

Gold Chapter 441

Fields of Gold Chapter 441 - Qualifications

Li Meirou sensed that Royal Princess Minglan was looking at her in a displeased manner and decided that she couldn't lose this argument. She raised her voice to say, "Everyone who is here had ancestors who contributed to the country, which is how they ended up with their ranks. You're only the daughter of a farmer, so how dare you compare us to you?"

Yu Xiaocao opened her eyes wide and looked at Li Meirou. It was only when the other girl started to feel uncomfortable that she finally replied, "You also said that this was all the deeds and contributions of your ancestors. So what leg do you have to stand on in being so proud and arrogant? Are you able to help the emperor in making the country better? Or are you able to improve the lives of the people? If you can't, then are you in any position to look down on other people?"

Li Meirou was speechless. Her father, as the Right Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Appointments, was a third-ranked official. Other than He Wanning occasionally saying a remark that made everyone not know what to say, there really wasn't anyone else in this circle who would speak to her so impolitely. At this moment, she was so incensed that her lips trembled and the rims of her eyes gradually turned red.

As one of the famed four talented girls in the capital, Wu Lingyun [1] had to interfere now. She stepped forward and said, "Older Sister Li had just had a misunderstanding with you and felt a bit upset about it. The only reason why she was a bit rude was because of the situation. Official Yu, do you need to be so overbearing?"

Overbearing? Her? Was the other girl sure it wasn't the other way around? One shouldn't be this obviously biased, right? Yu Xiaocao had never been the type of person to rein in her sharp tongue. That being said, it wasn't as if she was trying to fawn over these maidens. What was the point in swallowing this humiliation for nothing? If they wanted to cause problems for her, then she wasn't going to make their lives easy either.

"Miss Wu, the words you're saying are a bit too biased! From the moment I entered, have I ever personally claimed to be the daughter of the Left Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Appointments? Miss Li made a mistake, which isn't a big deal in the first place. But was there any need for her to lash out at me about my background and birth? From what Miss Wu is saying, I should take these insults, no matter how awful, and just endure it? Then, if someone wants to slap my face, I shouldn't try to dodge and instead raise my face to meet their hands and let my dignity be trampled? Is this how the noble maidens in the capital interact with each other? If that's the case, then I was wrong to come to this flower battle!"

As she finished, she slowly stood up and used a sharp gaze to look at all of the maidens who were obviously enjoying the show. She flitted across Wu Lingyun's and Li Meirou's faces before finally looking at Royal Princess Minglan. She moved a few steps as she said with an unapologetic look on her face, "Forgive me for causing havoc at your flower banquet, Your Highness. This pot of 'Two Qiaos' I will leave behind as a gift of apology. Hechun..."

Hechun stepped forward with a rigid look on her face and placed the pot of flowers in her hands up front. She also took cloth covering off of the flower, revealing a pot of chrysanthemums that had flowers that were colored yellow and purple on one bloom.

Royal Princess Minglan, who was a lover of chrysanthemums, immediately forgot the words of persuasion she wanted to say as her entire attention was now on that pot of gorgeous flowers. The dark green leaves contrasted sharply with the one flower in full bloom. The flower had rows of delicate petals and, in the exact middle, there was a clear division between the bright yellow petals and gorgeous purple petals. Next to the open bloom were several delicate buds that were all half yellow and purple. They seemed like shy little sisters that hid behind their beautiful sister and regarded everyone else bashfully.

"Isn't this...this the legendary 'Two Qiaos' chrysanthemum that is referenced in 'Two Qiaos hidden deeply within the Bronze Sparrow Platform' [2] poem and has flowers that are two colors? Miss Yu, where did you get such a valuable chrysanthemum? In fact, in order to find such a beautiful specimen, I begged my father and my older brothers to look for news about it. Yet, we've had no luck so far..."

The rumors weren't wrong. Royal Princess Minglan was truly someone who loved chrysanthemums beyond comparison. When she saw this valuable 'Two Qiaos' species, she only had eyes for this and nothing else.

Earlier, when her background was established, for a moment, all of the maidens in the room regarded the 'Two Qiaos' on the table with undisguised contempt. That all happened before Royal Princess Minglan revealed the identity of this flower. Yu Xiaocao had gotten a brief overview from her godmother before she went to this party. Royal Princess Minglan had been spoiled by her father and older brothers, so she had a somewhat childish yet open personality. Consequently, Yu Xiaocao didn't have any ill will towards her.

After the princess spoke, Yu Xiaocao glanced deliberately at the other maidens in the room and especially gave Li Meirou a provoking look before she leisurely replied, "My hometown is next to the mountain and ocean. In the mountains there, there's a valley surrounded on all four sides by the mountains. The climate there is mild and very few humans venture into that area. My younger brother

and I had coincidentally discovered this area and found that the valley had all types of rarely seen flora. This two-colored chrysanthemum had also come from that valley. From my godmother, I found out that this flower is the famous 'Two Qiaos' chrysanthemum. Thus, I brought it into the capital to the General's Estate and had it raised in the greenhouse...

“The rumors that true treasures are found in the wild are true. Flowers that have been bred from the hands of humans all seem to lose some sort of liveliness. Only this flower, which came from the wild mountains, has the liveliness befitting of a treasure. After hearing Miss Yu's story, I also want to go to that valley to take a look!” Royal Princess Minglan adored this pot of 'Two Qiaos' chrysanthemum and couldn't bear to look away.

She remembered that this pot of 'Two Qiaos' was something that Miss Yu had brought over to attend the flower wars banquet. However, the competition hadn't even started before this guest wanted to leave in anger. This offended guest also wanted to leave such a valuable specimen as a gift to her. If word of this came out, her reputation, as the host, would be negatively affected and people would claim she wasn't raised well. Royal Princess Minglan reluctantly ordered her maid, “This pot of 'Two Qiaos' was brought over by the young miss of Zhaoyang General's residence to attend the flower wars party. Quickly bring it into the greenhouse before it gets damaged from the cold.”

Yu Xiaocao was about to open her mouth to say something when the princess interrupted her, “There's a common saying: 'an exchange of blows may lead to friendship'. It's hard to avoid a few misunderstandings here and there between us girls. For my sake, would you two consider making up now?”

Although Li Meirou was indignant at the thought, she wasn't brave enough to refuse Royal Princess Minglan's suggestion. The princess's father was a first-ranked duke and her older brothers were all in the military with illustrious deeds under their belts. In fact, Royal Princess Minglan was awarded her title as royal princess from her father's and brother's deeds. If she made things inharmonious at the princess's party, then she likely wouldn't get any future invitations to the duke's residence...

After thinking things through, she restrained the hatred in her heart and pasted on a fake smile before she said to Yu Xiaocao, “It was just a misunderstanding. Miss Yu, please don't take it to heart.” This was the most she could do at this point. If she really had to apologize to a peasant with dirt on her shoes, in the future, how could she hold her head up in this circle of girls?

Yu Xiaocao slightly sneered but she decided to assent to Royal Princess Minglan's suggestion. It looked like she and Miss Li weren't fated to get along, but it wasn't a big deal! In any case, she would take things as they came and react accordingly.

After looking around, she saw He Wanning waving a hand towards her, so she walked to that table. That table only had He Wanning, who was dressed in fiery red, and Yuan Xueyan, who was dressed entirely in white sitting there. Thus, she also took a seat at the table.

However, one of the maidens in the room, who she didn't know, sourly remarked, "That table either has the daughter of a first-ranked official or the relative of the imperial family or the Royal Princess herself. Even the daughters of third-ranked officials don't have the guts to go up there. Why should she sit there?"

Royal Princess Minglan was in a very good mood after getting to see a 'Two Qiaos' chrysanthemum. When she heard this particular maiden stating a remark meant to cause trouble, she lightly gave her a glance that held a hint of warning.

Unexpectedly, Yuan Xueyan, who had been sitting at this table silently, spoke up in a cool tone, "If we're speaking about qualifications, in this entire room full of people, other than the royal princess having her own title, only Miss Yu is personally titled as a sixth-level official. Although sixth-level officials don't amount to much in court, many of the people here have fathers and brothers who aren't high-ranked either. She is the person most qualified to sit at the head table here."

The so-called 'four talented girls of the capital' only had male relatives that were lowly ranked. In fact, the highest ranked among them was only a fifth-ranked official. Compared to Yu Xiaocao's sixth-level official title, it wasn't that much higher. In this room full of young maidens who were the daughters of second-ranked and third-ranked officials, they were only here because of their fame as 'talented girls'. Otherwise, if they relied on their status as daughters of fifth-ranked officials or lower, they didn't have the qualifications to be invited to a party held by Royal Princess Minglan as there were plenty of girls of their status on the capital's streets. After hearing the 'icy beauty' Yuan Xueyan speak up, these four girls all blushed in embarrassment and lowered their heads.

The other girls in the room, who had originally wanted to cause problems, also reined themselves in when they saw Royal Princess Minglan and the other 'two beauties of the capital', who were unspoken heads of this circle, speak up for Yu Xiaocao.

"Many thanks, Miss Yuan, for helping me. Let me take this cup of tea in place of wine to toast you a cup." Yu Xiaocao held up her cup of tea and took a big drink from it.

Yuan Xueyan's lips slightly curved up in what could be considered a smile and also took a gentle sip from her cup. After placing down her teacup, she lightly said, "Yu Fan is the last disciple of my grandfather, so

our two families are actually connected in this way. My grandfather always praises your younger brother and states that his scholarly abilities are similar to my father's when he was young. Not everyone can understand the struggles of a talented young man who is born in humble circumstances.”

Although her voice wasn't loud, it was enough that everyone in the room could hear her words clearly. Someone who was praised by Great Scholar Yuan to be similar to his most talented son likely was truly a talented youth! Yu Xiaocao didn't look much older than ten to eleven, which meant that her younger brother was even younger. However, he had been taken in by Great Scholar Yuan as his last disciple. His future career and connections was not something to be taken for granted.

The vast majority of the young maidens here silently rejoiced that they didn't blatantly reveal their disgust and contempt towards Yu Xiaocao. The interpersonal relationships between the young maidens in the capital were actually miniaturized versions between the officials and wealthy nobles. If they couldn't help their fathers and brothers, then, at the very least, they shouldn't be causing trouble for them.

Yu Xiaocao could easily tell that the looks that were on her had now held less contempt and more kindness now. She gratefully nodded her head towards Yuan Xueyan and said, “Headmaster Yuan's takes good care of my younger brother, so I am very grateful towards him. I will definitely come and visit him on another day...”

“Miss Yu is being too polite! Before the end of the year, Grandfather came back to the capital from Tanggu Town. He is very fond of your culinary talents and often talks about the snacks that you make. If he found out that you, Miss Yu, was coming over to visit, he would definitely be extremely happy.” Yuan Xueyan also felt a bit helpless at her foodie grandfather's gluttonous actions. In the past, her grandfather would be more restrained for the sake of his reputation. However, now he was acting more and more like an unruly urchin. For the sake of eating good food, he had done many things that made other people laugh. However, because of his status, no one actually showed their ridicule.

The smile on Yu Xiaocao's face became a few fractions more sincere when she thought of Headmaster Yuan's true personality. Even her attitude towards Yuan Xueyan became more intimate.

He Wanning had finally finished inspecting the set of clothing Xiaocao was wearing. She raised her eyes to look at the other girl's face and noticed the younger girl's smooth and perfect skin. She felt her own skin on her face and sighed, “It's truly nice to be young. Younger Sister Yu's face has skin that looks as smooth and glossy as a freshly peeled boiled egg. It's glowing with health and full of moisture. With my personality, I can't stand spending the entire day cooped up at home, so I have to go out to ride my

horse or practice archery...under the insults of the sun and wind, my skin is so dry that it seems like tree bark now..."

Fields of Gold Chapter 442 - Handmade Soap

In actuality, He Wanning's skin was the shade of light wheat. Paired with her strong eyebrows, it also had a distinctive flavor and beauty. However, the climate in the north during the autumn and winter seasons tended to be on the dry side, so it was natural that it would cause her skin to become dehydrated.

Hechun had been silently standing behind her young miss when she heard this. Her mouth opened and closed but she didn't end up saying anything. Despite that, Yu Xiaocao managed to sense her maid's movements and turned her head to look at her for a bit. The two of them exchanged glances and, from Hechun's eyes, Xiaocao could tell that this maid had brought along some of her recently-made handmade soap along.

She carefully inspected He Wanning's complexion and quietly asked, "Miss He, what do you usually use to wash your face?"

"I naturally use the soap crafted by 'Full Spring Fragrance', which is the most famous cosmetics store in the capital. Since I often go out to ride my horse, if I don't wash my face with soap, I feel like my face doesn't get clean enough." He Wanning stated this in a matter-of-fact manner. Although soap was an expensive item, most of the noble young maidens in the capital could afford to use it.

Li Meirou coldly remarked from the side, "Miss He, I'm afraid that some country bumpkins may not have heard of this type of soap. Isn't this like playing the qin to a cow ah?"

One of the young girls sitting next to Li Meirou sniggered quietly. From time to time, some of the other young ladies would shoot a look to see if Yu Xiaocao had any reaction to this. Hechun was so incensed by this that her face turned red and wished she could go argue with these girls. Yu Xiaocao gave her warning look that said, 'We'll find out very shortly just who is the country bumpkin here.'

Yu Xiaocao glanced briefly at Li Meirou, who was immensely pleased with herself. She lightly laughed and continued to talk with He Wanning, "Full Spring Fragrance's soap admittedly is very good at washing all of the dirt and oil off of your face, but it contains lye as one of its ingredients, so it takes away a lot of moisture from the skin. When added on to the dry climate of the north, it's very easy for your skin to become dehydrated in autumn and winter. Our skin is like an apple. Originally, it is full of moisture and life but if it lacks water, it very easily shrivels up and becomes dry..."

