

Gold Chapter 451

Fields of Gold Chapter 451 - Rumors

As soon as they left the General's Residence, Li Meirou swiftly slipped into the carriage and angrily made a ruckus, "Why is it like this?! How could that lowly peasant girl be able to wear clothing personally made by Modiste Jiang? Is she even worthy?!"

Lady Li saw that her daughter's face had almost twisted into an unrecognizable expression out of anger and hurriedly comforted her, "That lass has to go to the Imperial Plantations every day, take care of the fields, and harvest vegetables. Even if she has beautiful feathers to wear, a wild pheasant can't morph into a phoenix! My sweet daughter is pretty and dignified with a graceful figure. It's Modiste Jiang's own loss that she refuses to design clothing for us!"

If Yu Xiaocao could hear Lady Li's words, she would definitely have to ask the woman, "Lady Li, are you a transmigrator from the Republic of China ah? You're pretty similar to Ah Q ah! You truly embody the spirit and soul of Ah Q [1] and could be considered a true disciple of his ways ah!"

"Mother, just what is Modiste Jiang thinking? Is it really like what that peasant girl said? That she inspired Modiste Jiang? Sending her two sets of clothing as thanks is one thing but why is she now sending her two sets of custom-made clothing for every season now?" Li Meirou felt very aggrieved over this whole matter. She had lusted over gaining even one piece of clothing from Exquisite Garments yet her desire never came true. That rural peasant girl, on the other hand, was now getting supplied with two sets of clothing for every season now!

Lady Li hastily comforted her daughter, "Rou'er, just think about Modiste Jiang's family background. She's only from a merchant family. In the four classes of our society, merchants are even lower in status than farmers. Although everyone in the capital treats her like a precious flower, she still must feel inferior and unimportant when she walks in our wealthy and noble circles. Now, a peasant farmer girl whose birth is even more lowly than hers has suddenly popped up from who knows where. Naturally, she feels more comfortable interacting with another dull sparrow!"

Only after hearing her mother's explanation did Li Meirou's expression finally relax. Suddenly, she thought of something and lifted the curtain covering the window to look around before she seriously said, "Mother, we can't say such things in public! Everyone in the capital loves Modiste Jiang's clothing. If what we said gets transmitted to her ears, then we will likely never be able to set foot into Exquisite Garments again! We must be careful of what we say!"

“My daughter, you are very wise and think of all situations! Alright, we won't speak anymore on this subject! In the future, we will only secretly have such discussions in our inner courtyard!” Lady Li abruptly remembered the purpose of her visit today. Did she complete her mission or not?

“Rou'er, it looks like this Yu Xiaocao's fame in the capital will not be in any way inferior to Jiang Siniang's acclaim. Right now, just by relying on her ability to grow fruits and vegetables in winter, the whole capital knows of her name and her deeds. I heard that on Royal Prince Yang's farmstead, the little tomatoes there are almost as popular as the clothing personally designed and made by Jiang Siniang herself. Wealthy and noble families now take out little tomatoes when they receive guests to show off.”

Lady Li recalled that Lady Fang was older than herself by four to five years yet the other woman looked like she had just hit thirty years of age. Her skin was so tender and smooth that it resembled a young maiden's. If this was truly the product of that peach blossom tea, then once Yu Xiaocao came up with a method to manufacture more and put it on the market, it would definitely become a product that was even more popular than Jiang Siniang's handmade clothing.

Other types of clothing, while inferior to the ones made by Jiang Siniang, were still acceptable to wear. However, the quality of one's skin was a different story. It didn't matter how beautifully one was dressed if it was paired with a face that had skin like tree bark. Beautiful clothes didn't go very well with sallow and aging skin. However, if a person had good skin, it made them seem much younger. Even if they were wearing normal clothing they could still have a pretty and graceful presence. Wasn't Lady Fang from today a perfect example of this?

Although Li Meirou was unhappy about this, she had to admit that the facts were true. The small tomatoes were currently sold in tiny boxes for ten taels each. Each box only held less than a catty of the fruit. The Assistant Minister's residence was more than able to afford this but these tomatoes had rationed sales. Every shop only sold twenty boxes of tomatoes a day.

There were many high-ranking officials in the capital, and there were even more wealthy merchant families around. Even if the stores sold a hundred boxes a day at a price that was ten times the current price, that still wasn't enough to sate the appetites of the rich and wealthy. In the past two months, the Assistant Minister's residence was only able to snatch one box of tomatoes. There were around at least a dozen people in their family as well as her father's most favored concubine. It was considered pretty good to get one or two tomatoes to eat. Since she was favored by both her parents, she only got an extra tomato for herself compared to her older and younger brothers.

The little tomatoes were small and delicate, with a pleasing red color that delighted the eye. They had a sweet and sour taste and were very juicy. One bite was more than enough to cause people to fall in love

with them. She also heard rumors that the tomatoes not only tasted good but were also good for nourishing the body!

It was rumored that the little imperial princess didn't have a good appetite a few days ago but didn't want to eat medicine. Yu Xiaocao had sent in a basket of tomatoes to her and the little princess got better without taking medicine! Not only was her appetite better but her complexion had also improved and she had become more lively. Consequently,, Consort Li's maternal family's attitude to that lowly lass had also improved quite a bit after this happened.

She was only a stupid farmer yet there were so many nobles who treated her as if she was a treasure. This lowly brat was truly too lucky! Although Li Meirou inwardly disdained Yu Xiaocao, she knew, for the sake of her family's connections, that she would have to play nice with her. This would help her family thrive in the future.

Without her mother persuading her, she had already understood what she needed to do in the future. However, she still pretended to be a bit distressed, "Mother, don't worry! In the future, I won't try to make things difficult for her anymore. If she wants to, I will even treat her like one of my best friends."

"I knew you were Mother's sweet daughter! I know you feel aggrieved about all of this. How about this? I know you've long liked my golden bracelet that's shaped like clouds and has jewels embedded in it. When we get back, I'll have one of the maids find it and give it to you!" Lady Li felt very grateful that her daughter had seen the light and knew how to bend for her family's sake.

Li Meirou immediately felt happy but she remarked in hesitation, "Isn't that bracelet supposed to be inherited by the wives of the family and not the daughters? I think Eldest Sister-in-law also likes it very much!"

"Hmph! Give that bracelet to her? Wouldn't she just send it back to her maternal family? Rou'er, in the future, you absolutely cannot act like your eldest sister-in-law, always thinking about sending money and goods back to your maternal family. Although our family isn't extremely wealthy, we don't need you, as a daughter, supplementing us. Doing this will only cause your husband's family to resent you!" In regards to her eldest daughter-in-law, Lady Li was very displeased and looked down on her. She also blamed her husband for this as well. He had gotten drunk one night and had promised another man that they would be in-laws. Now they were in a mess. They were stuck with some poor in-laws who were always looking to get more from their residence to subsidize their expenses.

“Mother, just what are you saying?” Li Meirou blushed with embarrassment as the topic of the conversation changed to her future marriage prospects. As long as they stayed in the capital, it probably wouldn't be hard for her to get a good marriage in the future as her father was a third-ranked official in court. Thus, being aggrieved for a bit didn't count for much in the grand scheme of things. However, she also knew that now wasn't the right time to be talking about her future marriage. It was all that lowly peasant girl, Yu Xiaocao's, fault! That farmer girl had harmed her reputation recently!

Lady Li's eyes flickered as she said, “I don't know where that Yu Family's lass got that recipe for the peach blossom tea. If we were able to get our hands on that recipe, then we would definitely make a fortune!”

Li Meirou thought for a bit and then the smile on her face deepened. She whispered quietly, “Mother, if news came out that there was a recipe that could make women become more youthful, wouldn't people rush out and try to grab it? There are plenty of people in the capital who are more powerful than General Fang! Do you think that if this came out that tiny sixth-ranked official farmer girl would be able to hold onto her recipe for long?”

“What are you trying to say?” Lady Li looked at her daughter in a dazed manner. She had never seen such a malevolent and hateful expression on her daughter's face before.

“It's quite simple! If I can't have it, then I can't allow that lowly peasant girl to have it either! It doesn't matter who gets this recipe in the end. As long as it's not in the hands of that farmer girl, I'm happy!” Li Meirou snarled out her thoughts.

Before long, news that the newly titled Official Yu had a recipe to allow women to become more youthful spread throughout the capital. For a period of time, the currents in the capital became murky and stormy. Lady Fang had subsequently become more busy as more people came to call on her to inquire about the news.

When Royal Prince Yang got word of this, he suspected that there was the stink of a conspiracy. He was quite busy with his official affairs recently, so he couldn't personally deal with this right now. Instead, he sent over two bodyguards who were skilled at martial arts to Yu Xiaocao and repeatedly reminded the little lass that she needed to take them out with her when she went to the Imperial Plantation. He still wasn't satisfied with this, so then he gave her two maids who were skilled at martial arts to protect her at all times. Finally, even Head Steward Liu was sent over by him to guard Yu Xiaocao. He gave the excuse that the steward was there to help her manage the farmstead for him while he wasn't there. In actuality, it was obvious that Head Steward Liu was only there to keep a close eye on her and the people targeting her.

Yu Xiaocao didn't fuss at these protective measures and accepted them without any questions. The rumors swirling in the capital became more outlandish with each passing day. They now claimed that Yu Xiaocao had the ability to reverse time which was why she was able to grow fruits and vegetables out of season. This ability could even be used to restore the youth of older people! If it was merely the ability to beautify people and make them look youthful, then only the people obsessed with beauty would be interested. However, reversing time and giving back youth was a whole other matter and scores of people were now interested. Rulers of every generation all hoped to obtain long youthful lives, so why wouldn't the rich and powerful covet it too?

In a flash, Yu Xiaocao had become the most delicious piece of meat in the world and everyone stared at her wherever she went. Luckily, she had the best bodyguards from Imperial Prince Jing's Estate following her and also Royal Prince Yang's Head Steward Liu, who no one truly understood. These protective methods caused a lot of people to not act on their desires.

However, these rumors had also entered the Imperial Palace. Some of the favored concubines in the palace had whispered their desire to obtain this recipe at the emperor's pillow. Even the empress herself was very interested in these rumors.

"Your Imperial Majesty, do you really think there is some type of medicine or prescription in this world that can make a person regain their youth?" The empress quietly asked this question while she was gazing at her reflection in the mirror. The woman shown in the mirror was not as lively or youthful as she was in the years past.

Zhu Junfan guffawed in amusement and replied, "You ah, you're the mother of the empire ah! How come you also want to believe these baseless rumors? If there really was a medication that can restore the youth of the old, do you think any of the emperors in dynasties past would let this go? Have you heard of anyone in any previous dynasty becoming immortal and youthful forever? That being said, why do you need to use a medication to restore your youth? Look at that face of yours, Fei'er, you look like you're still around eighteen years old. If you become even younger, then we will have another imperial daughter in this palace!"

The empress felt her heart burst with happiness when she heard the sweet words from the emperor. However, she restrained the corner of her lips from lifting up as she replied in a scolding tone, "What are you saying? If other people hear this, they'll think we're a joke!"

Although she still looked young, she was almost thirty this year. Compared to those newer concubines entering the palace, who were around seventeen to eighteen years old, she was definitely not as youthful or tender. However, the emperor wasn't the type of person who lusted after new women all

the time. He had been on the throne for seven to eight years by now, and the palace didn't even have more than four to five new concubines currently. Compared to the previous dynasties, where they had thousands and thousands of women in the palace, how could those few count?

