent relationship with Fang Zizhen, who was in charge of constructing the docks into Tanggu Harbor, the county magistrate naturally allowed them first pick of the shops in the harbor for the sake of currying a good relationship with Fang Zizhen.

Fang Zizhen took over the decision making and bought ten shops that were directly across from the Zhenxiu Restaurant the Zhou Family wanted to open for his goddaughter. The deeds were all written up and ready. A few of these shops had already been rented out to other people and those people were currently renovating the insides. The management of the harbor estimated that the harbor would be ready to open in about three months. Naturally, these people didn't want to waste any time on the opening of their stores!

There were still a few minor matters at the docks that needed to be wrapped up. When Yu Hang got to the harbor, he very quickly found Fang Zizhen, who was currently inspecting a construction area. He didn't take the time to catch his breath before he ran up and yelled, "General Fang, Wokou pirates are coming to attack, please prepare immediately!"

Fang Zizhen noticed that Yu Hang's face was stark white and full of worry. He seriously said, "Don't be in a hurry and carefully explain! What do you mean by Wokou pirates? Where did you get this news from?"

Yu Hang shook his head and explained, "I can't slow down! If I'm any slower, the Wokou pirates will start to land and attack! My younger sister went into the ocean to swim today and was taken by the little dolphin further out. She discovered a giant fleet of ships and all of the people on these ships wore different clothing than we do and also don't speak the same language as us! When she got closer, she discovered that the direction they were headed in was towards Tanggu Town and the surrounding areas. Younger Sister had heard the older folks in our village mention what Wokou pirates in the past had done. They are vicious and cruel, so she hurried back to inform everyone. General Fang, time is of the essence, please send people to Dongshan Village to help! My family's younger sisters as well as parents and relatives are all waiting for you to rescue them!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 393 - Yu Hang's Thoughts

When he heard that his goddaughter had seen it with her own eyes, as well as Yu Hang's description of the Wokou pirates, Fang Zizhen was completely convinced. Xiaocao had a little dolphin friend in the sea. Every year, at the end of spring and beginning of summer, she would play with it in the sea and collect many treasures.

Fang Zizhen had been able to eat a lot of valuable seafood. The filial Xiaocao would also tell him to bring some back to the capital for her godmother. Every time he went back to the capital, his wife would always complain about him not bringing their daughter back. She grumbled for a long time as if he was a fake godfather who didn't dote on their goddaughter.

He also wanted to bring Xiaocao back, but his daughter was seriously too capable. Not only did her family open a pharmaceutical workshop, raise hundreds of pigs, cultivate on hundreds of mu of farmland, but they also opened a shop in the prefectural city. The business was doing so well that even he was envious of them. For a period of time, Xiaocao had been very busy and barely even returned to Dongshan Village. If it wasn't for Royal Prince Yang who sent several helpers over, he was worried that his daughter wouldn't be able to bear the exhaustion! Where would she find the time to go to the capital with him ah?

Fang Zizhen lightly sighed and asked Yu Hang a few questions. Knowing that the villagers of Dongshan Village should probably have arrived at the cave by now, he felt slightly less worried. He had once followed his goddaughter to her secret base because he was worried.

The entrance was narrow and covered with vines, so even young hunters wouldn't be able to find it without someone leading them. The cave inside was very big, and there were many different sized caves connected within. It was definitely capable of accommodating three to five hundred people! The valley had a pleasant climate and was filled with flowers. There were many tasty fruits and a small stream flowing through the valley. It was a very suitable place for refugees to live!

“Did you say that the Wokou pirates' fleet is extremely large, and that many seem to be coming towards the harbor?” Fang Zizhen asked for the details, and Yu Hang nodded repeatedly in response.

Fang Zizhen swiftly took his two right-hand men, Li Li and Wu Yun, to the tallest lighthouse on the port. He used the monocular that Xiaocao gave him and looked towards the sea. Sure enough, in the place where the sea met the sky, there was an unfamiliar fleet approaching at full sail.

“Li Li, quickly go to town and notify County Magistrate Zhao. Tell him to send some backup. Wu Yun, go to the garrison and notify Commander Sun! Yu Hang, the Wokou will land soon, so it's not safe for you to be here. Isn't your younger brother studying in town? The news might cause chaos in town, so go there and accompany Little Shitou. It's not safe for Little Shitou since he's so young!”

Fang Zizhen knew that Yu Hang was deeply worried in his heart, but if he went back to Dongshan Village now, he would likely encounter those murderous Wokou pirates. Although this lad had learned some martial arts with him for a few days, he was still pretty young after all. He might be able to win in a one-to-one fight with a Wokou, but the other party obviously had the advantage of outnumbering them. So failure was inevitable... If Yu Hang got injured or killed, his daughter would definitely hate him to death.

Yu Hang had originally planned on returning to Dongshan Village and staying with his parents and sisters after informing General Fang. However, when he heard General Fang's words, he began to worry about his younger brother in town. As General Fang had just analyzed, if the villagers of Dongshan Village had been brought into the cave in time, then it wouldn't be that easy for the Wokou pirates to succeed. Moreover, the imperial bodyguards of the Prince Jing's Household could put up a fight at the critical moment. His youngest brother was only nine, so he could easily become their target...

Yu Hang gritted his teeth and made a decision—he would first go to town with Li Li. Li Li was somewhat worried as he glanced at Little Gray, who was beside Yu Hang. He took the general's order to rush to town, but would bringing Yu Hai along delay the process?

Yu Hang fed Little Gray some mystic-stone water from the water bag. After drinking mystic-stone water for several years, Yu Hang felt that the water in his family's well was different from the water in the stream outside. Especially when he was tired, if he drank a cup of the water, his exhaustion would instantly disappear.

Other people didn't know the reason, but he knew very clearly. He had once seen his youngest sister stretching her hands into the well, as if she was doing a sacred ritual. After his youngest sister left, he

fetches a bucket of water and compares it with the water in the vat in the morning. The well water in the bucket was even more sweet, and his whole body felt very comfortable after drinking it!

He recalled how the whole family's health started to improve after his youngest sister recovered from nearly dying. Even his weak and sickly mother was becoming healthier day by day without the help of medicine. In the past two years, even during the snowstorm, no one in the family had gotten sick. If he had guessed correctly, then this must be closely related to his youngest sister.

Also, they were all growing early-maturing vegetables, but other families couldn't grow them as well and as fast as his family. This was probably because his family used the water in the well in their backyard.

In addition, the first year that they grew watermelons, the water that they used to irrigate the crops was either touched by Xiaocao, or she told them to use the water from their family's well. It wasn't until they hired someone to dig out a well near the melon fields that they stopped doing the troublesome task of transporting water from home to the fields. There was no comparison in the past, so they didn't know. However, someone in the neighboring village also planted watermelons this year. No matter if it was the size or sweetness, their watermelons could not compete with his family's. Moreover, his family's watermelon ripened almost a month earlier than the other family. His family thought that it was because they were different varieties of watermelons, but in his opinion, it was definitely due to the well water!

Even the grass around the well grew stronger than other places. The little roe deer especially liked eating the weeds beside the well. It would also lick clean the water spilled when they fetched water from the well. It would have a pleasurable expression on its face like it had just eaten some delicious delicacies! The animals raised at home were becoming more and more aware, and this must be closely related to the well water at home!

Could it be that his youngest sister was really helped by the gods? They had gifted her with some divine water that could not only improve the health of the family, but also enhance the growth of crops? It was no wonder that Youngest Sister wasn't afraid of others learning the formulas at her pharmaceutical workshop. Without their family's well water, no one would be able to make the same pills and liquid medicine with the curative effects.

Various thoughts surged through Yu Hang's mind. He was full of confidence and expectation for his youngest sister. He always felt that, with his youngest sister around, his family and the fellow villagers of Dongshan Village would definitely be fine! After he fed Little Gray, Yu Hang gently combed Little Gray's smooth hair. He could feel that it was no longer tired, and it was full of energy.

He mounted the donkey, and when he raised his head, he saw Li Li's worried gaze. He was confused for a moment, but he immediately understood what the other party was concerned about. He glared back disgruntledly, and then gently tightened his legs. Little Gray understood him, and without the need to rush it, it galloped on the smooth, flat official road towards the direction of town.

By the time Li Li reacted, they had already run far away. He couldn't help but wonder, 'With this speed, it looks faster than the fine-breed horse that I'm riding. It's indeed a good donkey, and even the general has praised it several times. It seems like that kid Yu Hang is displeased because I underestimated them!'

He prompted the steed he rode on and chased after Yu Hang. He originally thought that the little donkey may have speed but not endurance, but he hadn't expected that he couldn't catch up to them the whole way to town. He was worried that they would hold him back earlier, but it turned out that he was the one who lagged behind!

Jinwei Prefectural City's garrison wasn't too far from the harbor. Less than an hour after Wu Yun's departure, Commander Sun had mobilized the soldiers of the garrison to be stationed near the port in an orderly manner. Fang Zizhen was very worried about his daughter's safety, but he had to commit to his duty as a soldier. The emperor had sent him to the harbor, so he must ensure the safety around this area.

Fang Zizhen personally went to the port and got in contact with Brother Six's management office. He learned that there weren't too many ships entering the port today, but there were still three fleets, which were about twenty ships. Each ship was full of popular goods from the south. If the Wokou pirates took them, then they would lose up to ten thousand taels! No, he absolutely couldn't benefit those b*stards!!

Fang Zizhen told Brother Six to mobilize everyone that he could use to work overtime to transport the goods, striving to transport all the goods to the harbor's warehouse before the Wokou landed! He, on the other hand, met up with Commander Sun. Jinwei Prefectural City was close to the sea, so the garrison had dozens of warships and a group of trained navy soldiers. Commander Sun mobilized the soldiers and led the fleet of warships, ready for battle. He was waiting for the Wokou pirates to get closer to the nearby waters in order to ambush them.

All of the Great Ming Empire's warships were modified by the current emperor when he was younger. Each ship was equipped with a stone catapult and a rocket. The stone catapult didn't throw ordinary stones, but instead it was something similar to a large firecracker. When ignited, it would launch towards the opposing ship with the force of the catapult. With its explosive force, it could severely damage the other party's horses, people, and even ships. Inflammables were tied onto the rockets.

Presently, the ships were all built with wood, so once launched, the other party's ship would burn in flames. Without their ships, the enemies were just like cats without claws. They wouldn't be able to do anything!

Jinwei Prefectural City was located relatively close to the Wokou's country. During the previous dynasty, they were occasionally attacked by the Wokou pirates and suffered heavy losses. Hence, the first batch of improved warships were tested and put into use in Jinwei City. Commander Sun had seen the power of the 'weapons' on the ships with his own eyes, so he felt increasingly confident within his heart and he acted in an even more steady manner.