Wasn't she claiming that a country bumpkin would not have heard of soap before? However, now, the person she was claiming to be a bumpkin knew the ingredients of the soap. Was there anything else she could say now? Li Meirou felt like her face had just been slapped and felt her complexion flush hotly.

“Then what should I do? If I don't wash my skin clean, I'll get pimples on my face. The pimples are red and quite swollen, so they don't look very good! Younger Sister Xiaocao, I heard you're skilled at medicine. Quickly tell me if there are any methods to fix this, okay?” He Wanning felt her own face and thought of a dried up apple that lost all of its juice. She shuddered and then had to ask if there was a solution.

Which maiden in her teenage years didn't like to be beautiful? There were quite a few young ladies in this room that had some sort of problem with their complexion. Even the most expensive cosmetics didn't seem to do much for their skin. They had noticed that Yu Xiaocao had skin that looked as tender as tofu and felt their insides start to itch. Although they pretended to be disinterested on the surface, they all had their ears perked up as if they were afraid they would miss something important.

Yu Xiaocao glanced at Hechun and the smile on her face became even more sincere as she said, “Tanggu is close to the ocean, so the air tends to be more humid. It was only after coming to the capital that I started feeling like my skin was getting dry in this climate. I also have similar issues to Miss He. I spend a lot of time outside due to work and my skin gets exposed to the buffeting of the wind and the harsh rays of the sun. If I don't protect my skin, wouldn't it become as rough as tree bark then?”

When He Wanning heard this, she repeatedly nodded her head, “Stop saying 'Miss He' this and ‘Miss He' that. It seems so distant ah! I'm only older than you by a few years, so just call me by Older Sister He then. Younger Sister Xiaocao, quickly tell me what methods you have to protect your skin, okay?”

When the other young maidens heard He Wanning's statement, they looked at Xiaocao with gazes full of envy and jealousy. He Wanning was the granddaughter of the Princess Royal [1] and, consequently, had a high status in the capital. She also had a somewhat proud and aloof personality. Most people found it difficult to get close to her. However, they would have never expected that a young girl from a farmer's family would get her good opinion after meeting her once. It looked like this Yu Xiaocao was someone not to be underestimated!

Yu Xiaocao flitted a look at all of the other maidens' expressions and smiled more deeply. A pair of cute dimples appeared on her face that were adorable enough to make people take a second glance, “I guess I will have to assent to your request and tell my secrets then! Older Sister He, to protect the skin, you

need to hold in moisture and prevent damage from the sun. Let's talk about protecting your skin from the sun. The best method would be to wear a sunshade or veil when you go outside. If you don't like wearing those, then you need to spread some protective cosmetics on your skin. In actuality, the best method is to not go outside when the sun's rays are the harshest. As for keeping and replenishing moisture in the skin, aloe vera is one of the best things to use..."

"Aloe vera? What is that?" He Wanning wasn't the only one who hadn't heard of this term. Even Royal Princess Minglan had never heard of this type of plant.

Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and suddenly realized something. Aloe vera was a native plant in Africa. The Great Ming Dynasty did have aloe vera but it was probably something that was brought over by the emperor or Royal Prince Yang when they had journeyed to the western hemisphere. Since this plant didn't look very dazzling, most of these young maidens probably didn't notice it, which was why none of these girls knew about it.

"Aloe vera is a type of plant from the western hemisphere. It has large and fat leaves. When the leaves are cut open, it will reveal some plant juice. This plant juice can help decrease the redness from someone's skin and also add hydration. Besides that, aloe vera also has some medicinal properties. However, the juice from aloe vera shouldn't be put directly on the skin as some people may have allergies to it..." Yu Xiaocao started to explain.

"Allergies? What are allergies?" He Wanning was currently a curious little dumpling. She had a pretty high ability to catch onto unfamiliar phrases.

"Allergies ah..." Yu Xiaocao paused for a bit to think before she continued, "Allergies are when you have a particular reaction to something. Some people will have large raised red bumps on their skin after touching something. These bumps can be itchy or cause peeling of the skin. Other people will start feeling like they have cold symptoms. Their noses will start itching and they will sneeze a lot. More severe reactions will lead to trouble breathing..."

Before Yu Xiaocao could finish, one of the young maidens suddenly exclaimed, "My mother can't be around cats and dogs or other animals that have fur on them. Otherwise, she can't stop sneezing and her eyes won't stop tearing up. It's very uncomfortable for her. Is that an allergy?"

"That's right, your honored mother is likely allergic to the fur on animals. As long as she stays away from them, she naturally wouldn't have any reaction." Yu Xiaocao nodded her head in assent.

There was another young lady who had a more introverted personality and didn't like to talk. She was around fifteen to sixteen years of age. She wanted to say something but then hesitated. Finally, she decided to ask, "Miss Yu, in the spring, my face gets itchy and will also have some small bumps appear. Is that also an allergy?"

Spring allergies were very common and a lot of people were allergic to the pollen and fluffy catkins from willow trees. Yu Xiaocao stated without thinking, "It must be. I don't know what kind of flora you have in your garden. Can you list them for me?"

The young lady thought for a second and then replied, "In my courtyard, there's not a lot of flowers. I like the gentle elegance of weeping willows so my mother had the servants plant a lot of weeping willows next to the small pond..."

"Then when you have the symptoms on your face, does it happen when the fluffy catkins from the willows come out?" Yu Xiaocao had a good idea of what was going on and asked specifically about this.

That young maiden thought for a bit and then hurriedly nodded her head, "Indeed! Every time the fluffy seeds are flying around is when my skin has problems. I love looking at floating seeds drifting around the air. It's as if a warm snow is falling and very beautiful...but every time I'm done admiring the sight, the bumps on my face get worse. Does that mean my allergies are related to the willow trees?"

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head, "Many people are allergic to willow catkins. As long as they keep far away from them and add moisturizing ingredients to their skin, their symptoms will naturally decrease."

He Wanning patiently waited through the conversation about allergies and now impatiently asked the question that everyone wanted to ask, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, can you tell us, how do you keep your skin hydrated?"

"Didn't I mention it earlier? Aloe vera juice has very good hydrating properties. I've altered some soap and created handmade aloe vera soap. It not only cleans the skin well but also prevents moisture from leaving the skin." Yu Xiaocao pretended to smile in a mysterious manner.

"Handmade aloe vera soap? This is soap that has the hydrating aloe vera juice added to it? Younger Sister Xiaocao, did you bring any along today? Can you take it out to let us older sisters take a look?" At a party or banquet, most people had to wash their hands at some point. Some maidens were more picky and would always bring their own soap along. Because of this, He Wanning asked to see if Xiaocao brought any soap along.

Yu Xiaocao gave Hechun a look and lightly laughed as the rest of the girls looked at her, "I'm not used to using the soap that is sold by the stores in the capital, so I really did bring some along. I not only brought over some aloe vera soap but I also brought over some new soap that my maid and I came up with that contains honey and milk in it. It not only can maintain the skin's hydration but also has brightening and whitening effects..."

"Quickly take it out so we can see!" He Wanning could no longer wait. Before they realized it, Xiaocao had become the person under the spotlight. Even Royal Princess Minglan no longer had the patience to talk to the other guests and instead looked at Xiaocao with interest as she sat next to her.

Hechun had a proud look on her face as she transferred the two flower pots in her hands to one of the maids in charge of this warm room. She took out her personal purse and carefully lifted out two delicately carved wooden boxes. These boxes were tiny and adorable and had a lily carved on their lids.

He Wanning grabbed one of the wooden boxes and carefully lifted the lid. Everyone could see that inside the box was a handmade soap that looked as beautiful as the most precious mutton-fat jade. It was about half the size of a maiden's palm and was in the shape of a flower. On the top of the soap, they could also see a small lifelike honeybee carved there.

"It's so beautiful and it even has the light sweet smell of cow's milk. It resembles the most expensive pastry from 'Daohua Village!'" A plump young girl who still had some baby fat on her face exclaimed somewhat foolishly. Apparently, before they knew it, Yu Xiaocao had attracted the attention of everyone and had been surrounded by all of the young maidens. Everyone craned their necks so that they could see the box holding the soap in He Wanning's hands.

Yu Xiaocao introduced this product, "Older Sister He is holding the milk and honey handmade soap. It not only brightens and hydrates the skin, but it also leaves a light fragrance on your hands after you wash with it." "Quickly, bring a basin of water over. I want to try it!" He Wanning had an impetuous personality, so she immediately ordered one of the maids to bring some washing water over.

Royal Princess Minglan was also holding a small wooden box in her hands. Inside this box was a handmade soap in the shape of a leaf. It was so intricately decorated that she could even see the 'veins' on the leaf. It had a pale green color that looked very fresh and cute. A light sniff revealed a simple and delicate fragrance that reminded people of the smell of spring in the countryside. The aroma reminded them of fresh cut grass and spring flowers and was intoxicating to them.

“Is this...the handmade soap that has some aloe vera juice added to it?” Royal Princess Minglan quietly asked.

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head and smiled, “This soap is very good at maintaining skin hydration. After washing your hands, your skin will feel slippery and soft. It feels quite comfortable.”

The water basin had been brought up and He Wanning wet her hands before holding the milk and honey handmade soap bar. She grinned, “Such a beautiful handmade soap. I almost can't bear to use it!”

Fields of Gold Chapter 443 - Flower War

“Articles for daily use should be used in order to get their true value. Isn't that right?” Yu Xiaocao took the handmade soap and gently wet it with some water before rubbing it on He Wanning's hands.

He Wanning slowly rubbed her two hands together and a white bubbly foam quickly appeared. She grinned, “Just from the bubbles alone I can tell that this soap is better than the one from Full Spring Fragrance. Furthermore, the smell of the soap is very good. Although Full Spring Fragrance's soap has some added fragrance in it, it still can't completely get rid of the scent of lye. Younger Sister, your handmade soap has the slightly sweet smell of cow's milk and has no weird odors. After comparing the two, I can tell your soap is much better!”

She gently rinsed off the foam from her hands and then wiped her hands dry with a handkerchief. A look of pleasant surprise appeared on her face as she exclaimed, “Wow! My hands are so soft and slippery! It's not like how they feel after I use Full Spring Fragrance's soap; they usually feel dry and astringent. Xueyan, feel my hands! Aren't they soft and smooth now...”

“Your hands? You always use them to hold onto swords or boxing. They're so hard that they feel like steel claws, how could they possibly feel soft?” From the tone of Yuan Xueyan's voice, everyone could tell that these two beauties had a good relationship with each other and were quite close!

He Wanning glared at her and groused, “I was telling you to feel the skin on my hands to see if they feel soft and smooth! You ah! If you don't insult me a couple of times every day, then you probably don't feel right. Isn't that so?” Yuan Xueyan had a clearly reluctant expression on her face as she reached out to feel the other girl's hands. Suddenly, under the expectant gaze of He Wanning, she let out a noise in surprise and then carefully felt the skin on He Wanning's hands again. A thoughtful expression appeared on her face.

“Are you done touching me? I'm starting to get goosebumps from your constant touching! If I didn't have a good understanding of you, then I would start thinking that you have lesbian tendencies ah!” He Wanning pulled her hand out of Yuan Xueyan's hands and forcefully rubbed it.

“Your Royal Highness, may I feel your hands too?” Yuan Xueyan noticed that Royal Princess Minglan had already washed her hands with the handmade aloe vera soap and proposed a question.

Royal Princess Minglan felt the skin on her hands and then felt the skin on her face. She discovered that her hands had become much more hydrated and soft compared to before. After hearing the other girl's request, she moved her hands to allow Yuan Xueyan to feel them. She noticed that the other girl was lost in thought after feeling her hands and asked, “What's wrong? Is there a problem?”

Yuan Xueyan liked to make her own cosmetics at home and the products she made were not in any way inferior to the famous brand, Full Spring Fragrance. The duck-egg powder she made could improve the coloring of one's skin and it looked more natural on a person's face. The maidens who had a good relationship with her all shamelessly thought up ways to ask her to give them a box of powder. If this handmade soap could earn her recognition, then it was absolutely a stellar product.

“Who would have thought such a small piece of soap could have the ability to keep moisture in the skin and smooth it out. Furthermore, its effect is instantaneous. This is something that even I can't come up with.” Yuan Xueyan gave a very favorable review of this handmade soap in front of everyone, which made this product recognized by all of them.

Yu Xiaocao felt like it was time to be modest at this point and humbly said, “In actuality, keeping the skin hydrated not only requires the use of external cosmetics but it's also important to treat it from within. Every morning, having a cup of warm water can replenish all of the water lost from your body overnight. Eating more fruits and vegetables is good not only for the skin but also for the rest of the body. Furthermore, one can frequently use thin slices of cucumber placed on the face to help maintain skin hydration. If you want to brighten the skin, then you can mix some tomato juice with honey together and use it as a mask on the skin. However, you should probably test it out on a small patch of skin first to see if you have an allergic reaction...”

What a joke, she remembered all of the little secrets and methods that were well-known in modern times to treat the skin. In this era, where there was a dearth of information about this, her little bit of knowledge was more than enough to impress the other young maidens. As expected, a portion of the

young ladies' eyes started shining with an admiring light. The rest of them pretended to be calm and not interested, but it was obvious that all of them had their ears perked up to hear everything.

A flower war party had almost become a discussion in swapping skincare secrets. Luckily, Royal Princess Minglan didn't forget the purpose of her banquet. Although she was a bit reluctant to change the subject, the 'flower war party' was now in full session.