She had known the emperor since she was young and was childhood sweethearts with him. No matter how much the other concubines were favored, none of them could overtake her. Even if her complexion was not as beautiful as it was when she first married the emperor, or her voice as beautiful, the emperor had never slighted her a bit and still treated her well. She should be very pleased with all this! Thus, she often told herself that as the high and mighty empress, was there any point in her trying to compete with those concubines?

Fields of Gold Chapter 452 - Flower Tea and Skin Cosmetics

However, which woman didn't like to be beautiful? This year, Lady Fang was nearing forty years of age. When Lady Fang came to the Imperial Palace to greet her, the older woman's skin and complexion was even better than her own. It was hard for the empress not to sigh over this. Lady Fang was also perceptive and had brought a box of peach blossom tea that her goddaughter had made and given it to her.

After drinking this peach blossom tea, she discovered that it truly had an effect on her skin. The dark spots that had been left on her face after her pregnancy with her imperial son had lightened considerably. After putting on some powder on her face, they weren't visible anymore. Furthermore, when she was pregnant, she started to have constipation issues. This was a rather private issue for her, so she was ashamed to ask the imperial physicians to take a look at her. Unfortunately, it caused a lot of trouble for her. However, after drinking this peach blossom tea, her constipation had completely disappeared and she no longer had this problem!

Less than half a year had passed since she started drinking the tea. If she continued to consume this tea, she was certain that her skin would become much better than Lady Fang's. After all, she was younger than the other woman by almost a decade!

Lady Fang had also mentioned that this peach blossom tea recipe was something that her goddaughter had come up with when there was nothing better for her to do. Thus, was the so-called medicine that was able to give back youth and reverse aging actually this peach blossom tea? Then what was the point in her asking the emperor about this youth medication in such an impatient way? As long as Lady Fang had access to this peach blossom tea, she, as the empress, would naturally have access too.

She was quite aware of the value of this recipe that could improve one's looks and complexion. However, as the high-and-mighty empress, the emperor's private purse (and warehouse) was under her management. Since the sales of the greenhouse grown vegetables had been blazingly popular, the emperor's private purse had become fuller with every passing day. Basically, this meant that the amount

of money in her hands was also growing with every day. Was she really going to do such a shameful thing as fighting with her own official to snatch a recipe? Furthermore, this particular official was currently regarded with great importance by the emperor and had also saved her imperial son's life.

After thinking this far, the empress spoke to the emperor in a somewhat worried tone, "If this so-called youth regaining medicine does not exist, then what are the ulterior motives of the people spreading these rumors? Just how much do these people hate Yu Xiaocao to cause so much trouble for her?"

Even as the empress she could not resist the lure of this youth regaining medicine, so what did that mean for other people? Yu Xiaocao was only a tiny sixth-level agricultural official. She didn't have much foundation or backing in the capital and only had her godfather, who was only a third-level military official without much power. There were so many powerful and wealthy officials in the capital who could easily squash General Fang with no problems! If these people decided to move, then this lass would be in incredible danger!

Zhu Junfan had already investigated the source of these rumors as soon as the news came out. The secret guards under the lead of Chief Steward Su were not there for show. Su Ran also had a soft spot in his heart for this little lass. Thus, in regards to this little girl's affairs, as soon as something appeared, he was sensitive to it and made sure to investigate it thoroughly.

"Merely a small clown who is jealous of the little lass's abilities!" Zhu Junfan was not impressed with Assistant Minister Li's ability to manage and educate his children. He even now regarded the assistant minister himself with a bit of disgust. Thus, he directly stripped the man's assistant minister title from the Ministry of Appointments, which was a very lucrative position, and gave him the title of the Minister of Imperial Stud. Although they were both third-ranked official positions, how could being an official in charge of horses compare to being an official in the Ministry of Appointments? This was all in the future though.

For the sake of his younger cousin, Zhu Junfan needed to keep a closer eye on his cousin's sweetheart. Furthermore, from her contributions at the Imperial Plantations alone, he needed to make sure to protect this farming expert well!

"Fei'er, on another day, you should invite the little lass to the Imperial Palace and ask if she has any plans on opening a flower tea store. If people are able to buy the flower teas that can improve their appearances and nourish their bodies, then there wouldn't be such a fuss over all of this! Su Ran, you'll need to work a bit to suppress all of these rumors about the so-called youth renewal medication!

Change the rumors such that the so-called youth renewal medication is only something that can slow down aging and improve the physical appearance of people. At the start of spring, this flower tea store will be open on the market! Empress, you should collaborate with her and receive 10% of the profits from the store!” Zhu Junfan believed that he was a good emperor as he had eliminated a lot of obstacles for his own official.

Su Ran was surprised for a moment and then immediately replied, “Yes, this subordinate will go do this now!”

The empress waited until Su Ran had left the room and then gave the emperor a chiding look, “Miss Yu was the one who invented the recipe for peach blossom tea. If she opens a store to sell this tea and I just get 10% of the profits for doing nothing, how is that appropriate?”

“How is it not appropriate? If you don't get involved in this business, then there will still be people who want to get a bite of this rich piece of meat! It's not as if you'll be doing nothing. By involving yourself, you're protecting her from other people who want to swoop and steal her work! Think of all of the trouble you're saving her from!” Zhu Junfan stated this in a matter-of-fact manner.

The empress finally understood his reasoning and lightly chuckled, “Imperial Majesty, you are truly someone who appreciates the talented as you are protecting Miss Yu. I just don't know whether or not she appreciates the amount of care you put into her.”

Zhu Junfan also smiled and said, “Don't underestimate this little lass; she's not a stupid person. The 10% cut that I mentioned is only a small number. She herself may offer a cut of the profits to you that's even higher!”

Many of the merchants in the capital, in order to avoid encountering a lot of trouble, did their best to find a sponsor for their businesses. With someone powerful behind them, they could do their businesses without any worries of outside interference. In the capital, if you didn't have a powerful backer, it was hard to do anything. Let alone the empress, there were plenty of second-ranked and third-ranked officials who took thirty to forty percent of the business's profits in order to be their sponsor.

Before long, another set of rumors spread throughout the capital. It was said that little Official Yu didn't have a youth regaining medicine recipe on her hands. In fact, she had inadvertently offended someone and that person was deliberately spreading malicious rumors about her. If she truly had such a recipe on her hands, then why didn't she use it on her own family?

Originally, only a very small group of muddle-headed people believed that there truly was a youth regaining medicine recipe. The vast majority of people in the capital only half believed what was being transmitted. Naturally, there are also people who vehemently refused to believe that this was true! When the second set of rumors came out, it gave most of these people a believable explanation for what was going on. There was still a group of people who harbored ulterior motives that decided to wait and see what would happen next.

Another two days passed and more news came out that little Official Yu had been invited into the palace to see the empress. News quickly disseminated from the palace. They said that the empress had rewarded Official Yu heavily for creating this peach blossom tea. The empress also stated that this tea was so beneficial to women that it really should be placed on the market and sold through the capital. She had also asked Official Yu whether she was planning on opening a flower tea store to sell this. Little Official Yu readily agreed to this proposal and decided to collaborate with the empress.

Naturally, with the empress as her backer, Yu Xiaocao would be an imbecile if she didn't open this flower tea store! She was someone who loved to make money, so how could she possibly let go of this perfect opportunity? In fact, she didn't even have to worry about obtaining a good location for the store. The empress herself had already prepared everything. Furthermore, even the employees of the store had already been picked by the empress. These people were all maids from the Imperial Palace who had been sent out, so she didn't even have to train them before they could be employed.

When this news came out, the people who had ulterior motives immediately stopped their plans in their tracks. If the emperor himself hadn't approved of this collaboration, then how could the empress, who was someone who liked to keep to herself, start to work with Official Yu and open up a store jointly to sell flower tea?

Official Yu's peach blossom tea recipe had already caught the eye of the emperor. Who was stupid enough to try to steal something from the emperor? Did they want to lose their heads?

When the noble matrons of the capital found out this news, even the most aloof person became gleeful and ecstatic. They only had to look at Lady Fang to see the effects of the peach blossom tea. Prior to drinking the peach blossom tea, her skin was sallow and had spots of discoloration all over. She had a bloated figure and there were fine wrinkles around the corners of her eyes. When she came out with her son in her arms, if no one knew the truth, they would have thought that she was holding her own grandson!

But what about now? Didn't she seem to return to her youth again? She was in her forties but looked like she was barely in her thirties. Her skin no longer had any unsightly discolorations on it and she

glowed with the blush of youth. Her figure had also become more graceful and delicate than it was when she was young. When she stood next to the other matrons around her age, she made them all look like dried-up old sticks.

Furthermore, the empress herself had drunk the peach blossom tea that Lady Fang had given her. Now, her skin glowed with health and it looked as if her skin quality was about the same as when she was a young maiden.

Which woman in the world did not want to be beautiful? Which young maiden in the world did not want to become more alluring? The effects of the peach blossom tea were obvious. Unfortunately, there was none to be had on the market. If it was available, they wouldn't care even if the price was sky high. They would still squabble to buy some!

In the past, people who had ignored Lady Fang now did their best to make connections with her. They all wanted to see if they could use their connections with her to get their hands on some peach blossom tea. However, other than giving a box to the empress herself, Lady Fang didn't have much tea at home. She wasn't even sure if she could drink a whole year's worth before it was gone. Thus, how could she possibly give some to other people? At most, if you came over for a visit, she might give you a cup of tea to drink. That was already considered very welcoming. Because of this, Lady Fang's status and position in the capital had also increased sharply.

Now it was different. The empress had finally opened the market for the good of the people. She had Lady Fang's goddaughter bring out the tea to sell. Even if the sales were rationed, similar to the fruits and vegetables on the market, it still meant that people had an opportunity to buy some! This was still better than what it was like now, where they had to use their connections with Lady Fang to see if they could possibly get something out of her.

Yu Xiaocao didn't care what other people thought or felt at this point. As soon as she got back from the palace, she ran into her little study in her own courtyard and only allowed Hechun at her side to help her. Everyone else was prohibited from entering. She was busy recalling all of the recipes that she knew about flower teas and organizing them in a methodical manner.

She was planning on not only selling flower teas at the shop but also making a set of cosmetic products to sell at the store as well. Women who wanted to improve their appearances needed to use both 'inner' and 'outer' methods. It was definitely important to consume nourishing items but they also should not neglect using external cosmetics to help the process along!

She was planning on handing the management of the 'Nourishing Skin Beauty' shop to Hechun in the future. This maid was very interested in making cosmetics and also had some talent in this area as well. For example, after only getting a few tips from Xiaocao, Hechun was able to make handmade soap that came to about 80 to 90 percent of what Xiaocao was looking for.

The upgraded handmade soap had only been sent to Royal Princess Minglan and the 'two beauties of the capital'. They had already sent back their initial impressions. The effect of these handmade soaps was quite obvious. Although they hadn't been using the soaps for very long, they felt like their skin no longer felt as dry after washing during this early winter season. Furthermore, the smell of the handmade soap was very light and fragrant. Compared to Full Spring Fragrance's soap, which had a very dense and heavy perfume, these soaps smelled a lot more pleasing and natural.

However, Yu Xiaocao actually wasn't very good at coming up and making new cosmetic products. If she only relied on the mystic-stone water for the effect on her products, that wouldn't be good for the long-term longevity for this line of business.