After Fang Zizhen passed the message to Commander Sun, he led a group of about forty to fifty people, which included the guards of the General's Estate and bailiffs stationed at the port. They lay in ambush nearby, waiting for the Wokou pirates to walk right into the trap!

Behind them, all of the workers employed by the port management office worked hard to transport all the goods. With the big boss, Brother Six, personally directing the workers, the goods transportation work was carried out in an orderly manner.

Many of the dockworkers were curious about the reason why General Fang and his soldiers were lying in ambush at the docks, but no one dared to ask. Their boss was watching them right now, so who dared to slack off? Did they still want their jobs?

The management office had expanded to have fifty regular employees, and their temporary staff far exceeded one hundred. The regular employees got two days off each month, and received a monthly wage ranging between eight hundred copper coins to one tael. Temporary workers were paid for each job, but they might not be able to get work every day. There were many people vying for a position in the management office. If they didn't work hard, there would be many people waiting to replace them!

The temporary employees worked hard to perform well in front of the supervisors and strived for a chance to turn into a regular employee next time there was a chance! As a result, even though there was a group of soldiers ready for combat at the port, the dockworkers continued to work as if they didn't see them.

Fields of Gold Chapter 394 - The Test of War

When the Wokou's fleet got close to the Tanggu Docks, a fleet of well-equipped warships stopped and surrounded them. Before General Yamaguchi could react, they were stunned by a series of frenzied explosions. In this era, explosives weren't widely used in the military. This large firecracker, which was similar to a small rocket, had caught the Wokou off guard.

However, the Wokou's fleet had the advantage in terms of numbers. After General Yamaguchi returned to his senses, he led his group to break out of the encirclement. He was really able to open a gap and forcibly broke through with half of the ships. The other half of the fleet were destroyed by the gunfire of the Great Ming Empire's warships. Many of the Wokou pirates fell into the water. Like rats that fell into a pot of boiling water, they tried to flee in panic but had no way out.

Under the command of General Yamaguchi, the other group of Wokou landed not far from the port. Seeing the dozen or so ships docked at the port and numerous packages of goods unloaded from the ships, General Yamaguchi didn't allow his men to rest and rushed towards the port with over a thousand Wokou pirates.

Commander Sun's second-in-command, with a group of soldiers, lay in ambush near the port. When the Wokou got closer to the port, they attacked them on both sides with General Fang's team.

The dockworkers panicked at the sight of the invading enemies. Fortunately, Brother Six was relatively calm. With his trusted subordinates, they swiftly calmed the dockworkers. However, there were still some workers who were afraid of death. They looked ghastly pale and blamed their parents for not giving them a couple more legs. Before Brother Six and the others had come up to them, they had already run away, feeling extremely terrified.

Brother Six had naturally taken notes of these people in his heart. Among them, there were quite a few regular employees of the management office. He would no longer use these people who could only enjoy happiness but not share hardships with the people around them! The dockworkers were used to hard labor, so they all had a lot of strength. Brother Six called on them to pick up weapons and protect their homeland!

Over the past few years, the eighteen year old Yu Heizi had grown up to 1.75 meter in height. His skin was tanned, and his fat body had long transformed into a body full of muscles. Thus, he did look somewhat intimidating by just standing there. This kid was like a completely different person compared with his younger self. He was willing to work hard and was good at currying favors with others. He had been promoted to the position of a small team leader by Brother Six, and earned a monthly wage of one tael!

When the Wokou landed, for a moment, he also wanted to escape with those workers. However, Brother Six was watching them not too far away. After following Brother Six for the past few years, Yu Heizi had gradually turned into a regular employee from a temporary worker, and with his own efforts, he was also promoted to a small team leader. If he ran away, wouldn't it be a waste of all his previous efforts?

'Argh, I'm going all in!! Aren't there a lot of soldiers at the port? Although we're outnumbered by the Wokou pirates, we have the advantage of location and unity of the people. I'm not trained in martial arts, but I'm still very strong! Since Brother Six didn't leave, the situation at the wharf shouldn't be too serious. Oh whatever! Money comes from danger, so I'll just take this risk!'

He immediately stood behind Brother Six. With a thick stick in his hands, he looked at the two groups of people fighting at the docks with a nervous expression.

Brother Six looked at Heizi with an approving gaze. At first, he allowed Heizi to work for him because he was giving Yu Xiaocao face. He had originally thought that this little fatty wouldn't be able to bear the hardship and leave on his own. He hadn't expected that the kid had actually endured it. Yu Heizi was a hard worker and had some tricks up his sleeves, so he promoted the fellow to a foreman. The small team led by Yu Heizi could successfully complete their tasks every time. They had been praised by the customers on multiple occasions. Hence, Brother Six saw him in a new light!

Based on Brother Six's understanding of Yu Heizi, he wasn't considered someone very brave. Thus, he never thought that this kid would be the first person to choose to trust him and stand by his side. He watched as the other dockworkers followed suit by picking up their weapons and following closely behind him. Although there were only about sixty to seventy people, Brother Six felt very satisfied. To be able to step forward and support him in the face of danger, he, Brother Six, would definitely provide them with a good future!!

At this time, due to the difference in numbers, some of the Wokou gradually broke through the defense line of the soldiers and came to the shoreside. The Wokou pirates began to kill and rob on ships with unloaded cargo.

There weren't a large number of Wokou pirates approaching the port; only around a dozen or so. The weapon in Brother Six's hands was a steel fork, similar to a harpoon, and the tip of the fork glimmered with coldness. He said to the nervous dockworkers behind him, "Do you guys dare to join me to destroy these Wokou pirates?!"

Yu Heizi was somewhat nervous, but he was the first one to respond, "What is there to be afraid of!! We have sixty to seventy people, so how can it be possible that we can't beat a dozen or so dwarfs?"

Hearing his words, the other dockworkers looked at the short stature of the Wokou pirates, and they were immediately full of confidence and courage. Yeah, what was so scary about these dwarfs? If one person wasn't enough, then they could fight as a group, which would be enough to squash him to death!!

Seeing that the morale of his workers had gone up, Brother Six faintly smiled and quickly divided them into groups of five. Each group would go up against one of the pirates. He took the lead and led a group towards one of the Wokou. The other groups also didn't want to appear weak, so they tightened their grasp on the wooden sticks in their hands, clenched their teeth, and rushed forward.

All men had a certain sense of righteousness and a hero complex. When he saw Brother Six holding a steel fork to fight with the other party's steel sword, Yu Heizi, who was in the same group as Brother Six, raised up the wooden stick in his hands. The expression on his face caused his originally slightly fierce-looking face to appear even more ferocious. Taking advantage of the time when the other party hadn't gotten the chance to retrieve his sword, he brutally hit him on the head and back.

The other dockworkers in the same group also attacked the unlucky Wokou with the various weapons in their hands. Before the Wokou could make his second move, he was already knocked out on the ground and lost his ability to fight. Brother Six pierced the steel fork into the other party's chest and killed him.

Seeing that their boss had won, the other groups became more vigorous and imposing. They screamed like a ferocious tiger coming down a mountain and charged towards the Wokou pirates. Seeing the situation, the rest of the pirates didn't dare to continue fighting and quickly ran back to the shore. Some of them were blocked and killed by the soldiers on the shore. The dockworkers caught up to some of them and beat them until they couldn't fight back.

The dockworkers had won their first battle. Their timidity had been swept away and everyone was full of confidence. In the upcoming battles, each group was able to achieve victorious results. Brother Six had also stated, "Later, according to the number of Wokou killed, come to me for a reward. Five taels for each Wokou! After killing them, cut off their left ear as evidence!"

The dockworkers became extremely hyperactive as they rushed towards a Wokou that was alone. The Wokou was so scared that he tried to flee in all directions. Each time the dockworkers killed one of the pirates, they would pick up his weapon. They were soon armed with steel swords, which made them even more confident!

It might be because of their good cooperation, but despite a lot of workers getting injured, most of them were minor external injuries. Brother Six took out the wound balm that he bought from Tongren

Medicine Hall, which was very effective in stopping bleeding. The wounded dockworkers were triggered by the bloodshed, and they were also unwilling to give up on the rewards promised by Brother Six. Thus, they wouldn't leave the front line due to minor wounds and continued to do their part in protecting the harbor!

As the battle at the docks started in full swing, the Wokou pirates over at Dongshan Village had retreated into the village and adopted the policy of 'loot all, kill all, and burn all'. Even from afar, one could see that the village was ablaze with fire. Especially the thatched cottages, they swiftly burned into ashes as soon as they were lit on fire.

The Yu Residence, which was the newest and strongest within the village and also very close to the West Mountain, was expropriated by Watanabe Hiroshi. The vegetables in the courtyard had encountered a disaster as they were plucked and chopped, and they were completely destroyed by the Wokou. Most of the grain and fruits in the Yu Family's cellar, as well as the meat in the icehouse, were carried aboard the Wokou's ships. The rest was left for Watanabe Hiroshi to enjoy.

The Zhou Family next door had driven their chickens into the mountain forest nearby. They reared their chickens in coops, so many of the chickens returned and gathered in front of the Zhou Family's house. The Wokou pirates stationed nearby happily caught the chickens. After plucking the feathers, they seasoned the chickens with salt and roasted them. Since a great natural disaster happened in the Wokou's country, they hadn't eaten any meat except for fish! The Zhou Family's chickens were met with an unfortunate ending.

Likewise, the Yu Family's piggery also wasn't spared. Fortunately, in order to prevent the deterioration of the meat, these guys only slaughtered a portion of the pigs to sate their cravings. They planned on slaughtering the others before their departure and transporting them onto their ships. Every day, there would be miserable cries of pigs coming from the Yu Family's piggery.

At this time, except for several families who had fled into the forest by themselves when they were initially chased by the Wokou pirates, the other hundred or so villagers of Dongshan Village were being led by Yu Xiaocao to her secret base.

The valley wasn't too far from Dongshan Village, but the mountain road was hard to walk, which took up some time. After the Wokou pirates left the mountain forest, Yu Hai and Commander Zheng had followed the traces left by the group and joined them.

When Madam Liu saw her husband, she immediately checked if he was injured. There was quite a lot of blood on Yu Hai's clothes, but it was stained onto his clothes when killing the pirates, and he wasn't wounded at all. Most of the bodyguards had come back unharmed. Even if some were injured, they were just minor injuries that weren't a big deal.

Yu Xiaocao guided the group to a fog shrouded forest near the cliff. There wasn't any fog here in the past, but in order to protect her secret base from being found and ruined by others, Yu Xiaocao asked the little divine stone to set up this decoy. Without the guide of someone familiar with the path like her and her younger brother, other people would quickly get lost in the hazy forest. Once in a while, someone from Dongshan Village would come here, but when they saw the inexplicable appearance of fog, very few would dare to enter.