Li Meirou was quite upset that Yu Xiaocao had gotten the attention of everyone else earlier. In addition, the other girl had already revealed her 'Two Qiaos' chrysanthemum flower and had an additional two pots of flowers with her. She couldn't help but sourly remark, "There are some people here who are obviously inexperienced! Everyone only brought one pot of flowers over for this flower war party. She, on the other hand, brought over three pots! It's not like she can win by bringing more flowers along!"

One of the girls next to her lightly pulled at her sleeve. Earlier, everyone's impression of Yu Xiaocao had clearly changed and she had observed all of that. All of the maidens here desperately wanted to get their hands on some handmade soap like the ones that He Wanning and Royal Princess Minglan had tried. Who didn't want to use some handmade soap that could nourish and brighten their skin? Jumping out at this time to cause trouble for the inventor of the soaps was truly a stupid thing to do.

This young maiden usually had a good relationship with Li Meirou, which was the reason why she was reminding her. Furthermore, she helped her to soften her earlier remarks, "This is the first time that Miss Yu has attended a flower war party. It's likely that she didn't understand the rules before she came."

"Just whose side are you on anyway? You're only eyeing her handmade soaps, which is why you're saying a few flattering words, right? You just want something from her. Wang Qiuyue, I never thought you were this kind of person!!" Unfortunately, Li Meirou wasn't grateful and even snapped at her in a sarcastic manner.

Wang Qiuyue was so antagonized by her manner that her face turned white. She turned her back to the other girl and decided to ignore this person who was clearly too stupid to recognize good from bad. In the past, she thought Li Meirou was only slightly arrogant but she never knew that she was such a stubborn and dislikable person! Usually the other girl treated her fine but the one time things weren't going her way, she decided to bite off the head of a well-meaning person. It was better to stay far away from such a person!

When the other maidens saw that she even verbally abused Wang Qiuyue, who was the young lady who had the best relationship with her, they promptly decided to forgo trying to smooth things over.

The more Li Meirou dug a hole for herself, the happier Yu Xiaocao felt. She looked at the three pots of flowers that she brought and spoke to Royal Princess Minglan, "I didn't bring all three along to compete in the flower wars. This pot of 'Two Qiaos' is my gift to the hostess for inviting me. This pot of 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia is for the opening act of the flower war. As for this last pot of orchids, that's the pot that I will be using to compete in this banquet."

Li Meirou snorted disdainfully, "You certainly know how to smooth things over. Truly someone who refuses to admit a mistake! I, this young lady, shouldn't have bothered speaking earlier. When you lose face later on, then we can all laugh at you!"

Yu Xiaocao decided to not lower herself to the level of someone who had no brains to speak of in order to avoid getting contaminated by the other girl's stupidity. A maiden dressed in purple, who feverishly adored camellias, slowly got closer and remarked with an expression full of surprise, "Is this the famed 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia from Dali Bai? Their most famous variant? It really is, it really is! The color of these flowers is almost an inky dark purple and I heard that this type of camellia is the one with the most pigmented flowers. It's gorgeous without being overwhelming, stately without being crude...this camellia, did you also find it in that ravine in the mountain?"

The burning gazes of all of the maidens fell onto Yu Xiaocao. If she also stated that this camellia was found in the mountain ravine, she was pretty sure that they would all throw a tantrum and insist on going there. Yu Xiaocao hurriedly stated, "This pot of 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia was given to me as a reward from Princess Consort Jing."

The purple-clothed maiden muttered, "No wonder. Everyone knows that Princess Consort Jing loves camellias. Imperial Prince Jing and her three sons travel all throughout the country to find rare and beautiful varieties for her. Other than Lady Feng, no one else besides her would be able to have a precious specimen like this."

Lin Weiyu, who was one of the 'four talented girls of the capital', had a spark flash through her eyes and a friendly smile appeared on her face, "Princess Consort Jing adores her camellias the most. Younger Sister Yu, you must have done something great in order to have her personally give you one of her beloved camellia flowers! I heard that Princess Consort Jing's health had improved immensely in Tanggu Town after encountering a famous doctor who healed her body. Younger Sister Yu is from Tanggu and also has good medicinal skills. Are you somehow related to this famous doctor, Younger Sister Yu?"

Yu Xiaocao glanced at the other girl and gave her a small smile, "No famed medicinal skills here. I only coincidentally encountered a few prescriptions that are good for nourishing the body that were able to improve Princess Consort Jing's health! However, this reward wasn't given to me at random. Princess

Consort Jing's camellia had gotten infested with wood maggots and I managed to fix it, which is how I got this pot of 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia. I merely tried to graft it onto an ordinary camellia and didn't expect it to actually work!"

The eyes of the purple-clothed maiden lit up, "Are you saying that you used a branch of 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia and grafted it onto another camellia successfully? And now it's growing well? Then...doesn't that mean, as long as I'm able to get ahold of a branch of an expensive and precious camellia, you'll be able to grow it into a full plant?"

Yu Xiaocao naturally wouldn't make such a claim. Otherwise, in the future, everyone would be clamouring for her to raise plants for them. Where would she find the time to do so? Thus, she hurriedly explained, "This pot of 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia only happened because this method coincidentally worked. If you wanted me to grow other ones, I really don't know where I would start!"

The purple-clothed maiden was a bit disappointed. However, she persisted in insisting, "Since you know how to treat the ailments of camellia flowers, that means you also have a good handle on how to raise plants. When spring comes, my family will be having a flower banquet, so please, Miss Yu, show up."

"Of course, of course! It would be my honor!" Yu Xiaocao metaphorically wiped away a bit of non-existent sweat from her face. Interacting with these obsessed young maidens was truly more tiring than she had thought!

In order to make sure the outcome of the flower war party was fair, Royal Princess Minglan had especially invited a person famed for her gardening knowledge. In fact, she was on the level of Princess Consort Jing and Lady Feng and was considered an esteemed guest by both of them. She never had any issues answering any difficult questions about different flora.

Every young noble maiden, in order to gain some reputation at this flower battle, had also put in a lot of effort in finding good specimens for this party. However, rare and precious specimens could only be sought and not obtained. The ordinary varieties were a dime a dozen. As for any true rare flowers, there really weren't any.

The young maidens all brought along beautiful pots of flowers along. There were sumptuous and gorgeous peonies, elegant and stately chrysanthemums, delicate and adorable camellias, and refined and graceful orchids...it was truly an astonishing sight. To be able to get so many flowers in such a season, it made it seem like that atmosphere in this warm room had abruptly changed seasons. It looked like spring was in full bloom here.

There was a lot of variety of flowers. In the peonies section, there was the 'Pea Green' peony that had sparkling and translucent petals as adorable as jade. Then there was a variety that had thick layers of snowy white petals called 'Bright Jade' and a variety that had light purple petals that was called 'Lightly Tinted Jade Pavillion'...there was also quite a bit of chrysanthemums in this room. Aromatic Gilt, Purple Dragon Curled in Snow, Precious Jade Phoenix, A Thousand Birds, Rouge Stained Snow...these were just the names of some of the chrysanthemums present.

However, there wasn't a lot of variety of camellias present as the room only held the variants that were commonly seen. A few pots of orchids were available and their rarity was decent. Some of their names were: Heavenly Jade Snow, Green-scented Jade, and Great Silk Snow. Despite that, she had seen all of these orchid variants in the greenhouse at the Fang Residence.

Fields of Gold Chapter 444 - Winning the Competition

The 'judges' all minutely discussed each and every flower in detail. Not a single flaw escaped their eyes. However, they weren't truly interested in any of the displayed pots because not a single specimen was one that caught their eye with its brilliance and grandeur. The two that Yu Xiaocao had brought, the 'Two Qiaos' chrysanthemum and 'Cinnabar Purple' camellia, made their eyes glow with admiration as they were perfect examples of rare and beautiful flowers. Unfortunately, those two pots of flowers were not here to participate in the competition.

Nevertheless, one was here as a gift to the hostess while the other was to open the competition. Since both were such rarities, didn't that mean that Yu Xiaocao had brought over a flower that was even more precious and grand than those other two for the competition? All of the flower experts here were looking forward to her entry.

Finally, Yu Xiaocao took out her last pot of flowers and placed it on the judging table.

"Isn't this...this a lotus-petal orchid? That's not right, it...it looks like a combination of lotus-shaped petals that has harmonized with the simple elegance and character of the three most famous orchids! I've lived for so long yet I've never seen such an orchid like this. Could it be a new breed?" The judge who knew the most about orchids and who had personally thought that there wasn't an orchid in the world she hadn't seen was named Du Wenli. She was an esteemed flower expert but she almost thrust her head forward in an undignified manner to get a closer look at this pot of flowers.

Within the delicate porcelain pot, an orchid flower quietly bloomed. In between its slender leaves was a blossom of sparkling white petals that resembled the most high-quality jade. It looked like a simple and elegant court lady shyly revealing a sweet smile. Its lotus shaped petals had fine, delicate veins running through it that were tinted a light green. It made it seem as tender as a newborn child...

Another flora expert, Mei Fanghua, also praised this flower endlessly, “This is definitely an example of a lotus-petal orchid of the best caliber. Look at the flower petals, the length and width of them are perfectly proportional and balanced with each other. The ends of the petals come to a point like an arrow and make the petals come to the shape of an immortal peach. When that is added on to the delicate little tongue, no other lotus-petal orchid in the world could possibly compare to this one! It even has the superimposed colors of a bright red outline and pure white insides. One could truly say that this orchid is 'something that can't be sculpted by even the best artisan, a pure example of flowers blooming from the water'!”

“That's absolutely right! Lady Mei's assessment of this orchid is spot on and I believe that this specimen has increased the standards all flowers should be judged by. Truly something worthy of celebration!” Du Wenli had finally encountered someone who had similar inclinations with her. She pointed at this pot of orchid flowers, “Can you see the few strands of light-green traveling through the petals? I believe it truly accentuates the simple elegance of an orchid flower. Just like a top-notch beauty from the Tang Dynasty, it has clear features with a coquettish plumpness. Heavenly beauty and each open flower looks like it is surrounded by five heavenly peaches. Truly bewitches a person beyond comparison...”

Heavenly immortal peaches? Yu Xiaocao scooted over to take a closer look. Didn't all of the petals on the flower look like they were just in the shape of a peach? She felt like these expert flower enthusiasts had imaginations that were a bit too outlandish. Expert Du must be a foodie! Her godmother had said that Expert Du was one of her good friends. Next year, when the honey peaches were ripe, she needed to give her a portion...

Just as she was lost in her thoughts, Expert Du's voice suddenly brought her back to the present. Du Wenli noticed that the young girl was blinking her large eyes in confusion as if she had long stopped paying attention to the events around. She lightly chuckled and thought, 'Lady Fang's adopted daughter is really quite interesting. At such an important event, she can even get lost in her own thoughts. Is she very confident in the outcome or does she not care at all about this flower war banquet?'

“Miss Yu, does this pot of orchid have a name?” Lady Du gently made a few noises. Only when she saw that the little lass had finally looked at her did she quietly ask her question.

Yu Xiaocao smiled at her and said, “My godmother said that this orchid's flower, leaves, fragrance, demeanor, color, spirit, beauty combined with its lotus characteristics, simple and elegant atmosphere and other qualities makes it noble and refined. Thus, she gave it the name 'Elegant Lotus Crown'.”

“Elegant Lotus Crown'? Very good name. It truly describes the half-lotus and half-orchid characteristics of this orchid plant! This Elegant Lotus Crown orchid is simple and elegant, pure beyond comparison, so it is definitely one of the best orchids out there! Do you happen to know where Lady Fang got this plant?” Lady Mei also praised the name of this orchid unstintingly and she was very envious of Lady Fang's good fortune.

Lady Fang had loved orchids ever since she was a young girl. At that time, Matriarch Xia had also spoiled her and spent lots of money to buy precious orchids for her. After she married General Fang, she didn't have any children after twenty years of marriage. Consequently, she paid even more attention to her orchid flowers. General Fang also searched throughout the country to help her find rare and precious orchid flowers. Every time she had a flower banquet at her residence, her collection of orchids always dazzled everyone there. She truly had a collection that was hard to find.

Only half a year had passed since she last saw Lady Fang, yet the other woman had gotten her hands on another precious orchid flower. This orchid was particularly special and unique. It was unlikely that any of the other orchids in her collection could even hold a candle to this one in terms of rarity and value.

No one was the least bit surprised that the 'Elegant Lotus Crown' orchid that Yu Xiaocao brought was the winner of this flower war. Li Meirou felt very aggrieved at this outcome. However, in front of these flower experts, who were all complimenting this orchid without stopping, she couldn't say anything. Although the look on her face was slightly ugly, she wasn't so stupid that she would refute these expert opinions.

In fact, for the sake of gaining some prestige at this flower war party, Li Meirou had begged her mother to use her connections to get Lady Feng to lend a famous camellia flower to her. Naturally, how could someone who loved flowers bear to lend out her most precious flowers to another person? Despite that, even Lady Feng's least outstanding flower from her collection was still more than enough to outshine the specimens from the young maidens who only had a hobby of raising flowers.

However, the result was contrary to her hopes. A girl from a farmer's family, from who knows where, had actually brought over a pot of flowers that even the flower experts had never seen before. Furthermore, this new variety was also one of the rarest orchids too. It really ticked her off that someone else had stolen her thunder!

Li Meirou remarked in a dissatisfied manner just as everyone was in good spirits, “This pot of rare orchid isn't something from your own collection. So what's the point in you feeling so happy and proud about this? So unexpected that you have such an ambitious personality that you would bring out a rare orchid from Lady Fang to show off. You just wanted to stomp everyone else in the ground!”