She vaguely recalled that when she attended the flower war banquet she had heard that one of the concubine born daughters from a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Ceremonies was obsessed with making new blushes and powders. Furthermore, the products she made worked very well. In addition, one of the 'two beauties of the capital', Yuan Xueyan, also liked to create new products whenever she had time. Two heads were better than one. Perhaps they could come up with products that could rival the popularity and fame of Full Spring Fragrance!

As of right now, she needed to wait a bit on the flower teas. After all, this was early winter, and most flowers were all withered and dead on the ground. There was no way for her to get any ingredients even if she wanted to. Once spring started, there were a lot of flowers to be found on the hills at the Imperial Plantation. For example, there were jasmine flowers, chrysanthemum flowers, and other early spring blooming flowers. She wasn't sure if roses were available in this time period. On another day, when she saw Royal Prince Yang, she could ask him. Roses were also quite efficacious when made into flower teas.

Fields of Gold Chapter 453 - Everyone Has Their Own Road to Walk

Fortunately, this year, when she planted fruit trees on the hills behind the Imperial Plantation, she had planted the most peach trees. She didn't know where Royal Prince Yang had gotten these trees. All of the trees looked to be around ten years old, and some of them even had trunks about as thick as an adult person's arm. These trees had probably just reached the age when they were about to bear fruit. She wasn't sure what method the royal prince used, whether it was power or money, to get the owners of these trees to give them to him.

With a dozen or so peach trees in the fruit orchard, in spring, when the flowers were blooming, it would be a sight to behold. In her eyes, she could already see the air filled with fluttering flowers and the

ground carpeted with scattered, delicate petals. It would be a fantastical and picturesque sight that could bewitch people's hearts. In the future, when they planted more fruit trees, they could open up the peach tree glade in the spring and allow people inside to admire their blossoms. She was planning on building a few elegant and intriguing pavilions within the peach tree forest. Scholars could rent these pavilions so they could hold a small banquet with the flower filled forest. Thus, she could also make another batch of money from this.

After thinking about it, she decided that managing a fruit tree orchard was quite worth it. The flowers during the spring could be picked and used to make flower tea. The blossoming trees themselves could also attract people who were willing to pay to admire them. Once the fruits were ripe, she could start a pick-your-own fruit business. The guests could freely walk amongst the fruit trees and eat any fruits they picked without paying while they were still in the orchard. If they wanted to bring any fruit home, they would have to pay by weight.

In her previous life, all of these methods were used in farms producing strawberries, peaches, and grapes until they were too commonplace. In this time period, noble young maidens rarely left their homes to do anything. Wholesome places like this should prove to be very interesting and fun to them, right? Thus, Yu Xiaocao had especially consulted young maidens like Jiang Siniang and He Wanning to see if they would be interested in something like this. Both of them stated that they were very intrigued by this idea!

However, these plans of hers would have to wait until the fruit orchard had expanded to a larger size. Currently, Yu Xiaocao was huddled next to the heated wall and discussing the cosmetics business with Hechun. For now, she decided that for cleansing items they would just rely on their handmade soaps. Other than honey, milk and aloe, they could also add a bunch of other natural ingredients to their soaps. That way they could divide their soap products into four main categories: moisturizing, refreshing, whitening, and acne prevention.

Many common ingredients in everyday life could all be incorporated into these soaps. For example, they could make soaps that contained glutinous rice and wolfberry, cow's milk with fresh salt, evening primrose and soy milk, creamy butter and silver fungus, propolis, mint, chrysanthemum flowers... they could even use fruits and vegetables and other food items in their soaps, such as: cucumbers, luffa, tomatoes, apples, eggs...After processing all of these raw ingredients, their essences could be easily mixed and matched to create the effect they wanted. Furthermore, with the mystic-stone water on hand, these products were guaranteed to work.

Since all of these cosmetic items targeted the noble and wealthy young maidens and matrons of the capital, that meant the packaging of these products needed to be very beautiful and fit for the audience. They decided to use the highest-quality precious woods for the boxes of their products and were planning on hiring master carpenters to carve and shape these delicate boxes. The products would be split into three tiers: top-notch, superior, and common. The top-notch products were going to be packaged in boxes made of golden silk nanmu wood. Superior quality soaps were going to be packaged in boxes made of red sandalwood and the lowest tier were going to be packaged in boxes made of yellow rosewood. In terms of pricing, even the soaps in the most common tier cost at least a few dozen taels per soap. Clearly, none of these products were things commoners and peasants could afford.

When Yu Xiaocao stated the pricing she was thinking of, Hechun was stunned by the numbers. She had never thought that the handmade soap she made, which was around five taels of silver for ingredient and production costs, could actually be sold for such a high price. The common tier of soaps was priced around at least fifty taels a bar, while the superior grade soaps were around a hundred taels per bar. As for the top-tier luxury bars, their prices were set at an even higher multiple than the superior grade soaps.

Hechun now regarded her young miss with feelings of worship. Her young miss was truly someone suited for doing business as she had both vision and boldness. If she was the one setting the prices, then she would have thought that selling the soaps for double what it cost to make them would have already been a grand thing. Her young miss, on the other hand, had priced them at ten times to a hundred times over the ingredient and production costs.

If Yu Xiaocao could hear her thoughts, then she would have scolded the maid, 'What do you know? Do you think a price could just be set willy-nilly? If these products are not efficacious, let's not even talk about selling them for a hundred to two hundred taels, even if we sold them at one tael a bar, there would still be no one willing to buy them! The three tiers of soaps are created for a reason. There is an obvious difference in the efficacy between the tiers.'

In fact, she was only planning on making around twenty bars per month of the top quality tier of soaps. These twenty bars of soap would all be personally made by her and she was going to use mystic-stone water for the entire process. Naturally, the effect of these soaps was very good. As for the superior quality soaps, she was only planning on adding a dozen or so drops of mystic-stone water to each bar. The common tier soaps had even less of the mystic-stone water added. However, even if the soap only had a little bit of mystic-stone water in it, the effects of these soaps were still very good.

Furthermore, Yu Xiaocao was planning on visiting Miss Yuan at the prime minister's residence soon to see if she wanted to be added as a collaborator to this cosmetics store. She also sent an invitation out to the concubine-born daughter of the official from the Ministry of Ceremonies to inquire if she wanted to teach her methods of making cosmetics to Hechun in return for ten percent of the profits. She heard

that this young lady was not very favored at home and didn't have an easy life. A tenth of the profits could help her alter her life considerably! In the future, when she got married, the amount of dowry she brought with her also determined how her husband's family would treat her. Yu Xiaocao was sure that as long as this girl wasn't stupid she wouldn't refuse this offer.

Yu Xiaocao was in the midst of discussing the cosmetics store operations with Hechun when Wutong suddenly came into the room. The maid shot a glance full of jealousy at Hechun and the smile on her face seemed a bit stiff as she said, "Young Miss, Yingtao is back and is waiting outside to give her greetings to you!"

Wutong was considered to be one of the maids who had been the longest with the young miss. At that time, after the young miss finished selecting her four personal maidservants, Yingtao and Yangliu ended up with good futures. Both were now managers of either stores or manufacturing facilities. Furthermore, they had shown their loyalty to the young miss so it wasn't unusual that the young miss rewarded them.

However, Xichun and Hechun, who came along later, didn't have qualifications that beat her nor were they more talented in any way. Why was one of them put in charge of the greenhouse operations at the Imperial Plantation and the other on the cusp of becoming a manager at the cosmetics shop? Just what sort of qualities did they have that made the young miss regard them with such importance?

The more she thought, the more Wutong felt resentful about all of this! Why did the young miss never see her good parts when she always carefully carried out her duties and didn't make a single mistake?

Pipa, who had also been left at Yu Xiaocao's side, was in charge of managing the young miss's wardrobe and jewelry and was a lot more calm in the face of things. At first, she also thought things were not fair, especially after Wutong aired her grievances. However, she had gone to the Imperial Plantation with the young miss and had seen Xichun with her pant legs rolled up laboring hard in the fields with the tenant farmers. The other maid looked incredibly busy. The sight made her understand that if she was the one in Xichun's shoes, she wouldn't be able to do as good a job as the other girl.

As for Hechun, that lass had always liked coming up with new recipes and methods to make beautifying cosmetics. Furthermore, that maid had the talent to match. When the young miss had explained the process of making milk and honey infused soaps and aloe vera soaps, she didn't hide it from either Wutong or herself. Pipa wasn't sure if the other maid understood anything but she herself couldn't make heads or tails of even the simplest instructions. On the other hand, Hechun was able to make these two soaps. Although her first batch was on the more ugly side, the effects of these new soaps were obvious.

Pipa lowered her head to look at her hands that had obviously become more smooth recently. Every time Hechun finished making a bar of soap, she always took it out and offered it to the people in the courtyard to use first. Wutong had a heart full of indignation and would often not only refuse to use the soap but also say a few scathing words that she didn't want to use experimental products for fear that they would harm her skin. Pipa, on the other hand, readily accepted the milk and honey soap bar. After using it for half a month, her face and hands were no longer dry as before and it looked like her skin complexion had also brightened.

The size of one's stomach determined the amount of food one could eat! Pipa believed that even if the young miss handed the management of the cosmetic stores to her, she wouldn't be able to do well. It was still better for her to obediently stay by the young miss's side and spend her time working wholeheartedly for her. Would the young miss treat her poorly for this?

Since even Pipa had noticed Wutong's little petty actions, she was sure that the young miss was also aware of the other maid's activities. The higher one climbed, the harder one fell! Recently, the young miss had treated her better compared to the past and had distanced herself from Wutong. Pipa tried to remind Wutong once out of the kindness of her own heart but the other girl was not grateful at all and instead lashed out at her. Forget about it! Everyone had their own fate. As long as she did her duties properly, that was all that mattered!

"It's still quite a bit of time before the year's end, so why did Yingtao return now? Invite her in ah!" Yu Xiaocao waved a hand at Wutong and gave her an order without even raising her head

Wutong felt quite discontent by this treatment. When she turned to leave, she shot an angry glare at Hechun. Hechun expressed her innocence. What was going on now? When did she end up offending this little angry ball again? Yingtao noticed that Wutong had an upset expression on her face when she exited the room, so she asked casually, "What's wrong? Who made you angry?"

"I now see clearly. Everyone in this courtyard can step on me whenever they like! Even Pipa's status in the young miss's heart is higher than mine!! Yingtao, how could that girl Hechun be so well regarded by the young miss even though she's younger than us by two to three years? The young miss is preparing her to manage the cosmetics shop! The profits from that place will be even higher than your pharmaceutical workshop ah!" Wutong grumbled this all out in a quiet voice and her voice had an undertone of discontent.

Yingtao glanced at the other maid and sighed within her heart. How come Wutong still hadn't made any progress yet? She never reflected on her own thoughts and actions and always bit off more than she could chew. She thought highly of herself but had little ability. Despite that, she always considered

herself to be more important than other people. In reality, as a maidservant, everything depended on your master. If the master approved of you, then you had status. If you couldn't, then shouldn't think of ways to show your reliability and talents to them?

Yingtao smiled faintly and said, "Don't judge the young miss by her age. She has a good eye for appointing people to the right positions! Since the young miss has decided to promote Hechun to the management of that store, that means that Hechun must have some abilities that make her stand out! Wutong, you need to make an effort to learn more while staying next to the young miss. Once you become proficient in a particular field, only then can you assume responsibility for bigger projects. Don't you think that makes sense?"

In actuality, she was trying to help Wutong with these words. However, in Wutong's ears, all she heard was that Yingtao was looking down on her and was making fun of her. A sliver of hate arose in her heart towards the other maid, 'What do you have to be so proud of? Aren't you just helping the young miss manage the pharmaceutical workshop? You're still just a servant under the orders of the master. What are you all arrogant about?'