"Xiaocao, are you sure we're going in the right direction? I've been here before, and I ended up walking around for three days and nights before finally getting out. I nearly starved to death here!" Goudan had been known as a mischievous child in the village since he was young. He had gone up the mountains and dived in the sea; there weren't any places that he didn't dare to go. When he grew up, his courage was still sky high. He made a bet with others to enter the foggy forest and almost didn't come out.

Chapter 395 - Settling in the Cave

Goudan wandered in the forest for three days, and his mother cried for three days. In the end, the fog in the forest gradually dispersed and he followed the sound of his mother's cries out!

It wasn't because of his luck that he was able to come out. Instead, the fog array changed every three days. Even if someone got trapped, there wouldn't be any great danger and they could naturally come out after three days. Goudan's incident had a great impact on the villagers of Dongshan Village. They all repeatedly warned their children to stay away from the foggy forest.

Yu Xiaocao looked at him and said with a smile, "Older Brother Goudan, you aren't frightened by the fog forest, right? Want to have a bet to see who can go in and come out intact?"

Goudan knew that she was teasing him. At that time, when he made the bet, he had nearly buried himself here for the sake of two wheat steamed buns!

Had it been someone else, Goudan would have already started fighting with that person. However, when he looked at Xiaocao's tender and pretty little face, Goudan blushed and scratched his head,

“Younger Sister Xiaocao, don’t make fun of me . When I was younger, I didn’t know how to be afraid and did a lot of ridiculous things . I won’t do it anymore in the future...”

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, “If I say that I can bring everyone inside safely and provide everyone with a safe place to stay, would you believe me?”

Goudan was mesmerized by her bright smile . ‘Xiaocao is so beautiful . Her skin is even more tender than a peeled egg and her eyes are big and lively, as if they can speak . Her voice is also very nice and sounded even better than the lark that I caught last time . ’ Goudan unconsciously nodded and said, “I will believe everything Younger Sister Xiaocao says! Haha!!”

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at the foolish-looking Goudan in her heart . She was only twelve, okay? In her previous life, she would only be a little sixth grader . Who did she offend to have so many rotten peach blossoms [1]?

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She ignored Goudan and said to the village head, “Village Head Grandpa, my younger brother and I are very familiar with this forest . We often come here to play when we were younger, and we have never gotten lost . The cave that I mention is at the end of the forest . ”

The village head remained silent for a moment, and then confirmed with her again, “There was no fog in the forest before, so it wasn’t easy to get lost . Have you been here after the forest was shrouded by fog? Have you ever been in this mountain forest? It’s not that Village Head Grandpa doesn’t believe you, but this affects our village of more than a hundred people . I must be cautious ah!”

Yu Xiaocao firmly replied, “Rest assured, Village Head Grandpa! I came here ten days ago to catch some little white fish in the valley to make soup for the princess consort . If you don’t believe me, you can ask Her Highness!”

The delicious small white fish could only be found in this valley stream and couldn’t be found anywhere else . After he got Princess Consort Jing’s confirmation, the village head finally agreed to let Xiaocao take

everyone into the fog . Originally, many villagers rejected this idea . Didn't the imperial bodyguards already say that the Wokou had already withdrawn from the forest? So, why couldn't they just stay in any random cave? Why must they enter this dangerous fog forest?

Several households didn't believe Xiaocao's words . Among them, there was a villager who frequently set traps and hunted in the surrounding forest . He thought that he was very familiar with the surrounding area . The head of those families came to an agreement to work together . After talking with the village head, they took their families and separated from the big group .

That villager had once gone into the mountain and encountered heavy rainfall . At that time, he hid in a cave to avoid the rain . That cave could accommodate at least thirty to forty people . The families had a good relationship, and there was more than enough room for them . However, that cave was somewhat far from here . Fortunately, they should be able to arrive before sunset .

The people who stayed chose to believe in Xiaocao . In actuality, the person who they believed in was the village head . Since the village head trusted in Xiaocao, they didn't have the courage to doubt her . Thus, they could only follow the majority .

Xiaocao took everyone and stepped into the fog filled forest . The fog didn't actually exist in her eyes . Therefore, she could clearly see where they needed to turn and the obstacles in their path . The people behind her could only see the back of the people in front of them, and beyond that was completely covered by fog . In order to not make any mistakes, all of the villagers were completely focused on following the person in front . They were afraid that they would get left behind in the forest accidentally .

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Soon, Xiaocao stopped in front of a cliff full of green vines . There wasn't as much fog here . She turned around to check on her family; none of them were missing! Meixiang, who was beside Princess Consort Jing, also did the same and made sure that the people who came with them were all present . The village head told each head of the household to make sure that everyone in their families were present .

Xiaocao gently pushed away the vines that covered the entrance of the cave and revealed a pitch-dark and bottomless hole . The entrance of the cave could only fit a person who was bending down . Thus, Princess Consort Jing got off the sedan with Meixiang's help . Yu Xiaocao, who had a short stature, got a torch from the basket that her uncle was carrying and lit it up .

Seeing this, Princess Consort Jing hastily told Meixiang, "The entrance of the cave is narrow, so it's not safe to use a torch . Meixiang, take out the luminous pearl and give it to Xiaocao . "

'Luminous pearl? Luminous pearls really existed?' Yu Xiaocao widened her eyes with curiosity . Meixiang carefully took out a circular object wrapped in silk from her small bundle . After she unwrapped it, a white object, similar to a frosted crystal ball, was revealed . She handed the luminous pearl to Xiaocao and said, "Miss Yu, this luminous pearl is the love token that His Imperial Highness gave to Her Highness, so you must be careful and not break it . "

"So talkative!" Princess Consort Jing glared at her, and then said to Xiaocao, "Don't listen to her . Just take it, and you can keep it if you like it . Anyway, I have a lot of these things at home and will give them to my family's Little Three!"

Little Three [2]? Yu Xiaocao quickly lowered her head and tried really hard to suppress her laughter . So it turned out that the young royal prince had such a 'hilarious' nickname . She rubbed her somewhat tired cheeks and did her best to control her expression as she said, "This is an expression of Imperial Prince Jing's love for you . How can I be so shameless to take it? Your Highness, be carefully and follow me closely . I'll lead the way in front . "

Without waiting for Princess Consort Jing's reply, Yu Xiaocao had entered the entrance of the cave . Princess Consort Jing had no choice but to hold up her dress, bend down, and carefully follow behind Xiaocao . As soon as they entered the cave, the originally common 'frosted crystal ball' emitted a peculiar glow . The faint blue glow was like a 60-watt lightbulb, but its glow was much softer than a lightbulb .

The luminous pearl was able to light up around seventy to eighty square meters of its surrounding . Yu Xiaocao had a short stature, so she just needed to bow her head when walking . From time to time, she would turn around to help Princess Consort Jing carry the hem of her dress, or help her walk over the uneven ground . Fortunately, Princess Consort Jing wore a relatively light riding outfit and her hair was styled into a simple bun . She also didn't wear much jewelry . Otherwise, it would be more difficult to walk .

After walking about twenty or so meters inside, the opening of the cave gradually widened . Princess Consort Jing could finally straighten her back . Meixiang, who was behind her, quickly stepped forward to support her mistress to rest on a stone beside them .

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The members of the Yu Family were behind Meixiang, and behind them were Xiaocao's oldest paternal aunt's family and eldest granduncle's family . The place that Princess Consort Jing rested at was another opening of the cave that was about 198 square meters . It was dark and deep . From time to time, drops of water would fall down onto the stone, making a light sound .

The people outside came in one by one . Some with bigger luggage had to divide their big bundle into two to three smaller bags . Otherwise, they would get stuck at the entrance and couldn't come in .

When the village head entered this somewhat small cave, he frowned and said to Xiaocao, "Xiaocao, it's too crowded for over a hundred people to stay here . There isn't even enough space to sit . "

Yu Xiaocao smiled at him and said, "This is just one opening of the cave . It's very big inside . The biggest cave is capable of accommodating three hundred people . Your Highness, have you rested enough?"

Princess Consort Jing wiped the sweat on her forehead . She stood up and said with a smile, "Don't think of me as being so weak . I can now walk up from the foot of the mountains to the entrance of the residence without others helping me . "

With the luminous pearl in one hand, Yu Xiaocao held Princess Consort Jing's arm with her other hand . Then she turned around and said to her father, "Father, Oldest Paternal Uncle, light up a torch so that the people in the back can see the path . We can walk faster that way . "

Before she finished speaking, a clear howling of a wolf spread throughout the cave . The echo within the cave made it hard to distinguish which direction the sound came from .

The villagers in the back immediately panicked . Some of them instantly turned back and screamed, “Wolf! There are wolves in the cave!! Quickly run ah!!”

The others also panicked, and even Yu Hai worriedly stepped forward to block in front of his daughter and Princess Consort Jing, solemnly guarding them . Before Xiaocao said anything, Little Black and Little White dashed out from the back of the group . They put down the game in their mouths and made a clear howling sound with their necks stretched out . The sound of the wolf howling on the other side stopped, and a pair of emerald green eyes appeared from a dark cave nearby . The green eyes came closer and closer, and soon appeared within the area illuminated by the luminous pearl . A gray wolf with a rich coat of fur and a powerful appearance showed up in front of the Yu Family .

“Eh? Isn’t this the gray wolf that the royal prince entrusted Xiaocao to raise?” The village head took a closer look and recognized it . He hastily placated the villagers, “Don’t panic, everyone . This wolf is domesticated and doesn’t bite people!”

Yu Xiaocao bent down, gently touched the gray wolf’s head, and said, “Big Gray, our village is in trouble, so I brought my fellow villagers here to take refuge . Sorry for disturbing you!”

Big Gray looked at the water bag she was carrying on her body with an apparent meaning of, ‘You guys can live here, but you need to pay rent—what do you think about paying with that mystic-stone water?’

Little Black and Little White were very excited to see their father . Especially Little Black, he immediately hugged Big Gray’s neck with his forelegs and gently nibbled on his father’s ears . Big Gray impatiently shook off his paws, pressed his foolish son onto the ground with his front paws, and grimaced somewhat threateningly at him . Little Black thought that his father was playing with him, so he happily rolled around on the ground .

When the people in the back saw the interaction between the Yu Family’s two ‘dogs’ and the wolf, they finally believed the village head words . Last winter, their village was attacked by wolves and a gray wolf had saved Yu Hai’s life . This was a matter that had spread throughout the entire Dongshan Village . The Yu Family’s children had also used a gray wolf to pull on their sled, which was something that all the village children envied . When they got home, they had told their parents and grandparents numerous times in an envious tone . The villagers’ mood gradually calmed down .

Fields of Gold Chapter 396 - The Worry in Her Hear

t

More than a hundred villagers of Dongshan Village followed behind a gray wolf and quietly entered a cave. If someone made any noise, the big gray wolf that was about the height of a person would stare fixedly at that person with his emerald green eyes until that person quieted down. As a result, the more than one hundred people, including the children in their arms, all silently moved forward in the quiet, dark cave.