When she finished speaking, Yu Xiaocao didn't deign to reply but many of the other young maidens in the room had their expressions change. Out of the two dozen or so young ladies here, just how many were true flower lovers? Most of them were only participating for the fun and took the flower war party as an excuse to spend time with each other in a lively situation. The vast majority of them had brought over some rare specimens from their older relatives to attend this party for the sake of saying a few flattering words to the royal princess. Now that their actions had been brought to the forefront, how could any of them be happy? Flushes of anger and shame appeared on their faces.

Every young maiden here had a different personality. Some of them swallowed down their fury and seethed inwardly. Others, on the other hand, ignited as if they were a firecracker and brought the conflict out into the open, "Li Meirou, just what are you trying to say? You're shameless enough to scold other people, ah? What about that pot of 'Crane Feather' camellia you brought over? Do I need to say anything more?"

"Yesterday, your paternal aunt visited Lady Feng's residence and didn't bring anything along. However, when she left, she came out with a flower pot. I've known you for so many years but I've never seen you take much interest in flowers. Yet, you suddenly appear at this party with a rare species of camellia. And this all happens after your paternal aunt called upon Lady Feng, the renowned lover and collector of camellias. What do you have to say for yourself?" Another young maiden took advantage of the situation to sling some mud at her.

Li Meirou had originally been trying to target that lass, Xiaocao, but she didn't expect her actions to draw the ire of the others. After being confronted with the pointed remarks of her previous friends, her eyes immediately turned red as if people were bullying her. She choked out, "You guys...why are you guys speaking up for that stupid lass? Were you truly just bought over by a little handmade soap and methods to nourish the skin? Or are you guys thinking of other benefits you can get from her so now you're targeting me instead..."

When she said this, everyone else was even more offended by her words. From what she was claiming, everyone here was only using others for their own advantage and were stepping down on her!

Royal Princess Minglan sent a scathing glare at her, hinting at her to stop talking. Then she came out to relieve the pressure, "Miss Li's words were a bit rash. Everyone has known each other for many years, so we should all be familiar with her personality, right? That being said, this flower war party was for the sake of having some fun and I only did it as an excuse to have everyone come together. Does it really matter where we got the flowers from and who actually owns them? Despite that, my eyes have truly been opened by today. Apparently, there were many species of precious flowers that I have never seen before so I have grown in knowledge. In the future, if we continue to have more flower banquets, it's likely that all of us will become much more knowledgeable in flowers!"

After receiving Royal Princess Minglan's warning, Li Meirou didn't dare to show that she was upset despite the grievance she felt in her heart. If she ruined the royal princess's party, then in the future, it was unlikely that she would be invited by any of the noble young maidens for other gatherings. She squeezed out a smile on her face and tried to show her friendliness to the other girls present. However, she still somehow managed to neglect Yu Xiaocao in her apologies.

Yu Xiaocao didn't take any of this little girl's petty actions to heart and continued to sit peacefully at the main table. She was currently in a lively discussion with Yuan Xueyan, who was very interested in the Elegant Lotus Crown orchid.

“Older Sister Yuan, if you like this flower, then when the flower starts diving into a second stalk, I'll give you that one!” This pot of Elegant Lotus Crown orchid was actually one of the other stalks that had split from the one she had given to her godmother two years ago. However, she had used the excuse of borrowing this pot at the banquet already, so she naturally couldn't just give it to someone. Thus, Xiaocao could only promise that in the following year, she would give a stalk that split from the main plant to Yuan Xueyan.

Yuan Xueyan sincerely liked this orchid that was pure and elegant. It was really to her taste and fit her temperament. However, she could tell that this Elegant Lotus Crown orchid was extremely rare and valuable from Lady Mei's assessment of the flower and the older woman's envious tone. This was the first time they met. Although their personalities got along and she truly liked this younger girl, she really couldn't accept such a valuable gift so shamelessly.

He Wanning, who was sitting at the side, could tell her good friend's misgivings and hurriedly interjected, “Younger Sister Xiaocao, this orchid is extremely valuable and precious and must be the treasure of your godmother. Is it alright for you to so easily promise that you'll send a pot out without asking your godmother first? What if she has other plans for it?”

Li Meirou, who was sitting at a neighboring table, had been eavesdropping this entire time in an attempt to catch Xiaocao at a disadvantage. How could she possibly let go of such a good opportunity? She coldly laughed and sneered, “Looks like some people here throw caution to the winds in order to flatter the noble daughter of the prime minister! I wonder how Lady Fang would feel if she found out that her own goddaughter promised to give out her treasure to climb onto others. A piece of dog meat cannot stick onto a sheep. Some people are so shameless that they'll try to grab onto anyone. However, doing so will never change the truth of their lowly background!”

Just who was the dog meat and who was the sheep? Yuan Xueyan lightly frowned. Just how did the Right Assistant Minister of the Ministry of Appointments teach his daughter? She never thought before she spoke and acted impulsively and arrogantly. She was narrow-minded and only concerned with the superficial. How could this type of person be also considered a noble young maiden?

Li Meirou didn't realize that while she was trying to point out Yu Xiaocao's flaws and flatter the daughter of the prime minister, she actually ended up offending said daughter of the prime minister. Furthermore, Miss Yuan now considered her to be a person she absolutely could not interact with in the future. She had truly bitten more off than she could chew!

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes and, under the concerned gaze of Yuan Xueyan, easily refuted the other girl's accusations, "Miss Li, it is of no concern to you whether or not I have the authority to give out this Elegant Lotus Crown orchid. I am well aware of what I can and cannot do. However, some people did their utmost best to borrow a valuable plant from others yet clearly have no idea how to take care of it. If that flower got damaged by frost or even destroyed, I don't know how you'll make it up to the original owner, right?"

Fields of Gold Chapter 445 - Invite

Li Meirou still wanted to talk back, but when she turned her gaze to the flower that she brought over, she realized that it really didn't look as lively as when she came. Lady Feng loved flowers, so if it was really harmed in any way, her aunt tearing her apart would be considered letting her off easily.

With this thought in mind, Li Meirou felt as if she was sitting on pins and needles. She struggled for a long time inwardly and finally decided not to stay to the end of the banquet. She came up with an excuse and left the venue ahead of time. She carefully protected the pot of gorgeous camellia flowers for fear of any mishaps.

After sending away that eyesore, Yu Xiaocao ate and drank with relish at the banquet. The cooking skills of Duke Zhenguo Estate's chefs were pretty good. Duke Zhenguo Estate had put in a lot of effort for the sake of this flower competition. In addition to meat dishes, the vegetables were all bought from the greenhouse. For these two tables of dishes, they had to spend at least several hundreds of taels.

During the meal, Royal Princess Minglan picked up a refreshing and crisp green vegetable and said, "In the past, when I wanted to eat some fresh greens in the winter, I would have to grow some vegetables in the hothouse like planting flowers. It would usually be hard to even have a plate of leafy greens on the table, let alone eat to one's heart's content. The small amount of vegetables grown in the greenhouse wouldn't even be enough to entertain guests at banquets and New Year celebrations. Now, we can buy nearly any fresh vegetables that we want to eat. We can even eat fruits and melons in the winter!"

“That's right! Younger Sister Xiaocao, what exactly is your brain made out of? You actually came up with the idea of growing vegetables in a big greenhouse. You're my savior ah!! Do you know that? I really hate eating cabbage and radish, but in the winter, other than the different kinds of meat, those two are the only two vegetables that can be eaten. The taste makes me want to vomit, but if I don't eat it, I'll get inflammation and ulcers in my mouth. It's fine now because I'm saved by the greenhouse vegetables!” He Wanning took a bite of the stir-fried lettuce with oyster sauce, which had a fresh and green appearance that roused one's appetite.

For families of high-ranking officials like them who had money and power, they could afford to eat vegetables daily. However, at today's banquet, there were quite a lot of young misses from families of fourth-ranked and fifth-ranked officials whose fathers and brothers worked in a post without much profit. Thus, they couldn't eat vegetables, which were even more expensive than meat, whenever they wanted.

In addition to sweet watermelons, the fruits served after the meal included the sweet and delicious muskmelon and little tomatoes that were about the same size of pigeon eggs. These little tomatoes were produced by genetic mutation with the help of the little divine stone's power. They were small but had an even better taste. They also had a richer concentration of spiritual power than ordinary fruits and vegetables.

The frequent consumption of the little tomatoes would trigger an obvious change in the human body, so in order to prevent this, they only planted a small amount of the tomatoes. Most of them were kept for their own consumption, while a small portion was sold. The price for the little tomatoes were ten taels per catty, which almost caused a fierce competition. This was because there was a purchase limit. Each household could only buy one catty per day. They would at most sell ten catties a day, so it could only be considered something novel to try out.

For example, for Duke Zhenguo Estate's banquet today, they either had to line up for several days without rest, or ask families, who they had a good relationship with, to help them buy the tomatoes. What? They should have had their servants go buy more in disguise? If they got discovered, they would get blacklisted by the store. Moreover, there were so many rich and influential businessmen in the capital. Would they allow one family to dominate the goods? No one dared to openly cheat in front of public eyes!

The fruit plates were mostly filled with cut up watermelons and muskmelons. There were only enough little tomatoes for each person to eat one. The people here were all tactful and knowledgeable people,

so no one dared to inwardly complain that Royal Princess Minglan was being petty. Instead, they admired her for being able to entertain guests with little tomatoes!

It was the first time that these young ladies, who had come from humble backgrounds with fathers and brothers in low-ranking positions, had tasted such a delicious 'fruit'. There was a slight sour taste in the sweetness. With one bite, the juice would instantly burst within their mouths. It was an incomparably satisfying feeling that caused people to savor the taste for a long time.

He Wanning finished the little tomato in two bites, and then looked at the remaining fruit on the plate. When the little tomatoes were served at the main table, except for Yu Xiaocao, everyone had picked up a piece to carefully taste. Even Royal Princess Minglan, as the host, was unwilling to give up the little tomato, which she seldom had the chance to eat, to the guests.

"Younger Sister, you're not eating?" Seeing that Xiaocao had reached her hand out to get a muskmelon and slowly savored it, He Wanning looked around and asked with a smile as she pointed at the remaining tomato.

Yu Xiaocao took in the expression in her eyes. She suppressed her laughter and thought, 'She really is just a teenage girl who can't resist the temptation of tasty food.' Then she looked at the other young misses, who held the little tomato in their hands and were unwilling to eat it. 'So who's the ignorant country bumpkin?'

"If Older Sister Wanning likes it, you can have my share!" These fruits and melons were all grown by her, so would she lack these at home? This lass He Wanning had a straightforward temperament, but she wasn't someone with ill intentions. For someone like this, if she liked someone, she would even be willing to take out her heart and give to others. But, of course, if she didn't like someone, then she would unreservedly show it on her face.

He Wanning was just waiting for her to say that, "Then I won't be courteous! Heh heh..."

"Just look at how embarrassing you're being! Does the princess royal not feed you? You're embarrassing yourself at other people's house!" Yuan Xueyan knew her temper, so she jokingly scolded her.

As if she was Zhu Bajie eating a ginseng fruit, He Wanning ate the little tomato in one bite. She sighed and said, "You should also know that this thing can't be bought even if one has money! Even if you line up in front of a fruit shop for three to five days, you still might not be able to buy one catty back! My grandmother isn't very interested in other fruits, but she loves this little tomato. After we managed to

get a catty back with much difficulty, most of them were given to my grandmother. Do you think that I can snatch food from my grandmother, who has doted on me since I was young?”

“Who told you to put up a front and say that you don't like eating it?” Yuan Xueyan knew the reason behind it, so while she teased her, she actually agreed with her friend's actions in her heart.

With a troubled expression on her face, He Wanning replied, “If I didn't say that, my grandmother would be reluctant to eat it and she would save them for me to eat! My grandmother has doted on me for nearly fifteen years, so why can't I pamper her once? Poor me, I have to find an excuse to leave every time my grandmother eats the little tomatoes so that she wouldn't see my salivating expression.”

Someone who was filial couldn't be too bad of a person! Yu Xiaocao thought that she was someone who was worthy of making friends with. However, she wouldn't say this in front of everyone. She just asked in a roundabout way, “What does Older Sister He usually do for fun?”

“I just read books and practice swordsmanship. Occasionally, I will run a few laps on the racetrack in the countryside. When my older brothers go hunting, they would sometimes take me along.” He Wanning wasn't interested in the four arts [1] and was brought up like a tomboy by her older brothers.

Yu Xiaocao smiled and said, “I have a little red horse with good strength in its legs. On another day, if you're interested, we can go for an outing on horseback together. There are many pheasants and wild hares in the mountains near the Imperial Plantation. My archery skills aren't very good, but I know how to set traps. If we catch some game, we can have a barbecue at the foot of the mountain...”

Outing? It was winter now, so it wasn't a good idea to go on an outing in this cold weather. But the thing that piqued He Wanning's interest wasn't the outing. Instead it was the location of the outing—near the Imperial Plantation! What was the most famous thing about the Imperial Plantation now? Greenhouse vegetables ah! At Royal Prince Yang's plantation next door, they had the even more famous greenhouse fruits! Inside, they had her favorite little tomatoes...

Younger Sister Yu was considered half an owner of these greenhouses, right? If she went as a guest, wouldn't she be treated to good food and drinks? She might even be able to back some stuff back when leaving...

“Okay, okay! When are we going?” With that thought in mind, He Wanning was itching to leave Duke Zhenguo Estate and immediately go to the Imperial Plantation.