Yingtao, after managing the workshop for the past two years, had interacted quite a bit with all sorts of people and naturally acquired the ability to read others. From the slight sneer at the corner of Wutong's lips, she knew that the other maid didn't understand her true intentions. Forget about it, ungrateful dogs only knew how to bite those who tried to help. If Wutong didn't change her attitude in the future, then it would be very hard for her to advance!

Yingtao decided to ignore her and lifted the thick door covering over the doorsill. She stepped into the room. Because the room had a heated wall, it felt as warm as spring inside. Pipa took the hat she had taken off and placed it on a shelf. Yingtao thanked the other maid with a smile. Now wasn't the time for her to exchange pleasantries. She had come over to discuss an important matter with the young miss!

"Yingtao, quickly come over closer to the heated wall. The weather suddenly changed today and we have a cold spell. You must be freezing, right?" Yu Xiaocao waved a hand at Yingtao and motioned to her to sit. Hechun perceptively brought over a small embroidered stool and placed it next to the young miss's low couch.

Fields of Gold Chapter 454 - Leaving the Capital to Suppress Bandits

"Congratulations Young Miss! You've added another money-making venture to your collection!" Yingtao finished greeting her young miss and sat down on the small embroidered stool. She grinned broadly as she looked at her master. It had been a few months since she last saw her young miss and the fact that time passed so quickly made her head spin.

Although Yu Xiaocao had spent almost a month at Tanggu, she spent all of her time at the farmstead on the outskirts of Tanggu Town to keep an eye on the workers constructing the greenhouse pavilions. Furthermore, she personally trained the employed farmers how to sow seeds, water the plants, and fertilize the soil in the greenhouse...by the time the work on the greenhouse pavilions was about done, the capital needed her to come back. She didn't even have the time to visit Dongshan Village to see her family's newly built home.

Argh! She hadn't even reached the age of thirteen yet. In her past life, at this age, she was still wearing a backpack going to school every day. Why was she as busy as a dog now?

Yu Xiaocao let out a sigh and then smiled at Yingtao, "Big Boss Yingtao is a very busy person! How come you have the time to come to the capital ah?"

Yingtao's lips twitched and she said in a scolding tone, "Young Miss, you only know how to make a joke out of me! If this servant wasn't busy, then I'd be afraid that you'd accuse me of not taking my responsibilities at the pharmaceutical workshop seriously!"

"I know you're a responsible helper, I consider you to be my right arm. Tell me, you can't have traveled to the capital just because you missed me, right?" The subordinates under her were all hard-working and knew what they should and should not do. Consequently, Yu Xiaocao didn't have any airs when she interacted with them. In fact, their interactions seemed more akin to a sisterly relationship.

The smile on Yingtao's face deepened, "Young Miss, I heard you're preparing to open a flower blossom tea shop and are also planning on selling some skin cosmetics there too. Then have you thought about where to build the workshop for it ah? Are you planning on building the place yourself or buying a building from other people? Don't just think about finding a place for your new venture. You should also remember to think of more ideas for our pharmaceutical business too."

Yu Xiaocao raised an eyebrow and remarked in surprise, "What's going on? Does my head manager want to move the pharmaceutical workshop to the capital?"

"I don't want to move the workshop over! Instead, I want to open another workshop here in the capital!" They had chosen a good location in Dongshan Village to build the pharmaceutical workshop. Now that the harbor was about done, it was quite convenient to ship their goods either via the water or by land.

Tongren Medicine Hall had opened quite a few branches in Jiangnan so their need for medicinal pills and tinctures also increased. The pharmaceutical workshop at Dongshan Village had expanded compared to the past but it would be hard-pressed to supply all of the medications needed in Jiangnan and in the north!

Currently, the piggery had already been moved to the young miss's maternal relatives at Xishan Village and it was under the management of her eldest maternal aunt. With that transferred over, the young miss's older sister had more time on her hands. Yingtao wanted to propose to the young miss that they open a new pharmaceutical workshop in the capital and have the products from that place be responsible for supplying the north. Dongshan Village was close to the new harbor so it could be in charge of the products sent to the south.

Recently, Miss Xiaolian had already started helping at the pharmaceutical workshop. Once she was familiar with the methods and management of the place, Yingtao wanted to hand that one over to Miss Xiaolian to manage. Then, she could head to the capital to build and establish a new pharmaceutical workshop. Once the new facility in the capital was up and running, Miss Xiaolian could decide to stay at Dongshan Village or come to the capital. Both of them were trusted by the young miss. With one of them managing one workshop each, it was also a good working situation.

Yu Xiaocao fell silent for a moment after hearing Yingtao's proposal. Only after Yingtao finished her cup of tea did she finally raise her head. She gave a look full of praise towards Yingtao, who had started to feel nervous, and then said in a voice full of admiration, "Yingtao, I didn't expect you to mature so quickly and come up with innovative ideas on your own! I will hand over the pharmaceutical business for you to handle alone! With you managing things, I can rest easy!"

"Thank you, Young Miss, for believing in me!" Ideas rushed through Yingtao's head. She was first going to find a good location for the new workshop as it couldn't be too far away from the capital. The best scenario would be to have it located in a place close to the young miss so she could visit the young miss often. The young miss was her backer. With her around, she always felt calm no matter what she was doing.

"Yingtao, for the capital's pharmaceutical workshop, I plan on discussing it with Royal Prince Yang and see if we can build it on his farmstead. At most, we could just give him a percent of the profits! That farmstead is very close to the Imperial Plantation and also has imperial soldiers patrolling nearby. This will prevent any small bandits or thieves from getting close. Furthermore, I'm currently managing all of the affairs at the Imperial Plantation. That way, I can also find some time to help you with some issues. It will be quite convenient!"

Yu Xiaocao thought that this idea was quite good. In fact, the best scenario would be that the flower blossom workshop could also be built on the small hill behind the farmstead. Royal Prince Yang's farmstead had a small hill in the back. In future years, she was planning on planting a lot of flowers and trees in the area. Flowers were the raw ingredients for both the flower teas and skin cosmetics, so having their workshops near the sources were a good thing.

The more she thought about this, the more Yu Xiaocao thought that Royal Prince Yang's farmstead was the best location for all of this. She started mumbling to herself, "I'm not sure whether Royal Prince Young would be willing to part with his farmstead and allow us to buy it from him..."

Yingtao's eyes flickered as she silently thought, 'My mistress, with how much Royal Prince Yang likes you, I'm pretty sure he would even happily give this farmstead to you, let alone allow you to buy it from him. Didn't he readily give you his farmstead in Tanggu Town? And that had around 800 mu of land. Isn't this an example of the saying, 'spending thousands of taels of gold to obtain a smile from a beauty'?'

However, she was afraid that her master might feel embarrassed by all of this, so she didn't say it out loud. She only quipped, "Young Miss, I'm sure that as long as you open your mouth and ask, Royal Prince Yang would happily give this farmstead to you."

"Bah! Are you asking for a beating?" Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at her maid and then continued, "How could I just ask for someone's possession? That's truly too shameless! In fact, I heard that he had bought this farmstead for around two thousand taels. When I get back, I need to check whether we have enough money in our accounts for this."

Two thousand taels was considered an outlandish sum to Yu Xiaocao when she first transmigrated over. She didn't even dare to dream that she might have that much money in her hands at that time. However, things had changed. Her dividends from Zhenxiu Restaurant alone could easily cover that cost. Furthermore, she had a farmstead in Tanggu Town that had almost a thousand mu in land. The harvests from the spring wheat as well as the autumn corn were so high that they shocked other people. All of this could either be sold to the imperial court as seeds, or they could be sold at a high price to other people in the area. From the spring and autumn harvests alone, they were probably making around ten thousand taels. In addition, the Yu Family had their early-growing vegetable and watermelon fields, their braised food store and pickled vegetables store, and the pharmaceutical workshop... Now, she had even added her split of the profits from the greenhouse grown vegetables and fruits in the capital. Let alone two thousand taels, even if she needed to take out twenty thousand taels that wouldn't be a problem.

However, the amount of capital she had to use to build the new pharmaceutical workshop, flower tea workshop, skin cosmetics workshop, and the storefronts was quite large. She still needed to scrimp and

save where she could! If she could borrow the land on Royal Prince Young's farmstead to build these facilities, then she didn't need to think about buying it directly from him. The greenhouse grown vegetables and fruits on that land were now the goose that laid the golden eggs!

“Then...this servant will return back to Dongshan Village and discuss this with Miss Xiaolian. After that, I will rush back to the capital to take charge of building the new workshop.” Yingtao felt like her body was full of energy now that she had the permission to start building a new facility.

Yu Xiaocao looked at her with mirth in her eyes, “Don't start bustling about now! Royal Prince Yang was just assigned a task and has left the capital. I don't know when he'll be able to come back. Without him as the owner of the farmstead to give us permission, how can we shamelessly use the land on his property right now? It's been a long time since you've been back at the capital, so you should go see your parents and siblings. Also, Yangliu is waiting for you and you haven't seen her for more than a year. Every time she comes to see me, she always talks about you!”

Yingtao was a servant who had been born in a noble estate. Her family had been sent over as dowry from the Xia family to take care of Lady Fang's dowry lands. She had an older brother above her; he was a clever man. He had already been promoted to assistant steward at one of Lady Fang's dowry shops. Her younger brother was still young, so he was currently assigned to study in the outer courtyard as one of the servants. Ever since Yingtao had gone to Dongshan Village and taken control of the pharmaceutical workshop, she had been so busy that she rarely had the opportunity to return to the capital, let alone spend time with her parents and family.

Because the chefs in the braised shop in the capital were now experienced, Yangliu now had more time on her hands. Ever since Yu Xiaocao returned to the capital, Yangliu went to see her mistress from time to time to describe how the business was doing. She also talked about some interesting gossip she heard throughout the capital. Yingtao and Yangliu were as close as two blood-related sisters, so she often talked about the other maid when she was there.

It had been a long time since Yingtao had been back, so she had also started missing her family. She also wanted to keep touch with some of her good friends in the residence. In the future, these connections could help her young miss as well.

“Young Miss, you said that Royal Prince Yang had left the capital? Did he go out to sea again? Will he be able to come back before the start of spring?” Winter in the capital was quite cold and the ground was frozen during that time of year. It absolutely was not a good time to build new constructions at that time. It looked like they needed to wait until spring before building these new workshops. They weren't sure when Royal Prince Yang would be able to get back. If he needed to go out to sea again like the last time, it might be one or two years before he came back. By that time it would be too late!

Yu Xiaocao frowned somewhat worriedly and stated, "When he left, I vaguely remember him mentioning that the emperor had sent him to the north to suppress bandits! A few days ago, he sent a few skilled bodyguards over to keep me safe. On the day he left the capital, if I hadn't persisted in refusing, he would have even left Head Steward Liu behind with me. It's already been seven to eight days since he left, and I don't know how his mission in suppressing bandits has been going..."

Yingtao hurriedly tried to comfort her young miss when she saw the downcast and worried expression on the younger girl's face, "Young Miss, Royal Prince Yang is rumored to be one of the best martial arts experts in the capital, so he has plenty of ability to protect himself in dangerous situations. In addition, with Head Steward Liu protecting him, none of the bandits will be able to harm him no matter how skilled they are! You don't need to worry too much about him!"

