

Gold Chapter 431

Fields of Gold Chapter 431 - Seen Through

'Why didn't you say so earlier?!' Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes in her heart and once again commanded the eunuch, who was standing far away, to bring over a pot of clear water. She took off the multi-colored stone from her wrist and let it soak in the water for a short period of time before she finally placed the Yixing clay teapot [1] on the small clay stove.

"Is that stone of yours clean or not? Will I get a stomach ache from drinking water from it?" Zhu Junfan was making a fuss over nothing. He watched Xiaocao's movements and naturally assumed that putting the multi-colored stone in the water was necessary to release spiritual energy in it.

Before Xiaocao could open her mouth to retort, a golden light flew out of the multi-colored stone. It shaped itself into a small golden kitten about the size of a person's palm and stood on the table. The little divine stone tended to prefer to take this kitten shape versus the fat and chubby baby shape.

"Stupid humans! This divine stone's bathing water has always had good effects on your bodies. How could you possibly end up with diarrhea? If you don't want to drink it, there are plenty of people who would rather drink it instead and will line up to do so!" The golden kitten lazily stretched forward and its mouth opened and closed. Only Xiaocao and Zhu Junfan could hear it speaking.

Zhu Junfan looked at the Yixing clay teapot that was warming up on the clay stove and had an expression on his face that was full of disgust, as if he had just stepped into dog poo, "What? You say that is your bathwater? Isn't that a bit too disgusting ah? How long has it been since you last bathed?"

"Do you think I, this divine stone, am like you dirty humans? That unsanitary ah? This divine stone bathes every day and sometimes I bathe several times in one day!" The little divine stone naturally liked water and often ran to nearby sources of water or wells to soak in. It currently had a good control over its spiritual energy and wouldn't leak any out inadvertently. Without its master's command, it wouldn't let any energy out.

However, Zhu Junfan understood this explanation in a different manner. In his mind, Xiaocao had the little divine stone create mystic-stone water every day in order to keep the crops growing well. This tiny little rock was probably working very hard in order to make enough mystic-stone water. It looked like the little divine stone wasn't omnipotent. Since the multi-colored stone's abilities were nowhere near what he thought it was, he naturally lost the desire to keep this treasure all to himself.

As he was lost in his thoughts, the water in the teapot was finally heated to a boil. After waiting for the water to cool down, the process of brewing tea started. Before the tea could be tasted, a delicate and alluring fragrance spread into the air. The tea leaves used were the highest quality oolong, Da Hong Pao. It was said that the leaves for this tea were picked off an ancient tea plant that was over a thousand years old and grew on a high cliff. After undergoing a complicated process to stir fry and oxidize these tea leaves, they only got around two catties of finished tea leaves per year.

Da Hong Pao that had been brewed a second time seemed to have a more mellow and rich flavor, and its aroma became a bit more elegant. Zhu Junfan had long forgotten the fact that the water being used for this tea was technically the bathing water of the little divine stone. He gently sniffed at the fragrance of the tea and then delicately tasted a sip. It had a pure flavor that seemed to tell the person to keep drinking without stopping.

“Mmm! This is the right taste!” After he finished this cup of tea, Zhu Junfan personally poured himself a second cup. Tea that was brewed from the third wash of leaves seemed to have an even more full and round flavor than the second.

The emperor seemed to be engrossed in drinking tea and had apparently forgotten that Xiaocao was still on the side, waiting for his command. Xiaocao finally opened her mouth after she saw that he finished his third cup of tea, “Your Imperial Majesty, your purpose in summoning this official wasn't for the sole sake of brewing this pot of tea, right?”

“Of course it's not!” He drank another cup before he finally reluctantly set down the porcelain cup and said, “I've already read the reports that Junyang sent up! Were you the one who asked him to send them up?”

“Hee hee, I only saw that the Imperial Plantations has some hills nearby that are completely vacant. I thought that it was a waste of resources and wanted to do something good! That being said, if the fruits grown on these mountains are good, would I not give you a portion?” Yu Xiaocao cajoled with a sickly flattering smile on her face.

Zhu Junfan didn't seem to need to think much about this as he simply nodded his head, “This world doesn't have enough variety of fruits and they don't taste very good either. The apples sent from Yantai prefecture are not as large nor as delicious as the Fuji apples from my previous life. The pears here have coarse meat and not enough juice. They're also not sweet enough. The grapes here are more sour than sweet...and the watermelons. Although they are sweet, there is something wrong with the melon flesh. Only the ones that you grow are similar to the ones in our previous lives. They are large, the flesh is red, and the flavor is juicy and sweet! This means that you are quite good at cultivating and planting fruits!

Alright, all of the hills near the Imperial Plantation are yours to use to plant fruit trees. However, all of the fruit for the palace must be provided for free by you in the future!”

“For the fruit for the palace, does that exclude the regular eunuchs and palace maidservants ah?” Yu Xiaocao frowned and started to haggle over the conditions.

Zhu Junfan pointed a finger at her and said in amusement and exasperation, “If all of the hills near the Imperial Plantation are planted with fruit trees, you'd have more than enough fruit to supply the whole capital let alone the palace alone. Just how stingy are you? You're not even willing to lose even this little bit?”

“If you add up all of the eunuchs and palace maids together, there must be at least a few hundred if not a thousand. If I had to provide fruit for every single person in the palace, just how much would it be ah? I'm only doing a small business and can't handle giving out that much for free!” Yu Xiaocao's frugalness was being pushed to the extreme.

“Alright then! Then you'll only provide enough fruit to supply the masters and the higher ranked eunuchs and maids then. Altogether, that's not more than thirty to forty people. Is that alright then? You won't be losing out, right?” Zhu Junfan agreed irritably.

He suddenly thought of something else and brought the topic up, “As for using a greenhouse to grow vegetables, if you use glass to construct these facilities, then it would cost too much to expand it, so you can't do it on a large scale. A few years ago, when I was figuring out how to manufacture rubber tires, I also came up with a method to make some thick plastic membrane. However, the strength, flexibility, and transparency of this plastic is only so-so. At that time, it wasn't considered an urgent item and making it also pollutes the surroundings, so I didn't pursue it further. If you plan on growing vegetables on a large scale in greenhouses, I can send down an imperial decree to have some people in the Ministry of Works to work overtime and help you come up with more. Does that work?”

Yu Xiaocao was pleased beyond expectation. She nodded her head as if she was pounding garlic with it and breathlessly said, “If there's plastic membrane available, that would be even better! We're just at the start of summer, so it's not something that needs to be done in a hurry. How about...you first have the people at the Ministry of Works experiment a bit and see if they can increase the transparency a bit on the plastic membrane?”

“Done! Doesn't that take only a word from me? Don't look down upon these ancient people. Sometimes I can get a lot of results by only giving them an idea here or there. It appears that there are geniuses in every era!”

Zhu Junfan had often sighed over this in admiration. Since he had an engineering background from his past life, he regarded these inventors and workers who had talent in these areas with importance. Thus, the Ministry of Works had also gradually enlarged throughout his reign and recruited people of talent.

“Hee hee! If we are able to build large greenhouses out of this, then I will take care of all of the vegetables for the palace for free!” Yu Xiaocao patted her chest and happily gave this promise.

Zhu Junfan glared at her and rebuked, “You're only going to provide the palace with vegetables for free? That's giving you too many advantages! I'm giving you two hundred mu at the Imperial Plantations so you can grow vegetables in greenhouses. We should be splitting the income 40-60. I get 40 percent while you get 60 percent!”

Yu Xiaocao was just about to protest when he swiftly interrupted her, “Don't cry at me yet. I'm going to give you a brief calculation! The farmlands, plastic membrane, and workers are all given to you for free by the court. You're only providing the expertise, so how can it be that you're the only one who gets all of the profits ah?”

Yu Xiaocao calmed herself down to think a bit. He was right. Other than the knowledge of growing vegetables in greenhouses and the mystic-stone water, there wasn't much else she could provide to this endeavor. However, the fact that she had to give away forty percent of the income made her feel a bit unhappy. She grumbled sourly, “The farmlands were already under your ownership and the workers were already there. You're only providing the plastic membranes yet you want to get forty percent of the income. Isn't that a bit too much ah?”

“Without the plastic membrane technology, you would have to use greenhouses constructed entirely out of glass. That would increase the amount of capital you have to put in, so how many vegetables can you grow? Thus, what kind of income would you have then? Have you calculated all of this out? Right now I'm allotting two hundred mu from the plantations to you. This is still the first year. If this is successful, then we can expand even larger. Just think, in one year, how much can you make by using the plastic film over glass? Just what makes more sense money-wise?”

That being said, although this forty percent of the income was going into his private purse, he had spent a lot of money ever since he ascended the throne. The money he personally spent was to help the country recover and the economy to stabilize. For the first two years, his income from taxes and such

was not enough to cover all of the country's expenditures. Only after two years of hard work of expanding business opportunities did the pressure gradually abate. The giant mountain of money he had made when he had gone out on his sea journey had gradually shrunk in order to subsidize the imperial treasury. If he didn't rebuild his coffers, in the future, his descendants would only have an empty shell to inherit!

Yu Xiaocao had already calculated everything out in her mind. If she could only use glass to construct these greenhouses, she couldn't even harvest a hundred thousand catties of vegetables in one year. Even at a good price, that was only a few thousand taels in income. Now, if she switched to using plastic film to construct these giant greenhouses, then she absolutely could harvest around a few hundred thousand catties of vegetables from these two hundred mu in one year. It would be stupid of her to not take this opportunity to make more money ah! Consequently, Yu Xiaocao readily agreed to the emperor's request.

Before she left, Zhu Junfan also had her go to the Imperial Kitchens and have her use the multi-colored stone to alter the well water in the kitchens. The last time the little lass went to the kitchens, the food had tasted much better for a little bit after she left. Originally, he thought that the imperial chefs had improved their skills under the little lass's instructions. However, after that period of time passed, the food that the imperial chefs made went back to their old flavor and were not as good as when the lass was there.

Now, he finally understood the reason for the difference. It wasn't because the imperial chefs had poor skills. Instead, it was all due to the fact that the water quality was different. Similar to that pot of tea earlier, the little lass must have secretly put the stone in the well water to alter it, which changed the water quality and ultimately changed the way the food tasted.

Since she was at the Imperial Kitchens anyway, Yu Xiaocao once again started to cook there. This time, she made two desserts that she was good at. One was honey cakes while the other was flaky egg tarts. Both were desserts that little children loved to eat. When she was in the imperial gardens, she had encountered the young imperial prince and promised him that, if she had the opportunity, she would make something especially for him. Now, she was about to stay good to her word!

While she was personally teaching the imperial chefs how to make these two types of pastries, the emperor's trusted little eunuch had secretly put the multi-colored stone into the well. When she was about to leave, he made sure to give it back to her. In actuality, even if she forgot to retrieve the multi-colored stone, it wouldn't be an issue. The little divine stone would automatically take its stone body back to her.

Yu Xiaocao only left the Imperial Palace after she finished eating lunch. The imperial chefs who worked in the kitchens naturally had to be pretty talented to work there. With that added onto the altered water, the food they made was naturally better than before. Yu Xiaocao happily ate a sumptuous and delicious meal in the palace before she left.

Even the masters of the palace were very satisfied with this meal and made sure to send down a lot of rewards afterwards. It was said that the little imperial prince and princess were extremely ecstatic over the deserts today. They especially liked the egg tarts and didn't seem to want to stop eating them. They even sent down an eunuch down to state that they wanted to eat this pastry tomorrow as well.

The young imperial prince even made a bet with the empress whether the pastries today were made by Yu Xiaocao herself. After they investigated, he joyfully took his imperial mother's forfeit and even implored his mother to call Yu Xiaocao into the Imperial Palace more often in the future. The reason was quite obvious...

Fields of Gold Chapter 432 - Planting Trees and Melons

The blistering heat of summer had arrived. All of the young maidens in the capital had switched to wearing light and airy cotton clothing. The Imperial Plantation was backed against the mountains and had a clear creek surrounding it. When the wind blew over it, it felt cool and refreshing.

Yu Xiaocao was currently wearing a short dark green riding habit with narrow sleeves. It was paired with a pair of thick, soft boots. She energetically directed the tenant farmers on the plantation to plant the fruit trees in the already dug up holes. Royal Prince Yang was quite efficient. In just two days time, he was able to deliver all of the fruit trees that she wanted.

There were ten peach trees, ten pear trees, ten citrus trees and ten apple trees. She also had fifteen apricot trees, plum trees and persimmon trees. There were a bit more grape vines, around twenty or so. This was the first year she was trying to cultivate these fruit trees and it also wasn't the right season to move and plant them. Thus, the prince didn't give her too many in fear that if they died, she would be very sad.

Most of these samplings had already flowered and borne fruit in the past. As long as they were planted well and taken care of, it was likely they would bear fruit in the following year. She didn't know where Royal Prince Yang had gone to get such good fruit trees but it was likely he exerted quite a bit of effort.

Each fruit tree had its roots with a bunch of soil attached and their root systems had been preserved very well. After the trees were all planted, Yu Xiaocao personally took over the task of watering these trees. Xichun and Wutong held the water buckets as they followed their young miss from behind. They watched as she went back and forth between the bucket to get dippers of water. She was bent forward

constantly to water the trees properly. Xichun eagerly stated, “Young Miss, you should rest for a bit. Let this servant try instead!”

Yu Xiaocao put the ladle into her hands and smiled, “Watering plants isn't something that requires a lot of skill. You only need to make sure that each tree gets two full dippers of water. I know you're worried about me. Relax, in the future, if the entire hillside is full of fruit trees, then I will make sure to assign people to take care of them. We won't have to do the hard labor then.”

Xichun cheerfully replied, “It's only watering a few plants, nothing too tiring! Young Miss, do you think we'll be able to eat some peaches and grapes at this time next year?” Yu Xiaocao used her hand to fan her face and smiled as she nodded, “Yes. If the trees are taken care of, they might even fruit early!”