Seeing He Wanning's reaction, Royal Princess Minglan understood what she was thinking and immediately said, “Younger Sister Yu, you can't just favor one over another and only invite her but not me.”

“It's my honor to be able to invite Your Highness the Royal Princess. On another day, I'll send an invitation to invite Royal Princess, Older Sister He, and Older Sister Yuan to go on an outing! Please accept my invitation ah!” Of course, she didn't mind making friends with some of the most famous noble young misses in the capital. Now, her godmother didn't have to worry about her not being able to make friends.

When she came out of Duke Zhenguo Estate and the carriage had traveled a short distance, Hechun quietly said, “Young Miss, Royal Prince Yang is in front of us. Could it be that he's waiting for you, Young Miss?”

Linglong shot her a look and the smile on her face slowly faded, “Where are your manners? What right do you have to speak of the master's matters?”

Hechun bowed her head and timidly replied, “Yes! This servant knows my mistake. Please punish me, Young Miss!!”

Yu Xiaocao looked at Linglong, nodded, and said, “Then you will be punished with no salary for three months. Go back and reflect on yourself!”

“I understand!” Hechun inwardly scolded herself for crossing the line. Her master was kind, but that didn't mean that servants didn't have to abide by their duties. She had become somewhat smug after her handmade soaps were praised by the noblewomen. From now on, she must remember this lesson and live up to the trust and support of her young miss.

“How is it? Did things go well at today's flower banquet?” When Zhu Junyang, who was riding on Fierce Wind, saw the familiar horse carriage come over, he guided his horse to follow beside the carriage. His voice sounded through the window of the carriage.

Yu Xiaocao lifted the curtain and looked at the devilishly handsome man dressed in dark black brocade robe. There was a profound glow within his pair of phoenix eyes, which seemed to be able to lure one's soul, as he looked at her. The corners of his eyes were slightly slanted upwards, which enhanced his seductive charms. With his lips pursed together, it seemed like the snow had melted and spring had started. 'So devilish ah! He's seriously so devilishly charming ah!' Yu Xiaocao inwardly exclaimed when she saw the young maidens and matrons on the street staring at him with blushing faces.

“What's wrong? Got bullied? Who is it? Tell this prince!” Zhu Junyang's face was suddenly covered with frost, and a wave of murderous intent lingered around him.

Yu Xiaocao shook her head and said, “You're thinking too much. No one bullied me! The flower banquet went very well. All the flowers that everyone brought over were famous species. However, in terms of value, they naturally couldn't compete with my 'Elegant Lotus Crown'. I won a lot of rewards today. Since you're here, how about I share half of them with you?”

“This prince isn't interested in things that girls like!” Seeing that there didn't seem to be anything wrong with the little lass's expression, Zhu Junyang's heart felt half relieved. As for the other half, he would see after he inquired about what had happened!

Fields of Gold Chapter 446 - Blacklis

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It wasn't hard to find out about the discord between the daughter of the right assistant minister of the Ministry of Appointments and Yu Xiaocao, who was an official under the Ministry of Revenue. When Zhu Junyang heard about this matter, he was immediately enraged. Not far from the entrance of Assistant Minister Li's residence, he stopped Eldest Young Master Li and beat him until he looked like a pig head. Fortunately, he had controlled his strength. Otherwise, he would have broken several ribs and that guy would have to lie in bed for more than half a year.

Before he left, he even arrogantly said, “Tell your foolishly complacent younger sister to stay away from the Ministry of Revenue's Official Yu and don't come out to disgust people! Otherwise, this prince will beat you up every time I see you!”

Eldest Young Master Li lay on the ground and groaned. Who did he offend? He didn't have any relationship with this black-faced King of Hell ah. Why did he suddenly encounter misfortune out of nowhere? When Assistant Minister Li heard the news and came over, he only saw the elegant and unrestrained back view of Royal Prince Yang leaving, and his son lying on the floor like a dead dog.

“What happened? Why did you have to go and offend the black-hearted and cruel King of Hell? You're lucky that he was being merciful to you, otherwise, you might have died! Quick, quickly go get a

doctor!!” Assistant Minister Li only dared to complain in his heart and didn't dare to actually go seek justice. If one offended Royal Prince Yang, there was nowhere to voice one's complaints!

Eldest Young Master Li was helped up by two servants. He covered his swollen face with his hands and murmured, “How would I dare to offend him? I usually stay as far away from him as I can! I was just someone else's scapegoat!!”

“Who? Whose scapegoat? Your two younger stepbrothers? They're timid and weak, so there's no way that they would dare to do anything. Your two younger brothers? How old are they? One is eight, while the other is six years old! Even if they want to offend that jinx, they wouldn't be able to do it!!” Assistant Minister Li thought of all the possibilities, but still couldn't find the answer.

It couldn't be that...he was the one who had unknowingly offended Royal Prince Yang, right? It seemed...perhaps...probably...when Official Yu was bestowed the position of an official, he had voiced his opposition——Argh! He wasn't one of the main opposers. The royal prince wouldn't have held a grudge for this long and finally decided to get revenge, right?

Eldest Young Master Li snorted and shook off the two servants. As if he had an egg in his mouth, he shouted, “You want to know? Then go ask your precious daughter!!”

Assistant Minister Li had three sons with his legitimate wife and two illegitimate sons, so he had a bunch of sons. Since Li Meirou was his only daughter, he had always doted on her. As a result, this daughter of his had been spoiled rotten by him and his wife. At times, even Eldest Young Master Li, who was the oldest son, had to give her some face.

This resulted in Li Meirou's arrogant and cocky personality. Normally, when interacting with other noble young misses, she would listen to her parents' warning and somewhat restrain her temper. When she encountered those whose fathers and brothers had a lower rank than her father, she would display her bossy and snobbish attitude. The young misses, who came from families of lower ranking officials, would also suppress their dislike and try to flatter her, which enhanced her arrogance. Now, she had finally offended someone she shouldn't have.

Yesterday, when Li Meirou returned from the flower competition, she broke several valuable porcelains in her room. She locked herself in her room and cried for a long time. Upon asking, they found out that she had been shamed by the newly appointed female official of the Ministry of Revenue. Assistant Minister Li and his wife finally pacified their precious daughter after they coaxed her and promised to help her get some face back by teaching that sixth-ranked official a lesson.

Upon hearing his son's words, Assistant Minister Li didn't take his words seriously and said, "Your younger sister? What trouble would a little girl like her cause? Besides, I actually want your younger sister to have some relationship with Royal Prince Yang. But, on second thought, with your younger sister's temperament, she wouldn't be a suitable partner for Royal Prince Yang... There's no way that it was your younger sister who offended him, right? Think about it again. Perhaps, during the meetings with other scholars, you had inadvertently said something bad about that jinx..."

"He told me himself to tell your precious daughter to stay away from Official Yu. If she appears in front of her again, Royal Prince Yang won't bother to do anything with a little girl but he will vent his anger on me, her older brother!! Father, I'm just a weak scholar, who can barely take a flick of his finger! If you don't want me to die before you, then you should restrain that daughter of yours. Don't act differently in front of different people and look down on others because of their origin!" With a toss of his sleeves, Eldest Young Master Li limped into the estate. He didn't need to participate in the scholar meetings for the next few days. With his face swollen like a pig's head, his friends would definitely ridicule him!

Assistant Minister Li's brows were tightly creased together as he stepped forward and said, "What did you say? Are you saying that Royal Prince Yang came to avenge that lass with the surname Yu because Meirou offended her at the flower competition? What ability does that lass have for that jinx Royal Prince Yang to support her?"

"I don't know what ability Official Yu has, but I know that if your daughter doesn't know when to stop, then I, your son, won't need to go out anymore!" Eldest Young Master Li replied angrily without giving his father any face. How exactly did that cold-faced death god make it so that his entire body ached but his bones were fine? Ay! He didn't check the almanac before going out. It was seriously such an unlucky day ah!!

That wasn't the end of it! After Royal Prince Yang left Assistant Minister Li's Estate, he went straight to his vegetables and fruits shop and directly ordered, "From now on, if people from the household of the right assistant minister of the Ministry of Appointments come to purchase fruits and vegetables, don't sell it to them! Just tell them that it's an order from this prince. Since they look down on farmers, then they don't need to eat the fruits and vegetables grown by them!! Also, send out the message that whoever helps Assistant Minister Li's household buy fruits and vegetables will also be on the blacklist!"

The vegetables and fruits shops on the east and west side of the capital city were all part of Princess Consort Jing's dowry. In the past, they either rented them out, or sold goods like silk fabrics and pastries. However, compared with the present fruits and vegetables stores, they were only small businesses. It wasn't enough to use 'thriving businesses' to describe the vegetables and fruits shops. Every day, the

people lining up to buy food would fill the entire street. During the busiest times, military forces were dispatched to maintain public order.

Since Royal Prince Yang managed the business of the fruits and vegetables shops, Princess Consort Jing gave the stores to her youngest son. He could do whatever he wanted with them, and she didn't have to worry about them.

Before the transfer of the shops, many people used their relationship with the Imperial Prince Jing's Household to harass the imperial prince or sent their wives to visit Princess Consort Jing. This really bothered the couple. Since they gave the shops to their youngest son, the world instantly quieted down and the people who wanted to go through the backdoor completely gave up on the idea. It seemed like her youngest son's aloof face was quite useful at times.

Since the fruits and vegetables shops belonged to Royal Prince Yang now, everyone had to do things according to the royal prince's rules. No matter how high one's status was or how influential one was, it was all useless in front of this fellow who wouldn't even give face to his own relatives. In this way, although the business was booming in the fruits and vegetables shops, it was still very orderly. Those servants who assumed that they had a high status all acted in an honest and careful manner in front of the shops. They were afraid of violating the shops' rules and causing their masters to not be able eat fresh vegetables.

In front of the vegetables and fruits shop, everyone was equal. As long as one was willing to spend money and had enough patience and energy to line up, there wouldn't be a situation in which the shops refused to sell the goods to them because they lacked power and influence. They also wouldn't use their status as a high-ranking official to pressure merchants to give up their business opportunities to them. In conclusion, even if the emperor came, they still might not give him face!

Therefore, when Royal Prince Yang's message was sent out, no one questioned the reason, let alone put in a good word for Assistant Minister Li. There must be a reason why Royal Prince Yang refused to sell fruits and vegetables to him! Soon, some people recalled the 'flower war' a couple days ago! Who in the capital didn't know that the female official in the Ministry of Revenue was supported by Royal Prince Yang? After Assistant Minister Li's daughter mistook her identity, she got angry from embarrassment and repeatedly used the young girl's family background to insult her. However, she didn't gain anything from this. Instead, she was roasted so badly by the other party that her head was completely muddled. In the end, the girl became friends with Royal Princess Minglan and the two beauties of the capital. She ruined her own reputation for no reason and went home in disgrace.

Who in the capital didn't know that Royal Prince Yang would seek revenge for the smallest grievance? There was nothing one could do if their son got beaten by him. There was also nothing one could do if he refused to sell fruits and vegetables to them!

Assistant Minister Li was extremely anxious these past few days! His father's seventieth birthday was coming up soon and they had already sent out all the invitations. However, the purchasing servants came back to report that Royal Prince Yang's fruits and vegetables shops had put them on the blacklist. It didn't matter how much money they had if the other party wasn't going to sell the goods to them!

Now, people no longer cared about having fish, meat, and valuable seafood at banquets in the capital! Vegetables that could be bought with one copper coin in the spring and summer had become the new favorite on dining tables. If one didn't have a few fresh green vegetable dishes on the table when entertaining guests, people would say that they were insincere behind their backs as they weren't even willing to line up to buy some vegetables. When they hosted another banquet again, many people would find different reasons to decline the invitation.

People often said that seventy years old was a critical moment—if one could pass this critical period, they wouldn't have any problem living up to their eighties or nineties. Therefore, Assistant Minister Li, who was a filial son, had made a lot of effort to prepare a big event for his father. Assistant Minister Li had planned on spending a lot of money. He had arranged more people to line up day and night with the thought that it would eventually be their turn to make a purchase. It was the beginning of winter now, and the vegetables could be kept for many days. Moreover, the shelf life for the greenhouse vegetables was longer than ordinary vegetables. On the day of the birthday banquet, there would be more than enough vegetables and fruits.

But, their household was suddenly blacklisted by the stores. This meant that their family wouldn't be able to eat greenhouse fruits and vegetables anymore in the future. They could only eat radishes and cabbages over the winter... It was very easy for the frugal to become extravagant, but hard to reverse the process. In comparison to the fresh and tender green vegetables, the radishes and cabbages stored for the winter were seriously not very appetizing. It was just the beginning of winter, so how were they going to endure the long winter?

Instead of something in the future, we should talk about the patriarch's seventieth birthday banquet. If they didn't have any fruits and vegetables, there wouldn't be anything special about their dishes. If the banquet failed, the patriarch would be upset. Then if something bad happened... Assistant Minister Li didn't dare to think about it anymore!

He hurriedly asked someone to help put in a good word for him. But, was there anyone who didn't know about the royal prince's temper? Even his parents might not be able to change his mind. If they made him upset again, even the mediator would be placed on the blacklist. The loss outweighed the gains ah.

Fields of Gold Chapter 447 - Choice

As a result, the people who Assistant Minister Li wanted to seek help from, either found various reasons to refuse or directly ordered the doorkeeper, "If Assistant Minister Li comes, just tell him that the master isn't home!"

Seeing that he was so filial, the Ministry of Revenue's Minister Liu pitied him and reminded him one day after court, "Whoever started the trouble should end it. Official Li should go back and think about why Royal Prince Yang blacklisted your household. Did you offend him?"