"Swords and knives don't have eyes. Who can guarantee their safety? However, I made him pack the best wound balm we have and some pills to treat internal injuries. As long as he has one breath of life left, the medicines can keep him alive!" When she saw him off on his journey, she had personally handed the two types of medicine to him. She even repeatedly reminded him to pack them carefully and to remember to use them if he got hurt. She wasn't sure if that fellow took her words to heart or not.

Yingtao deliberately used a cheerful tone of voice to reply, "What do you have to be worried about now that you have given him the medicine you personally made yourself? That being said, he's just suppressing some bandits that's all. Some tiny mountain bandits are nothing. Let's not even talk about using the elite troops from the army against them. Even the private soldiers under the royal prince's command could rout them out with no problems!"

Last time, when the Wokou pirates invaded, the royal prince had rushed there from afar and brought his personal troops to slaughter the pirates. Their fierceness and heroism were deeply engraved into Yingtao's heart and the Dongshan villagers' memories.

Hechun felt extremely envious as she watched Yingtao and the young miss happily converse from the side. Usually, the young miss was already quite tolerant and lenient when she dealt with her maids. However, she had never treated them with the camaraderie and friendliness that she did with Yingtao. They looked so natural together!

She heard that Older Sister Yangliu and Older Sister Yingtao had personally volunteered to go to Tanggu Town when the young miss was under more difficult circumstances. No wonder they had become the

young miss's left and right arms now. Hechun could deeply feel that as long as she was completely loyal to the young miss and did her best to help the young miss, the young miss would definitely remember her efforts and treat her accordingly!

Fields of Gold Chapter 455 - Hoping for his Return

This time, there was no news from Royal Prince Yang for more than a month. When they had said their reluctant farewells, the prince had only stated that he was going to the north to suppress bandits and didn't go into detail.

As midwinter came closer, Xiaocao started to feel more and more concerned. She could faintly feel that Royal Prince Yang had mentioned suppressing bandits for the sole purpose of hiding the true mission from her to prevent her from fretting this much. When he left the capital, he had taken with him a large portion of the Jinwei elite troops with him. If he only had to suppress some mountain bandits, he would have long come back victorious. Was it possible that the northern border had gotten invaded instead and that's why the emperor sent Royal Prince Yang there?

Argh! If the border truly had a crisis, then she was afraid that it would be impossible for the prince to return before the end of winter. Winter in the northern parts of the country was harsh and long. If the roaming nomads north of the border had lost any of their cows or sheep, then they would definitely attack the Great Ming Empire in an effort to steal food. At this time, protecting the borders was a vital task!

The first snowfall was falling in the capital and Yu Xiaocao was sure that Royal Prince Yang wouldn't be able to get back before the end of the year. However, he suddenly returned triumphantly. On the day that had happened, Yu Xiaocao was at the Imperial Plantation, wearing a thick woolen robe that made her resemble a tiny fuzzy ball. She was inspecting the greenhouse pavilions with the hired farmers and having them sweep the snow off of the structures.

"The snow is falling harder with every passing second. You guys need to keep an eye on it. If too much snow accumulates on top of the pavilions, it might cause the whole thing to collapse. It's slightly better while we still have daylight but you guys absolutely cannot neglect this when darkness falls!" Yu Xiaocao slipped out of one of the pavilions. Every structure had a heated wall inside, which guaranteed that the insides of these greenhouses were as warm as spring. She was quite satisfied with the farmers in charge of taking care of these pavilions. Every greenhouse was filled with lush green vegetables that were growing. The sight of these vegetables pleased people's hearts and made them feel extremely refreshed.

One of the farmers, who was in his forties, was named Liu Shanshui and had been promoted to a foreman by Yu Xiaocao. He was honest and hardworking with a talent for taking care of vegetables. He was following closely behind Xiaocao and accompanying her as she inspected every greenhouse. He

stated firmly, "Official Yu, don't worry ah! At night, we'll have a rotating watch of people on guard and we will make sure nothing bad happens to the greenhouse vegetables!"

"Alright, I'm relieved with you in charge! Tell the rest of the hired farmers that they'll have to work a bit hard this winter but I'll make sure to give every one of you a fat red packet as a bonus at year's end!" Yu Xiaocao was never stingy towards her subordinates who were hardworking.

A sincere smile spread across Liu Shanshui's tanned face. He chuckled happily, "Official Yu, the monthly salary you give us is quite good! We've made more money in these past two months than we've made in a year from laboring hard! It is our fortune to be able to have such a generous employer like you!"

"We'll be growing vegetables under these greenhouse pavilions until next March or April ah! When spring starts, I plan on splitting what we do on these lands. One section will continue to grow vegetables while we'll grow watermelons on the other portion. At that time, if you guys would still like to stay, you guys can continue working for me! I won't stint on your salaries!" These forty-or-so vegetable farmers all had years of experience under their belts. Whether it was the greenhouse vegetables on the Imperial Plantation or the neighboring greenhouse grown fruits on Royal Prince Yang's farmstead, all of them were taken care of by these farmers. From the way things were going, other than a small percentage of them who had other motives, the rest she could continue using!

The smile on Liu Shanshui's face became deeper and he repeatedly nodded his head, "Official Yu treats us with honesty and intimacy. Even if we made less, we would still feel the most comfortable working with you. If the prices of the vegetables decrease next spring, it wouldn't bother us even if our wages decreased."

Liu Shanshui was originally a tenant farmer on one of the nearby farmsteads. His family had a few mu rented to them, and he always planted them with vegetables. Every day he would get up at the crack of dawn and work until late to care for his vegetable fields. When they were ripe, he was so busy that he rushed around every day. Before the sky had light, he needed to get up to pick his vegetables and then bring them into the capital to sell in a wheelbarrow.

The capital and its surrounding suburbs had a lot of farmers like him who relied on growing vegetables to make a living. Even if he spent the whole day at the vegetable market selling his vegetables, he wasn't guaranteed to sell them all by the end of the day. He pretty much had no free time in the year and the amount of money he made was just enough for his family to eke by.

The other farmers' circumstances were not much better than his. Some of them had even worse living situations. After the start of autumn, most of their vegetables had been harvested and sold. They usually didn't have much to do in the winter. When they found out that the Imperial Plantation was looking for experienced vegetable farmers to cultivate vegetables in greenhouses in the winter, they decided to try their luck since they had the time anyway.

At first, Liu Shanshui was not very optimistic about the prospect of trying to grow vegetables in the winter. Regardless of whether they were planting grain or vegetables, they all needed to respect the seasons. It was a foolish dream to try to grow fresh green vegetables in the harsh cold of winter. Furthermore, the person looking to hire them was also a little lass just over the age of ten. He truly thought she was making a ruckus at the time!

If he didn't have his innate awe and worship of imperial authority, Liu Shanshu would have long muttered within his heart, 'Has the emperor become muddle-headed ah? He decided to promote a tiny, delicate little girl, who hasn't even reached thirteen, to be an agricultural official and even gave her the authority to manage the Imperial Plantation. How much can a little lass know? Can she even tell the difference between a wheat sprout and a garlic sprout ah?'

He would have never expected that they were really able to cultivate vegetables in the middle of winter. In fact, many of the vegetables that were previously only grown in spring or summer were all thriving in the greenhouses even when it was the frost season or the snow season. Furthermore, even watermelon and cantaloupe vines were also able to bear fruit in the middle of winter. This was the first time he was able to see such an astounding sight in his forty years of living.

He had to wonder just how Official Yu's head was screwed on to be able to come up with such a crazy method to build these magical greenhouse pavilions. They had a very good ability to retain heat and she even knew to build heated walls inside to keep the temperature up. Although snow was falling endlessly outside, when they entered the greenhouses, they didn't even have to wear thick layers of clothing to feel warm.

Night watch also wasn't a big deal. They just needed to erect a few simple beds in the corners of the greenhouses and have one person at all times keeping an eye on things. The rest of them slept in rotation. Sleeping inside the greenhouses, with their regulated temperature and humidity, was actually a lot more comfortable than sleeping on their kang beds at home!

Official Yu had stated that as long as they did their job meticulously, they were going to be able to get a fat red packet at year's end as a bonus! If that bunch of stinky brats found out, they would definitely work their hearts out to receive such a thing!

Even if they didn't get a bonus, they needed to work hard to leave a good impression on Official Yu. The amount of money they made was not a joke. Even if they only worked for four to five months, they still made substantially more than they used to earn from selling their own vegetables! From what Official Yu was saying, she was planning on continuing to grow vegetables and fruits in the spring and summer and needed to pick some workers from their ranks then.

Liu Shanshui knew what he had to do now and decided to remind the fellows he had a good relationship with. He needed to tell them to not slack off like some of the other people. Otherwise, their gains would not make up for their losses and Official Yu would stop hiring them in the future.

After she was done inspecting the greenhouses on the Imperial Plantation, Yu Xiaocao braved the blustery snow and wind to arrive at the neighboring farmstead. The tenant farmers on those lands were currently busily removing snow from the pavilions.

When he saw Yu Xiaocao come over, the steward in charge of the farmstead, Jiang Youshun, hurriedly went over to greet her. After that, he followed her blindly from behind to listen to her every single order. Jiang Youshun was originally sent over as a steward with Princess Consort Jing when she got married. Since he was talented and hardworking, the princess consort had transferred him over to her youngest son to help manage her son's newly bought farmstead and greenhouses.

Yu Xiaocao felt very pleased when she saw the tenant farmers working exactly as she ordered, so she complimented Jiang Youshun a few times.

As she was talking, a fast horse rushed over through the wind and snow. When the horse got closer, Yu Xiaocao finally recognized this steed. It was the one Head Steward Liu liked to use the most. Riding the horse was a thin and wiry figure with white hair that seemed to have fused with the falling flakes of snow.

“Head Steward Liu! You guys are back? How is Royal Prince Yang? Did the mission go well this time ah?” Yu Xiaocao went forward a few steps and asked a series of questions to Head Steward Liu, who had just jumped down from his horse.

Head Steward Liu puffed out a few breaths that fogged up the air. When he saw that Yu Xiaocao seemed very concerned about his master, a smile bloomed onto his aged face. It was clear that his master's sacrifices had not been in vain. At the very least, Miss Yu cared about him in her heart.

Liu Fusheng used his somewhat shrill voice to slowly reply, "In reply to Miss Yu, my master has just entered the capital and the army should be following shortly. The master needs to report to the emperor first but he was afraid that you might be worried, so he sent this old servant to inform you. I first went to General Fang's residence to find you and found out there that you were at the Imperial Plantation, so I spurred my horse over here!"

"You've worked hard, Head Steward Liu. Let's go to the building so you can drink a cup of tea and warm yourself up!" Yu Xiaocao suddenly thought the sky full of falling snow had become cute after hearing the news that Zhu Junyang had come back safely. The rock that she had been holding in her heart was now released and she felt much more comfortable.

Head Steward Liu bowed in thanks and remained one step behind Yu Xiaocao as they headed towards the building. In other people's eyes, he, Liu Fusheng, was a fierce and merciless castrate. Even though his master had always treated him well, no one else treated him like a normal person as Miss Yu did. In fact, Miss Yu always regarded him with clear and limpid eyes without any hint of disgust or fawning. It was as if in Miss Yu's eyes, he was the same as other people. Thus, interacting with Miss Yu made him feel like he was a whole and true human being!

Some people said that his master had poor taste to fall in love with a small peasant girl. He, on the other hand, felt the exact opposite. His master's taste was unique and perfect. Perhaps Miss Yu's peculiarities were able to calm his master's heart and soothe him. From that, his master was able to control his inner demon and go down a better road...