“Then...will they be as delicious as the honey peaches you brought from Dongshan Village?” Xichun was a natural foodie. Last time, after finishing her tasks well, the master had rewarded her with a peach. Since eating that peach, she couldn't seem to forget about it.

Yu Xiaocao replied in a forthright manner, “Don't worry, these peaches will be even more delicious. If you don't believe me, next year at the start of spring, I'll have my family back at Dongshan Village ship some peach branches over. We can graft the branches on these small peach trees. I promise the fruits will be incredibly good!”

“Graft? Is that what you mentioned before, Young Miss? Using pumpkin vines to grow watermelons?” Xichun was very interested in this concept.

Wutong, however, found her question hilarious, “How can pumpkin vines possibly produce watermelons? Xichun, are you feverish right now? Be careful what you say unless you want to get made fun of by other people.”

Xichun was originally only a second-ranked maidservant. However, the young miss was starting to see her in a different light. Wutong gradually felt more and more unhappy about this. In front of her master, she managed to control herself. However, she was starting to reject the other maid in surreptitious ways and this was one of her methods.

Xichun had a generous and magnanimous personality. She smiled innocently and said, "Older Sister Wutong, don't just take my word for it! The young miss said that you can gra...graft watermelon sprouts onto pumpkin vines. The resulting melons from these two vines are large and sweet. Furthermore, they're more resistant to disease and pests harming them! We should do our best to learn about these farming methods that the young miss is in charge of. That way we'll be able to help her more in the future!"

This maid was always forthright and outspoken. She didn't have any other intentions in what she said as she only wanted to persuade Wutong to take more interest in the young miss's farming affairs instead of being narrowly preoccupied with managing that small inner courtyard. However, her good intentions, in Wutong's ears, became a sarcastic criticism of her own inability to take care of her master, as if she was not detail-oriented enough. Anger immediately blossomed in Wutong's heart and her expression darkened. She deliberately used coarser movements when watering the plants and 'accidentally' splashed Xichun's pants and shoes with some water.

All of this was observed by Yu Xiaocao. From her perspective, there would be conflicts wherever people were. It was pretty normal for maids to fight for favor and power. In some ways, it could be a good thing as it would spur them to compete with each other and therefore elevate all of their abilities. However, the people that she could not tolerate were those who relied on small tricks, gossiped behind people's backs, or gave their rivals the cold shoulder.

After choosing her four main maidservants at the onset, she discovered that Yingtao was efficient and responsible with a good handle on managing affairs. Thus, she gave the job of managing the pharmaceutical manufacturing to her and it was thriving. Yangliu had a steady temperament and was obsessed with cooking. She was also hardworking and her culinary skills improved by leaps and bounds. At the rate she was going, she was soon going to surpass her master's skills. Thus, Yu Xiaocao had no qualms in handing over the management of the braised food store that was opened in conjunction with the emperor emeritus in the capital to Yangliu.

Pipa was on the slower side and only had average abilities. She also wasn't very ambitious but her ability at taking care of Xiaocao's inner courtyard wasn't bad. Thus, other affairs outside of the residence weren't suitable for her. Wutong had illusions of grandeur and was on the more selfish side. She was also more prone to petty actions but she didn't have a lot of ability. As long as her maids abided by the rules and showed restraint, Xiaocao wouldn't treat them poorly. However, it was possible that as time went on, some of them might become more bold...

"The sun is quite fierce today. How come you're not wearing a hat out?" Zhu Junyang had been roaming around the hills and had caught two wild hares, one wild pheasant, and gathered some pheasant eggs. He noticed that her face had turned bright red from the sun and hurriedly took off the straw hat from his head and placed it on Xiaocao's head.

Yu Xiaocao shook her head in dislike as if she wanted to have the hat fall off her head. However, Zhu Junyang stopped her from doing so, "Keep it on. Otherwise, your skin might start peeling from the sun exposure and you won't be pretty! You should delegate this type of hard labor to the tenant farmers and servants. Why do you always need to do everything yourself?"

"You also said that this isn't the season to plant fruit trees. If I don't keep an eye on them and the fruit trees die, wouldn't that waste all of the effort you expended to get me these trees?" Xiaocao touched her somewhat hot face. When she got back, she needed to use some mystic-stone water to cool her skin down. What if, like Royal Prince Yang mentioned, her skin got burnt by the sun and started to peel? How could she go and see people then?

[It won't! As long as you put mystic-stone water on your face a few times, I guarantee that your skin tomorrow will look as smooth and flawless as a boiled egg. It'll be tender, glowing, and soft to the touch...] A tiny golden kitten appeared out of nowhere and scrambled towards a fruit tree. It batted at one of the branches with a tiny paw.

"It's so cute! Where did such a tiny kitten come from? It's so small; was it just weaned from its mother's milk?" Xichun stared at the adorable cat with stars in her eyes. She desperately hoped she could bring the creature back so she could take care of it.

Zhu Junyang bent down and picked up the kitten by the scruff of its neck. He examined the cat, which was hissing and growling at him, head on. Its angry demeanor was very similar to its master's! He happily placed the little kitten in his palm and let the creature gnaw on his thumb with its tiny milk teeth. He smiled at Xiaocao, "You also brought your cat along? You've been raising this little fellow for a few years now, so why is it still so tiny? Seems like it hasn't grown at all."

Yu Xiaocao took the little divine stone from Royal Prince Yang using both of her hands and gently stroked its soft and glossy fur. She casually remarked, "Who knows ah? I picked it up at around this size when I was in the mountains. Perhaps this species only gets this big ah?"

Xichun quickly finished watering the remaining few fruit trees and threw the ladle down to run over. She looked at the tiny adorable kitten in her master's hands and asked curiously, "Young Miss, is this cat yours? How come I don't see it usually?"

“This fellow is more wild than tame and often runs off to who knows where for a few days. Not only you, I haven't seen it since I came to the capital. I even thought that it had gotten lost and wasn't able to find its way. I would not have expected to encounter it at the Imperial Plantation!” Yu Xiaocao smoothly constructed a lie without even batting an eye.

“The Imperial Plantation is quite a distance away from the capital. Did it run all the way here by itself?” Xichun's eyes opened wide and looked very similar to the little golden kitten's large and cute eyes.

Yu Xiaocao shook her head and replied, “Who knows ah? Perhaps it was hiding in some corner of the carriage. Little Glutinous Dumpling is very smart and clever!”

Xichun extended her hands and asked her master, “Young Miss, you should let this servant hold the kitten instead. You might get tired!”

Yu Xiaocao gave the maid a sidelong glance. If you wanted to hold the little kitten, then just say so instead of making an excuse. How heavy could a tiny kitten about the size of a person's palm be? Despite the little divine stone's protests, she handed it to Xichun.

Xichun hurriedly held the little kitten close to her as it was struggling to get out. She continuously comforted the cat, “Little Glutinous Dumpling, don't be scared, be sweet...Young Miss, it seems like Little Glutinous Dumpling is a bit shy of strangers. Am I scaring it right now?”

“Not at all, the little fellow is extremely bold and brave. In fact, it even teases the wolves it encounters in the mountains!” Yu Xiaocao wasn't making things up this time. The little divine stone was a bit bored for a period of time and went off to bother Big Gray. Big Gray ended up chasing it everywhere.

“Wow! It's so amazing!” Xichun's eyes immediately became dazzled with stars again and she instantly became the little divine stone's biggest fan. The little divine stone could sense the maid's worship and it became unduly proud and arrogant. Thus, it allowed her to hold it for a bit.

Zhu Junyang glanced at the fruit trees, which still had their leaves slightly curled under the sun. He suddenly stated, “Little lass, are all of the people at the plantation usable? If there are any who are not good, make sure to tell me. I'm now in charge of everything at the Imperial Plantation. If there are any people who are not usable, we have the power to change them out!”

Yu Xiaocao carelessly waved a hand at him, clearly not interested in the topic, "With Steward Wang around, those people with ulterior motives will have to weigh the pros and cons before acting. It's not like I'm the only person here at the Imperial Plantation. Furthermore, don't I have the emperor himself as my backer? As long as the emperor treats me with importance, those people with grievances can only obediently follow my orders anyway. I have to go into the palace to report anyway so it's not as if they can do anything! As for those people who dislike me, they can only grumble underneath their breath and say a few sour words behind my back. It doesn't matter what they say as long as they obediently follow their orders, right?"

"Alright! As long as you don't think those guys are eyesores, then you can continue using them!" Zhu Junyang sincerely didn't want his little lass to be wronged in any way. He thought for a bit and decided to let those unruly people jump around a bit. He was confident he could find their weak points easily. When that came...heh heh, he wouldn't be lenient with them!

Yu Xiaocao's eyes flickered with a light and she changed the subject, "I heard that you bought the neighboring plantation, right? What plans do you have for it?"

"Oh? You have an idea for me? Just say it. What sort of crazy idea did you come up with now?" Zhu Junyang had a good grasp on all of her expressions. Whenever her eyes got this particular look, he knew that the little lass had come up with another idea.

"I want to take advantage of the warm weather to grow some watermelon seedlings. I plan on grafting them on some disease and pest-resistant gourd vines. By the time the Ministry of Works is done developing the plastic film, then we can make some giant greenhouse tents and grow watermelons and cantaloupes in there. If we can get some Hami melon seeds, that'd be even better!" Yu Xiaocao never let a money-making method slip through her hands.

Fields of Gold Chapter 433 - The Hidden Instigators

The farmstead next to the Imperial Plantation wasn't very large and only had about six hundred mu in land. It was previously owned by an idle member of the imperial clan. Somehow, Royal Prince Yang was able to convince this person to give it to him. The vast majority of the fields had already been planted with soybeans and sorghum. It was apparent that this idle member of the imperial clan didn't regard this farmstead with much importance. All of the people at this place, from the stewards to the tenant farmers, were all incredibly lazy. If they didn't prep the land now, then the timing for farming would be over this year!

In actuality, it was still the middle of June right. If she got them planted now, she could harvest a batch of watermelons by September with the help of the mystic-stone water. At that time, it would be the right time in the market to sell these watermelons.

Royal Prince Yang had already switched out all of the stewards at the farmstead and recruited a bunch of new tenant farmers to tend the fields. He had already sent down his orders that every single person at this place needed to listen to Official Yu's commands. Consequently, Yu Xiaocao had very little pressure when ordering these people around.

She first had the tenant farmers clear out a batch of land as she grafted watermelon seedlings to gourd vines. The well at this farmstead had already been altered by the little divine stone's energy. She not only used the mystic-stone water to irrigate the grafted watermelon vines but she also instructed the tenant farmers to water all of the crops on the land with this water. Recently, the capital had been on the dryer side and it hadn't rained for several days. Thus, her orders to irrigate all of the crops made sense to the farmers working there.

For the following few days, Yu Xiaocao frequently ran to the Imperial Plantation to check on things. Lady Fang often complained that the emperor had given the work of an adult man to a twelve year old young girl. However, only Yu Xiaocao knew that the reason she went there so often wasn't for the corn growing at the plantation. Instead, she was more concerned about the fruit trees on the mountains as well as the watermelon vines at Royal Prince Yang's farmstead.

After some precious rain fell, Yu Xiaocao once again arrived at the Imperial Plantation with the moist wind surrounding her. The people under Steward Wang, who were in charge of the everyday details of the fields, were currently reporting to her on how the corn was growing. Furthermore, they also gave her the reports that the secretary of the Ministry of Revenue wrote on the progress.

She flipped through these reports briefly and stated in an uninterested tone, "There's not much difference between this and the materials I provided in the past. Even the most detailed documents cannot replace walking through the fields for a personal look."

After she talked, she strolled into the fields with a bunch of somewhat unwilling stewards and officials. Under the blazing hot sun, they arrived in the middle of one of the experimental fields. With the little divine stone as her cheat, it'd be odd if the corn didn't grow well!

"Miss Yu, all of the fruit trees on the hills are still alive. Other than a few that don't look quite lively, the vast majority don't look like they've just been transplanted over." Although the fruit trees on the mountain were the private property of Yu Xiaocao, Steward Wang still helped her keep an eye on them. Yu Xiaocao gladly accepted this favor from him. In the future, once the fruit orchard expanded and the canning factory and preserved fruit factory started, she was planning on giving him a few shares.

However, didn't Steward Wang state that some of the trees weren't growing well? That couldn't be, right? Yu Xiaocao walked towards the fruit orchard on the hills in unhurried steps. When she got to the fruit trees that Steward Wang said were 'not quite lively', she couldn't help but frown. These fruit trees had all been moved!

As the proverbs said: 'trees die when moved, people live when moved'. Finicky and precious fruit trees were the most afraid of being transplanted casually. If she didn't have mystic-stone water on hand, Xiaocao would have never been sure that moving these trees now, out of season, would be successful. Apparently, there were people who took advantage of when she was gone and moved all of her trees. It looked like those people who had ulterior motives could no longer wait anymore and had finally acted!

“Steward Wang, let me get this straight. The Imperial Plantations usually don't allow outsiders to easily step in, right?” Yu Xiaocao bent over to loosen the soil near the roots of one of the trees that was looking listless. At the same time, she secretly had the little divine stone infuse the tree roots with some spiritual energy. The little divine stone angrily complained to her in her mind that all of the fruit trees on this hill had been moved. If it wasn't for its energy keeping them alive, all of them would have dried into sticks and died.

Steward Wang felt chills run through his heart. Was the problem with these fruit trees something that was caused by humans? He hurriedly stated in a serious manner, “Miss Yu, these are the experimental fields of the Imperial Plantation and the emperor places great importance on this. Even those tenant farmers were specially picked before they were sent here. Ever since the high-yielding crop corn has entered the country, the emperor has also sent his personal soldiers here to patrol the area. Thus, outsiders absolutely cannot enter here!”

“So doesn't that mean that the culprits are the people who work here instead?” Yu Xiaocao shot a knowing gaze at the people behind Steward Wang. She slowly looked at every single person present and coldly smiled.