"Offend Royal Prince Yang? Who would dare?" Suddenly, he recalled that day that his oldest son got beaten up. He seemed to have said that his daughter had offended the Ministry of Revenue's female official. During those few days, his daughter kept scolding that lass with the surname Yu... Could it be that Royal Prince Yang was targeting their family because of this? Assistant Minister Li finally understood the underlying problem.

He disregarded going back to work at the Ministry of Appointments and hurried home. He had his wife wake up his daughter, who was still in bed, and asked for the details of what happened on the day of the flower competition. Li Meirou naturally made it seem like she was in the right. She described Yu Xiaocao as a crude and hateful country girl who was disrespectful and arrogant. She, on the other hand, became a pitiful person who was insulted, ignored, and ostracized.

Assistant Minister Li had a good understanding of his daughter. Although she was somewhat arrogant, she still got along quite well with the noble young misses in the capital. Why would those girls unite to bully his daughter for the sake of a rural girl who just arrived in the capital?

"Rou'er, tell me exactly what happened on that day. Tell me honestly! Don't add things into the story and don't recount it in a biased manner! This is very important to our family!!" This was the first time that Assistant Minister Li pulled a long face and spoke in such a serious tone when hearing his daughter's complaint.

Since she was the only daughter in the family, she had been pampered since young. When had Li Meirou ever seen her father with such a 'stern' expression? For a moment, she was stunned.

Lady Li's heart ached for her daughter as she pulled on her hands and said to Assistant Minister Li, "Husband, give the child some time to speak. Don't scare her! Rou'er, listen to Mother. Just honestly tell your father what happened on that day. Didn't Mother tell you this in the past? It doesn't matter if you caused trouble. The most important thing is for you to honestly tell us, your parents, the truth, so that we can help you solve the problem!"

Seeing her parents' anxious gazes, Li Meirou realized that there was some major issue related to the flower competition. She stopped pretending to be aggrieved and told them about her conflict with Yu Xiaocao that day, as well as how Royal Princess Minglan and the other noble young misses treated Yu Xiaocao. Although she still added some personal feelings in, she had recounted most of the details of what happened that day.

Lady Li lightly gasped. From her daughter's narration, she could clearly feel her precious daughter's contempt and hatred towards the female official. She could also understand why Royal Prince Yang was targeting their family. He was helping the female official get some face back!

"It's all your fault! You always talk about how it's disdainful and shameless for women to be officials. Your words have influenced the child's view on the female official. Our daughter has a frank temperament, so she won't hide her likes and dislikes. Well, isn't it great now! She has seriously offended someone..." Li Meirou had a wronged and puzzled expression on her face that also showed a slight sense of unease. Seeing this, Lady Li couldn't bear to say harsh words to her daughter, and got angry at Assistant Minister Li instead.

At that time, he had voiced his opposition about women being officials before that official made an outstanding contribution. Since the big harvest of corn and the emperor decided to promote this high-yield crop in the north, had he ever said anything bad about that female official? Moreover, her greenhouse vegetables and fruits had become a trend in the capital—it was an honor to have them on the dining table.

How could he complain about her when he was eating her food? At this time, he desperately wanted to be on good terms with her, okay? But, his ignorant daughter just had to go and offend the other party. What made him even more helpless was that she not only didn't find fault in the other party but also got roasted instead! Ay! There were so many noble young misses at the flower competition, but why didn't they come out to say anything? This child had been spoiled rotten by her mother, so she didn't have any worldly wisdom at all!

"What should we do now? There's only five days until the patriarch's birthday banquet! Even a good housewife wouldn't be able to cook without the ingredients. Without the vegetables and fruits, how am

I supposed to hold a banquet with over a dozen tables?" In the past two days, Lady Li couldn't eat well and sleep well for the sake of the birthday banquet. She felt like her hair was going gray from worrying about the banquet.

Assistant Minister Li looked at his daughter with a hopeless expression, snorted, and said, "What else? She's the one who caused the trouble, so it's natural that she's the one who must clean up the mess! Tomorrow, bring our daughter to the General's Estate. Make sure to bring enough gifts to show our sincerity..."

"I won't go! I won't apologize to that boorish wretch! If I do that, then how am I supposed to hang out within the capital's noble young ladies' circle in the future? I'm not going. I won't go no matter what!!" Without letting Assistant Minister Li finish speaking, Li Meirou screamed desperately with a look of pain and madness within her eyes.

Assistant Minister Li was seriously angry now. If he had another choice, would he let his daughter be wronged? But the birthday banquet was already in the works. If there was a lack of vegetables and fruits on the tables, it was obvious that the Li Family would become a laughingstock for the entire capital! How was he supposed to lift his head in front of his colleagues in the future?

"You're the one who caused this mess. If you don't go, who's going to go?" When faced with his daughter, who kept shaking her head and was extremely resistant, Assistant Minister Li felt very exhausted. His precious daughter, who he had doted on for a dozen or so years, was actually so selfish that she only cared about herself and neglected the overall situation.

"Mother, I'll become a laughingstock if I go apologize to that wretch! I definitely won't go! If you guys force me then...I'll go kill myself!!" Li Meirou recalled that last year, there was a noble young miss who encountered a similar situation, in which she had to bow her head to her rival. At that time, she had taken the lead to ridicule and humiliate her. That night, that noble young miss hung herself with a white silk. She shivered at this thought, and the air around her became suffocating.

Seeing her daughter's pitiful appearance, Lady Li couldn't help but say, "Husband...why don't you ask your colleagues to see if anyone has a hot spring manor or grows vegetables in a greenhouse? We can buy them at a higher price..."

When Li Meirou heard this, she fixed her expectant eyes on her father. Assistant Minister Li sighed and slowly shook his head as he said, "Think about it. Would those who could afford a hot spring manor lack money? It's better not to mention money. Otherwise, the other party will get irritated! Also, those who

own greenhouses are people with literary pursuits. Their greenhouses are used to raise valuable plants and flowers. Have you seen anyone grow vegetables in their glass greenhouses?"

Li Meirou's hopes were completely shattered. She hugged her mother's arms and silently wept. Assistant Minister Li went up to her and gently stroked her hair. He said, "Rou'er, Father knows that you feel wronged! However, Father really doesn't have any other choice ah! Think about it. If you attend a gathering with those noble young misses and there's a lack of fruits and vegetables at the banquet, what would you think?"

'What would I think? I will definitely gossip about them being stingy and shabby with other noble young misses in private. Since they can't prepare a high-class banquet, they shouldn't pretend to be capable and make a fool out of themselves!' It was going to be her grandfather's seventieth birthday in five days. Originally, her family had made great efforts to gain some face through this birthday banquet. If they couldn't get the vegetables and fruits, then it wouldn't be gaining face. Instead, it would be getting slapped in the face—slapping themselves in the face!

But, it was worse than killing her to have her lower her head in front of that low-born and vulgar lass, admit that she had offended the other party, and ask for her forgiveness.

Seeing her daughter silently weeping, Lady Li's heart ached as she said, "Why don't...I go visit Lady Fang alone? I don't have a close relationship with her, but after all, both our husbands are officials of the imperial court. Lady Fang is the female official's godmother, and they allegedly have a relationship that's closer than real mother and daughter. If I can persuade Lady Fang, that female official wouldn't not give her godmother face, right?"

Li Meirou raised her head again, sniffled her nose, and a spark of hope flashed through her eyes. Assistant Minister Li thought about it carefully and still felt that it wasn't right, "This is our last hope. If we mess it up, our family won't be able to raise our head in the capital anymore. I think that it's better to bring Rou'er along, just in case."

Seeing the slightly desperate look for help within her daughter's eyes, Lady Li showed a troubled expression and said, "But..."

"No buts! I'm someone with no backing, so do you think that it was easy for me to get up to this position step by step? If you feel bad for our daughter, then let's just let it be and not care about losing face. Anyway, my term for this position will end next year. I'll just apply for a post outside the capital. When we move to a new location, no one will know us..."

Before Assistant Minister Li had finished speaking, he was interrupted by Li Meirou. She anxiously said, "Don't! I'll just go apologize to Yu Xiaocao, so don't apply for a position outside of the capital!"

When Li Meirou was younger, she had grown up in that environment. Although it was true that she had a higher status among the noble young ladies in that place, it was still a much lower status than in the capital. Hanging out with a bunch of ignorant country bumpkins had pulled down her class.

Although she wasn't very famous in the noble young misses' circle in the capital, she was the subject of flattery among the young misses, who came from families of fourth-ranked and fifth-ranked officials. If her father transferred to a position outside of the capital, then she could only interact with those unrepresentable people in the future.

Moreover, she was fifteen this year, and had reached the marriageable age. Had it not been for the fact that her parents doted on her and wanted her to stay with them for two more years, she might have already gotten engaged like many of the other noble misses. But, if her father transferred out of the capital, he would have to go for four years. By then, she would be nineteen years old. Even if she didn't get married to a local at that place, she probably wouldn't be able to find a good marriage partner when she got back to the capital. There was also a big possibility that she would get married to a local and not be able to easily return to the capital. She didn't want that to happen!

Thus, she made a decision to stay in the capital and lower her head to the other party.

Lady Li's heart ached for her daughter, so she got someone valuable from the dowry and gave it to her daughter. When Li Meirou's eldest sister-in-law found out about this, she privately grumbled to Eldest Young Master Li, "It seems like they're the only ones who are related by blood and you, the eldest young master, was picked up from the streets..."

Fields of Gold Chapter 448 - Half-truth

The next day, Lady Li delivered a message to Count Zhongqin's (Author's note: New title awarded to Fang Zizhen) Estate about their visit.

When Lady Fang received Lady Li's message, she looked strangely at the maidservant who brought the message over, "The assistant minister of the Ministry of Appointments sent a message over? When did our general ever have any relationship with Assistant Minister Li?"

The maidservants thought about it and all shook their heads. Zhenzhu said, "Madam, don't you always say that the general doesn't like to interact with those civil officials? Those scholars all speak in a genteel manner and have a stomach full of schemes. It's tiring to listen to them speak!"

Lady Fang knew that her husband didn't have a close relationship with any of the officials in court because he used to be a commander under General Zhao in the previous dynasty. Normally, their household only interacted with some of her close friends and matrons who liked flora. She had never met this Lady Li before, okay?

“One wouldn't come for no reason. For what reason would this Lady Li come over today?” Lady Fang muttered to herself.

Hupo spoke without thinking, “I reckon she's a weasel paying respects to a chicken—she has ill-intentions!”

“What are you saying? Even if she wants to be a weasel, I, your mistress, am not willing to be a 'chicken'!” Lady Fang glared at her and pretended to be angry.

Hupo hastily smacked her mouth and begged for mercy, “Look at this servant's mouth. I can't control it! This servant has said the wrong thing, so please punish me, Madam!”

“I'll let it go this time! In the future, remember to be cautious with your words, lest you cause trouble outside. I might not be able to help you even if I want to!” Lady Fang was usually quite tolerant of her maidservants, who had mostly grown up around her. However, she would still discipline them when needed.

Linglong hurriedly came out to help her, “This servant thinks that Lady Li's visit might have something to do with Young Miss.”

“Cao'er? Since coming to the capital, Cao'er has either been working at the Imperial Plantation or playing with Lin'er at home. She seldom came in contact with the families of other officials in the capital. How would she know Lady Li?” Xiaocao was afraid that her godmother would be worried, so when she got back from the flower banquet, she didn't tell her about her unpleasant matters and only reported the good things that happened. She told her that she had invited Royal Princess Minglan and the capital's 'Two Beauties' for an outing at the Imperial Plantation. She didn't mention anything about the incident with Li Meirou.

Linglong pondered for a moment, and then said, "Although Young Miss had no contact with Lady Li, she did have a friction with the young miss of the Li Family at the flower competition banquet last time..."

"What? Did the daughter of the Li Family bully our Cao'er?" Lady Fang sat up straight and looked at the message with a frown. She was deliberating on whether she should let Lady Li wait outside for a while! Lady Fang felt that she had a rather good understanding of her goddaughter's personality. That kid Xiaocao would never deliberately cause trouble, but if someone provoked her, she wasn't someone who would take it sitting down.

Sure enough, Linglong pursed her lips into a smile and said, "Madam, would that Young Miss Li be able to bully our young miss? Of course, she got roasted by Young Miss!"

Lady Fang threw the visiting message aside and asked with interest, "Oh? Quickly tell me what happened."

Linglong told her about how Li Meirou tried to use the young miss's family background to insult and ostracize the young miss, but she ended up being retorted and rendered speechless by the young miss. In the end, she was the one who was ostracized by the other noble young misses. Their family's young miss, on the other hand, left a good impression on Royal Princess Minglan and the 'Two Beauties'.

"Excellent!" Lady Fang hit the table, and the smile on her face deepened, "Humph! In what way is Assistant Minister Li's family background better? He's just a poor scholar who can't do anything by himself. Had it not been for his in-laws providing financial assistance, he wouldn't even have enough travel expenses to come take the exam in the capital! At the beginning of our dynasty, there was a lot that needed to be done and the imperial court was in urgent need of talents. This was the reason why someone like Assistant Minister Li, who had just done well in the primary rounds of the imperial examination, was able to stay in the capital! In the previous dynasties, people like Assistant Minister Li would have been sent to a post outside the capital. It would be extremely difficult to get a position as an official in the capital without working for a decade or two! Li Meirou's maternal grandparents' family is merely a local squire, so that lass also grew up in the rural area. How many years has it been since she came to the capital? She's already putting up airs and looking down on others?! Who does she think she is?!"