"Head Steward Liu, did you guys encounter any danger this time?" Yu Xiaocao had noticed that his complexion looked a bit dull as if he had just recovered from an injury, so she asked.

Steward Liu drank a sip of the warm tea and felt his insides slowly heat up. Even his just healed injury seemed to feel a lot more comfortable after that sip. He lightly sighed and said, "This mission went pretty well, all things considered. However, there were still a few difficulties. This old servant needs to thank Miss Yu! If you hadn't given Master your medicine, this old servant might have lost my life in the north!"

"What? Are you telling me that those mountain bandits were so fierce that even you, Head Steward Liu, weren't their opponents? Then...what about Royal Prince Yang? Is he okay?" Yu Xiaocao felt her heart skip a beat. Her heart, which had been relaxed, started to rise to her throat again.

Head Steward Liu thought for a bit and then sent all of the other people out of the building and quietly said, "To the outside, we only broadcast that we were suppressing bandits. In actuality, it was an armed rebellion instigated by the remnants of the previous dynasty. The northeast had encountered many disasters these past few years. First they had a drought that only comes once in a hundred years, and then there was the snow disaster. Following that, there was the locust plague from two years ago that also affected the northeast. In addition, the north has the Khitan people that come to raid them from time to time. It hasn't been easy for the common people to survive there. Thus, the remnants of the previous dynasty seized this opportunity to incite the common people to rebel..."

Fields of Gold Chapter 456 - Putting Down a Rebellion

At first, they thought it was only a small rebellion. However, they soon discovered that there was an expert from the previous dynasty hiding within their ranks and it was even someone that Head Steward Liu knew. In fact, Head Steward Liu was also a remnant of the previous dynasty and had been a small leader of one of the groups of the imperial hidden guards.

When the current emperor emeritus stormed his troops into the Imperial Palace, the emperor of the previous dynasty had sent out his newly born grandson with the then leader of the imperial hidden guards. The leader had originally been a free and arrogant martial arts expert in the jianghu [1]. Once, he had been chased by his enemies who wanted to kill him and he had serendipitously encountered the previous dynasty's emperor, who was traveling incognito among the people. The previous dynasty's emperor told his subordinates to save the expert, who was on the verge of dying, and also helped him take revenge.

The people of the jianghu followed their own code of ethics and chivalry, and this particular expert was an adamant adherent to the code. He believed that his life had been saved by the previous dynasty's emperor and swore a blood-oath to follow his orders to death. Thus, he was the one responsible for building up the imperial hidden guards from scratch and all of the hidden guards within the organization were personally trained by him. Every single hidden guard in the group was a peerless martial arts expert.

When the previous dynasty's emperor died alone from an illness, his only request was that his last blood-related descendant would live and, later on, regain the throne. At that time, the head of the imperial hidden guards took away more than half of his loyal subordinates and left the rest in hiding in the capital to wait for opportunities and further orders.

This leader had been in hibernation with his little master for more almost thirty years. The hidden guards, who had been left in the capital, went from hope to despair. In this time period, medical science was not very advanced and the survival rate of young children was not very good. It would be difficult to ensure that an infant, who was just a month old, didn't encounter any mishaps while being taken around with a crude adult man.

There were loyal and devoted hidden guards among those who had been left in the capital. They continued to train their successors and sent them into the Imperial Palace to serve whenever they had the opportunity. In fact, Su Ran was one of those people who had been trained and sent in. There were also those that, as time went on, started to become indecisive about their mission. Within these people, some had left the capital to go live their own private lives, while others wanted to use this giant secret to get some glory and wealth in return.

In the end, a traitor had appeared within their ranks and many of the previous dynasty's hidden guards who had connections with him were pulled out of their hiding spots. Liu Fusheng, who had been hiding in a remote palace for a very long time, was one of the men who was betrayed by the traitor.

The emperor on the throne at that time was the current emperor emeritus. He had been a military man all his life and had been a god of the battlefields. When he found out that there were so many remnants of the previous dynasty around him, he erupted in fury. A river of blood appeared in the capital as he sent people to chase down and slaughter all of these hidden guards. The results were disastrous for the hidden guards. Only one in ten had survived the massacre. Those who were fortunate knew that they could no longer stay in the capital and secretly fled. They followed the secret messages left behind by their leader and returned to meet up with their leader and their young master. As for the remaining hidden guards in the capital, they had almost been wiped out!

Liu Fusheng had been a head steward in the palace then and had been heavily tortured and punished until his body didn't even resemble a human being's anymore. Despite that, he still refused to betray any of the secrets he knew. However, within their ranks, there were other people who were not as courageous and daring as he was.

At that time, the previous dynasty had been destroyed for almost twenty years. These hidden guards had cover jobs in every trade. Some of them, after getting used to a normal life, had lost their courage and loyalty. With these people confessing, it speeded up the destruction of the remnants of the hidden guards. As for those turncoats, who thought that confessing would lead to lenient treatment, they had been executed in secret. On the contrary, those like Liu Fusheng, who stayed faithful to the end, had obtained the appreciation of the emperor emeritus and he kept them around.

The emperor emeritus respected and admired those who remained loyal and persevered. He knew that as long as he obtained their loyalty, he would be able to obtain subordinates who were dependable. After several years of kindness, even a stone would start to warm up.

Liu Fusheng had been castrated before he entered the Imperial Palace but it wasn't his personal idea to do so. For the sake of the previous dynasty's emperor, he had forsaken his right to be a man. Furthermore, he had eradicated many dissidents to the previous emperor, so he was a meticulous and dutiful subordinate. At that time, Liu Fusheng had finally started to slowly soften under the years of good treatment and the persuasions of his fellow comrades who had also pledged loyalty to their new master.

During that time period, the emperor emeritus never treated him poorly because he was one of the remnants of the previous dynasty. Instead, he placed Liu Fusheng by his side to manage the large and small affairs of the palace. It could be said that other than the other old experienced court eunuch by the emperor emeritus's side, he had the most power.

After all, with his status as a previous enemy, it made the rest of the court wary of him and many officials sent up requests to either remove him from office or imprison him. However, the emperor emeritus withstood all of that pressure and showed Liu Fusheng that he was trusted. This was the main reason as to why Head Steward Liu Fusheng became hell-bent on following the directives of the emperor emeritus.

Despite that, in order to avoid having his old leader and previous colleagues use his status against him for their own motives, he had continuously looked for an opportunity to leave the Imperial Palace and the emperor. Later on, Imperial Prince Jing's youngest son had a problem come up and required an expert to 'protect' him. Liu Fusheng volunteered to take that role and had been with his current master until now.

Liu Fusheng truly wasn't one of the original turncoats. He had never used his knowledge to trap and kill his former comrades within the hidden guards. At most, he only abandoned his previous master and was now following a new one.

Unfortunately, the remnants of the hidden guards from the previous dynasty didn't know the whole truth! The head of the hidden guards, who had been hiding within the rebel army, had seen his previous capable subordinate following the leader of the army in charge of putting down the rebels. Furthermore, this leader was also one of the members of the Great Ming Dynasty's imperial family. The head of the hidden guards thought of many possible circumstances. He now believed that Liu Fusheng had used the blood and lives of his comrades to obtain the trust of the Great Ming dogs in return for glory, splendor, and wealth.

Consequently, while the army was putting down the rebels, the head of the previous dynasty's hidden guards and a few death soldiers he personally trained used the chaos of the battle to mount a sneak attack at Royal Prince Yang and Liu Fusheng, who was by the prince's side.

Because he detested traitors, the head of the hidden guards, who was the most skilled out of all of them, made Liu Fusheng the target of his ambush. As for Royal Prince Yang, who had barely reached his twentieth birthday, the leader regarded him as an unskilled young fellow. Thus, because he was underestimated, Royal Prince Yang was only targeted by two of the death soldiers.

With Royal Prince Yang's insane martial arts skills, how could two little death soldiers do much against him? In fact, the prince acted as if he was a cat playing with two mice and was very carefree as he fought with the two soldiers. The fight didn't even resemble a battle and instead seemed more like a game to him.

Liu Fusheng, on the other hand, was in a whole other situation! It could be said that all of the hidden guards' skills had been learned from this leader alone. Furthermore, their master wouldn't teach them all of his tricks. Even though Liu Fusheng hadn't become rusty in the past few decades and even sparred constantly with Royal Prince Yang, his opponent was still his previous master! The leader of the hidden guards wasn't just a tiny bit better than him; he was a lot better.

As he was caught off guard, Liu Fusheng had been instantly injured by his old master and obtained a serious internal injury. Blood spewed out of him as he desperately tried to defend himself. Under the oppressive attacks of his opponent, his body started collecting large and small injuries very quickly. If Royal Prince Yang hadn't discovered his peril and started to fight seriously to get rid of his own opponents before he leapt over to block a fatal attack, it was likely that Liu Fusheng would have lost his old life at that battlefield.

After hearing such a thrilling story, Yu Xiaocao felt her heart clench in fear and she asked in worry, "That leader of the previous dynasty's hidden guards is so violent that even you, Head Steward Liu, aren't his opponent. Wasn't Royal Prince Yang in danger then?"

Liu Fusheng finished his large cup of tea and then poured himself another cup from the tea kettle on the table. He had tasted pretty much all of the famous teas of the era and thought that even the top-notch Da Hong Pao [2] wasn't as fragrant as the tea in this pot. Obviously, this pot of wild tea had been personally processed by Miss Yu herself. All of his deep exhaustion and pain from his injuries seemed to have disappeared after drinking this tea.

"Miss Yu, you are truly looking down on my master!" Head Steward Liu let out a light sigh of relief and continued to tell his story about that fight on the battlefield.

When the head of the hidden guards saw that Royal Prince Yang was coming of his own volition 'to die', he decided to seize the opportunity to arrest the leader of the opposing army right then and there. This guy was from the imperial family and was also a favored grandson of the Great Ming Dynasty's emperor emeritus. If he had this prince in his hands, then the Great Ming troops wouldn't dare to continue for fear of harming the youth. It would definitely be an advantage to capture this juicy target.

The leader of the hidden guards didn't even consider Royal Prince Yang to be an opponent after looking at his youthful, handsome face. He believed that as long as he stretched a hand, the prince would be captured. He never expected that this 'embroidered pillow', who was even more beautiful than a woman, was more than he could handle! Since he underestimated the prince, Royal Prince Yang very easily injured him. With an internal injury now hindering him, the head of the hidden guards continued to fight but noticed that Royal Prince Yang seemed to get fiercer and fiercer as time went on. The young man fought with an incredible ease and was full of energy. The leader of the hidden guards knew that he had finally hit a hard wall!

As soon as he sensed that things were going south, he made a quick calculation. Although he was unable to defeat Royal Prince Yang, he still had some leeway to flee with his life. His young master was still waiting for him to get back, so he couldn't have a mishap occur here. Thus, he abandoned all of his subordinates and the rebel army he incited. The leader of the hidden guards escaped without even looking back!

Soon thereafter, the remaining remnants of the previous dynasty, who had infiltrated in, either fled from the battlefield or died right there. The ignorant peasants, who had been incited, had nothing left for them! Before long, the rebellion in the north had been suppressed!

Liu Fusheng had a very serious internal injury and was also covered in external wounds that weren't light. If his master hadn't reluctantly given him a pill for treating internal injuries, then he likely would have lost his life. Even if he didn't somehow die from his injuries, his veins, muscles and tendons had all been heavily damaged. He would have likely become a cripple.