Someone automatically spoke up in discontent, “This isn't even the season to transplant fruit trees, so the vast majority of these trees can't even stay alive. It's not unusual for a couple of trees to die here and there. Official Yu, all of us have been sent over by the emperor himself. You can't just suspect us for no reason!”

The cold smirk on Yu Xiaocao's face became more prominent as she slowly replied, “Steward Leng, it's not as if you guys are the only people who are working at the Imperial Plantation. Aren't there a few hundred tenant farmers too? You're so eager to jump out to defend yourself. Is it because you have a guilty heart?”

“You...I, Leng Fang, have been here since the emperor emeritus was on the throne and have been helping the emperor manage the Imperial Plantation. I've already been here for many years yet I have to deal with the sarcasm and disdain from a little girl! I can't take such disgrace anymore!” This steward named Leng Fang looked to be around forty to fifty years of age. His hair and beard was speckled with white hairs but the skin on his face was pale and smooth, without many wrinkles. At a glance, one could tell that he very rarely spent time out in the fields. Instead, he looked like an idle and wealthy lord who did nothing at home.

Yu Xiaocao quirked up an eyebrow and was not even the slightest bit polite as she said, “You also know you've been here for quite a while? You've spent many years here and it's about time for you to think about retirement! The next time this official enters the palace, I will make sure to mention to the emperor that those officials who are over the age of fifty are no longer suitable due to physical health to manage the fields at the Imperial Plantation...”

“You...” Leng Fang was so angry that he turned red from head to toe. However, he also didn't dare to say anything at this point. This girl in front of him was viewed by the emperor with great importance and would go into the palace to personally meet the emperor every month to report. What was his status? He was only a tiny little assistant official at the Imperial Plantation. If the little lass truly said what she had stated earlier to the emperor, he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to stay much longer at the Imperial Plantation!

Steward Leng backed down but Yu Xiaocao wasn't planning on letting this issue go, “I don't care what your status is at the Imperial Plantation. Whether you're a steward or a tenant farmer, I will absolutely not tolerate anyone who tries to harm any of the affairs here! This time, you guys have decided to harm my fruit trees. Doesn't that mean next time you guys will start causing problems for the experimental fields in the Imperial Plantation?”

“Official Yu, aren't you being a bit too unjust here? Let's not talk about the fruit trees as we can't even prove that people have tampered with them. Instead, let's talk about the experimental fields. As soon as a problem shows up, all of us can't run away either. Who would harm a project that is tied up to their own lives and livelihood?” The person who spoke up was a steward named Zhou Yang. He was on the younger side and always had a friendly and approachable air around him. Because of that, he had a good relationship with most of the people at the Imperial Plantation.

Yu Xiaocao smiled faintly and looked at him discerningly in the eye, “I know that I am very young and also a woman. Thus, there are many stewards and officials here who are quite upset that I am in charge here. If anything bad befalls the Imperial Plantation, the first person the emperor would blame would be

me, the official in charge of all of the operations here. As for you guys, all you have to say is 'we did everything according to the leader' to wash most of your shortcomings away. Once the emperor loses faith in me, then won't all of you, who have been making things difficult for me, still be able to keep your positions here? I can't say for sure, but I bet there are already people who have thought of this and have come up with methods to get rid of me, the person you don't like."

"What a bunch of nonsense! Do you have any proof? This is only your own personal suspicions and nothing else!" Leng Fang angrily rebutted.

"Whether or not my guess is right or wrong, I'm sure the perpetrators know for sure! Looks like I, this official, have been too benevolent. I thought that everyone here at the Imperial Plantation had been here for a good amount of years and held fondness for their positions. Thus, when the emperor gave me the power to change out any people I wanted, I couldn't bear to move any of you away. However, the facts tell me that my decision then was wrong!"

Yu Xiaocao sighed and then spoke to Steward Wang, "Steward Wang, you're now in charge of this situation! Please find the people who are responsible for harming the trees here in three days. Otherwise...I will have to take drastic measures and send up a report to the emperor. Then I will change everyone here for new people!"

When she mentioned that the emperor had given her the power to swap people out of the Imperial Plantation as she pleased, everyone present, except for Steward Wang, immediately started to panic. The emperor had placed great importance on the experimental fields at the Imperial Plantation, so naturally, whatever they needed was given to them quickly. Thus, the treatment of the people working here was naturally much better compared to other places. Even the lower ranked stewards at the Imperial Plantation got treated about as well as the eunuch stewards in the Imperial Palace. Furthermore, they could sometimes get a few other side benefits from working here.

No one wanted to be stripped of position here and have to leave such a flourishing site. When Steward Wang was just about to start investigating, there were already plenty of people volunteering up information to him and telling him exactly what they knew.

In actuality. Steward Zhou was trying to privately give Yu Xiaocao a lesson by having his trusted subordinates re-transplant all of these fruit saplings. Although he wasn't very old, he was a proud man and had usually done very well for himself due to his connections here at the Imperial Plantation. However, once Yu Xiaocao started taking over, everyone had to listen to her. As soon as she arrived, she had ordered all of the stewards to start working in the fields along with the tenant farmers to do hard labor.

In private, all of the stewards complained and moaned about this. Whenever they got together as a group, they all grumbled and wailed that this little lass didn't know her proper place in life. When Yu Xiaocao transferred some tenant farmers to the hills to help transplant fruit trees, they found out that these fruit trees were privately owned by the little lass.

She was blatantly using the Imperial Plantation's resources for her own private gain and profits. Wasn't this lass being too bold about this? Zhou Yang was speechless by this misuse. Once he saw that the fruit trees were thriving, he felt even more unhappy about this. He came up with a method to create a stumbling block for her and have her eat a silent loss. One night, he brought along a few trusted subordinates and had them pull the trees up before putting them back into the ground.

Originally, he had thought he had accounted for everything. In any case, this wasn't the right season for transplanting fruit trees, so no one could guarantee whether these trees would live or die after transplanting. Even if they died, there wasn't any leeway to suspect anyone of wrongdoing. That being said, the lass was using the hills of the Imperial Plantation for her own private affairs. Even if she ate a loss, she wouldn't dare to bring this problem up. However, he would have never expected that she had already reported her idea to the emperor and was now going to send up a report about people sabotaging the trees.

Those who were able to act as stewards at the Imperial Plantation were naturally shrewd and not stupid. Zhou Yang's private affairs naturally didn't escape the eyes of those people. However, they also wanted to teach this little lass a lesson so they turned a blind eye to this. Unfortunately, how could they know that the lass would rather slaughter a hundred innocents instead of letting go of a single thief? For the sake of their own affairs, they needed to sacrifice Zhou Yang first in order to keep their own skins!

Once Zhou Yang had been pointed out by the rest, he was sure that he was doomed to leave the Imperial Plantation. He didn't know what sort of punishment was in store for him as well. However, who would have expected that Yu Xiaocao would decide to do something completely outside of their expectations. Instead of driving him out and punishing him, she actually put him in charge of the fruit orchard on the hills. She was following this saying: 'using work to make up for your past mistakes!'

Fields of Gold Chapter 434 - Greenhouses for Vegetables

Zhou Yang was extremely surprised at this turn of events and he didn't know quite how to feel. However, in the end, he couldn't bear to leave his position at the Imperial Plantation and took on this task of managing the fruit orchard. Furthermore, he did a very good job in doing so.

In the future, Yu Xiaocao's fruit orchard encompassed the entire hill and the fruits from the orchard were sold all throughout the country. These fruits were famed and well-known among the people. Zhou Yang resigned from his position at the Imperial Plantation and became the head steward at the fruit

orchard. His position and treatment there was two-fold higher than when he was at the plantation. In addition, the master even gave him five percent of the profits.

Five percent may not seem like a lot but most people were poor for their entire lives and had never seen as much money as this steward got in one year from bonuses. All of his previous coworkers at the Imperial Plantation envied him completely! Obviously, this was all in the future.

The stewards and officials at the Imperial Plantation finally settled down and started to earnestly do work. With someone also especially in charge of the fruit trees, Yu Xiaocao could focus her efforts on Royal Prince Yang's new farmstead and their melon vines. Since they had planted watermelons at a later date than usual, she had the little divine stone shorten the sprouting phase by a third of the time. In any case, there weren't a lot of people cultivating watermelons in the capital. Furthermore, she was on the only one in the capital using this special grafting method to raise them.

After the melon sprouts were grafted on the vines, she had Royal Prince Yang handpick some trusted servants and then taught the grafting method to them. These people were not the tenant farmers on the farmstead. Instead, they were all trusted servants from Imperial Prince Jing's estate and their loyalty to their masters were a guarantee.

After all of the melon sprouts were grafted onto the gourd vines, they were transplanted into the melon fields. They were irrigated with mystic-stone water from the well, so they naturally grew very well. The people who had been snickering behind her back, claiming that she didn't know the first thing about farming, now had nothing to say. They no longer had a leg to stand on. After all, Yu Xiaocao managed to finish the agricultural tasks assigned to her in a timely manner and also managed to transplant her own fruit trees and watermelon vines such that they were flourishing. They now had to admit that she was very skilled in the area. The emperor's decision to give her the title of an agricultural official was truly a wise idea.

There were countless people in the capital who were keeping a close eye on the Imperial Plantation. After two months passed, the tenant farmers on the plantation, under the management of the stewards, began to harvest the corn like wildfire. Which of the tenant farmers who worked at the Imperial Plantation weren't old hands at farming and harvesting? These people all had giant grins on their faces as they picked the plump ears of corn. They discussed amongst themselves just how good the harvest was this year.

Minister Liu came over early that morning to inspect the Imperial Plantation. When he saw the ears of corn that had been harvested, he smiled so broadly that all of his wrinkles became apparent. The size of the ears of corn were significantly larger than the previous years and each kernel seemed to be plump and bursting with juice. Compared to the harvest from last year, this year's harvest was of an entirely different grade.

After one mu from the experimental fields was fully harvested, Minister Liu personally took some people along to impatiently weigh all of the ears of corn. Oh my! One mu had actually yielded around two thousand catties of grain! He had originally thought that last year's a thousand catties per mu was considered a high-yield. However, compared to their giant harvest this year, last year's numbers looked really too wretched. As expected, having Miss Yu take on the position of an official and being given responsibility of the Imperial Plantation was a very wise decision!

All of the officials who had been keeping a close eye on the situation at the Imperial Plantation could only shut their mouths now. The vast majority of court officials rejected the idea of having a tiny little lass become an official at the Ministry of Revenue. However, the emperor was adamant. Minister Liu and Royal Prince Yang also supported this plan, so they didn't stubbornly fight this appointment and decided to wait and observe instead.

If the harvest this year at the plantation was about the same as last year or even not as good, then they would have a leg to stand on to voice their objections. After all, the weather each year differed, which influenced the resulting harvest. This was the reason why there was this saying: 'the common people depend on the heavens to eat'.

This year, the weather conditions had not been very good. There wasn't a lot of rain after summer started and even the deepest wells at the Imperial Plantation had water levels that were incredibly low. After autumn started, a few downpours of torrential rain also occurred. Thus, these unfavorable conditions naturally influenced the growth of the crops. In fact, the commoners who lived around the capital all had their grain harvests decreased by about a third or even more this year. They were so sure that the little lass was doomed.

Contrary to their expectations, the Imperial Plantation was not affected by the poor weather conditions. Instead, the yield of corn there actually went up. The officials that were sent by the Ministry of Revenue had tallied up the numbers and the numbers were incredibly shocking. The farmers who had bought corn seeds to plant in their own fields also got yields around a thousand catties per mu. As things were going, corn, as a true high-yielding crop, would soon be propagated throughout the northern parts of the country. It was likely that there would be many more farmers standing in line to buy corn seeds. The grain stores in the capital would likely explode with popularity then!

The numbers from the farmstead in Tanggu Town also came back to court. The Yu Family's farmstead, which now had over a thousand mu in fields (Author's note: Royal Prince Yang's eight hundred mu farmstead had been given to Yu Xiaocao so now the land was naturally a part of the Yu Family's farmstead), had produced over 180,000 catties of grain. In other words, their fields had also reached a yield of two thousand catties per mu. It was rumored that all of the villages in the vicinity had sent out representatives to negotiate with Yu Hai as they wanted to buy these corn seeds at a high price. If the Yu Family agreed to this trade, then the high-yielding crop corn would first be widely planted in the areas around Tanggu!

Tanggu was the feudal lands of Royal Prince Yang, so they couldn't let the royal prince monopolize the benefits of growing high-yielding crops alone. Consequently, for the next few sessions at court, there were lively debates about how to disseminate the high-yielding corn to areas around the capital and the process to do so.

The endless arguments at court didn't have much to do with Yu Xiaocao, who was only a small sixth-level official. She, on the other hand, was currently busy making another fortune!

During the summer, Yu Xiaocao had planted a hundred mu with grafted watermelons at the farmstead next to the Imperial Plantation to test it out. These watermelons were now ripe and entering the market. From her rough estimations, she figured that this season they could harvest more than eight thousand catties of watermelons from the fields. Watermelon sprouts that had been grafted to gourd vines were more resistant to pests. In addition, the soil on these fields had some spiritual energy there, so this made the watermelons grow better. Furthermore, all of the people in charge of watermelons were very hardworking and did a good job in taking care of these plants.

When the first batch of watermelons was ripe, the other watermelons on the market had already disappeared. Once these large and extremely sweet melons hit the shops, they all sold out within moments. They were currently in the middle of the hot spell of autumn and being able to eat some sweet and cooling watermelon to quench one's thirst was truly such a great feeling!

In addition, the watermelons from Royal Prince Yang's farmstead were not only larger than the other watermelons, but the inner rind was also fully bright red and didn't have any of the depressing stripes of white in between. Thus, eating this watermelon was much more enjoyable. If these watermelons came onto the market during the summer, then those other watermelons would have been ignored completely. With large, sweet, and juicy watermelons to be had, who would still want to eat those small and not as tasty watermelons instead?