Soon, a ray of light came from the top of the cave and a large cave appeared in front of everyone. The cave was very big and should be able to accommodate more than three hundred people like Xiaocao said. The best thing was that it wasn't dark in the cave thanks to the glow from the top of the cave, which was like a bright lamp.

It was very dry inside the cave, and there were a lot of dry branches and stones. Xiaocao stopped and announced that they would settle down here. Each family could select a place to settle down, put down their luggage, and do some simple cleaning.

They were safe for now, so the children, who were carried by the adults, were full of curiosity regarding the cave. After knowing that there was no danger in the cave, several of the older children began to explore the cave. The younger children frolicked around their families. Since there was a lot of echo in the cave, the children's laughter rippling through the cave made it oddly noisy.

Princess Consort Jing furrowed her brows slightly and felt a slight headache. She preferred a quiet environment, so it was too noisy for her to stay in a cave with more than a hundred people of varying ages. However, she knew that it was a peculiar period and she shouldn't be too picky. Thus, she just signed and endured it.

Yu Xiaocao dodged an infant who had just learned to walk and came up to Princess Consort Jing's side. She said, "Your Highness, there's a lot of connected caves here. I'll go with Older Sister Meixiang to select one that's suitable for you to stay in. Later, you can move over."

When Princess Consort Jing heard this, she revealed a smile and nodded, "Alright, you and Meixiang should be careful. Bring Little White and Big Gray along with you. Come back earlier!"

Yu Xiaocao glanced at Big Gray, who was drinking water with his head lowered, and gently touched his butt with her feet. Big Gray moved his bottom slightly to the side and looked up at her with a somewhat impatient expression as if she had interrupted him from enjoying the mystic-stone water.

“Big Gray, are you full? If you are, then take us to find a cave where we can live. It's best to have around four or five caves that we can live in. It doesn't need to be too big. It's big enough if it can accommodate ten or so people!” Yu Xiaocao didn't care whether Big Gray could understand her. The cave was very big with a lot of connecting caves, like a maze. How was she supposed to find habitable areas by herself?

Meixiang chuckled and said, “Miss Yu, can he really understand you?”

“You mustn't underestimate an animal's ability, especially one with intelligence! Big Gray isn't a normal wolf, so he should be able to understand me, right?” Yu Xiaocao also felt somewhat uncertain as she spoke.

Big Gray pushed away Little Black who was trying to take his mystic-stone water and swiftly finished licking the bowl of mystic-stone water. He licked his mouth and walked towards a small opening in the cave. Seeing that Xiaocao and Meixiang didn't follow him, he turned his head to look at them, as if he was rushing them.

Xiaocao understood and pulled Meixiang to follow along. The opening was as tall as a person's height and two people were able to walk side by side. After walking about fifty meters, it suddenly brightened up. This part of the cave was semi-closed, and the top of the cave was semi-circular, like it was covered by a lid.

One side of the 'lid' was opened, and several slightly slanted trees covered the gap. Among them, there was a wild peach tree with many fruits hanging on it. Many of them were ripe for picking. From the opening, she could see the view of the valley. At this time, it was already dusk. The orange sunlight shot into the cave, and made it appear warm and bright.

On the walls of the cave, there were a row of openings like doors. Xiaocao looked inside and saw that they were small caves that were probably dug by humans. The walls were all neat and tidy, and there were also some stone beds and stone chairs left behind. Each of the small caves looked like a room that was around seventy to eighty square meters. It was dry and refreshing inside, and people could move in after doing some simple cleaning.

Meixiang was very surprised as she looked at each 'room' and asked, “People must have lived here before. I wonder who dug these caves. We wouldn't have taken over some hermits' homes, right?”

Yu Xiaocao looked at the thick dusk on the ground, and then shook her head, saying, "Even if someone had lived here, it must have been a long time ago. 'Ancestors plant the tree and the descendants enjoy the cool under the tree.' Well, it's to our benefit. There are eight 'rooms' here, which should be enough for us to live in! Older Meixiang, please tidy up here while I go get the princess consort."

When Yu Xiaocao came back with the princess consort and her family, Meixiang had already cleaned up one of the bigger caves. At this time, she was wiping the stone bed in the cave with a wet handkerchief!

"Eh? Older Sister Meixiang, where did you get the water?" Yu Xiaocao asked in slight surprise.

With a smile on her face, Meixiang pointed at a stone trough near the gap. The spring water flowed out of the mountain wall and gathered in the stone trough. The excessive water flowed out to the outside of the wall.

"This is really such a good location. With this stone trough, it will be so much easier for us to get water." As mentioned, if there wasn't a source of water here, they would have to fetch water from the valley under the tall cliff or walk back to the other cave and go out to find a water source. It would be very inconvenient!

Lanxiang quickly got a basin from another servant and started cleaning the cave with Meixiang. They covered the stone bed with a brocade quilt, and used the stone tables, which were carved out of the walls, as storage space. Princess Consort Jing's belongings were neatly placed on the tables. Xiaocao placed the luminous pearl in the highest part of the cave. The entire room lit up as if they had just installed a lightbulb in the room.

As for the remaining caves, the Yu Family, Xiaocao's oldest aunt's family, and Eldest Granduncle's family each lived in one cave. The maidservants and senior servants divided the rest of the four caves. The manservants and imperial bodyguards could only sleep in a corner of the 'living room'.

It was getting late, and in order to escape, no one had time to eat lunch. Everyone was so hungry that their chests were sticking to their backs. There was quite a lot of food brought over from Prince Jing's mountain manor, and there was a complete set of condiments such as oil, salt, and soy sauce. Xiaocao's family and her relatives had brought enough food to last them for three to five days, moreover, they also had Little Black and Little White catching pheasants and wild hares back.

They simply cleaned up their own cave. The stone bed inside was very big like a large kang bed, and it was big enough for ten or so people to sleep on. Old Yu slept in the innermost spot, and next to him were Yu Hai and Madam Liu. Xiaocao and Xiaolian slept at the outermost part of the bed. For families with poor living conditions, it was common for the entire family to crowd together on one big kang bed during the winter in order to save firewood.

After putting their things down on the stone bed, Xiaocao took Xiaolian out to the gap outside of the cave. They set up a simple stove with stones, washed the rice, and started cooking. She looked to the side and saw the servants of the Prince Jing's Household busily working. They had three stoves, on which they cooked three pots of rice. There were thirty to forty people from the Prince Jing's Household, including the servants and imperial bodyguards. They ate a lot of food and everyone was hungry now, so it wouldn't be enough if they cooked too little!

Yu Caifeng came over with a bag of rice. She squatted down beside Xiaocao and helped her light a fire. She thought for a moment and said, "Why don't our families cook together? That way, we can save up on some firewood!"

Yu Xiaocao nodded. She thought about it and said, "Oldest Paternal Aunt, can you go over to Eldest Granduncle's place and ask if they want to eat together? Our families are eating together, so if we don't ask them, I'm afraid that Eldest Granduncle's family might think that we're not treating them as relatives..."

Yu Caifeng smiled and said, "Xiaocao is still the most thoughtful one. Okay! I'll go ask Eldest Aunt to see what they plan on doing."

A moment later, she came back and shook her head with a smile. She said to Xiaocao, "Eldest Uncle said that they brought dried rations, so they're not cooking tonight. They also said that they will eat separately since they have a lot of people in the family."

In the middle of their conversation, a figure passed through the opening of the cave. Xiaocao looked carefully and saw that it was Commander Zheng and his subordinates. Each person carried a bundle of firewood on their backs. It turned out that the bodyguards of the Prince Jing's Household thought that it was too troublesome to walk around the cave, so they tied a rope on the stone and tree sticking out of the gap. It was only ten or so meters tall, which wasn't too difficult to climb for people who practiced martial arts like them.

Commander Zheng left three big bundles of firewood for Xiaocao, which was enough for them to cook three or four meals. Yu Xiaocao returned the favor by giving them a pheasant that Little Black caught. It

wasn't enough for all of them to eat, but at least they had some meat among all the vegetable dishes, right?

Xiaocao skinned the wild hare that she kept, and then stewed it together with potatoes. She gave both Princess Consort Jing and Eldest Granduncle a bowl each. While the rice was cooking, she added the sausages and smoked meat that they didn't finish in the winter, which was delicious even without vegetables. In addition, Xiaocao also cooked a pot of laver soup.

The members of the Yu Family and the Liu Family all held a big bowl of cured meat rice with potatoes stewed hare. It might be due to hunger, but everyone ate with great relish. Even the youngest Little Fangping finished more than half a bowl of rice and a spoonful of hare meat.

Seeing the little guy eat with relish, Madam Liu suddenly put down her chopsticks and heavily sighed. Yu Caifeng saw this and asked, "What's wrong?"

"When I see Little Fangping, I will think about our Little Shitou. I don't know if he's safe in town, and there's also our Yu Hang. Xiaocao said that the Wokou pirates have also reached the docks. Xiaosha wouldn't have encountered them, right..." The more she thought about this, the more Madam Liu felt as if there was a large rock pressing on her heart.

Yu Caifeng comforted her, "Don't worry too much. Little Shitou is in town, which is quite a distance from the sea. Even if the pirates went there, aren't the local authorities there? They will definitely ensure their safety! As for Xiaosha, there is even less for you to worry about. Xiaocao's godfather is a great general who has experienced numerous battles. His subordinates are also very skilled. There's no way that they can't protect him."

Hearing her words, Madam Liu felt that she was right and her heart slightly relaxed. But she couldn't continue eating after eating half a bowl of rice. 'To raise a child until they were a hundred years old and be worried about them until they were ninety-nine.' Parents would always be worried about their children.

Fields of Gold Chapter 397 - Urgent Message

Unbeknownst to Madam Liu, her two sons, who she was worried about, had daringly sneaked out of town and were rushing to Dongshan Village.

"Eldest Brother, if those Wokou pirates didn't find anyone in the village, would they go directly to town on the official road? Perhaps this path isn't safe anymore!" Little Shitou's face was full of worries for his

family. It was safer to stay in town, but their family had all gone into the West Mountains and their safety was uncertain. So how could he be at ease?

Yu Hang patted his younger brother, who was sitting in front of him, pacifyingly and speculated, "Killing isn't the ultimate goal of those Wokou pirates. Plundering goods is their most important mission. The villagers left in a hurry, so they could only take a few things. There are enough food and goods left behind for them to search through for a while! At this time, they should have settled down in Dongshan Village, so it's the safest to stay in town. Shitou, in fact, I can come back by myself. You're young and have a short stature, so you wouldn't be able to help much even if you return!"

Little Shitou shook his head and disagreed, "Although there's not much I can help with, my heart is with everyone. It's really painful for the family to be separated in different places and be worried about each other's safety!"