Fortunately, the internal injury pills that Miss Yu personally made not only saved his old life but also allowed him to recover from his internal injury very quickly. The military doctor had kept saying that a full recovery was impossible. However, the master had also given him some special wound balm and it was much more efficacious than the army's wound balm. The foot-long wound on his back had very quickly stopped bleeding after the wound balm was rubbed on. Furthermore, his wounds stopped hurting and a cool, refreshing feeling came on instead. Before several days had passed, he felt like his scabs were starting to itch. After accidentally picking one off, he discovered that the flesh underneath had unexpectedly healed! This...wasn't logical ah!

After receiving a warning glare from his master, Liu Fusheng, as a perceptive man, naturally knew that this wound balm and medicine to heal internal injuries weren't normal. He continued to wrap himself under layers of gauze even after his wounds had completely healed. Furthermore, whenever he swapped his dressings, he didn't dare let the military doctor help. He even pretended to have an internal injury that hadn't healed completely from time to time as he was afraid other people might notice something odd. Now that he was looking back, he felt that it was very tiring to have to put up an act for so long!

Just as they were about to go back to the capital after putting down the rebellion, news came from the northern border that outsiders were invading. The emperor sent an emergency decree from far away to give Royal Prince Yang command over the army as the head general to reinforce the frontier troops.

When he received this new imperial decree, Zhu Junyang had already been away from the capital for more than a month and he missed his little lass. He originally thought that after the rebellion was put down and things became calm, he would be able to go back to the capital to see his little lass, Xiaocao. He didn't expect he'd be called to duty again to rush to the northern border for who knew how long. This made the prince very irritable for some time.

Fields of Gold Chapter 457 - Urgent Feeling

Although Zhu Junyang was rarely influenced by his heart devil now, he was quite upset by all of this so naturally his aggressiveness shot up. Now that he had been given the title of Zhenbei General, he had the responsibility of defending the northern borders. With his soldiers behind him, he slaughtered like a raging god on the battlefield. The invading Tartars had been beaten until they cried for their parents. It was an utter defeat for them.

The so-called Tartars was actually just a name used to describe the fierce nomadic tribes that roamed in the north. These tribes lived on horseback and had a lot of cavalry. They were relentless in battle and used guerilla warfare tactics as their movement speed was quite high. This was a headache to the Great Ming generals and soldiers in charge of defending the northern borders.

The stationed general in the north was very disappointed when Royal Prince Yang arrived to bring reinforcements as the prince had both a youthful and devilishly handsome appearance. The general believed that the prince was a silver-spooned member of the imperial family and was merely at the border to gain some glory. He didn't have any expectations for this youth. However, the other person soon proved him wrong. Royal Prince Yang gave a decisive victory to the Great Ming Empire and did so by only using his own men.

Whether it was the private soldiers under Royal Prince Yang's command or the elite Jinwei soldiers, they were all staunch and experienced soldiers on the battlefield. Royal Prince Yang's private soldiers were

especially tough as they were often tormented by their master in private to spar with him. Every soldier had undergone extreme training and was extraordinarily valiant.

This time, the prince had brought along around a thousand cavalry units to the north with him and the vast majority belonged to Imperial Prince Jing's private troops. Everyone in the capital knew that, in the younger generation, Royal Prince Yang was the wealthiest as he had brought over a dozen ships full of novel items from the western hemisphere. In the capital, he sold finely wrought clocks, delicate jewels and dazzling enamelware at sky-high prices.

Beyond that, if they only counted the amount of money he made during winter by selling vegetables and fruits out of season, he still had a large fortune in money. With plenty of money on hand, did he have to worry about equipping his private troops? Every private soldier under his command not only had a fine Mongolian steed, but even their armor and weapons were also the finest available on the market. The elite soldiers from the Jinwei troops had always thought that the emperor was their 'true father' as they were always supplied with good equipment compared to the other armies. However, when they compared themselves to the private troops under Royal Prince Yang's command, they looked like a wretched bunch...

Under the command of their master, the private troops under Royal Prince Yang took the lead as they sped into battle. They swept everything away. As for the elite Jinwei soldiers, they could only follow behind and take the job of cleaning up the aftermath. As for the troops that were originally stationed here, they really had nothing left to do.

Royal Prince Yang had a belly full of rage within him and he let it all out on the battlefield. He viciously attacked the Tartars with no mercy. On their first battle, he immediately slaughtered the Tartar's most skilled warrior at a moment's notice and used the man's head as a grisly flag on the battlefield. His private soldiers charged their tall and sturdy horses into the fear-stricken Tartar ranks. It was as if a bunch of savage tigers had been unleashed and they weren't going to be restrained!

Morale was very important during war! On the Great Ming Empire's side, they had already gained the upper hand on the first battle by their show of strength and easily extinguished the fires of eagerness within the Tartars. Following that battle, everything else continued on the Great Ming's advantage. Zhu Junyang not only seized a total victory but also broke the unspoken rule to 'not chase a retreating enemy'. He continuously forced the Tartars to retreat further and further along.

Following that, the Great Ming army continuously attacked the Tartars and obtained victory after victory! Furthermore, they even managed to win back all of the cities that they had lost prior to the establishment of the Great Ming Dynasty. The Tartars had been beaten back to the prairie grasslands and sent envoys again and again to ask for peace.

At first, Zhu Junyang refused to accept their terms for peace and only preoccupied himself with beating them back farther and farther. By the time the leader of the Tartars was about to despair, the prince finally received one of the envoys and stopped fighting. The resulting negotiations were not something that was within Zhu Junyang's given authority, so that was handed off to someone else.

By then, snow had already started to fall in large flakes in the north. Zhu Junyang wrapped himself in a cloak made of weasel fur and watched as the snow lazily drifted throughout the air. He felt as if he could see an image of that small and skinny figure, running around the snow like a happy little fairy.

Winter in the capital was much colder than it was in Tanggu Town. He wasn't sure if that little lass was currently hiding in a room with a heated floor or heated wall, or whether she was coming up with another crazy idea to sell her unique pastries.

While he was at the border, Zhu Junyang continued to think about Yu Xiaocao. The northern hunters in the area had quite a selection of valuable furs and the prince made it his mission to get as many quality specimens as possible. There was the lustrous and colorful scarlet-red fox fur that was good at keeping a person warm. He bought it! Then there was soft and delicate ferret fur with a pure color. He also bought it! As for weasel fur, silver fox fur, sable fur...all good specimens had one outcome: buy, buy, buy!

Other than good quality furs, the north also specialized in producing valuable medicinal ingredients. From what happened with Head Steward Liu, he knew that his little lass was able to make medicines of astounding efficacy. With better quality ingredients on hand, she would be able to make even better medicines. Hundred-year ginseng, thousand-year reishi mushroom, and hundred-year Chinese knotweed? He bought them all! With money, one could be willful!

His days passed like this while he waited for the envoy in charge of negotiating the treaty to get there. Finally, the envoy arrived and he had also brought the emperor's imperial decree to withdraw the troops and head back to the capital. Zhu Junyang had long set his heart on heading home, so he braved the snows with the troops to go back. He didn't care whether it was day or night as he traveled as he was only preoccupied with speed. Despite the soldiers complaining non-stop about this breakneck speed, they arrived back in the capital about a dozen days earlier than expected.

As he got closer and closer to his little lass, Zhu Junyang started to feel a bit homesick. Was his little lass doing well? Did she miss him like he missed her? Had she been eating properly? Had she grown any taller? He had never simultaneously experienced feeling both nervous and excited before.

As the leader of the victorious army, he had to go into the Imperial Palace to 'report'. He resisted his urge to see the little lass and entered the throne room somewhat resentfully. He was afraid that Xiaocao might worry too much, so he sent Head Steward Liu Fusheng out to report on what had happened to him.

After hearing the entire story of their adventures from Head Steward Liu, Xiaocao felt happy for Royal Prince Yang but also worried that Head Steward Liu only told her the good and not the bad. She was afraid that he might have hid the fact that his master had gotten injured. She couldn't stay at the farmstead anymore and needed to see Zhu Junyang as soon as possible to verify his safety in person.

She patiently waited until Head Steward Liu Fusheng finished his tea and ate a few pastries before she proposed returning to the capital. Liu Fusheng didn't say an extra word as he picked up his own cloak to go outside! The earlier they got back to the capital, the earlier he'd be able to let Miss Yu see his master. He was sure his master would be very happy!

After leaving Xichun at the farmstead to keep an eye on things, Yu Xiaocao declined Wutong's and Pipa's proposal to have her sit on the carriage. Instead, she mounted her own horse and galloped off in the falling snow.

In the blustering snow, there was a delicate little figure clothed in a fiery red satin cloak riding on a fiery red fine steed. The bright colors of this person seemed to add a bit of warmth and light to the dusky cold of the winter evening. This was the first snow of the season and it wasn't as large or dense as the snow that fell in the northern parts of the country, which more resembled dense cotton balls. The ground only had a thin layer of snow at this point and didn't negatively influence the little red horse's speed at all. The icy cold wind whipped at her face and her skin had already gone numb to the stabbing pain. She held the reins in her hands that had already frozen into ice chunks. Despite the cold, Yu Xiaocao seemed to have forgotten that she wasn't even wearing gloves at the moment and had also forgotten to wear her scarf. The chill on her body couldn't fight against the warmth that was rising from within her heart. The sooner she returned to the capital, the sooner she could see him. That seemed to be the only thought running through her head at this moment.

Head Steward Liu, who was doing his best to keep up with Yu Xiaocao from behind, complained endlessly within his heart. 'Miss Yu, Official Yu, the Honorable Miss Yu! Can you slow down a bit ah? That red horse you're riding on is on the same level at treading through snow as the master's Black

Cloud. Although this old servant is riding a decent horse, it still can't compare to yours.' Unfortunately, Head Steward Liu could only blankly watch as the distance between the two of them grew larger and larger. It was almost to the point where he couldn't see the red figure anymore.

The days were short in winter and it got dark relatively earlier. The snow fell harder and harder, which reduced her visibility by a lot. Suddenly, in the dusky light of the evening, the snow seemed to part and a tall and sturdy figure appeared within Yu Xiaocao's line of sight.

Although that figure was a bit vague and hard to make out, Yu Xiaocao intuitively could tell that it was the person she had wanted to see!

The figure slowly grew larger and grew clearer within her eyes. Before Yu Xiaocao could clearly see that person's face, Little Red, who she was riding, used its animal intuition and figured out the identity of that person's mount. The little horse let out a happy and arrogant little whinny.

Both horses were rare specimens of perfect horseflesh. Two silhouettes, one red and one black, quickly come closer until they met...

Zhu Junyang greedily looked at that tiny and adorable little face...a sharp pointed chin, enormous eyes, eyelashes that were long and curly, a ruddy little mouth, and the delicate little nose that had turned red from the cold. He noticed that Xiaocao's face and hands were both exposed to the wind and cold, so he couldn't help but scowl.

"You...didn't you go enter the palace to see the emperor ah?" Yu Xiaocao's large, doe-like eyes gleamed with happiness as she inspected Royal Prince Yang from head to toe. She still wasn't completely without worry so she asked, "Are you doing okay? Were you injured at all..."

Before she could finish speaking, she let out a cry in surprise as her body was lifted by a pair of strong arms out of the saddle. By the time she got a hold of herself, she had already been moved onto the other person's horse and pulled into a warm hug.