One hundred mu of watermelons was not enough to provide enough melons for all of the rich and noble families in the capital. Whether it was for stately banquets, drinking parties, flower banquets, or dignified dinner parties, everyone would feel like the hosts were being too stingy if there wasn't at least one plate of watermelon at the table. Gradually, the people who didn't offer watermelon at their gatherings found out that their friends and acquaintances would find any excuse to decline their future invitations. Furthermore, their friends were also not as close and intimate with them anymore...

Yu Xiaocao was only able to be happy over the blazing watermelon sales for a few days before she became busy again. The Ministry of Works had finally finished working on the plastic film and incorporated her requests. Not only was the new product stronger and more flexible, but they also managed to improve its transparency. Thus, construction on the greenhouse pavilions for vegetable cultivation began at breakneck speed.

There were people bustling around everywhere on the Imperial Plantation. Within the experimental fields, the corn stalks had all been chopped down and their roots needed to be pulled up one by one from the ground. The ground also needed to be plowed in preparation for the second crop. Yu Xiaocao was occupied with directing the people constructing the greenhouses while also overseeing the breeding of an improved wheat crop. Although she said she was breeding, in actuality, she only had the little divine stone transform into its golden kitten form and run around the grain storerooms a few times to let its spiritual energy settle into the seeds.

The construction of these greenhouse pavilions was also done by people from the Ministry of Works. Just the ceiling alone caused the workers to work very hard for a period of time. In terms of how to construct these greenhouses, Yu Xiaocao also only knew about half. She used the experience she had from her previous life, when she spent half a year working in a greenhouse, to come up with ideas and methods to properly build this. Thus, progress on these pavilions took quite a long time.

Furthermore, the technology for working with iron was much more primitive in this time period. Steel output was very low, so using a steel backbone for these greenhouses was out of the question. She could only use bamboo and wood as the building materials for the backbones of these structures. The thick plastic film was then put across the wooden structures. During the winter, they could use more layers of plastic to increase the insulation and keep it warmer inside.

By the time the farmers were done sowing the winter wheat, the greenhouse pavilions had also finished construction. This was her first year in trying this, so she only had them make enough to cover a hundred mu. The neighboring farmstead also had large pavilions set up on the fields. However, those greenhouses weren't intended for growing vegetables. Instead, they were going to be used to grow some out of season watermelons and Hami melons.

What did people here lack the most in the winter? Obviously, it was a lack of access to fresh vegetables and fruits. During the winter, people either ate cabbages with radishes or radishes with cabbages. As for fruits, the only fruits available were the dried and shriveled up fruits stored from late autumn, such as apples and pears. In the past, even if you had money to spend, you still couldn't buy fresh fruits. However, this winter was going to be completely different!

Once the greenhouse pavilions were done, Yu Xiaocao personally used her own money to hire some experienced vegetable farmers to look after the vegetables planted in the greenhouses. Green vegetables had a short growing cycle, especially the ones that were infused with spiritual energy. After the seeds were planted, they grew very quickly and were ready to harvest after about a month had passed.

As for the cucumbers, eggplants, green beans and tomatoes, they were being grown in special large greenhouse tents. They grew even faster than they did at the start of spring. The hired vegetable farmers all thought this was very odd. However, they thought that it was because the tents helped the vegetables grow. The awe and envy in their hearts grew and they began to wish that the court would start selling this plastic membrane to the public. In the future, wouldn't they also be able to grow such vegetables too?

Every year when it was about time for frost to start in autumn, everyone had already made sure to stock up their cellars full with cabbages and radishes for the winter. They had to store enough to eat for an entire winter. The wealthy and noble families in the capital usually cut down on their banquets at this time of year because there wasn't much variety of food to be served, so it made for a poor table for the guests.

However, this year was entirely different! The capital was loosely organized with the rich and wealthy in the eastern and western parts of the city and the poor in the northern and southern parts. Imperial Prince Jing's estate had added five more fruit and vegetable shops in the eastern and western parts of the city. Usually, at the end of autumn and start of winter, these shops would either switch to selling other goods, such as dried goods and candied fruit, or they would shut down for the season. This was because there were no vegetables or fruit to be sold! However, this year, Prince Jing's estate had actually opened a decent amount of vegetable and fruit stores.

The rich and wealthy instantly thought of the greenhouse pavilions that housed vegetables and melons on the prince's farmlands. Then, all of the rich, powerful, and noble families turned their attention to the stores. Everyone knew that this year the prince's estate didn't plant that many vegetables and melons, so they didn't know if these greenhouses could supply enough vegetables and fruits for the whole capital.

Finally, these fruit and vegetable stores opened and satisfied these people's expectations. The first day they opened, they were stocked with fresh green vegetables. There was fresh spinach, tender Indian lettuce, crispy celery, and lush and verdant romaine lettuce. In addition, they had shepherd's purse, amaranth greens, malabar spinach, pea shoots, and a whole host of other leafy greens. These vegetables were all stacked high in the shops. The lush green color of the vegetables made people feel happy just looking at them and they all wished they could buy all of it home to eat.

The day the shops first opened, all of them exploded in popularity. Because there was a quota placed on these vegetables, limiting the amount each household could buy, these wealthy and rich families only started fighting. Luckily, Royal Prince Yang had experienced the immense popularity of the braised food store before and had the foresight to send bodyguards to keep order at all of these shops. That was the only reason why fist-fights didn't break out around the shops.

Fields of Gold Chapter 435 - Invitation

"The young miss is back! The young miss is back!" When Yingchun got the news, she happily went back to the young miss's courtyard, chirping like a cheerful bird. She ran all the way from the drooping flower gate and had a sunny smile on her face.

Wutong walked out from inside and had a stern look on her face. She hollered at Yingchun, "What are you being noisy about? No sense of etiquette! The young miss was only gone for a few days yet all of you flout the rules and etiquette! As a servant, having good etiquette and manners brings prestige to our young miss. It's no wonder that the young miss doesn't bring someone like you, who has her head in the clouds, out when she leaves!"

The giddiness within Yingchun's heart was extinguished as if a bucket of cold water had been poured on her. Her cheerful steps stopped and the smile on her face slowly disappeared. Wutong was the personal maidservant of the young miss and was one of the earliest people to follow her. No one knew when she had become the maid in charge of the entire courtyard, but she was now in charge of all of the maids and senior servants in the young miss's residence.

At first, Wutong treated the other maids amiably. However, once the young miss promoted Xichun and Hechun to fill the empty positions within the personal maidservants, Wutong changed. She became moody and prone to anger. Sometimes, the eyes she used to look at other people seemed as if they had daggers coming out of them. It always made the other maids feel a bit scared.

All of the maids and senior servants in the courtyard knew that the young miss didn't have a lot of rules and regulations. As long as you did your work well, she was satisfied. The lower ranked maids all secretly whispered that they felt more relaxed in the presence of the young miss as they didn't have to guard their every action. Even small mistakes were waved away by her with a smile. However, in Wutong's

hands, if she wasn't in a good mood, you might be punished lightly with a fine or heavily by getting beaten with the plank.

Ever since the young miss went back to Tanggu with Hechun and had given the management of the Imperial Plantation's greenhouses to Xichun, Wutong had been in a bad mood. She and Pipa had been left behind to manage the courtyard again. Everyday, she roamed around the courtyard looking for victims so she could vent her discontent. The smallest mistakes would be picked out by her and used to torture the other maids. All of the maids in the courtyard didn't dare to say anything out loud but they cried out their grievances in secret. They were all looking forward to when the young miss got back from Tanggu because Wutong would restrain herself a lot more when the young miss was around.

Yingchun wasn't as lucky as Xichun and Hechun as she didn't catch the eye of her mistress to get promoted to a first-ranked maid. She naturally didn't dare to have an outright conflict with Wutong, so she suppressed the displeasure within her heart. Instead, when Wutong was not looking, she made a funny face at the other girl's back as she viciously thought, 'You're such a two-faced person, so it'd be surprising if the master trusted you! Serves you right that the young miss left you behind to only guard a courtyard that is the size of three mu ah!'

Yu Xiaocao had just entered the inner courtyard when a group of maids surrounded her and escorted her to her own courtyard. As they walked, she asked if anything important happened recently. Wutong had a face full of smiles and had rushed in front of Pipa to take the lead. She gently smiled and said, "Ever since the fall harvest, you have become a well-known figure throughout the capital, Young Miss. Especially once the green vegetables grown in the pavilions came to market. Everyone in the capital knows that you're able to cultivate fruits and vegetables out of season and that you can make anything become ripe during any time of the year. While you were out and about, many young maidens from good families had sent invitations to you to attend some banquets and such. If you hadn't just left for Tanggu, I'm pretty sure you'd be very busy right now!"

Yingchun surreptitiously curled her lip. Wutong was such a two-faced person. Earlier she had been as vicious as a female wolf when scolding her but now she was pretending to be as sweet and innocent as a white bunny rabbit. The smile on Wutong's face was so flattering.

"Pick only the important things to tell me!" Yu Xiaocao was not the least bit interested in interacting with these young maidens in the capital. These girls either started spouting poetry as if they were ill or had to show off their other skills in some fashion. She wasn't good at any of this stuff. All of those people sending her invitations to parties and banquets likely wanted to see her stumble in these social

settings so they could laugh at her, right? Consequently, even when she was in the capital, she had no desire to attend any of those boring parties.

Wutong's eyes flickered and she smiled, "The best modiste in the capital, Jiang Siniang, who is also the owner of Exquisite Garments, also sent an invitation asking to see you. Young Miss, are you interested in meeting her?"

Many years ago in the capital, Jiang Siniang had endured lots of criticism from naysayers similar to Xiaocao. However, she used her own abilities to suppress all of these people. Her Exquisite Garments boutique not only became famous in the capital but she also opened several branch stores in the nearby prefectures. The stores did very well with the public and was in no way inferior to the popularity of Zhenxiu Restaurant and the Yu's Braised Food Shops and Fruit Shops.

The clothing that Jiang Siniang designed was not only bold in their usage of color but they also harmonized very well. Even bright reds and greens, when used together, could become an impeccable work of elegant art in her hands. Furthermore, all of her clothing was beautiful and flattering to the female form. People often offered grand sums of money to have one of her stores make a piece of clothing for them. All of the ladies and maidens in the capital desperately wanted to have a piece of clothing personally made by Jiang Siniang. It would allow them to have immense status and boasting power in their circles.

Unfortunately, for the past few years, Jiang Siniang only took five custom orders each season. Furthermore, not just anyone could be lucky enough to get a custom order slot. From her words, it all depended on fate. Those who caught her eye, even if they didn't have a single penny, she was still willing to design and sew a custom piece of clothing for them. Those who didn't, even if they offered a thousand taels of gold, she would still refuse to make one for them. Even the imperial concubines in the imperial palace had to comply with her rules. After all, the emperor himself had given her a handwritten document personally written by him that stated 'the epitome of a talented woman'!

In Wutong's eyes, the fact that such an incredible woman, who had legendary designing and crafting skills, wanted to see the young miss was an incredible honor! If those other young maidens in the capital found out, then wouldn't they be incredibly jealous? In fact, even the lady of the residence didn't have a custom crafted piece of clothing from Jiang Siniang.

Jiang Siniang? Yu Xiaocao paused in her motion of taking off her cloak. Was that the Jiang maiden who had refused an offer of marriage from the son of the prime minister on the grounds that she wanted to focus on her career? The two of them had never interacted before, so why would she want to see her suddenly?

“Also, Royal Princess Minglan is hosting a 'flower war banquet' in the middle of this month and sent you an invitation to you. Do you want to see if...” The other young maidens were one thing but Royal Princess Minglan was the treasure of her family. She was actually paternal cousins with Royal Prince Yang.

“Flower war banquet? What does a 'flower war' mean?” Yu Xiaocao did actually recognize Royal Princess Minglan's name. It was said that this princess had learned how to ride and shoot arrows since she was young with her older brother. The average person was not her match. She had a bit of an arrogant and headstrong personality but also wasn't a person who looked down on those who were lower ranked than her or someone who deliberately made things difficult either.

Wutong took the cloak from her young miss and handed it over to Yingchun. She hurriedly explained, “It's actually quite simple. It's just that every invited person must bring along a pot of flowers. Whoever brings the most valuable specimen is the winner.”

“Oh? Does the winner get a prize for this?” Yu Xiaocao was more interested in this. When it came to rare and expensive plants, her godmother and Princess Consort Jing both had plenty that she had given to them. These were the flowers that were found in that mountain ravine. The last time they had to take refuge there, the princess consort even brought her personal maidservants around to stroll around the valley. When they left, she was able to bring back another bunch of rare flora.

Wutong smiled, “Every person who participates not only has to bring a pot of flowers but also needs to bring a forfeit item. The winner can take all of the forfeit items from everyone else home!”

“They can take away everyone's forfeits?” Yu Xiaocao stroked her chin and her eyes crinkled up into a smile. She looked like a little fox who had thought up a sly trick. The noble misses of the capital all cared about their reputations, so they absolutely wouldn't bring forfeit items along that were cheap. Then...didn't that mean that she could make a small fortune from this?

After changing into a set of clothing suitable for the indoors, Yu Xiaocao headed out of the courtyard, “Let's go, I need to greet Godmother! It's been a few days since I last saw Little Linlin and I quite miss him!”

Wutong followed along and said, “Young Miss and the little master are truly siblings. The young master always keeps asking, 'Where has Older Sister gone?' and 'When will Older Sister come back?'. He even has no desire to eat his most favorite egg tarts anymore!”

Xiaocao's courtyard was very close to the main courtyard. As they talked, they already arrived at the gate to the main courtyard. Linglong grinned as she welcomed her inside, "Young Miss, the mistress and young master were just talking about how much they missed you. The young master especially does. When he found out that you came back, he wanted to go to your courtyard to wait for you and only the mistress kept him back."