Yu Hang remained silent for a moment. His younger brother was only nine and he was a young county-level official. His teachers praised him a lot and the family were full of expectations for him. Yu Hang didn't know if bringing his younger brother back was the right decision. If something happened to his younger brother, how was he supposed to face his parents and younger sisters?

"But, in order to get to the West Mountain, we must pass by our house. In the village, besides the village head's house, our house is the biggest. So, we don't know if there will be any Wokou at our house!" Yu Hang's concern wasn't without reason.

Little Shitou thought about it and said, "I know a path that can bypass our house, but it's somewhat difficult to walk. At that time, I'm not sure if we can bring Little Gray along...but Little Gray is very smart. If it hides in the forest, it probably won't get caught by those wicked pirates, right?"

Little Gray was a very intelligent little donkey. It had been with the Yu Family for nearly three years and had done a lot of work for the Yu Family. It had a special place in the hearts of every member of the Yu Family. Would it be dangerous for it if they left it in the forest at night? Would it get eaten by those Wokou pirates?

However, there was no use in worrying about this right now. During such a crucial time, they didn't even know if humans would be safe, let alone a domesticated donkey.

They soon reached the small path that Little Shitou mentioned. In order to enter the mountain, they needed to climb over a mountain peak. Although it wasn't very high, it was somewhat steep. Humans could manage to climb up, but it was impossible for Little Gray. Disregarding whether Little Gray could actually understand him, Little Shitou thoroughly cautioned the little donkey. After that, he patted its bottom and told it to quickly find a place to hide. Little Gray appeared somewhat reluctant as it looked at Little Shitou with its big, dewy eyes. It licked his hand and walked into the nearby forest while turning back at every step.

Under the dim moonlight, the brothers climbed up the mountain. Fortunately, the brothers were used to climbing up mountains since childhood. This slight slope wasn't too much of a problem for them. Four hours later, the two brothers had arrived at the foggy forest.

“Awoo—Awoo—Awoo—” A series of familiar wolf howling turned Little Shitou's stern expression into a smile, “Eldest Brother, Big Gray and the others came to welcome us!”

As soon as he finished speaking, a black figure dashed out from the white fog and excitedly jumped towards Little Shitou.

“Little Black, slow down! I can't carry you now!” When Little Shitou saw the black figure running towards himself at full speed, he feared that it would unwittingly jump on to himself. With his small body, would it even be possible for him to bear the weight of Little Black, who weighed over one hundred catties?

Even without his reminder, Little Black had a sense of propriety. His lightning-like figure abruptly came to a stop three meters away from Little Shitou. The force of inertia caused his forelegs to slide two meters forward. When he finally stopped, his head just happened to touch Little Shitou's shoulder.

Little Black hadn't seen Little Shitou for nearly half a month and was particularly excited to see him. He rubbed his head on Little Shitou's body and used his rough tongue to lick Little Shitou's hands and face. Big Gray and Little White, who were behind him, strode forward in the same solemn manner and came to their side.

Little Shitou rubbed Little Black's neck, patted Little White's head, and then climbed onto Big Gray's back. Big Gray shook his body in annoyance, but Little Shitou held on tightly and didn't fall down.

“Big Gray, you can't always act so differently in front of different people. No matter what my second sister does to you, you're as obedient as a cat. However, you won't allow me to do anything. I haven't seen you for three months, so just let me ride on you...” With a rascally expression, Little Shitou clung onto Big Gray's body with both his legs and arms.

Yu Hang, on the other hand, went up to Little White and asked with a slightly uneasy voice, “Little White, have my parents and sisters arrived? Are they safe?”

As Little Shitou struggled to avoid being thrown off by Big Gray, he giggled and said, “Since Little Black and Little White are here, our family is definitely also here. Second Sister and I are the only ones who are familiar with this part of the forest, so there won't be any problems at all with Second Sister leading the way!”

Little White looked at Little Shitou, and then nodded his head at Yu Hang. He turned his body and looked back at Yu Hang, motioning him to follow him. As for Little Shitou, he was finally thrown off by Big Gray. He patted the dust on his long gown, made a funny face at Big Gray, and also followed his older brother into the forest.

Little White guided the brothers through the maze-like cave and avoided the big cave that the villagers were staying in. They soon reached the entrance of the cave that the Yu Family stayed in. There were two imperial bodyguards guarding the entrance to prevent the villagers from disturbing them again.

It turned out that in the evening, Madam Zhang had come to cause trouble with Yu Dashan. They had thrown away the food that they brought along when they were being chased by the Wokou pirates. Seeing that the two little wolves had caught game, the mother and son wanted to pretend to be pitiful and get some food. Madam Zhang thought that since she had once been married to Old Yu, the old man wouldn't just watch as they starve to death. This 'extraordinary person' finally remembered that she and Old Yu were married. When Old Yu was seriously ill and on the verge of death, she didn't even think about their familial affections at all!

The Yu Family also didn't bring a lot of food. No one knew when those pirates were going to leave, so it was impossible for them to share their food with the pair of ungrateful mother and son. When Madam Li fled in the forest, she got separated from the group and her safety was still uncertain. However, Yu Dashan didn't seem very sad about it. As expected, it was true that 'a married couple were birds in the same forest who would fly separately in the face of danger'!

Madam Zhang and her son were thick-skinned and wanted to continue to cause trouble. Princess Consort Jing's head started to hurt due to the ruckus they were causing, so she just gave them two pancakes and had the bodyguards throw them out. She also sent two imperial bodyguards to guard the entrance. Except for the members of the Yu Family and Liu Family, no one was allowed to casually enter! With Princess Consort Jing here, the pair of 'extraordinary' mother and son didn't dare to continue to cause trouble and timidly went back to the bigger cave.

The two imperial bodyguards recognized the Yu brothers. Although they thought it was strange for the brothers to come back at this time, they just let them go in. It was already late at night, so everyone was already in deep slumber. As soon as the brothers entered the cave, Commander Zheng, who slept on the floor outside, opened his eyes vigilantly. With the dim light of the torch, he took a clearer look at their faces. Then he pointed to the small cave where the Yu Family stayed to the brothers and made a gesture, telling them to be quiet.

When the brothers saw that the bodyguards and servants lying on the ground, they carefully walked around them and arrived at the small cave that their family lived in. Under the dim light of the torch, the brothers saw their sleeping family. With tears brimming in their eyes, their anxious hearts finally relaxed.

After a day of thrilling escape, the Yu Family members didn't sleep very well. Yu Hai had opened his eyes when the Yu brothers entered the cave. Seeing the tired and untidy appearance of the brothers, he immediately sat up. He didn't speak for a long time, thinking that he was dreaming.

"Father! Don't worry, we're fine..." With tears brimming in his eyes, Little Shitou walked to the stone bed and pulled on his father's hands.

Yu Hai finally believed that this wasn't a dream. He examined both children and asked in a slightly angry tone, "You kids, why aren't you obediently staying in town and coming here at this time? If you guys encounter a wild beast in the middle of the night, what will you do ah!"

Yu Hai's voice woke everyone up. When they saw Yu Hang and Little Shitou, they were both surprised and happy. Madam Liu hugged the brothers tightly, and then scolded them, feeling fearful. Yu Xiaocao silently watched the scene and felt that they could overcome anything with the whole family together!

"Eldest Brother, Shitou, have you guys eaten dinner yet? There's still some cured meat rice, but it's a little cold!" Yu Xiaocao saw that their lips were peeling from dryness and guessed that they hadn't eaten and drank anything since the afternoon.

Little Shitou was slightly embarrassed as he struggled out of his mother's embrace. He smiled at Xiaocao and said, "It's still Second Sister who dotes on me the most! Eldest Brother and I were worried about you guys, so we left in a hurry. We didn't even drink a sip of water the whole way. I'm dying of hunger ah!!" Before he had finished speaking, his little tummy growled several times, amusing everyone.

While the Yu brothers wolfed down the cold rice, the capital had already received the urgent message sent from Tanggu Town. Could the emperor just sit back when he saw that the Wokou pirates had invaded? That night, he immediately summoned the ministers to his imperial study to discuss the situation.

The Tanggu area was under the ruling of Royal Prince Yang, so he naturally wasn't left out. Zhu Junyang immediately became anxious when he heard that a lot of Wokou pirates had gone to Tanggu Town. They also appeared to be well-trained and very fierce, and didn't seem like ordinary pirates. His lady mother and future wife were both in Dongshan Village ah!

"Your Imperial Majesty, are there Wokou pirates at Dongshan Village?" Zhu Junyang interrupted the officials' discussion and anxiously asked.

When the emperor nodded solemnly, Zhu Junyang immediately turned around and left the imperial study! The message was sent from Tanggu Town and reported to the emperor. Then the emperor summoned them over. Didn't they waste a lot of time already? He didn't know how his lady mother and Xiaocao were doing. Could those imperial bodyguards protect them? Zhu Junyang could only blame himself for not leaving more bodyguards at the mountain manor. How long could those twenty or so imperial bodyguards hold up?

Fields of Gold Chapter 398 - The People He Worries About

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"Emperor, look at Royal Prince Yang, he..." The Minister of War had long disliked the fact that the emperor favored Royal Prince Yang. Thus, when he had a chance to badmouth the other person, he took it.

As soon as he opened his mouth, Zhu Junfan knew what the minister wanted to say. He waved a hand to interrupt the official and said, "Beloved Official Zhen, Princess Consort Jing is still residing in the mountain villa at Tanggu Town ah! The mountain villa is close to the sea and Junyang definitely is worried about his lady mother. We can understand his filial heart and concerns!"

The Minister of War had a tactful personality. When he saw that the emperor wanted to protect the royal prince, he resentfully closed his eyes for a second. Why was the emperor always so lenient to that good-for-nothing and cruelly violent fellow? Was it because he was the son of the emperor's imperial

uncle? The emperor didn't only have Imperial Prince Jing as his only imperial uncle. Furthermore, weren't any one of his own sons more talented and outstanding than Royal Prince Yang? Despite all that, the emperor only seemed to regard Royal Prince Yang with importance. He really couldn't understand why!

While the rest of the court officials were currently discussing the matter at Tanggu Town, Zhu Junyang was currently dashing back to Imperial Prince Jing's estate. An imperial prince was allowed to have his own private army. He knew that his lord father was in the outer study and rushed over there to inform his father about what he just learned from the emperor.

Once Imperial Prince Jing found out that Wokou pirates were attacking Tanggu Town and that his beloved wife was still in the mountain villa there, he almost lost his reason. If he hadn't been able to restrain himself, he would have been just like his son and ran to Tanggu Town despite his other responsibilities.

However, since he had been an imperial prince for over twenty years, he was able to squelch the worry towards his beloved wife. He took out the token to the prince's estate, gave it to his son and solemnly said, "Your lady mother's safety is in your hands now, son!"