"No wonder the young miss said that the more one feels inferior, the more one will attack others in order to seek a balance in their hearts. This Young Miss Li is probably one of these people!" Linglong quite agreed with her young miss's theory.

Lady Fang looked at her trusted personal maidservant with amusement. Linglong was a thorough and prudent worker, so she had sent her to help her daughter with several errands. She hadn't expected that this girl had gradually become a strong supporter of her daughter.

There was no shortage of maidservants in her daughter's courtyard, but there wasn't a supervising matron. At the beginning of spring next year, Linglong would be eighteen, which was a marriageable age. Lady Fang was pondering about which young steward in the estate had a bright future and would be a good person to betroth Linglong to. Later, one could work in the outer court, while the other could serve her daughter. After gaining a few years of experience the couple could accompany her daughter when she got married. One could manage the affairs of the outer court, while the other could manage the inner court...

After being stared at by her mistress for a long time, Linglong felt somewhat perplexed as she asked, "Madam, did this servant say something wrong?"

"No!" Lady Fang thought about it and decided to test the girl to see what she had planned for the future. If she wanted to leave and return to a normal status, she wouldn't insist on making her stay, "Linglong, you're not young anymore! Do you have someone you like?"

The sudden question from the madam caused Linglong's entire face to flush up. She quickly changed the topic with slight embarrassment, "Madam, Assistant Minister Li's wife is still waiting outside! Do you want to see her? Please give me an answer!"

Lady Fang chuckled and said, "Alright, alright! Today isn't the right time, so I'll let you go for now! But, you should also have something in mind. With your status as a head maidservant in the count's estate and pretty appearance, it would be a waste for you to just marry into a poor, humble family! Of course, if you want to stay in the estate, I'll ask the master if there's any promising young stewards in the outer court..."

"Madam..." Linglong's face was as red as the sunset at dusk. She tried her best to shift away from the topic, "I heard that Assistant Minister Li and his wife have spoiled their daughter rotten. Do you think that Lady Li is coming to help get justice for Young Miss Li?"

"Seek justice?" Lady Fang snorted coldly and said, "If she dares to mention the incident at the flower competition, then I'll rip into her! How long has it been since their family got rid of their identity as country bumpkins, yet they're already looking down on my daughter? Go! 'Invite' that Lady Li in. I shall meet her!"

At this time, Assistant Minister Li's wife was in the carriage reminding Li Meirou, who was dressed as a maidservant, "Rou'er, Mother knows that you feel wronged! However, for you to be so understanding, your father will definitely make it up to you in the future! Later, if you're too embarrassed to speak up, then just lower your head and appear as if you understand your mistake. No matter what that female official says, you must endure it..."

"Mother, I understand!" Li Meirou's heart was full of hatred. What exactly was so good about that despicable wretch for Royal Prince Yang to protect her?! Not to mention that Royal Prince Yang was a member of the imperial family, but he was also someone trusted and favored by the emperor. Although she usually stayed at home, she had also heard that Royal Prince Yang was a man who would seek revenge for the smallest grievance. If they offended him, her father's future would be completely ruined!

Li Meirou was taken to the capital when she was six. At that time, she could already remember and understand things. After experiencing the prosperity of the capital and the joy brought to her from power and influence, she didn't want to return to that small and backward place. She wouldn't be able to stay there for even a moment. She didn't want to leave the capital. Didn't she just have to apologize to that lowly wretch?! Even Han Xin [1] had to suffer the humiliation of crawling under someone's legs. For the sake of her father's future and her own future, she decided to bear the humiliation!

After preparing herself mentally, Li Meirou appeared very well-behaved. This made Lady Li very happy, yet her heart also ached for her daughter.

"Later, when we enter the estate, I will accidentally knock over the handwarmer so that you can go change your clothes. In this way, others would think that I came to Count Zhongqin's Estate with two maidservants. Your friends won't know about you coming to apologize to Official Yu..." Lady Li was worried sick about how to help her daughter save face.

Li Meirou hesitated for a moment, and then whispered, "Mother, do you think that girl with the surname Yu will spread this out? Using my humiliation to improve her reputation?"

Lady Li pondered for a moment and said, "Later, I'll talk to that Official Yu. If she's really that kind of person, Mother will think of another way to handle the situation!"

When Linglong invited them in, Lady Li came down from the horse carriage with her daughter, who was dressed as a maidservant, and her personal maidservant.

“Lady Li, sorry for the wait! Our young master likes to pester people in the morning, and our madam just managed to pacify him! Linglong looked at Li Meirou, who had her head bowed. She felt that the maidservant looked somewhat familiar, so she looked at her again.

Lady Li stepped forward to block her line of sight and said with a smile, “Children like to cling to others at this age, but it's just for these two years. When they get older, it will be difficult to get them to be so close to you!”

Sure enough, after they entered the estate, Lady Li 'accidentally' knocked over the handwarmer in her hands, and the silvery ashes inside soiled her clothes. She pretended to apologize and said, “Just look at me. As I get older, my hands and feet aren't as nimble as before. I can't meet Lady Fang in such a state. It's so impolite! Young lady, can you find a room for me to change my clothes first?”

It had only been a few days since the flower competition, so Linglong still had a rather deep impression of Li Meirou. At that time, she had already recognized Li Meirou, who was dressed as a maidservant. Seeing Lady Li's action, she already knew her plan. She sneered in her heart, 'Acting in such a sneaky manner, they definitely aren't coming to cause trouble. If Li Meirou was in the right, they would definitely make it known to the whole world.'

On second thought, in the past two days, Royal Prince Yang had announced that his fruits and vegetables shops would never sell their goods to Assistant Minister Li's Household in order to avenge her young miss. Could it be that this pair of mother and daughter had come because of this matter? If she frankly admitted her mistake, her young miss might be benevolent and let the matter go. But, upon seeing this mother-daughter pair put up this act, Linglong inwardly made an assessment of this Young Miss Li, 'She wants to be a b*tch, but she also wants to look honorable!'

Fields of Gold Chapter 449 - Exchange Blows

Everything went as Lady Li expected. In the room that Linglong prepared for them, the mother and daughter changed into a new set of clothes. Of course, Linglong also reported their actions to her mistress.

Lady Fang had an even worse impression of the mother and daughter! They had indeed come from a low-class family. Even after being in the capital's aristocratic circle for ten years, they still couldn't get rid of their petty nature. A daughter from such a family actually dared to look down on her daughter?

In front of the mother and daughter of the Li Family, Lady Fang acted in a polite and aloof manner. Others couldn't find fault in her, but they also couldn't get close to her.

The servants were ordered to serve tea. Lady Fang held a cup of tea and gently blew the tea leaves on the surface of the tea. She took a sip of the tea, and then asked with a spurious smile, "Lady Li, aren't you going to try the tea?"

Would Lady Li be in the mood to drink tea? She took a sip casually, forced out a smile, and repeatedly nodded as she said, "It's fragrant and tastes very good. May I ask where Lady Fang got such a good quality tea?"

Lady Fang just smiled and didn't say anything. She slowly took another sip with her eyes narrowed, as if she was savoring the sweet aftertaste of the tea. She finally spoke up after a long time, "Lady Li, have you ever heard of peach blossom tea?"

Peach blossom tea? Was it that beautifying flower tea that was very popular with the noblewomen in the capital and imperial consorts of the Imperial Palace in the past two years? When Lady Li looked down and saw the clear and fragrant tea in the cup, her expression turned solemn. One should know that it was very hard to find peach blossom tea in the capital!

Aiyo! She remembered now!! Didn't this peach blossom tea come from Lady Fang? She looked up at the Lady Fang, who was over forty years old but had a complexion that was even better than someone in her thirties. Lady Li's attitude became more sincere as she hastily said, "Even if one has money, it's still very difficult to buy this peach blossom tea. It's an honor to be able to drink this precious product here!"

Lady Fang put down the cup in her hands and wiped the corner of her lips with a handkerchief. With a slight smile, she looked up and said, "This peach blossom tea is valuable not only because it tastes good, but also because it can detoxify and beautify, making one's body feel lighter. It's easy for people like me, who are older and had just recently given birth to a child, to have a plumper figure. After drinking peach blossom tea for over a year, my body feels much lighter and my complexion has also gotten better..."

"That's right!" Lady Li lowered her head to look at her love handles and protruding belly. She looked even more eager as she said, "My Lady, from the back, you look just like a young maiden. Also, there's a healthy flush in your fair skin. There's no sign of dullness at all. Unlike me, I'm only around thirty-five but I have enough wrinkles to kill mosquitoes!"

Li Meirou quietly pulled on her mother's sleeves. What exactly was she talking about? No wonder her father didn't think it was a good idea for her mother to come for a visit. He was probably afraid that she would say the wrong thing and embarrass their family.

Lady Fang looked at the young miss of the Li Family. She pretended that she didn't see her small action and continued, "I'm not afraid of you laughing at me. I gave birth at the advanced age of forty and got a mischievous little fellow. After giving birth to Lin'er, I was out of shape and would pant after walking a couple steps. There were spots on my face, which couldn't be covered by a thick layer of powder. I had even more wrinkles than you!! Had it not been for this peach blossom tea, I wouldn't even dare to come out to entertain guests!"

"Does the peach blossom tea really have such an amazing effect?" There weren't any women who didn't like beauty. Lady Li seemed to have forgotten the purpose of her visit, and her train of thoughts had been led astray by Lady Fang.

Lady Fang deliberately touched her smooth and delicate face and smiled mysteriously, saying, "Lady Li, don't believe what people tell you until you see it for yourself. What do you think?"

Lady Li leaned forward and asked eagerly, "Lady Fang, can you tell me where you bought this peach blossom tea?"

"Buy?" Lady Fang revealed a proud smile on her face and lightly shook her head, saying, "If it can be bought, who in the capital doesn't have the money to buy it? The peach blossom tea would have already popularized amongst the upper-class circle! Lady Li, have you seen anyone else drinking it except me?"

Lady Li shook her head without thinking. Who wouldn't want to put powder on their face if they had it? If the noblewomen in the capital had something good, they would want everyone to know about it. She had tasted premium quality Da Hong Pao tea at other people's houses, but she had only heard about peach blossom tea. What did this mean? Peach blossom tea was so valuable that it couldn't be bought!

Suddenly, a thought flashed through her mind. Lady Li mumbled, "Could it be...that this peach blossom tea was made by Lady Fang?" If it was like this, then everything made sense.

It was no wonder that, except for the imperial consorts in the Imperial Palace, there were only a few people in the capital who could show off the effect of the peach blossom tea. On second thought, those people all had a good relationship with Lady Fang!

Lady Fang shook her head with a smile and said, "Would I have such capability?"

"Then..." Lady Li didn't believe that the peach blossom tea had nothing to do with Lady Fang. She looked at Lady Fang with an extremely eager gaze.

Lady Fang felt that she had tantalized her long enough, so she said in a rather appreciative and proud tone, "It's thanks to my filial daughter. I don't know where she got the recipe but she personally made this peach blossom tea, which has the effects of detoxification and enhancing one's beauty. At the beginning, I didn't really believe that the peach blossom tea would be so effective. After drinking it for a little less than half a year, my skin and figure have improved significantly. Those madams, who are close to me, noticed my change and asked about it. Hence, the peach blossom tea was spread out. The process of making peach blossom tea is very complicated. I'm afraid that my daughter would be too tired, and I don't want her to work several days and nights to make the tea. Thus, she only makes one or two catties per year. There isn't even enough for our family to drink. The only reason I gave those madams the tea was because I usually had a good relationship with them. I couldn't refuse them when they came to ask me for the tea, so I had to harden my heart and give some out!"

Lady Fang's words not only verified the amazing effects of the peach blossom tea, but she also clearly told Lady Li, 'Our relationship isn't so good that I would give you the little bit of tea that I saved for myself! So, if you're smart, don't ask about it!'

Hearing this, Lady Li silently swallowed down the request that was on the tip of her tongue. She complimented with a smile, "So it turns out that Official Yu is also skilled in this area! At such a young age, Official Yu is not only skilled in cooking and medicine, but also making flower tea. She is really full of talents!"

"Lady Li is being too courteous. There's no need to call her Official Yu. Our family's Cao'er came from a peasant family and has a low status. She can't compare with Young Miss Li, who came from a noble family, so she doesn't deserve such praise from Lady Li!" Lady Fang blandly refuted Lady Li's compliment.

When Lady Li heard her response, she knew that the other party was angered by her daughter ridiculing Miss Yu's family background at the flower competition. She quickly glared at her daughter and said with a helpless expression, "Lady Fang, the purpose of our visit today is...to apologize to Miss Yu!"

“Apologize? My Cao'er is busy working for the imperial court and seldom has time to socialize. She probably doesn't know Lady Li, right? So what is Lady Li talking about?” Lady Fang asked with a puzzled face, pretending not to know.

With a slightly embarrassed expression, Lady Li sighed and said, “My daughter has been spoiled rotten by me since she was a child. She has a straightforward temper and believes everything she hears. Last time at the flower competition, she was egged on by others and said something rude to Miss Yu. When she got home, she realized her mistake and felt very guilty. She asked me to bring her to see Miss Yu so that she can apologize to her in person.”

“Lady Li, you're making a fuss over nothing. We have both been young girls too. The relationship between young girls can be different every day. It's normal for them to argue and throw tantrums ah! Why would there be a need to apologize in such a serious manner?”

Lady Fang's smile didn't change, but her lowered gaze was covered with coldness. She called her daughter a lowly person in front of so many noble young misses, but wanted her daughter to forgive her with just a few words? How could this be resolved so easily?