"Older Sister!" The curtains to the door had just been lifted when a little pudgy ball rolled out and held onto Xiaocao's leg. The little fellow raised his plump little face and pouted his lips as he unhappily whined, "Older Sister, you didn't bring Linlin out to play. Naughty, naughty!"

Yu Xiaocao bent down to try to pick up the little fellow and almost stumbled over. Fang Haolin had gotten plumper again and she almost couldn't hold him anymore. When Wutong saw this, she took the little master into her arms. The little fatty didn't like this change and his hands waved as he exclaimed, "I don't want you, I want my older sister!"

Xiaocao carried the little fatty into the inner room while Linglong and Wutong carefully escorted her from the side as they were afraid their two masters might fall over. Lady Fang saw this spectacle and burst into laughter, "Look at you two siblings. One gets thinner as time passes while the other gets fatter. Right now it looks like a skinny monkey is carrying a fat little piggy."

"Linlin is not a fat little piggy. Linlin is Sun Wukong and I have a golden cudgel to kill monsters!" When Xiaocao was at the residence, the 'Journey to the West' had become Fang Haolin's usual bedtime story.

Although the little fellow was young, he worshiped heroes. For example, the Monkey King was now his idol. He even begged his father to get him a round stick and claimed that it was the golden cudgel that Sun Wukong used. He brandished it constantly at the flora in the garden, claiming that he was 'destroying monsters'. It was so bad that Lady Fang didn't dare to bring out her precious flowers out anymore. She was afraid that the little brat might destroy them!

Lady Fang picked the little fellow up and sat on the chaise lounge. She gently slapped his bottom. If everything went the way the little boy wanted, then every piece of furniture or decoration in these rooms would have long been broken by him. She patted at an open area on the lounge and had her daughter sit down before she asked, "Was your trip this time smooth? Is everything going well over there in Tanggu?"

"Royal Prince Yang's bodyguards escorted me the entire way, so it'd be more surprising if it wasn't smooth. A hundred or so mu of land next to the farmstead have also been bought by Royal Prince Yang

and the greenhouse pavilions have also been built there. The artisans in charge of building the pavilions as well as the workers in charge of taking care of the plants were all highly skilled workers from his lands in the capital. I only had to provide a bit of advice here and there, so there wasn't much for me to do!" Yu Xiaocao picked out a small piece of cantaloupe and delivered it into Little Linlin's wide-open mouth. She also picked a slice of watermelon for herself and happily dug into it.

"Mommy is biased. How come Older Sister is allowed to eat watermelon but Linlin isn't?" The temperatures at the start of winter tended to be very cold and watermelon was considered a cold-natured food. Little Linlin had only recently become stronger in the past half year, so Lady Fang didn't dare to feed him a lot of watermelon. However, it seemed like the little fellow was unhappy about this.

Fields of Gold Chapter 436 - Qi-style Attire

Lady Fang tried to frighten him, "Your older sister's body is healthy and won't get sick. Have you forgotten that you had to take the bitter medicine for a while because your tummy hurt after having one more mouthful of shaved ice during the summer?"

Little Linlin rolled up his sleeves to reveal his chubby arms as he argued, unconvinced, "Linlin's body is also healthy! You see, Linlin has more meat than Older Sister! If Older Sister can eat, Linlin too can eat it, too!"

The little fellow was so adorable that Xiaocao couldn't help but burst into laughter. She took a small piece of watermelon and placed it in his hand, saying, "Mhm! Little Linlin has been obedient lately. You have been eating well and persisting in your daily run around the garden, so this is your reward. You can only have one piece a day. If you eat more, you'll fall sick!"

The little fellow, Fang Haolin, stuffed the watermelon into his mouth with a grin, "I'm not afraid! With Older Sister here, I don't need to drink the bitter medicine!" After having a piece of watermelon, the little fellow knew to stop pestering them even though he still wanted more, and followed his nanny to the garden to play.

"Madam, Young Miss, Jiang Siniang of Exquisite Garments is here." Linlang was smiling and her voice was clear as she drew the door curtain and entered the room. A while ago, Modiste Jiang Siniang had sent them a calling card and came to visit Young Miss, but the young miss was not here at that time. Who knew that Jiang Siniang would come and visit again when the young miss had just returned? Did this mean that her young miss was special in the eyes of Modiste Jiang?

Lady Fang also felt proud. The master of embroidery that others were rarely able to invite to their residence had come as a guest to her residence on multiple occasions! It was such a great honor. Her close friends would be so envious if they knew about this!

“Hurry, invite her inside!” Lady Fang held her daughter's hand as she stood up, “Come, let's go to the main hall to greet the esteemed guest.”

Yu Xiaocao looked at her own casual attire and thought, 'Would it be impolite if I wore this out to greet guests?' She lifted her head and smiled, “Godmother, I need to go back to change my clothes. I'll immediately go to the main hall afterward.”

“I've been careless in my considerations.” Lady Fang took a look at her daughter's clothes, then lowered her gaze to her own clothing, which had wrinkled after she lay on the seat. She laughed, “See, even I, as your mother, am not as collected as you are!”

“Godmother, this Modiste Jiang is only a master of embroidery, but you're a third-rank noble madam. Why do you regard her so highly?” The Jiang Siniang that others deemed highly of was only the owner of Exquisite Garments to Xiaocao. These madams and misses must not have enough entertainment, to have 'worshipped' Jiang Siniang like a fan towards their idol.

Lady Fang laughed, “My daughter sees the situation clearer than all of the capital's women. For the past few years, the madams and misses in the capital have indeed gone a little overboard with their adulation towards Modiste Jiang. However, this Jiang Siniang does indeed have the skills. The phoenix that she embroiders seems almost able to take off into the air, and the flora she embroiders, able to attract bees and butterflies. The clothes that she designs are able to cover up a person's shortcomings and bring out the good points of a person's figure. No matter how young or old a woman is, who doesn't like to be beautiful? That's why many began to adulate Jiang Siniang's skills.”

“I don't have any association with her, so why has she come to visit several times?” Yu Xiaocao mumbled. She was not so interested in apparels, and the clothes her godmother had prepared for her was, in her opinion, already good enough. Besides, the skills of the servants in the sewing department of their residence were quite good—she was satisfied with their needlework.

Lady Fang changed into another set of clothes and smiled at her confused daughter, “Stop worrying and go change your clothes. Wouldn't you understand once you meet the guest?”

Yu Xiaocao returned to her courtyard and told Pipa to take out her newly-made modified Qi-style attire [1]. This set of clothes was actually the result of a whim when she went to the sewing department to commission for a set of practical garments suitable for traveling on horseback.

The outer garment was lilac and reached down to her thighs. It split into two sides at the waist and, in effect, accentuated the curve of her waist. A little folded collar sat prettily on her neck, while slightly darker confederate roses were embroidered on the oblique collar and the hem of her bell sleeves. The lower part of her garment was a light yellow, pleated skirt, and the front part of the upper garment and hemline of the skirt was embroidered with the same pattern.

She let Wutong style her hair into two cute hair buns and used strings of rice-sized pearls as a hair tie to hold them in place. The hair at the sides of her neck were bound into two small yet long braids that hung until her chest, making her seem playful and bright.

Jiang Siniang was softly conversing with Lady Fang when Yu Xiaocao arrived at the main hall. Jiang Siniang's eyes lit up as she noticed her. Actually, Jiang Siniang was a fanatic for clothes and was completely obsessed over fashion design. This was also one of the reasons why she was always able to innovate on her old designs and receive the praises of the upper class.

Since she was ten years old, Jiang Siniang had displayed a surprising talent for fashion design, but it had been so many years, and her inspiration was bound to dampen at some point. Although they were not as cooped up in their homes as the women of the previous dynasty, the women of this era still rarely traveled very far. In recent years, Jiang Siniang had reached her bottleneck in fashion design, and no matter how hard she tried, she could not reach a breakthrough. She was distressed over the fact that she could not seem to come up with anything new.

About a month ago, she almost bumped into a passing rider on a horse outside of Exquisite Garments because she was too preoccupied with the design of the hemline of a piece of clothing. She was so startled that she immediately looked up, but she was instantly enraptured with the rider's clothes.

To be honest, if she were to describe the clothes the young girl was wearing in one word, it would be 'plain'. It was made from ordinary muslin, and there was nothing special about the craftsmanship, but the design itself was never before seen in this region!

It was a light green, straight-cut Qi-style attire with an oblique collar. It was made from muslin, and a pattern of peonies surrounded by butterflies was embroidered onto the outfit using colorful threads. Worn on top was a light blue, sleeveless jacket embellished with colorful clusters of flowers, and the edges of the sleeves and the hemline of the skirt was decorated with an inlay of faint, white flowers. The lower garment consisted of a loose pair of skirt pants made of the same material, and the hemline of the

trousers were also adorned with the same pattern of peonies surrounded by butterflies. Although it was an outfit paired with trousers, it did not feel vulgar, but rather brought about an air of neatness.

It was just a split second, but that small and delicate figure had deeply imprinted itself into the mind of Jiang Siniang. A voice in her heart told her, 'This girl will be the key to my breakthrough. I must absolutely find her!'

She inquired about the identity of that girl through various sources, and only then did she find out that the young girl was actually a sixth-ranked official under the Ministry of Revenue. That day, that girl was riding towards the Imperial Plantation outside of the capital. She guessed that the trouser-attire was so that it was more practical to carry out any agricultural activities.

She could not hold back her excitement, so she sent a calling card and visited the very next day, but the person who greeted her was Lady Fang. She was quite disheartened after she found out that the girl had left for Tangu Town two days ago and they weren't sure when she would return. She forced herself to discuss a few topics on apparel and accessories with Lady Fang before she excused herself.

After that, she had her servants pay extra attention to the whereabouts of the only female official at court. In actuality, when the emperor awarded her to be an official, she had become the capital's hottest discussion. At first, many were skeptical and made a lot of sarcastic remarks, but this young female official was quick to shut their mouths with her actions.

She cultivated high-yield crops to the point where a single mu of land was able to produce two thousand catties of crops, and even managed to successfully plant fruit trees and watermelons out of their proper season. During fall, she managed to yield fresh vegetables by cultivating them in greenhouses so the people could enjoy a larger variety of dishes at mealtime during fall and winter.

Even though it was already the beginning of winter, the prestigious families could still serve their guests with an exquisite plate of fruits filled with watermelon, cantaloupe, and a type of small tomatoes that seemed to be called cherry tomatoes. It was pleasant to their taste buds, tasting both sweet and sour at the same time. Those madams and misses of the prestigious families would also comment about this young female official once in a while; although they disapproved of a girl being appointed as an official, they couldn't help but praise her for the results of her work.

It was not hard to track the whereabouts of this young female official. Once she found out from her subordinate that Miss Yu had returned to the capital today, she hurriedly came to visit. Regardless of everything else, just the sight of this pretty young girl's attire had already made her trip worthwhile. It was as though a door leading towards a new fashion had opened right in front of her eyes...

Yu Xiaocao was taken by surprise by Jiang Siniang's zealous gaze that seemed as though it wanted to swallow her whole. She forced a stiff smile on her face and politely offered the guest some fruits and dessert, but the other person's burning gaze was fixed on her...clothes, as if she wanted to strip her bare. Was there...something wrong with this person?

Jiang Siniang's personal maidservant knew that her mistress's obsession had resurfaced and shot Lady Fang and Miss Yu an apologetic smile. She lightly tugged on her mistress's sleeve and softly called her, intending to remind her to be a little more reserved.

Jiang Siniang, who was seemingly entranced, ignored her efforts and stood up, walking towards Xiaocao. Her slender and fair hand slowly reached towards Xiaocao's collar, lightly feeling the embroidery as she mumbled, "The design of this collar is truly ingenious, and although the craftsmanship of this button knot is a little unrefined, it's quite stylish. This pinched-waist design which splits in the middle accentuates the waist, and the layers of pleats gives volume to the skirt...the only thing lacking is the embroidery. If I made this, the quality of this attire would definitely improve tremendously and be able to reach the height of its beauty..."

Not one person in the world wouldn't react to a pair of unfamiliar hands feeling about their body—to be precise, their clothes. Imaginary black lines hung on Yu Xiaocao's forehead as she inwardly rolled her eyes as hard as she could. 'Jiang Siniang, Modiste Jiang, is it alright for you to do things so carelessly?'

Jiang Siniang's maidservant felt so awkward she wanted to hide somewhere no one could find her. She felt so embarrassed every time her mistress's obsession surfaced, to the point where she wanted to cry. She apologized on behalf of her mistress, "Lady Fang, Miss Yu, I'm really sorry for this! Every time my mistress sees a new design or a particularly stylish set of clothes, she'd become a little...different! She's not usually so impolite!"

The shock on Lady Fang's face faded as she slowly nodded, "Only when one person reaches the point of obsession in a certain field, can they become the expert of said field and be true to the title of 'master'. That is Modiste Jiang's true nature, how can it be considered impolite?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 437 - Inspiration

A significant amount of time passed and by the time Jiang Siniang finished studying Yu Xiaocao's clothes, Xiaocao felt that her muscles were going stiff. Jiang Siniang slowly let out a breath and returned to her seat, sipping the tea that had been served before she said, "Official Yu, if it's possible, can you tell me who designed the clothes you're wearing?"

Yu Xiaocao also let out a deep breath, and the smile on her face was a bit stiff as she replied, “Modiste Jiang is too courteous. Please, call me by my name. It feels like someone is calling for my dad when I hear them call me 'Official Yu'.”

Jiang Siniang chuckled, “Alright, I won't be courteous since Miss Yu is so easygoing. I'm only a few years older than you are, so if Miss Yu doesn't mind, please call me Older Sister Jiang!”

“Older Sister Jiang, let's also forgo 'Miss Yu'. Since I'm calling you older sister, you can call me Younger Sister Xiaocao.” Yu Xiaocao smiled sweetly and her expression was filled with joy. She did not disdain the other maiden at all even though she was an official and Modiste Jiang was just a merchant.