"Lord Father, ease your worries! I, your son, will definitely not disappoint you!" Zhu Junyang gripped the token tightly within his hands and didn't say another word as he turned around to bring Head Steward Liu and a few bodyguards along. They spurred their horses the entire way to the lands on the outskirts of the capital that housed the estate's private soldiers.

After checking over the eight hundred soldiers and giving orders to Commander Liu, they all started to head towards Tanggu Town at top speed. However, Zhu Junyang thought that the soldiers' horses were too slow, so he left a personal bodyguard to give them directions and sped off on his own. He took with him two bodyguards and Head Steward Liu. The four of them raced to Dongshan Village on horseback the whole way there. Because the situation was urgent, all of the relay stations had their horses ready to ride. Thus, Zhu Junyang switched horses at every station and didn't rest at all throughout the whole journey. A route that normally took two to three days was compressed by him and the three other people into one day and one night. Like that, the small group arrived at the heavily guarded Tanggu Town.

"Master, you've already been on horseback for a whole day and night. You haven't eaten or drunk anything. Even a person made of steel wouldn't be to handle this ah! How about we first go into town

and find a place to eat and drink..." Head Steward Liu had noticed that his master's lips were dry and cracked, and his eyes were completely bloodshot. The prince was covered entirely in dust and there was no color on his face, so the steward couldn't help but beg him to rest. Even he, as a servant who was used to doing all sorts of tasks every day, was having trouble handling such a gruesome schedule. His master usually lived a luxurious life full of comforts. In fact, when they were out at sea and encountered storms and other hardships, it was not as difficult as today.

However, Zhu Junyang sped past Tanggu Town's gates and directly galloped his horse down the official road towards Dongshan Village. It was as if Head Steward Liu's entreaties hadn't even entered his ears so he naturally couldn't respond. Stop to get a drink and eat food? What a joke! What sort of situation was it now? The two most important women in his life (alright, one of them could only be considered a young maiden), were currently being trapped at Dongshan Village by the Wokou pirates and it wasn't certain if they were still alive. How could he rest at this time?

Right now, it was as if a blistering fire was in his heart. His mind was only filled with the thoughts of his lady mother and Xiaocao and their safety. He could care less about his own physical discomforts at this time. The sooner he got to Dongshan Village, the sooner the danger would lessen a bit for his lady mother and Xiaocao. He absolutely could not stop now nor rest at this time. For the sake of his loved ones, time was of the essence right now! If the two women who had treated him the best in his life were...gone, what was the point in him living anymore?

The horse crop in his hands came down heavily on the horse's rump again. His beloved horse had already been exhausted on the way to Tanggu Town, so he was currently riding a horse he had switched into when he was at Jinwei Prefectural City. The horse had been spurred on at full speed this whole time, so it already had streaks of sweat and foam at its mouth. It was likely it wouldn't be able to endure such a punishing speed for much longer.

Suddenly, the sound of a horse whinnying in distress could be heard followed by a loud thump. Head Steward Liu turned back to look and saw that one of the horses that a bodyguard was riding had collapsed from exhaustion. It lay there, trembling weakly. All of them knew that once a horse fell from exhaustion, there was nothing left for it. How many horses had fallen already? Not even the best horse in the world could endure galloping at top speed all day and night without rest ah!

When Head Steward Liu turned back to the front, he found out that his master had already traveled a great distance and left the three of them behind. Zhu Junyang only had one thought in his mind right now: faster, faster, faster! Everything else could not even enter his scope of attention now. Nothing was more important to him than getting to Dongshan Village as fast as possible.

Fortunately, the horse that Zhu Junyang was riding still had some energy left. Only when he reached the entrance of Dongshan Village did the hapless animal finally collapse from exhaustion. At the moment the animal stumbled down, Zhu Junyang leapt out of the saddle and landed not far in front of the horse. He didn't stop moving for a single second and continued to run forward with his two legs towards the direction of Dongshan Village.

Head Steward Liu had a face full of worry as he mustered his energy and jumped off his horse to reach a further distance to chase after his master. His horse also collapsed not long after. Despite his advanced age, he had to move his old body and run after the prince.

"Master, the village has Wokou pirates there. You should observe it first and then come up with a strategy..." Before Head Steward Liu had finished talking, Zhu Junyang had already gotten to the village gates and was in the midst of fighting against the pirates standing guard there.

Zhu Junyang looked like a crane in a flock of chickens as the pirates were all shorter than him. He didn't say a word as the pirates surrounded him with their knives on hand. It was better to act first and talk later. He unsheathed his double-edged sword in one swift movement and took care of these pirates in a few moves.

Perhaps he had finally heard Head Steward Liu's words but he no longer charged forward into the village in a conspicuous manner. Instead, he slunk forward and made sure to stay hidden. When a patrolling group of pirates came by, he avoided them and then headed towards the direction of the Yu Family's residence, which was at the foot of the West Mountain.

This was already the second night that the Wokou pirates had been lodging in Dongshan Village. Watanabe Hiroshi was currently in the middle of the Yu Family's courtyard. Every day, he ate chicken meat, pork meat, white rice and food made from white flour. It was quite a luxurious situation for him. However, he was very much aware that he couldn't spend too much time here. They needed to leave on either tomorrow or the day after tomorrow at the latest. The Great Ming's army was not to be trifled with!

Watanabe Hiroshi gawped on a chicken leg as he frowned in thought. It had already been a day since he sent some men to the docks. Why hadn't they come back yet? Did General Yamaguchi encounter some difficulties over there?

When Zhu Junyang came over the wall and looked into the Yu Family's courtyard, he saw that all of the vegetable fields had been stomped over and defiled. He remembered that these fields were all lovingly

taken care of by Xiaocao and her family. He was so incensed by the destruction that he barely managed to restrain his urge to jump in and slaughter all of the pirates in there!

Head Steward Liu noticed that his master's restrained urges and quickly stated, "Master, we haven't seen a single villager in Dongshan Village and we also didn't find any places where they were holding prisoners. They must have been able to flee in time! Master, let's not do anything here and find the people first!"

"Did you already go and look at the mountain villa up the mountain? How's the situation there?" Zhu Junyang took a deep breath. The fury within his phoenix eyes was enough to burn a man to ashes. He glared fiercely at Lord Watanabe, who was currently sitting in Xiaocao's personal rocking chair and leisurely gnawing on a chicken leg. He snarled inside, 'That miserly little lass never let me sit in her rocking chair in the past. You, you stinking dwarf, actually dare to sit in Xiaocao's chair. Once I guarantee my lady mother's and Xiaocao's safety, I'm going to rip you into pieces!'

"Master, the mountain villa has been locked up securely and the people inside must have retreated to safer grounds. Perhaps the Wokou pirates weren't able to find the villa because it's halfway up the mountain and hidden among the trees!" When Head Steward Liu saw the condition of the mountain residence, he had let out a sigh of relief. The princess consort must be safe somewhere!

Zhu Junyang nodded in reply and then lowered his head to think for a bit. He mumbled to himself, "Looks like my lady mother must have fled along with Xiaocao and the others to a safe refuge. But where would a hundred or so people from Dongshan Village go?" As he spoke, he looked towards the lofty and grandiose West Mountain in the distance. He scowled slightly.

"Head Steward Liu, wait at the mouth of the village for Xiaowu and Chunzi. Tell them to guard the mountain villa. If any little nasty pirates come around, kill them instantly!" Zhu Junyang jumped down from the tall walls of the Yu Family's residence and dashed towards the direction of the West Mountain.

Head Steward Liu hurried after him and lowered his voice as he projected, "Master, where are you going ah?"

"I'm going to the West Mountain. Xiaocao is a sneaky little lass and must have brought my lady mother and the villagers to hide in the mountain range! I'm going to go find them!" Zhu Junyang felt even more desire to see Xiaocao. He knew, with that weird and clever little lass around, his lady mother would be perfectly safe!

Head Steward Liu stated somewhat dispiritedly, “Master, the mountain range is vast, do you know where Miss Yu took everyone? You're not very familiar with the terrain there. What if you encounter some vicious beasts...”

He didn't say anything else because his master had already ran into the mountain forest and had already disappeared into the thick vegetation. Head Steward Liu thought of the task that his master had given him and angrily went back to the entrance of the village. He leapt onto the old elm tree that was there, which must have been at least a few hundred years old, to wait for the two imperial bodyguards to arrive.

With what he knew about Xiaocao, Zhu Junyang could already guess where the little lass had most likely taken all of the people. Zhu Junyang had gone a few times to Xiaocao's secret valley. The ravine not only had a bunch of beautiful and rare flora, but it also had a lot of wild herbs and fruit trees. The creek there also had lots of fish swimming in the waters. The most important part was that the secret valley was hard to find yet had no savage beasts. There were also enough caves in that area that could hold at least a few hundred people. This was naturally the best place for the people to hide in!

Zhu Junyang hurried in the direction that he remembered. He rejoiced inwardly that, in the past, he had used the excuse of guarding Xiaocao against any beasts and tagged along a few times. Thus, he had a decent idea of where to go.

At this time, he felt tired, thirsty and hungry, but he could only continue to worry about his lady mother and Xiaocao. With those thoughts on the forefront of his mind, he leapt through the thick vegetation that was about as tall as a man. In that short half an hour, he felt like time was creeping by slowly, as if it was slower than two days or even two years.

“Who's there?!” Not far from the inner forest shrouded by mist, a familiar figure jumped down from a tree. If he hadn't already recognized the person's voice, Zhu Junyang already would have attacked Commander Zheng and killed the other man, leaving a corpse on the forest ground.

Fields of Gold Chapter 399 - Drawn into an Embrace

“Third Young Master, how are you here?” Commander Zheng almost didn't recognize the wan and sallow figure in front of him and exclaimed in surprise.

After Zhu Junyang identified the person in front of him, he grabbed onto the commander's shoulder and hurriedly said, “Zheng Yun, my lady mother...and Yu Xiaocao, are they okay? Have they been injured?”

Commander Zheng grimaced from the tight grip of the prince and stated, "They're all okay, all okay! This subordinate will take you to see the princess consort now."

Zhu Junyang loosened his hold on the other man's shoulder and the tight feeling in his heart finally relaxed. Commander Zheng led the way in front. After receiving Xiaocao's instructions, the mountain villa's guards were all patrolling within the misty and foggy forest.

Commander Zheng took a brief glance at the royal prince and calculated the time. Yesterday, at around noon, the Wokou pirates had arrived. The capital was around four hundred kilometers away, and, at top speed, it must have been late at night when the news finally arrived. Third Young Master must have ran straight to Dongshan Village as soon as he got the news ah!