Lady Li was slightly irritated to see that Lady Fang wasn't someone easy to deal with. However, she still remembered the purpose of her visit. She suppressed the unpleasant feeling in her heart and said with a smile, “Lady Fang, the child is still young and inexperienced, so her thoughts are rather simple. She was led on by others to say those things at the flower competition, and thus said those words in a haste. I have already severely disciplined her at home. I have scolded her for not knowing people's hearts and making bad friends...”

She paused briefly and saw that Lady Fang had no intention of replying, so she continued, “You see, your daughter is two years younger than this brat in my family, but she's already working for the imperial court. Moreover, she's very talented in many areas. There isn't a very big age difference between the two girls, so I think my family's brat should learn more from Miss Yu...”

“Please don't!” Hearing this, Lady Fang interrupted the other party and said, “My daughter has a low status and her work requires her to work with country bumpkins. Assistant Minister Li's daughter is raised in a pampered lifestyle, so it's better not to let Cao'er, who came from a peasant family, lead her to become boorish and vulgar!”

Boorish and vulgar were words that Li Meirou used to insult Xiaocao with at the flower competition. Lady Fang felt angry in her heart when she said this. Had it not been for the fact that her husband and

Assistant Minister Li were both officials of the imperial court, she would have already kicked these two out of her house. What kind of people were they! When others were of no use to them, they would trample them under their feet. But, when there was someone useful about the other party, they would pretend to flatter them. No one was a fool here. If there was something they needed to say, they should just do so directly. What was the point in being so pretentious?

“It's all my daughter's fault. She came to apologize to your daughter wholeheartedly. If Miss Yu is upset, she can vent her anger by scolding and hitting her a few times.” Lady Li worked hard to suppress the impatience in her heart and said in a good-natured manner.

Lady Fang, on the other hand, picked up the tea cup, took a sip with her head lowered, and said, “If Lady Li and Miss Li had come for this matter, then it's unnecessary! My daughter doesn't care at all. Perhaps, you might not believe this, but she didn't mention anything about the 'misunderstanding' with Miss Li at all. She only said that she had met a few friends with similar temperament at the flower competition.”

After she said that, she held the cup and looked up at Lady Li. The meaning of her words was very clear, 'My daughter is magnanimous and won't be on the same level as your daughter. So stop pretending to be apologetic. Even I feel tired for you.'

Fields of Gold Chapter 450 - Mission Completed?

In actuality, what she was hinting at was quite different: my daughter is able to get along swimmingly with Royal Princess Minglan, Miss He and Miss Yuan, yet she's unable to get along with your daughter. It was obvious; the problem did not lie with her daughter!

Lady Li glanced at her daughter and noticed that she had her head lowered obediently and wasn't making a sound. She remembered that she was here to complete a mission. Despite the fact that the other woman had already served tea and was saying pleasantries, she continued on, “Miss Yu is magnanimous and we were unable to treat her properly. Is Miss Yu available to be seen so that we can clear the air on this misunderstanding?”

In reality, Lady Li didn't believe a single word Lady Fang was saying. If she really didn't take any offense to the situation, why was she refusing to allow her daughter to be seen? Was this the way the Fang Residence received guests? If they didn't have a grudge against them, then why did they ask Royal Prince Yang to support them and cause so much trouble for them in the capital such that they had no face to see anyone else? However, she was here to 'apologize' to them today. Therefore, she could only suppress these questions within her heart.

“Eh? Did I not tell you that my Cao'er has gone out to the Imperial Plantations early this morning to overlook the affairs there? Aiya! My memory now has gone to ashes after chasing after that little

disobedient boy all day everywhere. Lady Li, please don't take offense! Just think, if my daughter was at home and a young miss came over, how could I not have her come greet the other maiden? That is not how my General's Estate treats guests." Lady Fang pretended to look frustrated but her eyes flashed with a mischievous light.

Lady Li's expression changed suddenly and she slightly frowned, but, before long, she regained her serenity. She sighed, "It's not easy for her to take care of court affairs! It's getting colder with every passing day. It must be very difficult for her to run to the Imperial Plantation everyday!"

Lady Fang also sighed along with her and stated in a tone full of approval, "That's right ah! As a mother, how could I bear for my dear daughter to endure any grievance? After all, she did receive the imperial decree, and the emperor places great importance on this winter wheat. A few days ago, he even showed up himself with only Chief Steward Su along to inspect the fields! We won't even get into her other responsibilities, but she has been fretting over her greenhouses full of vegetables. Ever since she got back from Tanggu Town, she had to personally go and check whether the people from the Ministry of Works had finished building the greenhouse pavillions. The vegetables have just sprouted, so she goes over every day to check on them to make sure that we will have green vegetables in time for the New Year's!"

"Then Miss Yu must be working very hard!" Lady Li suddenly saw an opportunity when the topic of the conversation moved to the vegetables. She obsequiously began to flatter, "Speaking of the greenhouse grown vegetables, everyone in the capital knows how incredible Miss Yu is. In the years past, other than radishes and cabbages, it was already considered pretty good if we could have a few wilted green vegetables to eat at this season. Not at all like today, as long as you have money, you're more than able to eat some fresh green vegetables."

Li Meirou sneered inwardly when she saw her mother giving flowery compliments to that disgusting, low-born girl. What was so great about her growing vegetables in the greenhouses? Was that low-born lass really that pure and great? They claimed that she was growing them for the sake of allowing people to have access to fresh vegetables, but how come they didn't talk about the immense amount of money that lass made from selling it? No matter how many vegetables she grew or how much money she made, that low-born chit was still a farmer! Muddy peasants were all the same. The low-born were always the low-born!

Lady Li was currently wracking her brains in praising Yu Xiaocao more and more beautifully. The words coming out of her mouth were so fake and obvious that even the personal maidservants attending to Lady Fang rolled their eyes in their hearts. No one paid attention to a young lady for no reason—there

must be an ulterior motive! This wife of the Assistant Minister had already dawdled at the residence, chattering away, for almost half the morning, yet she still hadn't got to the crux of the issue. Did she really want to stay over and also eat lunch here too?

"My daughter is still young and isn't worthy of Lady Li's compliments!" Lady Fang couldn't stand it anymore and didn't want to interact with her anymore. She interrupted the other woman and said, "Lady Li, if you only came here to apologize, then I can receive this apology in my daughter's stead. She absolutely didn't take this misunderstanding to heart. However...is there anything else you need today, Lady Li?"

Lady Fang had already made it this obvious, so Lady Li didn't try to beat around the bush anymore. She slightly frowned and got to the point, "To tell you the truth, this time when we came to visit, other than giving an apology to Miss Yu, we also had another matter we wanted to discuss."

"What sort of matter do you want to discuss right now? Just directly say it. As her mother, I can definitely speak in her stead at certain times!" Lady Fang had already a good inkling on what this other lady was hinting at but pretended to be clueless on purpose.

Lady Li was inwardly thinking that Yu Xiaocao was a commoner and had only become a puny little sixth-level official recently. In the capital, there were the scores of sixth-level officials just walking around the streets. If Lady Fang didn't manage her matters, then how could that lass be able to work in the capital without any problems? However, these were thoughts that she could only think of and not say.

"You also know that my family's patriarch will be celebrating his seventieth birthday in a few days. Everyone says that to reach the age of seventy is a very rare thing. My husband is very filial and wanted to make sure that his birthday celebration goes very well, so he started preparing very early. However, recently we have come across a small problem..." Lady Li raised her head to look at Lady Fang and stopped for a moment.

"The fact that Patriarch Li has reached an old age is a cause worthy of celebrating!" Lady Fang said a few words of congratulations as she inwardly roasted the other lady, 'Your family's patriarch is celebrating his birthday, but we haven't even received an invitation here. Can't you tell that our two families don't have much to do with each other? Do you really think that coming here to ask for favor is truly suitable at this point?'

Lady Li noticed that the other woman wasn't taking a hint and felt even more vexed inside. However, she had already reached this point. She could only go ahead and shamelessly continue, "You also know that scholars are distressingly direct and can often inadvertently offend someone with their speech. I'm

not sure when my lord husband has offended Royal Prince Yang but his fruit and vegetable stores refuse to give my family any service. How can we have a birthday banquet without any fresh vegetables? However, other than Royal Prince Yang's own vegetable and fruit stores, there are no other stores in the capital that are selling any fresh vegetables! I heard that when Miss Yu was in Tanggu Town, she had helped Royal Prince Yang handle many things. Thus, she does have some ability to ask him for a favor. You see...can't Miss Yu help say a few words in our favor and let Royal Prince Yang allow us to..."

"I was wondering what such a big problem was! Isn't it just some fresh vegetables?" Lady Fang acted as if she didn't understand her true meaning but she continued, "Patriarch Li's seventieth birthday celebration is a very important event! We absolutely cannot let him have a poor time then! Don't you worry, I will take care of all the fresh vegetables needed for his birthday celebration! Linglong, tell the kitchen to not touch any of the vegetables that will be sent to us in the next couple of days. On the day of the birthday celebration, we will send them all to your residence!"

Before Lady Li could interrupt, Lady Fang continued, "As one of the younger generation, I should actually visit your residence on the day of Patriarch Li's birthday. However, you have also seen how many things I have to manage at the General's Estate. In addition, my family's little rascal is very clingy and needs me at every moment! So just take these vegetables as a sign of my respect to your patriarch. Please don't take it to heart!"

Lady Li did not expect that the result would turn out like this today. On the surface, she had completed her mission. In actuality, they were only treating the symptoms and not the root cause! They were able to get a supply of fresh vegetables for the birthday celebration, but what about in the future? Lady Fang had already said that these vegetables were being sent to show her respect to the patriarch for his birthday. What about after the birthday celebration? Was their entire residence going to have to go back to eating only radishes and cabbages for the rest of the winter?

When she tried to interject, Lady Fang had already started to pretend that she was very busy. She had her maids go in and out of the courtyard to manage affairs as well as report to her what was going on today. Helpless, Lady Li could only say a few pleasantries before she finally said her farewells. There was always time for a second attempt. In the future, she would wait for when Miss Yu was at home and then bring her daughter along to see her then. She was very sure that Miss Yu, who was only around ten years old and also from the rural countryside, would be much easier to fool than the experienced Lady Fang! The two of them had just left the parlor when they saw a maidservant gleefully rush in. Following that, the sound of the maid's clear and crisp voice could be heard, "Milady, Modiste Jiang from Exquisite Garments is here to see us."

“Quickly! Quickly invite her in! Zhenzhu, go into the greenhouse and pick a few ripe tomatoes. Hupo, tell the kitchen to cut some watermelon and some cantaloupe to bring into the parlor!” Lady Fang's voice seemed much more inviting and welcoming.

Lady Li sneered. Was a mere seamstress and someone born of the merchant class worthy of everyone's compliments and praises? How did their current society turn out like this? Everyone rushed now to chase after some crude and rustic farmers and lowly people from the merchant class. Everyone tried to fawn over them constantly! Society was only getting worse and worse with each passing day!

As she raised her foot to leave, she heard that maid, who was named Linglong, speak, “Milady, Modiste Jiang is likely here to deliver the sets of clothing meant for winter and autumn. Last time, our young miss had worn a set of Qi-style clothing fit for the autumn season at the flower war banquet. The princess royal's granddaughter, Miss He, had asked about it constantly! Didn't the prime minister's wife invite you over to appreciate the plum blossoms in a few days? If you wear some Qi-style attire over, I'm sure you'll be the subject of all the matrons' discussions then!”

“Stop that, stop that! I'm already of an advanced age, so how can I be like a young maiden, only preoccupied with showing off my clothing?” Lady Fang laughingly scolded the maid.

Linglong's voice was full of glee as she replied, “My lady! Let's not even talk about the newest style of clothing that Exquisite Garments has come out with. There's probably not even a second person in the whole capital who is able to have Exquisite Garments send her clothing that is handmade by Modiste Jiang for all four seasons...oh wait, I mean there's probably not even a third person in the capital! Our young miss is the only other person in the capital to have such an honor!”

“Lady Li?” Linlang, who was sending off the guests, saw that the mother-daughter pair had stopped in their tracks and was shamelessly craning their heads to listen in on the conversation in the parlor. They didn't even try to hide the fact that they were eavesdropping. These two women were really too much!

Only then did Lady Li lead her daughter to walk slowly down the hallway. As expected, before long, Modiste Jiang's figure could be seen in the building.

After Jiang Siniang became famous, obtaining a set of personally handmade clothing from her was rarer than gold. It didn't matter how much money you had. She would only custom-make clothing for those who caught her eye. Assistant Minister Li's official position was not low, but his status could not ever compete with those families who had been rich and powerful for many generations. Lady Li and her daughter had long lusted after a set of clothing made by Modiste Jiang. However, every time they went

to Exquisite Garments to see her, they were always sent away with some excuse or another. Even now, they had never even met Jiang Siniang in person.

This was a once-in-lifetime opportunity. Lady Li pasted a friendly smile on her face. Even Li Meirou, who had kept her head down this entire time since she had entered the Fang Residence, looked up with eyes shining with delight as she stared avidly at Jiang Siniang. It was as if the famous dressmaker was a piece of delicious meat that she was craving for.

They were just about to stride forward and find some way to speak to Modiste Jiang to make a good impression on her. However, they were blocked by Linlang. Out of the four personal maidservants of Lady Fang, Linlang was the tallest out of all of them and was likely around 1.7 meters tall. With her blocking the way, Lady Li and her daughter were unable to even see one glance of the famous seamstress. By the time the two of them were able to walk around the blocking maid, Jiang Siniang had already walked past them.

“Modiste Jiang!” Li Meirou was quite anxious and gently hollered a greeting.

Jiang Siniang didn't slow down her steps one bit. She only turned her head to nod at them when she rounded the corner.