Jiang Siniang's heart had completely relaxed. Official Yu had indeed made a fortune by means of trade. She was unlike the madams and misses of other families who secretly looked down on merchants yet still wanted to get some benefits from her. Did they ever realize that if it weren't for the merchants in the capital, it would be extremely hard for their supposed 'high officials' to carry out their work...

“Older Sister Jiang, why did you visit us twice?” Yu Xiaocao already had her own guess in her heart, but she still asked nevertheless.

Jiang Siniang had a somewhat embarrassed smile on her face, “To be honest, Younger Sister Xiaocao, I came because of the design of your clothes. I've never seen the likes of the one you're wearing right now in the capital before. Can I know where you bought it?”

Yu Xiaocao smiled, “This outfit I'm wearing was actually paired with a pair of pants so that I can move around the fields with ease. But wearing trousers while I'm greeting guests would be a little too impolite, so I had the servants make this white, pleated skirt. Clothing that is tightly fitted at the top and loose at the bottom really accentuates a person's figure, don't you think?”

Hearing this, Lady Fang laughed, “You really don't have any shame, do you? You dare to speak as though you're a person in this trade in front of the true master? How can you display this outfit that you blindly came up with in front of others?”

Jiang Siniang hurriedly interjected, “Lady Fang, you're too humble! Although Younger Sister Xiaocao's outfit doesn't have wide sleeves, a train, nor is it paired with fancy accessories, there is exquisiteness in its simplicity. I should've known that when splendor and complexity reached its limit, we should turn

around and return to the basics, progressing towards the direction of simplicity and humility. Younger Sister Xiaocao has inspired me and opened a new window in fashion design for me. She is my benefactor! How did Younger Sister come up with this design?"

Looking at the excited Jiang Siniang, Lady Fang secretly laughed, 'Indeed the rumors weren't false, this Jiang Siniang is quite an obsessed person, but it's really because of her 'obsession' that she is able to throw herself wholly into her work and become a master, isn't it?'

"You sisters keep talking, I still have other things to do, so I'll be taking my leave." Lady Fang noticed that the two sisters were conversing amiably, so there was no need for her to be around. She was naturally happy to see her daughter become close to Modiste Jiang and not wholly because of Jiang Siniang's craft, but rather so that Xiaocao could widen her connections in the capital and make more friends.

The so-called 'well bred maidens' of the capital were blindly arrogant and looked down upon Xiaocao, who was born into a farmer's family. From time to time, mocking words aimed towards her daughter reached her ears and because of this, she had cut off all ties with a few other families.

She did not understand what those pampered little misses were so arrogant about. Were their chins lifted high up into the sky just because they knew how to recite a few poems, play a few instruments, and work a needle and thread together? Even Jiang Siniang who was a merchant seemed better than them! At the very least, she used her own skills and effort to create beautiful pieces of clothing for others! What right did those little rich misses who only knew how to wait for others to serve and pamper them and never contributed anything to anyone have to look down on others?

Lady Fang was inwardly elated when she saw her daughter chat animatedly with Jiang Siniang. Only those who could appreciate her daughter's capabilities were worthy to interact with. As such, what importance do the words and opinions of those supposed 'well-bred ladies' hold?

Jiang Siniang politely stood up with Xiaocao and waited until Madam Fang went back into the inner courtyard. Then, she held Xiaocao's hand and asked eagerly, "Quick, tell me! Where did you get this idea from?"

Yu Xiaocao seriously pondered about it and then said, "My aunt originally married over to the northeastern mountain region, and there's an ethnic group called Manchu over there. Most of them wear clothes that are designed like this, and it's called 'Qi-style attire', not the 'qi' from 'riding a horse', it's 'Qi-style attire' from the word 'flag' [1]. This outfit is not only practical, but it also saves a lot of cloth!"

Jiang Siniang drifted into a daze, seemingly mumbling to herself, "So it's the outfits of another ethnic group! I've heard that the clothes of the Hu ethnic group that live towards the northwest are very special and pretty and they use a veil to cover their faces. If I have the chance, I'd really want to travel around and see the world outside, then I wouldn't be lacking in inspiration..."

"That's right, it's better to travel ten thousand kilometers than read ten thousand books. I've heard that the people in the southwest use silver accessories, and their clothes are dyed with a special method, it's really marvelous...If I had the chance, I'd like to follow our Great Ming's ships to the western sea to see it for myself. Rumors say that the people over there have white skin, golden hair, blue eyes and a head full of curly hair, isn't it interesting?" In her two lifetimes, Yu Xiaocao had never travelled outside her country, and, though the chances were small, she still yearned to see the world for herself.

Jiang Siniang's eyes widened as she held her hand to her mouth in surprise, "Blue eyes, yellow hair, moreover, curly hair? It...sounds like the description of monsters from the legends. Are there really people like this?"

"Of course! Both the emperor and Royal Prince Yang have travelled across the western sea and seen westerners before. I heard that not only do they have yellow hair, but some of them also have red hair! They look different from us, and their language is also different. I don't know how the emperor and Royal Prince Yang were able to communicate with them! The clothes that the westerners wear are also different from ours. If the opportunity arises, we can have the fleet get us some of the clothes that the westerners wear for reference!" Yu Xiaocao said a little whimsically.

However, the Great Ming Dynasty's trade ships were all currently under the command of Royal Prince Yang. She would only need to ask, and Zhu Junyang would definitely be willing to bring back not only their clothes, but also even all of their rare and strange trinkets and items for her.

"That would be wonderful! I'd really like to travel everywhere and sightsee..." Jiang Siniang's current expression was akin to a young girl who was filled with hopes and dreams and seemed unlike that of a master of embroidery's bearing.

Yu Xiaocao watched her and suddenly thought that having a dream was such a wonderful feeling. 'What is my dream? Cultivate high-yielding crops so that the civilians would never starve? This dream is too noble and should be one belonging to a person of higher authority. It doesn't have much to do with me as I'm only a small official. Make a fortune so that my family is able to pass their lives comfortably? But

I'm not lacking money, and my family's conditions only keep improving. What exactly is my dream? I really need to seriously think about it!

Jiang Siniang collected herself and returned to the more practical topic. She attentively inquired about the Qi-style attire's concepts, but Xiaocao only knew a little and did not understand the craft of making clothes at all.

"Can Younger Sister draw out the impression you have of the Qi-style attire for Older Sister to see?" Jiang Siniang felt that understanding the concept through sight was somewhat better in this case.

Yu Xiaocao said somewhat embarrassingly, "I don't know how to draw. I'm afraid that my drawings wouldn't serve any purpose and I'll only serve to humiliate myself. Why not let me describe while you draw? This seems much easier."

The two of them moved to Xiaocao's courtyard. Servants fetched them the writing tools from the outer courtyard and Jiang Siniang's maidservant ground the ink as Yu Xiaocao slowly introduced the designs of Qi attire that she knew to the modiste.

Yu Xiaocao, who loved to watch shows set in the Qing Dynasty such as "Empresses in the Palace", "Scarlet Heart" and "Nothing Gold Can Stay", was more than familiar with the apparels and accessories of the Qing Dynasty.

The length of its skirt nearly reached the feet, which was a similar design to qipao that came later. It was paired with a sleeveless jacket and had various types of the collars such as saddled-shaped, round shaped, and slightly folded. There were several different designs of the upper garment, like pipa style, buttoned-down on the right side, and buttoned-down in the middle. The matching skirt or pants had printed flower patterns, embroidery, and pleating. The edge of the lapel, collar, and sleeves were decorated with different techniques like inlay and embroidery. The sleeves were wider on the bottom and shaped like a horse hoof...

It could be said that Jiang Siniang's drawings were even more beautiful and exquisite than what Xiaocao had pictured. Jiang Siniang produced a few sketches of different beautiful designs. The other girl was indeed talented in clothing design, and she was able to create designs that were even better than what Xiaocao had imagined as long as Xiaocao was able to describe even just a little part of the outfit. Her maidservant's eyes shone with pride, yet said with a little haughtiness, "Mistress, the designs would be better if you'd used our colorings to draw them."

There was a design where the upper garment's length reached the knees and was decorated with inlays. It was paired with a pleated skirt. Yu Xiaocao pointed at it and smiled, "My godmother would look so good in this outfit! Since the weather is getting colder, you can sew on some fox fur on the collar and the opening of the sleeves. It'd be warm to wear and it'll still look good at the same time..."

The inspiration that had collected in Jiang Siniang over the past few months seemed to have found an opening and exploded. She consecutively drew more than a dozen different designs of the Qi-style attire. Some of them followed Xiaocao's descriptions while others were innovations of her own ideas and understanding of the concept. Each design was unique in its own way and was extremely elegant and exquisite. Looking at these designs was like seeing the sets of outfits present themselves to an observer in real life.

Jiang Siniang's heart itched when she looked at these designs. She yearned to rush back immediately so she could start turning these sketches into stunning sets of clothing.

Hearing Xiaocao's words, Jiang Siniang laughed, "Younger Sister Xiaocao indeed has a good eye for things. I have created this design with Lady Fang's figure in mind. Xiang'er, take Lady Fang's measurements later. Two days later, Older Sister will visit you again after I've created the outfit according to the design. At that time, we'll see if it's the correct fit for Lady Fang."

Yu Xiaocao was aware that her godmother had long desired to own clothes that were made personally by Jiang Siniang, so she smiled and expressed her gratitude, "Then I shall trouble Older Sister!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 438 - Handmade Soap

"You'd be treating me like an outsider if you're too courteous! If it wasn't for you, I'd have already been exhausted and my inspiration would've run out. Don't worry, I'll definitely treat you well! Exquisite Garments will sponsor all of you and Lady Fang's future clothes! I'll personally make a set of clothes for you and Lady Fang every season, and I'll give you 20 percent of the profits from the Qi-style attires. Don't refuse me, or else I'll throw these designs into the brazier!"

If Jiang Siniang was not a determined person, she would not have come out despite all the pressure and taken over the Exquisite Garments that was about to close up operations. She also would not have been able to successfully establish her reputation along with Exquisite Garments through her skills and hard work.

Jiang Siniang had initially planned to find the person who designed Official Yu's clothes and subsequently buy off the drawings and designs. However, she hadn't expected that she would connect so well with the designer, Yu Xiaocao, and they even became sisters of a different surname.

She had always put emphasis on integrity when she did her business, and reciprocity when she interacted with others. As the older sister, she most definitely would not take her younger sister for granted. Not only did she promise to personally create Xiaocao and Lady Fang's clothes, she had also considered Xiaocao's designs and ideas as an important element and decided to share her profits with her at the end of the year.

With the Yu Family's current conditions, Xiaocao didn't care whether she got the profits or not. However, she felt Jiang Siniang's insistence, so she was not courteous with her, "I'll unabashedly accept Older Sister's gift, then."

Only now did Jiang Siniang's face light up with joy as she stood up and said, "I'll return now—I still have to sort out these drawings and write up a profit-sharing agreement, which Xiang'er will send over to you later."

Yu Xiaocao wanted to have her stay for lunch, but she tactfully declined under the pretense of having things to do back in Exquisite Garments. Xiaocao did not insist, and called the servants to prepare a basket containing a few watermelons and cantaloupes for her to bring home.

Once they were in their horse carriage, Xiang'er happily put aside the watermelons and cantaloupes and said, "Mistress, Miss Yu is quite generous—even just these watermelons are worth over a hundred taels! The fruits and vegetables store owned by Imperial Prince Jing sells a medium-sized watermelon for ten taels each, and we wouldn't necessarily be able to get one even at this price! Not to mention that they're sold in limited numbers—fifty watermelons and thirty cantaloupes a day..."

She paused, then tried to stifle her laughter as she gossiped, "I heard Duke Wei was holding a birthday banquet, and in order to have a plate of fruits for each table, he had his servants queue up since the middle of the night. It so happened that his rival, Imperial Prince Rong, also wanted to hold a feast. The two of them nearly fought to buy the fruits! The melons and fruits produced in the greenhouse of Royal Prince Yang's farmstead is like a chicken that lays golden eggs."

"Then do you know who is the one that made growing vegetables, fruits and melons possible during winter?" Jiang Siniang asked without lifting her head as she flipped through the drawings in her hand.

"How could I not know? Who in this capital doesn't know of Official Yu that works in agriculture under the Ministry of Revenue? Not only can she cultivate high-yielding crops, but she also made it possible to

grow produce out of season! In the future, the people of the capital will be able to enjoy these delicacies! Who would've known that all of this is actually the result of the contribution of a smart yet gentle girl in her teens?" Xiang'er's face was filled with envy and admiration as she said this.

"Younger Sister Xiaocao isn't only talented in agriculture, but she's also gifted in culinary. It's been said that many of the best-selling dishes of Zhenxiu Restaurant are her creations. Her medical prowess should also be praised. She'd even successfully treated the little prince's illness!" Jiang Siniang couldn't help but feel in awe as she thought about the girl who was only several years younger than her and yet had already possessed such capabilities.

Xiang'er's eyes lit up as she held her face in her hands and dazedly breathed, "Official Yu looks only about eleven or twelve years old, yet she's so knowledgeable and proficient. Could it be that she's a genius?"

Jiang Siniang could not bear to move her gaze away from the pieces of designs, and she loathed that she could not immediately turn these drawings into pieces of clothing. She could imagine the sensation these extraordinary designs would cause in the capital!

She agreeably nodded to Xiang'er's words. Simply from the words of her relative, Younger Sister Xiaocao was able to identify the many special elements of the designs and had servants make an eye-catching outfit out of it. If Younger Sister Xiaocao would only spend a little more time on her drawing skills, it would only be a matter of time before she would have to surrender the title of 'Great Ming Dynasty's Master of Embroidery'.