It only took him slightly more than a day of travel to get to Dongshan Village. The prince absolutely must have ridden his horses at top speed in order to finish the four hundred kilometer journey so quickly. Just how many horses were dead of exhaustion from his trip? What about Third Young Master's Black Cloud? It couldn't have been left on the side of the road right? Although Third Young Master usually looked very cold and reserved, he had always been very filial to his lady mother. No wonder the princess consort treated him more lovingly than the heir to the estate and Second Young Master. Her efforts had not been wasted on him!

However, how could the commander of the bodyguards know that the royal prince, who had been praised to be very extremely filial, was more worried about Yu Xiaocao at this moment? Although Zhu Junyang was also concerned about his lady mother, there were still over twenty or so skilled bodyguards to protect her. In addition, the mountain residence also had a dozen or so servants to take care of her. It was likely that she was perfectly safe through all of this.

As for the light of his heart, Yu Xiaocao, other than her parents, the rest of her family was either the elderly or the young. If they encountered the Wokou pirates, they had no way to resist ah! Throughout his whole breakneck journey, images of a tiny scared face and bloodied dress kept flashing through his mind...the demon that had been hibernating for a long time in his heart finally started stirring up again. He did his best to squish down the violent tendencies inside him as he was afraid that if he lost control of himself, then he would lose precious time to get to the village and Xiaocao would...

Perhaps he didn't even notice it himself, but that clever and adorable little lass now had a firm foothold in his heart. Her importance had even eclipsed the mother whom he respected and adored.

They circled around the Dongshan villagers. Before long, Commander Zheng very quickly brought Royal Prince Yang to the cave that had been designated to them alone. As soon as he stepped into the cave, Zhu Junyang immediately spotted a slight figure in front of a simple stove in the corner. The person's back was turned towards him. In that second, all of the irritability had left his body. Seeing that familiar figure reassured his heart and it was as if some hole inside him had been crammed full.

“Third Young Master?” Commander Zheng turned his head and saw that the prince had stopped moving forward. The youth was staring fixedly at a corner, so the bodyguard couldn't help but call at him. It was as if he had just woken up from a dream. Zhu Junyang went forward with large steps towards the figure that had been the object of his worries for so long.

When the people outside the cave, who were all busy doing their tasks, saw Zhu Junyang, they all cried out in delighted surprise, “Third Young Master!” and “Your Royal Highness!”.

The young royal prince? Wasn't he in the capital? A few days ago, she had gotten a letter from him that said that he probably still had half a month more before he finally finished his tasks. How could he suddenly appear at these caves? Yu Xiaocao was very confused as she turned around. Before she could clearly see what was going on, she had been pulled into a warm and gentle embrace.

Yu Xiaocao stiffened for a moment. In both of her lives, she had never been this intimately held by a man before. The amount of heat on her face was almost enough to fry an egg. This hug was filled with the scent of a man, which had the slight aroma of sweat mixed in with the smell of ambergris. It didn't repel her at all. However...her face seemed to be plastered against his rock-hard abdomen, if it went down a bit...Yu Xiaocao felt horrified at the thought and forcefully pushed against the prince.

Madam Liu, who had been helping on the side, dropped the iron pot in her hands with a loud clang. She pointed at Zhu Junyang with a hand that shook with anger and worry. In front of all of these people, her youngest daughter had been embraced by Royal Prince Yang. Men and women needed to keep their distance from one another. What would happen to her youngest daughter's reputation now? If Royal Prince Yang was being sincere towards her Xiaocao, that was one thing! However, if the royal prince was only chasing after something novel...what would her poor Cao'er do in the future?

“As long as you're okay, that's what matters. I've been so worried!” Zhu Junyang felt his face flush when he saw his future mother-in-law staring at him blatantly. It definitely wasn't proper of him to hug a girl in front of her mother. However, he had been unable to control himself when his feelings overwhelmed him.

Yu Xiaocao noticed that her mother had acted as if Sun Wukong had paralyzed her with an art with her eyes bugged open. She glared fiercely at the troublemaker and then grumpily said, "This older sister is doing just fine!"

"Calling yourself 'older sister' now eh? You're younger than me by seven to eight years! Instead, you really should be addressing me as Older Brother Junyang!" Zhu Junyang saw that her face had a healthy glow and her clothes were neat and tidy, so he was finally able to relax. He couldn't control his mouth and let out a sarcastic remark.

"In your dreams!!" Addressing him as 'Older Brother Junyang' would be too sickeningly corny. Yu Xiaocao roasted him in her mind, 'This older sister has lived two lives already and, with my combined age, I am old enough to be your aunt. You're out of luck if you want to take advantage of me!'

A hint of a smile curled onto the edge of Zhu Junyang's lips. He was about to say something when he frowned and sniffed at the air, "What's this smell? Smells like some type of meat is burning..."

"My pheasant stewed with mushrooms! Mother, the food is burning! Quickly give the spatula to me!" Yu Xiaocao also smelled the scent of something burning and hurriedly took the spatula from Madam Liu's hands before sprinting towards the pot with the food cooking in it to flip the food. Luckily, only a few pieces of pheasant meat at the bottom of the pot had been burnt. The rest of the food was still edible.

Zhu Junyang said a greeting as Xiaocao ran to rescue her 'pheasant stewed with mushrooms' and was then brought to the inner cave that Princess Consort Jing resided in by Meixiang. When Princess Consort Jing saw her son, she had a smile on her face while she shook her head ruefully. She lightly sighed, "No wonder all of the matrons in the village say that once a son is married he'll forget his mother. Xiaocao isn't even your wife yet but she's still more important to you than me, your mother."

"Lady Mother, just what are you saying? I only greeted her first because I saw her first. It was only a few sentences..." Zhu Junyang was obviously a bit embarrassed and had to say a few words to defend himself.

"Oh? Are you sure it was only a few sentences in greeting? How come I heard from other people that as soon as you entered you went up to hug her, ah? And you even did that in front of her mother! If I was Xiaocao's mother, I would have long thrown the spatula in my hands towards your head!" Princess Consort Jing suppressed the smile on her lips as she made fun of her son.

Zhu Junyang replied somewhat sheepishly, “Lady Mother, are you sure I'm your biological son ah? How could my own mother say such weird things to me ah?”

The mother and son were currently having their conversation in the inner cave. While that was happening, Madam Liu finally couldn't restrain herself from saying something in the outer cave. She softly said, “Cao'er, in the future, with the royal prince...try to keep some distance. You're still young right now but I need to tell you that when men and women interact together, the one that always loses out is the woman! Before marriage, you must not do any intimate actions...”

Yu Xiaocao thought this was kind of funny. However, when she saw the worried look on her mother's face, she hurriedly nodded her head and said, “Mother, don't worry so much! I know what's proper and what's not. The young royal prince isn't that sort of man, earlier...it was probably because he was too concerned about us, so he forgot his manners.”

“You've always been dependable since you were young, so I was only giving you a reminder. Please don't believe the flowery speech and promises of a man. As a woman, only when you respect yourself and love yourself will a man treat you with respect.”

Madam Liu thought that her daughter was still too young for her to say things too explicitly. In the future, she would still have time to slowly teach her. She took out the pheasant stewed with mushrooms from the pot and divided the food into two plates. She gave the smaller plate to one of the maids from the mountain villa to have her serve it to the princess consort. The environment within the cave complex was on the cruder side, and Xiaocao had a good hand at cooking, so the princess consort's meals were all made by her.

Zhu Junyang smelled the delicious scent coming towards the cave and saw Lanxiang coming in with the plate of pheasant stewed with mushrooms. He grinned at Xiaocao and scampered over as he said, “Oh! Looks like the food here is quite good! Looks like you've all been living the good life here. I was all worried for nothing!”

Yu Xiaocao inspected him from head to toe and frowned at the sight of his sloppy attire, “Did you come straight from a refugee camp ah? Look at yourself, quickly go wash up in the small creek now...”

“Cao'er, how could you say such a thing to the royal prince? Quickly apologize to him now!” Madam Liu noticed that her youngest daughter hadn't been the least bit polite when addressing the prince and was afraid the prince would get angry. Thus, she hurriedly scolded her daughter.

Zhu Junyang hastily pasted on a warm and gentle smile and spoke to his future mother-in-law, "It's not a problem, Auntie! In the future, just consider me to be one of your family's nephews, no need to stand on such courtesy! Xiaocao speaking like this to me means she doesn't see me as an outsider. Makes me very happy ah!"

"Do you see now ah? He's the one asking for this..." Yu Xiaocao revealed a satisfied expression as if she had done something great.

Zhu Junyang gave her a look that said 'just watch how I get back at you for this' and then followed Commander Zheng outside. They exited from the side and jumped down a few meters from a cliff. The ravine experienced all four seasons and right now they were at the end of spring. The water in the little creek wasn't considered too cold, so Zhu Junyang was able to wash off all of the dust and dirt from his body. After changing into a clean set of clothing, he felt as if all of the exhaustion had been washed away from him.

When they were eating, Zhu Junyang actually wanted to sit at the same table as Yu Xiaocao. However, he decided to sit with his mother to take care of her and ended up reluctantly going into the inner cave. Princess Consort Jing quipped, "Your eyes are almost glued onto that lass's body and can't come back! Since you feel so reluctant, then go outside and eat with her. If I get to eat alone, I'll be able to eat more!"

"Lady Mother, how could you possibly finish all of the food on this table? It's still better for me to help you finish it all!" Zhu Junyang picked up a pheasant leg and placed it into Princess Consort Jing's bowl on top of the rice before he continued, "Before I left, my lord father repeatedly reminded me that I need to take good care of you. You need to eat more. If you get thinner, my father will peel the skin off of me!"

"You stinky brat, you only know how to make fun of me. Be careful or else your lord father will spank you." A flush arose on Princess Consort Jing's face. She was already in her forties yet was still able to reveal bashful expressions like a young woman. Under the light of the luminous pearl, the smile on her face seemed to have a bit of elegance and splendor mixed together. It was no wonder she was able to have Imperial Prince Jing favor her alone for all these years.

"Lady Mother, please spare me ah! I don't dare to make fun of you..." Zhu Junyang took on the task of being Old Laizi [1] and did his best to tease his mother into a better mood. With her son by her side, Princess Consort Jing was quite happy and was able to eat a few more bites of her meal compared to before. The lightly stir-fried dishes in front of her tasted exceptionally good today...

Fields of Gold Chapter 400 - Lacking Food

The crisp sounds of birds chirping broke the silence in the mountain ravine. The first ray of warm sunlight peeked into the mouth of the cave. Zhu Junyang, who had been sleeping on the ground with the bodyguards outside of the cave, stood up and loosened his stiff and somewhat sore limbs. From time to time, he unconsciously looked towards a certain cave inside.

All of the caves were currently silent without any movement. Other than the sounds of the bodyguards walking around, the rest of the cave system was completely quiet. Before long, the maids and senior servants from the mountain villa had gotten up, washed up simply, and started to cook breakfast for the bodyguards and other servants.