When Jiang Siniang returned to her residence, she immediately began work on making Qi-style attires throughout the day, and she was so immersed in making the clothes that she even forgot to sleep and eat. After she left the Fang Estate, Yu Xiaocao returned to the inner courtyard. She climbed and lay lazily atop a cushioned seat that was placed next to a heated wall. By her side, Lady Fang silently listened to Hechun's animated prattles.

"Madam, you don't know how amazing the young miss is! With just a few simple sentences, she was able to let Modiste Jiang sincerely treat her like her sister! This servant was also amazed when Young Miss described the Qi-style attire. Although it was only in black and white, the designs that Modiste Jiang made based on Young Miss's descriptions were enough to make people long for it. I'm filled with pride whenever I think that the Qi-style clothing that will be the trend among those well-bred ladies of the capital all came from Young Miss!" Hechun was only a fourteen-year-old girl after all, she took it as a form of pride to be serving such a talented young miss, so her words were full of energy and filled with admiration.

Yu Xiaocao only smiled, "That's because Older Sister Jiang is amazing. She's capable of sublimating and refining my thoughts and words into something better. She is the true talent in the world of fashion!"

Hechun agreed with this statement, but she still felt that her own young miss was better, "Modiste Jiang also said that, if it weren't for Young Miss that gave her a spark of inspiration, she would never be able to design outfits that are so unique and beautiful. Young Miss had made a great contribution to her!"

Linglong, who was usually solemn and serious, also chipped in, "To have Modiste Jiang's sincere friendship, our young miss is definitely the first among the capital's young ladies!"

Hechun nodded her head almost as if she were kowtowing, and her face blossomed with a smile, "Madam, take a guess at what Modiste Jiang had promised to Young Miss!"

"What did she promise? Make a set of clothes for our Cao'er?" Lady Fang did not have a single thing to say against her own daughter, "Cao'er, you're growing—it's about time you have a few sets of apparels and accessories that you can wear out!"

Hechun's smile deepened, "In the future, Young Miss can wear the clothes that Modiste Jiang personally makes for you when you go out. With a set of clothes from Modiste Jiang every season, you'd definitely be the envy of those arrogant young ladies!"

"A set of outfits every season? For every year?" Lady Fang was astounded. It should be known that it was enough bragging rights for a year if any one of the young ladies competing managed to get their hands on even just one set of Modiste Jiang's creations. Moreover, this was getting a set of clothes every season!

"It's not only for Young Miss. Madam, you, also get a set of clothes every season, made personally by Modiste Jiang! Modiste Jiang also said that the first set of Qi-style clothing would be made according to your measurements. You'd be the first noblewomen in the entire capital to own a Qi-style attire!" Once the words escaped Hechun's mouth, all the maidservants in the room immediately exclaimed and congratulated their mistress.

Lady Fang could not believe what she was hearing. It was good enough that Jiang Siniang connected well with her daughter and even offered to make clothes for her, but she didn't expect her daughter to weigh so much in Jiang Siniang's heart until Jiang Siniang's favor extended even to her, and promised to make

clothes for her, too. Everyone in the capital knew that Modiste Jiang of Exquisite Garments would not simply make clothes for anyone—how lucky she was!

“Cao'er, since Modiste Jiang treats us so well, we should reciprocate and return the favor!” Lady Fang thought about what she could possibly give back to Jiang Siniang.

Without much thought, Yu Xiaocao said, “At the most, I'll sponsor Jiang Family's fruits and vegetables for this winter!”

But Hechun responded hesitantly, “Young Miss, Modiste Jiang only promised to make clothes for both you and the madam because you gave her the designs of the Qi-style attire. If you also provide her with fruits and vegetables, isn't it a little...”

Lady Fang pondered about it, and then nodded, “Hechun is right, if there are too many benefits between friends, the friendship would no longer be pure. However, some harmless little gifts should still be alright. Don't you like making pastries? You can occasionally send her some so she can try.”

Xiaocao laughed when she noticed that Hechun seemed like she wanted to say something, “If you have something to say, just say it! It's not like someone is covering your mouth, why make such an odd face?”

Hechun giggled, “Young Miss, we actually have something new that can be sent as gifts to one's BFF!” She'd heard the term 'BFF' from Young Miss before. From now on, Jiang Siniang would be considered as her young miss's BFF, right?

Xiaocao's eyes lit up as she said, “You mean, the handmade soaps?”

Hechun nodded fiercely, “Yes, yes! I followed the instructions that you gave and tried for a long time before I finally made aloe soap and honey-milk soap! I'm only waiting for you to return and check the results!”

“Go bring it over for me to see!” Yu Xiaocao was excited.

Speaking of handmade soaps, the idea only came by when she was washing her face one morning and complained about the rough soap, “This soap is expensive but it's not particularly useful. It can't keep moisture, nor can it whiten the skin—it's not worth buying!”

Hechun always wanted to look pretty. On normal days, she liked to make some cosmetics like rouge and face powder. Once she heard her young miss complain about the soap that cost five taels each, the Hechun who idolized Xiaocao began to pester her, asking about the kind of soap that would be able to moisturize and whiten the skin. Thus, Xiaocao told her two ways to easily make soap. Although the person speaking was careless, the listener had the intention. Hechun remembered the instructions and secretly tried them out. Xiaocao had not expected that she would be able to successfully craft them after only a month's work.

The other maidservants in the room snickered when Hechun brought back two pieces of oddly shaped handmade soap. The aloe soap was only a green lump that looked like squished vegetable balls. The color of the honey-milk soap was neither yellow nor white and it looked like expired cheese. Could these actually be used?

Wutong felt that she had stolen her limelight earlier, so she was eager to deride her, "Hechun, this is the 'handmade soap' that you mentioned? Are you sure it's not a failed product that you brought out to fool Young Miss? Who would dare to use such a thing like this?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 439 - The Young Ladies of the Capital

Hechun's face reddened from their mockings and she retorted, "It looks bad, but it works better than the soap we buy from outside! Using the aloe vera soap moisturizes your hands and using honey and milk soap won't dry your hands. In fact, it'll even make them feel fine and smooth!"

Wutong continued to mock her, "With your lousy skills, others won't even buy it for half a tael, much less for five taels! Hurry and take it back, don't humiliate yourself!"

Yu Xiaocao's gaze lightly slid over her, and Wutong knew to immediately shut her mouth.

"Let me see it!" Yu Xiaocao took the two handmade soaps from the maidservant. Their shapes were indeed too horrible to look at. Hechun was too careless with this. Did she just casually shape them with her hands? She placed the light green soap to her nose and took a light sniff. The smell was quite refreshing and exquisite, with a hint of the fresh scent of aloe. The coloring of the soap was uneven. It was probably because Hechun had not thoroughly stirred the mixture when she had poured in the aloe juice.

She let Wutong bring in a pot of water and used the honey and milk soap to wash her hands. The soap suds were quite fine, and her hands felt smooth and moisturized after washing. There was a slight smell of milk candy leftover. The soap worked quite well; the only thing lacking was the appearance.

She gave Hechun some tips and a bottle of mystic-stone water, claiming that it was an extract of many herbs that had many benefits for the skin. She instructed the maid to drip a drop of the 'herbal extract' into the mixture the next time she made soap, so the effects would be better.

Hechun revered her mistress's skills in medicine. If her mistress said that this extract was beneficial to the skin, then soaps containing this extract would definitely have the same effects as her mistress had claimed. They would be able to brighten, moisturize, and remove pimples from a person's skin...

In Hechun's heart, her young miss was an existence comparable to the gods. Older Sisters Yingtao and Yangliu were both people that she admired and also the target she was working hard towards. Older Sister Yingtao was talented in medicine, which was why she became the manager of the pharmaceutical workshop. Meanwhile, Older Sister Yangliu showed great talent in the culinary arts and was placed in charge of the kitchen of their braised food store in the capital. If she could perfect these handmade soaps and add some finishings, could she also become young miss's important subordinate like them in the future?

Lady Fang smiled as she watched her daughter 'fool around' with the maidservants. Seeing Hechun getting fooled by her daughter with just a few sentences, she laughed, "Hechun, your young miss has a lot of unique ideas, and what she really requires are girls like you who have the guts to try and like to take action. Try your best, this might be your chance!"

Yu Xiaocao only smiled, but Hechun was full of vigour. At the side, Wutong sulked, 'Does the young miss not like me? She'd rather promote that lowly little girl than give me a chance. Could it be...that wretch had told the young miss that I was unwilling to follow her to the outskirts to suffer, and that I had even said some sarcastic remarks at that time?' Her worries consumed her as she thought really hard about what she could do to let her mistress change her opinion of her.

On the other side, Xiaocao and her godmother were discussing the young ladies of the capital.

"Cao'er, Royal Princess Minglan has already personally sent the invite over for next month's flower war party. If we continue to decline her invite, others might say that we're arrogant and disrespectful, but I'm afraid you'll suffer grievances if you go..." Lady Fang was also very hesitant. On one hand, she wanted her daughter to interact with more peers and slowly create her own circle of friends, but on the other hand, she was fearful that the other arrogant, pampered little misses would look down upon her daughter's lowly birth and use it to mock her.

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, "There's nothing to be aggrieved about. Those supposed well-bred maidens of prestigious families only behave so because they're backed by their family. If we disregard their backgrounds, what else is left for them to be arrogant about? Rest assured, Godmother, I won't get upset because of people who are unrelated to me."

"You've always been free and easy, so I won't say any more. You're right, making friends require fate. We should just go with the flow!" Seeing that Xiaocao understood the current situation, Lady Fang didn't say anymore on that topic, "Royal Princess Minglan's quite brisk and generous, unlike others. However, she does tend to be really down-to-earth with her words, so she doesn't necessarily have prejudices against you if she said something that's a bit offensive. This, you'll have to feel for yourself!"

Yu Xiaocao obediently nodded as Lady Fang continued, "It's not a secret in the capital that Royal Princess Minglan loves chrysanthemums. For the flower war, you should bring the pot of 'Two Qiaos' from our greenhouse and present her the thing that she likes. Even if you can't get first place, Royal Princess Minglan would still look at you differently."

After a thinking a bit, Lady Fang still did not feel completely at ease, so she started to prattle about the other well-bred maidens of the capital, "Among the ladies of the capital, the ones who are most well known are the 'four talented girls of the capital' and the 'two beauties'. Among the four talented girls are the Chancellor of the Imperial Academy's daughter, Cao Panyun; the granddaughter of the Grand Secretary of the Imperial Library, Wu Lingfu; Wen Shuhan, daughter of a scholar at Hanlin Academy; and Lin Weiyu, daughter of an official under the Grand Secretariat. They're all skilled in many aspects and are the target of pursuit of many scholars in the capital. These people are aloof and conceited, but they care very much about their reputation and won't offend others easily."

"As for the 'two beauties', they're judged by their appearance and bearing. One of them is the daughter of Prime Minister Yuan, Yuan Xueyan, who likes to wear white and is usually cold. The other is the granddaughter of the Princess Royal, He Wanning, who wears red and has a fiery temperament. Although the two of them have opposing temperaments, they're actually quite good friends. Yuan Xueyan is fine, but remember to never offend He Wanning. If she's angry with you, she'll hit you no matter who you are..."

Lady Fang also introduced the traits and temperaments of other young ladies and was unwilling to stop even when she had ranted on until dinnertime. She was afraid that if she missed out even just the slightest detail, her daughter might be at a disadvantage.

Yu Xiaocao only quietly listened to her. She had not intended to interact much with those well-bred young maidens who carried themselves arrogantly and seemed so fake. When the time came, it would be just fine as long as they could get along on the surface.

Days passed. As the weather slowly turned colder and colder, the greenhouse vegetables now fully displayed their charm. The farmstead had only tried cultivating a hundred mu of vegetables this year, but the capital was full of people that had wealth and authority. If one were to casually throw a stick on Chaoyang Street, they would hit a person that was either rich or distinguished. Neither the wealthy nor the powerful lacked money, so when the supply of greenhouse vegetables could not reach the demand, the prices of the vegetables spiked.

Even at the price of fifty copper coins a catty, one wouldn't necessarily be able to buy the green, leafy vegetables that normally sold at a few copper coins per catty. The prices were even higher for eggplants, yardlong beans, tomatoes, cucumbers and the likes. People would still fight for them even if they were sold at the price of one tael per catty. People queued in front of the fruit and vegetable stores at the east and west sides of the city even before dawn, and all the limited quantities of produce would definitely be sold out before half the day had gone by.

The person who suffered the most because of this was definitely Imperial Prince Jing. Once the people found out that the fruit and vegetable stores in the east and west of the city were owned Prince Jing, all of his peers, regardless of whether they had been acquainted before or not, approached him to chat, but every one of them eventually led to topics relating to fruits and vegetables, hoping that he would supply them with more produce outside of the set quantities under the table.

Imperial Prince Jing was so annoyed he could only sell out the emperor, "The greenhouse vegetables are the result of a cooperation between the emperor and Official Yu under the Ministry of Revenue and has nothing to do with the Imperial Prince Jing's Estate. We're only in charge of sales. I'm an imperial prince, but I really have no say in this matter! Rather than wasting your time here, it'd be better if you tried their luck with the little Official Yu instead."

Those civil and military officials were mostly against the appointment of Yu Xiaocao as an official. Back then, when she was being appointed, some officials who were more headstrong and obstinate almost rammed their heads into a pillar. How could they, for the sake of fulfilling their cravings, put down their dignity to beg a mere sixth-ranked official? Some of them even began to accuse Yu Xiaocao of not trying to fix her relationships with other court officials... These people wanted her vegetables, yet still acted haughtily while expecting her to hurriedly hand them over. It was really stupefying!

Yu Xiaocao would definitely spit her rice out if she knew how these people thought. The emperor only appointed her as a small official for practicality sake. She did not think that she could be promoted to a first-ranked official just by cultivating agricultural produce. Sixth-ranked was as far as she could go!

However, the general's estate received an increasing amount of calling cards recently. A small part of them came for Yu Xiaocao from some unknown young ladies with unknown motives. The rest were invites for Lady Fang to some gatherings that also specified for her to bring along her daughter, Yu Xiaocao, but Xiaocao had tactfully declined all of them under the pretense that she was busy with work. Rather than deal with those pretentious young ladies, she felt it was easier to go to the plantation and do some actual work!

It was exactly because she rarely attended these gatherings that she became a mystery among the young ladies of the capital. Of course, the young ladies whose invitations she had declined had spoken badly about her, like how she was so arrogant, petty, how they gave her face but she didn't want to save face and the likes...This had incited more curiosity from others. What kind of person was this twelve year old girl who was born in a farmer's family but was now a sixth-ranked official?

The day of the 'flower war party' arrived quickly. Days before the event, a lot of people were already asking about, trying to see if Official Yu under the Ministry of Revenue was attending the event. Even more eagerly awaited for a good show. If that person surnamed Yu would dare to not give face to Royal Princess Minglan, then she could only wait to be left out of the circle of well-bred young ladies! (Yu Xiaocao: Is this even important?)

Jiang Siniang had sent the Qi-style attire she had made to the general's estate in advance. The Qi-style clothing was about to make its first appearance on Exquisite Garments' display. She wanted to use this flower war party as an opportunity to create a huge sensation for it among the prestigious circles in the capital.

When Yu Xiaocao was trying on the clothes, she even mocked herself, "Older Sister, I'm only afraid that I'll go in bright and beautifully, but come out covered in ash and mud. Wouldn't it be a shame if someone were to 'accidentally' spill tea or some sauce over such a pretty set of clothes?"

Jiang Siniang's hand, which was helping her to adjust the garment, paused. She recalled the difficult times at the beginning when she was barely holding up Exquisite Garments and her lips thinned into a line. She proclaimed coldly, "It's alright! Those people still want to maintain their reputation, so they won't dare to do anything to you directly. At most, they'll say some unkind words—just take it as wild dogs barking. I've brought you an additional set, just remember to be careful while you're changing, or

else you might fall into someone's trap. You'll have to guard against the secrets and schemes of the young ladies."

Fields of Gold Chapter 440 - Misunderstanding

The day before the flower war banquet, Zhu Junyang, who usually couldn't be found, had finally appeared for some reason. The little lass looked like she had grown taller again and was now at the height of his chest. He was worried about her and reminded her, "Lass, if anyone tries to bully you, don't keep it inside of you. Come back and tell me..." After not seeing the young royal prince for over a month, the only thought Yu Xiaocao had going through her head now was—this fellow is even more bewitching now! She didn't dare to look deeply into that pair of alluring phoenix eyes as she was afraid that, if she wasn't careful, she might get lost in their depths. Someone needed to take this guy down a notch because otherwise he was going to harm everyone else!

When she heard this, Xiaocao, who was somewhat lost in her thoughts, burst out into laughter. She lifted her tiny head and looked at that devilishly handsome face and said, "Why do I need to tell you? Are you going to beat them up?"

Zhu Junyang was speechless for a second and then coldly huffed, "Although I don't hit women, these girls do have brothers you know..."

Yu Xiaocao silently gave a moment of silence to the brothers of the maidens who were planning on making things difficult for her. She then faintly smiled, "In actuality, you don't have to go through so much trouble. We just won't allow the families of those who are stupid enough to try to bully me to buy vegetables or fruits then. In any case, if she looks down on my background as a farmer, then she shouldn't be eating fruits and vegetables grown by this farmer's daughter, right? As for next year's fruit and watermelon harvest, we also won't sell it to them. When the canned and jarred fruits come out, we won't sell those to them either!"

Wasn't the reason why those people looked down upon her because they came from wealthy and powerful families? However, if they had the money but were still unable to buy popular goods, would they still believe that they were better than others?

Apparently his little lass wasn't a little white bunny who was easily bullied by others. Instead, she was a tiny cat who hid her sharp claws until she needed them. Usually she looked quite gentle, obedient and adorable. However, whenever she was unhappy, she would reveal those claws and leave a bloody mark on you that you could never forget!

Zhu Junyang, who had been escorted to the gate of the outer courtyard, helped Xiaocao by pulling her cloak and furry little hat into place. He smiled, "Recently I haven't spent much time with you. When

winter is in full swing, I'll have more time to spend with you. Whoever tries to bully you, remember them and tell me. I will make sure to get them all back for you!"

In actuality, for the past month or so, Xiaocao had been even more busy than Royal Prince Yang. She was the only one in charge of the vegetable stand in Tanggu and also was in the midst of managing the pharmaceutical factory's new products. Recently, Tongren Medicine Hall came up with a few new pills for nurturing the body, which were the masterpieces of her work from the past month. So...the young royal prince didn't have to be concerned about Xiaocao pining for him. In fact, she was too busy to even think about him!

The next day, early in the morning, Yu Xiaocao changed into the set of Qi-style clothing that Older Sister Siniang had personally designed and sewn for her. Her hair was combed into a pair of cute flower buns with two side braids that were expertly arranged on her head to make it look like she had two elegant flowers on her head. The buns were decorated throughout with hair pins encrusted with pink pearls. The remaining lower layers of hair were combed into small braids to swing at the front of her chest. It made her look younger by about two years and she looked especially adorable and unique.

When Xiaocao entered the inner courtyard of the Duke Zhenguo's estate, countless pairs of curious eyes looked at her from head to toe. She was dressed in a simple and elegant Qi-style dress that was a light pink. Her white sleeves resembled the petals of lilies as they had two to three layers. She wore a rose red outer short coat that was dotted with clouds embroidered with gold and the collar was embroidered with icy white lotuses in full bloom. To combat the cold of the winter, the collars and cuffs of her clothing all had puffs of white fur lining it, which looked very cute. On closer look, the pleated skirt on her dress had artful layers that were colored a rosy-pink. It contrasted very elegantly with the icy white lotuses and harmonized perfectly.

One of the maidens there, who had sharp eyes, had noticed that this girl's clothing had a tell-tale seal on it. She was incredibly surprised. This set of clothing was clearly the handicraft of Jiang's Exquisite Garments. In fact, it had to be made by the owner of the shop herself and was a brand new style. The clothing not only broke through the previous conventions of how dresses should be styled but also showed a brand new design. It was truly a stunning piece of work.

The young maidens who had arrived at the gathering early all looked at this strange little face that had skin as transparent and luminous as jade. They were all trying to guess who she was. Which family's young miss was fortunate enough to catch the eye of Modiste Jiang and be able to show off her new work in this type of setting?

“Oh ho! Which family are you from, little sister? You don't look familiar to me. Is this the first time you're attending a gathering with us fellow sisters ah?” Royal Princess Minglan couldn't help but smile and stand up when she saw this unfamiliar, adorable little girl. She was previously sitting next to He Wanning, who was a beauty and had a personality that complimented with hers.

Lady Fang was a bit worried about her daughter attending such a party, so she had Linglong accompany Xiaocao. The maid quietly reminded her and Yu Xiaocao hurriedly placed her delicate white hands on her abdomen and bowed a greeting. She used a dulcet voice as sweet as a skylark to reply, “I am Yu Xiaocao. Greetings to Royal Princess Minglan and the other older sisters here.”

Yu Xiaocao? Who was that? When the unfamiliar little girl said her name, everyone had a confused look on their faces. There was only one official that was surnamed 'Yu' [1] in the capital. He had just taken up a position last year at the Ministry of Appointments and was the Left Assistant Minister, Yu Yonghe. It was said that his younger daughter was around ten years old. Was this little girl in front of them his daughter? The daughter of the Right Assistant Minister at the Ministry of Appointments, Li Meirou, smiled as she walked over. She intimately pulled on Xiaocao's hand and used a familiar tone of voice to address her, “So it's the little sister from the Yu Family ah! I have long wanted to meet you and wished to invite you to my family as a guest. However, your honored mother always said that your health wasn't good, so you couldn't leave the residence. From what I see today, you must be feeling better, right?”

Xiaocao had a more weak and delicate looking body. The Qi-style clothing cinched in at the waist, which made her seem even more dainty and ethereal. In addition, with her slightly bony chin and a large pair of eyes that seemed to overwhelm her face, it made her egg-shaped face seem even smaller. Luckily, her pale skin had a rosy glow to it. Otherwise, it would really look like she had just recovered from a great illness!

“Young Miss, she is Miss Li, the daughter of the Right Assistant Minister at the Ministry of Appointments.” Although Linglong was a bit perplexed at the other girl's enthusiasm, she didn't forget her status and made sure to remind her young miss.

This...type of attitude didn't seem quite right! Why was she pretending to be on familiar terms with her? Was this some type of trap? Despite her doubts, Yu Xiaocao didn't show any of her confusion on her face and instead revealed a sweet smile as she politely replied, “Many thanks, Miss Li, for your kind thoughts.”

“It's what I should do!” Li Meirou pulled on Xiaocao's tiny hand and waved gracefully at the group of young maidens as she said, “Come, Older Sister will introduce you to a few good sisters to let you become familiar with them.”

Everyone who she met in the warm room had revealed a kind smile at her. Although they were not as warm in attitude to her as the young miss from the assistant minister's family, they also weren't cold.

“Younger Sister Yu, is the set of clothing you're wearing from Exquisite Garments? I didn't expect that you, as a newcomer to the capital, would be able to catch the eye of Modiste Jiang and get a set of customly designed clothing from her. Is there a story behind all of this?” The person who spoke up was He Wanning. She was around fourteen to fifteen years of age and was wearing a set of clothing in fiery-red. The color made her face look even more lively and her personality was similar to the color of her clothing, bold and unrestrained. There wasn't anything she was afraid to mention.

Today, Yu Xiaocao had also set a mission for herself to promote the new Qi-style attire. She naturally wouldn't let this perfect opportunity go by, “The set of clothing I'm wearing was made by Older Sister Jiang and she had drawn inspiration from a different culture. This style really shows a woman's gentle and delicate side. I'm certain that, before long, this style of clothing will also be displayed in all of the Exquisite Garment Stores.”

“You're familiar with Modiste Jiang, ah?” One of the girls sitting in the room asked in a tone full of jealousy.

Yu Xiaocao replied in a humble manner, “I've only seen her a few times, that's all...”

“You already call her as an 'older sister', so it must not have only been a few times. Miss Yu, you're not telling the entire story! Quickly tell us, just how did you become familiar with Modiste Jiang?” He Wanning circled around Xiaocao and inspected her clothing carefully from head to toe. This wasn't considered to be a rude gesture in the noble maiden circles. If any of them had gotten a customly designed set of clothing from Exquisite Garments, then everyone would have to look at them closely.

Yu Xiaocao hesitated for a moment before she simply outlined the reason why Jiang Siniang had asked to see her. He Wanning frowned slightly, “Are you saying that Modiste Jiang saw that you were wearing a different style of clothing once and ran after you to ask about it?”

Li Meirou also had an expression of disbelief on her face as she said, “Younger Sister Yu, hasn't the wife of the Left Assistant Minister always said that you had a weak constitution and rarely went out? It's a bit coincidental that Jiang Siniang would randomly see you outside once wearing clothing that interested her, right?”

Yu Xiaocao revealed a perplexed expression and asked, “The wife of the Left Assistant Minister? I have never met her, so how could she know what my body is like? I am quite healthy and I can easily ride a horse every day for an hour without any problems.”

Li Meirou had a shocked expression on her face and used the handkerchief in her hand to cover her mouth, “Eh? You're not the young miss of the Left Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Appointments?”

“I'm not.” Yu Xiaocao blinked her large eyes. Her clear and limpid eyes reflected all of the awkward expressions on the young women's faces in the room.

Li Meirou stated in a somewhat angry and flabbergasted manner, “Didn't you say you were surnamed Yu ah? Out of all of the officials in the capital, other than the new Left Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Appointments, there isn't another family surnamed Yu, right? Just who are you? Why are you trying to pretend to be a young miss and fool everyone?”

Apparently everyone had mistaken her for someone else! Yu Xiaocao finally understood why everyone had been treating her so well from the start. As long as it wasn't some sinister plot, then she was fine! The tight knot she had in her chest was now relaxed.

In front of the bewildered other young ladies, Yu Xiaocao was very calm. She faintly smiled and said, “Miss Li, I believe we've had a misunderstanding! I am truly surnamed Yu, it's the Yu from 'may you have abundance year after year'.”

One of Royal Princess Minglan's maids next to her quietly whispered a few words into her ear. She looked at Linglong, who was next to Xiaocao, and nodded her head. She had a reserved smile on her face as she said, “So you are the young miss from Zhaoyang General's estate. I was rude earlier and had mistaken you for someone else.”

The young miss from Zhaoyang General's estate? Wasn't that the girl who was now a newly appointed agricultural official at the Ministry of Revenue? It was true. That agricultural official was also surnamed Yu and had the first name of Xiaocao. In fact, many of the noble maidens had privately made fun of her name, stating that it was such a crude and inelegant name. It made it obvious that she came from a peasant farming family.

Many of the young maidens in the warm room stopped smiling now and they had a look of slight disdain in their eyes. Li Meirou was even more flustered and unhappy. This Yu Xiaocao was too vile! She had misled her and had her embarrass herself in front of all of these noble maidens.

“What is wrong with you? How come you didn't state your identity clearly? Were you afraid of your own status and decided to pretend to be someone else?” Li Meirou babbled incoherently as she was afraid the other girls would start to misunderstand and think that she was friends with a crude and lowly girl from a peasant farmer's family.

Yu Xiaocao lost her smile and gave her a cursory glance. She stated in a neutral tone of voice, “Miss Li, am I right in assuming that you always reference the fact that you're the daughter of the Right Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Appointments when you're greeting someone? What's wrong with my birth? If we go back a few generations, no one should be laughing at anyone else!”

After they heard this, they had to admit that her reasoning was sound. Even the person sitting on that regal and golden throne was the descendant of a poor peasant in his grandfather's generation. In fact, even Duke Zhenguo and many other generals had all come from peasant stock. They weren't any more noble than regular farmers either.