Zhu Junyang stretched his neck a bit. How come there was no sound of movement in the Yu Family's cave? When would that lazy lass, Yu Xiaocao, finally stop sleeping in? He had only arrived at this place last evening. After eating dinner with his mother and catching up, Yu Xiaocao had already gone inside her family's cave to start dreaming by the time he came out. The cave housed his future father and mother-in-law, so he couldn't just walk in to bug their daughter under their noses. He could only resist the temptation within his heart and stroll around the outer cave system for a long time before he went to sleep.

Finally, there were some sounds of movement in the middle cave. The first person to come out was a graceful young maiden who was wearing a simple set of cotton clothing. Her hair had been combed into two hair buns. Happiness crawled onto Zhu Junyang's face and he stepped forward. However, once he got a closer look at the girl's face, he revealed a disappointed expression and said, "Ah, good morning, Xiaolian!"

Yu Xiaolian had noticed the disappointed look on the prince's face and covered her mouth to surreptitiously smile. Then she spoke to the royal prince, who was craning his neck so far that he almost entered the cave, "Younger Sister will probably be sleeping for another hour before she gets up. Yesterday night she told me to tell you that if you woke up early, you could go to the small creek and catch some small white fish to bring back. That way, she could make some fish soup today. This is the ceramic pot that's already been baited, so you can use it..."

Zhu Junyang looked a bit helpless, "That lass always knows how to order me around. How can I be forced to do such crude labor?" Despite his complaints, he still took the ceramic pot that was offered to him. The little lass wasn't going to get up for another hour. It was better to take a walk in the ravine a bit instead of staying here doing nothing. Getting some fresh air in the morning would be nice.

He jumped into the valley and traveled to the bank of the creek. After taking off his shoes and stepping into the water, he looked at the white fish swimming in the water and idly thought, 'Why would I need to use bait to catch these fish? With my skills, how would I not be able to catch these fish easily?'

However, when he started to try without the bait, he immediately discovered that he had overestimated himself. The small white fish were nimble and were even more slippery than loaches. They darted back and forth between the rocks. Sometimes they would brush by his fingertips while other times they would swim around his feet as if they were teasing him.

After trying for quite a bit of time, his body was covered with sweat and he didn't end up catching many. Now humbled, he could only place the ceramic pot inside the creek and wait. Suddenly, a weird phenomenon occurred. Those little white fish seemed to have been supernaturally drawn towards the ceramic pot and even lined up to go in. It was as if they were all squeezing in to do a pilgrimage to see a saint.

He unconsciously frowned. Every time he was near Yu Xiaocao, he always felt like the little lass had some sort of secret. This secret allowed her to go beyond the natural and do things that were considered impossible in this world. He was worried that, in the future, her mysterious power would cause trouble for her.

However, with him around to protect her, other than the emperor or his imperial grandfather, no one else would be able to harm the little lass before going through him first. He would be her shield and help her protect her secret and keep her safe. With him around, there was no one who could harm his little lass. After thinking it through, Zhu Junyang gradually stopped frowning as his mood improved. His little lass only needed to do whatever she wanted to do. Seeing her act naturally all the time was what he liked about her.

By the time he brought back the ceramic pot full of fish and entered the entrance of the cave, Yu Xiaocao had already started cooking on the crude stovetop. She glanced at Zhu Junyang, who had scuttled by, and didn't even raise her head as she said, "Prepare the small white fish right now. I'll need to use them in a moment."

"Me?" Zhu Junyang pointed incredulously at his nose and his voice had an undertone of obvious surprise. "I know how to use swords, staves and how to kill enemies...I just don't know how to clean fish to eat..."

“If you don't know how, you can always learn! Quickly go! I need to use them soon!” Yu Xiaocao didn't even raise her eyes as if ordering around a royal prince was something that came naturally to her.

The servants from the prince's residence had already gotten used to this. They continued to do their tasks and not a single one came forward to help their master get out of this predicament. Princess Consort Jing stood at the entrance of her own cave and watched with obvious interest as her youngest son held the ceramic pot in his hands with a look of bewilderment on his face. She covered her mouth to hide the smirk on her face.

In the end, Madam Liu graciously took over. She rolled her eyes at her daughter and then took the ceramic pot from Royal Prince Yang's hands. She then pointed at his wet pant legs and said, “Your Highness, go change into some dry clothes. I'll take over the task of cleaning and preparing these fish for you.”

Zhu Junyang smiled at her gratefully. The smile seemed to be even more brilliant than the rays of the rising sun and it blinded Madam Liu for a second. She could only think, 'The royal prince is too handsome. In fact, he's even more pretty than Xiaocao by a few fractions. Is this type of person really reliable?'

In actuality, if Madam Liu had the choice, she absolutely would not choose a husband like Royal Prince Yang for her daughter. They were a farmer's family so what they were looking for was someone who was steady and reliable for their daughter. The best would be to find someone who was around the same social level as them. That way, if their daughter got bullied in the future, they, as her parents, would be able to support her and negotiate. The royal prince was exceptionally handsome and also had an illustrious background. In the future, if he had a change of heart, all they could do for their daughter was to cry and lament with her.

“Oh...” Madam Liu let out a heavy sigh and a worried frown crossed her face.

Zhu Junyang thought that his future mother-in-law disdained him for not being able to clean and prepare fish, so he hurriedly said, “Auntie, in the future just call me Junyang ah. Always addressing me as 'Your Highness' is a bit too formal. If you have other things to do...you can teach me how to prepare the fish. I learn things very quickly.”

Madam Liu shook her head and the frown didn't dissipate from her face, “Your High...your hands aren't the type of hands used to prepare fish, right? Quickly go change into a dry set of clothing ah. The temperature in these caves are colder in the morning and night, so you shouldn't get chilled.”

When Zhu Junyang saw that his future mother-in-law was concerned about him and that he didn't need to prepare the fish, he obediently followed her suggestion and went back to his own cave dwelling to change clothes. Princess Consort Jing gleefully commented, "Oh ho! Whose son is so obedient now? Usually no one ever listens to my words. Sigh...what's the point in raising sons ah? It only benefits other people in the long run!"

"Lady Mother!" In the past two years, her youngest son didn't have any of his violent spells anymore and it seemed like the demon in his heart had been suppressed. Because of that, Princess Consort Jing was able to set down one of her big worries and be more cheerful. Every day she seemed to like to pick on her youngest son, and Zhu Junyang had no choice but to go along with it.

Princess Consort Jing pretended to use the handkerchief in her hands to dab at the non-existent tears in her eyes as she curled her lip, "Okay ah! You haven't even married your wife yet you already think that I, your mother, is being too irksome. Sigh...life is too cruel ah. I spent twenty years raising my sons and I've gotten nothing in return ah!"

Zhu Junyang helplessly went around his mother and entered the cave to change his clothes. He was too busy to pay any attention to her fake laments and woes. He couldn't give her attention at this point. Otherwise, she would latch on and not let go. The only strategy he could do was to ignore her and let her talk it out.

Breakfast was on the simpler side. They each had some thick white rice congee, griddled flatbread and a bowl of fragrant fish soup. The smell of food lingered in the caves whenever they ate and took a long time to dissipate. Today, the Yu Family, Liu Family, and Princess Consort Jing and her son all sat together in a corner outside their caves to partake in the meal. They found a few rocks that were mostly flat to act as their table. Other than Princess Consort Jing, who was sitting on a cushion, everyone else sat on the ground as they ate the food with gusto.

"Father, we don't have much grain leftover from what we brought. If we scrimp and save, we should be able to last until tomorrow morning." Yu Xiaocao drank the fish soup as she frowned with a worried look on her face.

Yu Hai sighed and said, "I don't know how long these Wokou pirates will stay until they leave...how about, tomorrow I'll go walk around the mountain a bit and see if I can hunt down a larger animal or something..."

Zhu Junyang scowled and said, "How about I take Zheng Yun and the others to go into Dongshan Village and snatch some grain back. While we are there, we can also kill a few pirates and allow me to vent my temper on them!"

When he found out that the pirates were attacking, he sped all the way over to Dongshan Village on horseback. The rage in his heart hadn't gone away. If he wasn't worried about his lady mother's and Xiaocao's safety, he would have already charged into Dongshan Village and started slaughtering the pirates by the dozens to relieve his fury.

Princess Consort Jing remarked out of concern, "There are quite a number of Wokou pirates, at least a hundred to two hundred! We don't have many people on our side, so we can't act rashly. Meixiang, how much grain do we have leftover now? Let's go with Yu Hai's suggestion and hunt some game down to add to our food stores to hopefully stretch it out for a few more days. When the residence's private army comes, then we can beat those pirates into a pulp."

When Imperial Prince Jing was younger, he had traveled throughout the country with the emperor emeritus to the battlefields, so he was also considered a martial prince. Thus, all of his sons had also learned martial arts since they were young and they were quite interested in it. Naturally, this all influenced Princess Consort Jing so she would also occasionally reveal a more warlike side of her.

Although Zhu Junyang really wanted to slaughter the Wokou pirates willy nilly but he couldn't bear to disobey his lady mother and cause her to be worried. He stamped down on the outrage inside his heart. After finishing breakfast, Zhu Junyang and a few other bodyguards left the cave system and went deeper in the West Mountain with Yu Hai as their guide.

Some of the villagers, when fleeing for their lives, had lost all of their luggage, so these two days passed like a year for them. Madam Zhang and Yu Dashan were two of those people. At first, they had brought too much stuff along with them and had almost fallen into the hands of the pirates, so they had thrown their belongings away to run. Other than the money that Madam Zhang hid on her body, the two of them had nothing else other than the clothes on their backs. During the crazy run, they had also lost Madam Li somewhere in the chaos. Even now she had not met up with the other villagers.

Originally, some villagers thought that these two looked quite pitiful and would give out some food for them to eat. However, after two days had passed, none of the villagers had much food left as all of them had packed lightly. They couldn't even feed their own family members anymore so how could they give out food to feed these two?

Luckily, the bodyguards from the prince's residence had told them that there were no wild beasts in the valley and that some wild vegetables and fruits could be found. As long as they worked hard, they should be able to fill their bellies. When the news traveled throughout the villagers, it brought hope to all of them. Thus, the tranquil and peaceful environment in the ravine was quickly broken by the villagers. All of the flowers in the valley had been trampled flat by the hungry villagers who didn't know any better as they scrounged for food.

The group that had gone out to hunt today was quite lucky. They had come across a family of four wild boars. The adult wild boars had thick skins and most ordinary arrows couldn't penetrate their hides. However, the bodyguards from the residence were all skilled. By surrounding the animals with their superior numbers, they very quickly took down the family of wild pigs. The two adult boars weighed around four hundred to five hundred catties in total. The two juvenile ones were about half grown, so they also provided about a hundred catties of meat too.