A familiar rabbit fur scarf that alternated between black and white stripes and held a person's warmth was wrapped around her tiny face until only her two bright eyes were visible. This scarf was something she had made in her leisure time. She used rabbit fur and cotton thread together to spin into a knitable yarn. After working for a bit, she finished knitting the scarf. Originally, she was planning on giving it to either her father or godfather. Who knew that Royal Prince Yang had kept an eye on it and he snatched it away like a bandit when she was done!

She didn't expect that he had actually brought this scarf along when he went north to put down the revolt. Her little face, which had lost all feeling in it, started to warm up under the soft and cozy rabbit fur scarf. Her eyes suddenly welled up with some tears. She sniffed her nose. The scarf still had his faint smell on it that was hard for her not to notice.

In her previous life, Yu Xiaocao knew how to knit sweaters. When her younger brother and sister went to school, she bought some yarn and learned how to knit sweaters from the neighbor next door in order to save money. Later on, as their family's financial situation improved and both her younger siblings had their own jobs, she stopped knitting them for her siblings as the sweaters in the shops and malls around her had better styles and colors. After transmigrating over, it had been many years since she last touched knitting yarn and other tools like that. She was out of practice.

This was one of her practice scarves, so there were parts of the weave that were looser and parts that were tighter. The individual stitches also had some issues, so she didn't consider the end product a success as it didn't truly show her skill. In actuality, she was planning on knitting the prince a better quality product after practicing on this one. However, the prince didn't seem to care and had instead taken this 'flawed product' as his own.

"How come you didn't put on a scarf or gloves? It's such a cold day, so why did you go to the Imperial Plantation? What would you do if you got frostbite? There are so many experienced hands at the plantation, so it's not like they need you to help!" Zhu Junyang gently and softly scolded her and his voice was full of tenderness.

Fields of Gold Chapter 458 - Attached to Love

Her icy cold little hands had been clasped within a pair of warm palms. It felt very cozy and comfortable. Yu Xiaocao's eyes curved in a smile and then she turned to look at the always stunningly handsome face of Zhu Junyang. She quietly asked, "Isn't it snowing right now? I was afraid that it might snow too hard and crush the greenhouse pavilions, which is why I ran to take a look at the Imperial Plantation. I was wearing the fox fur scarf and gloves you had given me, but when I found out you were back I was so happy that I forgot them at the farmstead!"

Zhu Junyang supported her back and moved her from her side sitting position to astride on the horse. This little lass's waist was too thin. He wasn't sure if she had been eating right in the past month or so but even when she was wearing thick winter clothes his two hands were able to encircle her waist. Perhaps it was because her life had been too hard when she was young but in his memories, she had always been thin and weak in such a pitiful way. When she reached her age of majority and married him, he planned on making sure that she was eating and drinking well so that she could nourish her body!

He had Xiaocao comfortably lean back on his chest while he wrapped his sable overcoat tightly around her. He cupped his large hot hands around the little lass's icy cold ones and leaned over to gently breathe hot air on them. He continued to ask, "What? Were you this excited to see me? If you miss me so much, then marry me earlier. That way you'll prevent me from being bewitched by an evil spirit!"

After hearing the little lass state that she was so excited to see him that she hurriedly rode her horse over and forgot to wear her scarf and mittens, Zhu Junyang simultaneously felt a wave of tenderness and sweetness hit his heart as if he was suddenly drinking honey. The little lass had always been deathly afraid of being cold.

When the little red horse saw that its master had been taken over by Fierce Wind's [1] owner, it still obediently followed behind the stallion despite having no rider. It walked behind at a leisurely pace. Although Fierce Wind now had two people riding it, its steps were still light and easy. From time to time, it would move its head a little to look Little Red in the eye.

Xiaocao turned her head to roll her eyes at Zhu Junyang and snorted, "Why would I want a man who was so easily taken by others? Tell me! This time, when you left the capital, did you end up saving any little white flowers or encounter a poor but pretty girl who had sold herself into prostitution for the sake of her father?"

Little white flowers? Was that the term the little lass used to describe women who loved cry out sob stories and act pathetic ah? Just what type of taste did she think he had that she would believe that he would fall in love with one of those people? Wasn't it tiring to be around someone all day who constantly lamented and wept with an aggrieved expression?

"Did you forget just what kind of person I am? Do you think I would easily fall for the wiles of those women who don't have pure thoughts? Don't worry, other than you, I won't be interested in anyone!" Zhu Junyang could tell that there was a faint undertone of jealousy in Xiaocao's words and he immediately felt gratified. He made sure to make his thoughts clear such that she knew that he was only loyal to her.

Yu Xiaocao had warmed up so she was in the mood to banter with him, "Men are all the same ah! They always say the sweetest things but then do the exact opposite! The person with the mind-reading abilities is you, not me. How am I supposed to know what you're actually thinking about?"

Zhu Junyang pulled over one of her little hands that had warmed up and placed it on the area of his chest where his heart was and stated, "Do you feel it now ah? My heart only beats for you! In order to see you sooner, I galloped at top speed as soon as I left the Imperial Palace. I am totally devoted to you alone. If you still don't believe me, then you're truly too simple-minded!"

After hearing his heartfelt vow, Yu Xiaocao felt like the goosebumps on her body were about to fall off. He was being too corny! Where did this fellow learn how to say such things? Was he not afraid that other people might be sickened by his saccharine words?

"Can you be more normal ah? You need to tell the truth. Just who taught you to speak in such a sickening way? It's really not your style at all!" Yu Xiaocao endlessly roasted him. Zhu Junyang blinked his seductive phoenix eyes twice and then let out a sigh, "I knew you wouldn't like this at all! When I get back, I'm going to beat the crap out of those Jinwei youngsters who urged me to say such corny things. However, Xiaocao, you need to know my heart only has room for you in it!"

Although his last few words were plainspoken, why did they sound so good in her ears? Yu Xiaocao lowered her head to think a bit. Royal Prince Yang had the status and power. He also had a well-shaped body and alluring appearance. In addition, he had the talent and abilities...the most crucial point was that he didn't stubbornly cling onto the ancient people's ways of thinking and didn't expect his significant other to embody 'the three injunctions and four virtues' [2] of women.

In reality, she would be hard pressed to find a second man like him in the entire Great Ming Empire. If he was truly sincere about his feelings and had a heart that would never waver, then what was she hesitating for? Although she claimed that she'd be fine with never getting married, in such an environment and society, it'd be an extravagant hope for her to be able to live a happy and prosperous life alone as an unmarried spinster. She had the abilities but no significant background. Furthermore, she was female, so when things happened, she'd be the one who'd likely lose out.

When he saw that the little lass had her head down and was seemingly thinking hard about something, Zhu Junyang gently stroked her head and softly said, "Don't make things too complicated. I won't give you pressure! Didn't you say that you would only consider marriage once you turned eighteen? There's still five to six years to think about this! Take your time, I'm sure that the next five to six years will truly show my intentions and sincerity to you!"

Yu Xiaocao felt her eyes well up with hot tears when she heard such understanding and sweet words from him. Her nose got stuffy and, in the spur of the moment, she almost promised him something due to her roiling emotions. Ahem ahem! She needed to calm down now! Royal Prince Yang was right. There was still five to six years for her to contemplate this. She needed to take her time and then make her decision!

The blustering snow seemed to linger around the two affectionate people. The whole sky was filled with fat flakes of fluffy snow and they seemed to dance around like graceful butterflies as they circled around these two people.

Suddenly, the sound of a horse's urgent gallops could be heard from behind them. A somewhat old and shrill voice hollered through the night, "Miss Yu, please go a bit slower. It's hard to travel in such snowy conditions. If something happens to you, what can this old servant say to the master?"

The owner of the voice stared closely at the scene in front of him. Oh! The back of that person seemed quite familiar, wasn't that his master? He could now see Miss Yu snuggled within the master's arms and they seemed to be quite content. Liu Fusheng hurriedly shut his mouth and obediently followed them from behind as they slowly rode forward. Miss Yu had already safely met up with the master so there was nothing he needed to do anymore. All he had to do now was follow silently from behind and fade into the background properly!

However, Master, was it really alright for you to hug Miss Yu like this? If other people saw this, Miss Yu's reputation would definitely be ruined. Was that something you wanted to see? Liu Fusheng fell into a conundrum as he wasn't sure if he should pipe up a reminder to his master.

Luckily, it was getting late now and the snow was falling harder. The main roads in the surrounding areas of the capital were dark and empty at this moment. Otherwise, Miss Yu wouldn't be able to show her face out in public anymore!

If an old eunuch like Liu Fusheng realized this, how could Zhu Junyang not think of this? When they had traveled far enough that they could see the large gates to the capital, Zhu Junyang placed Yu Xiaocao, who was now nicely warmed up, back on her own mount. However, he still pressured her to continue to wear his larger sable fur overcoat.

The spacious and large overcoat was so big that it was easily able to wrap the little lass from head to toe. Even the gloves put on her hands were made of the best lambskin that money could buy. The gloves still had the remnants of the prince's warmth.

"I'll escort you back to the General's Residence first! In the future, don't come out on such a cold stormy day! If there's anything up, just send someone to tell me instead and I'll make sure to order the right people to get things done! If you really have no choice but to leave the estate, then take a carriage

instead! This prince has recently commissioned a custom-made carriage and it's quite spacious. There's a place to store a brazier and it can also boil hot water. If you get tired, you can lean against the carriage and sleep..." As long as it involved Yu Xiaocao, he would do his best to make sure all of the details were right. It was truly hard to find someone who had these intentions towards her!

Zhu Junyang spent the whole journey back to the General's Residence reminding her in a long-winded manner. If anyone else saw this, their jaws would have dropped open in utter surprise. Was this still the same grave and stern Royal Prince Yang who regarded his words as if they were gold? It was as if he was a completely different person, like he had swapped personalities with a talkative old naggy woman.

"Want to come in and rest for a bit and drink some tea before you leave?" Yu Xiaocao clumsily jumped down from the little red horse. There was nothing to be done about that as she had been wrapped up until she resembled a teddy bear.

Zhu Junyang leapt off his horse and helped her tidy up the overcoat that had been tousled from her dismounting. He wrapped her up even more tightly and then rubbed at her rosy little face as he gently said, "No need! I still need to return to the prince's residence and tell my lady mother that I am safe and sound. Tomorrow I'll come by to see you again! Go in and drink some more ginger and sugar tonic. Be careful not to get chilled."

Head Steward Liu Fusheng was so surprised his eyes were wide open. He had a look on his face as if he had just seen a ghost. His master finally had his head screwed on straight and knew how to care about people. Should he be happy about this or be ecstatic about this? Such a gentle and considerate motion and such a tender voice had actually come out of the mouth of the capital's most grim and vicious death god. Hearing this...tsk tsk, sure enough, love could change everything ah!

The exaggerated expression on the old eunuch's face was too much for other people to handle! Zhu Junyang faintly shot a glance at him and then turned his attention back to Yu Xiaocao. He gently said, "Go in ah. I'll watch as you enter..."

Yu Xiaocao somehow managed to surmount the threshold to the side door while dragging the giant overcoat behind her. It could have served as a perfect object to sweep the snow. She turned her head to look one last time at Zhu Junyang, whose hair now had many snowflakes on it. The fluttering flakes of snow in the air blended seamlessly into the background. This devilishly handsome man was gazing back at her with eyes full of emotion. He lightly moved his large and pale hands at her, hinting that she should quickly head inside.

She wasn't a true tiny maiden who didn't understand the flavor of romantic feelings. As she gazed at the picturesque scene in front of her, her heart, which had been silent for over thirty years, couldn't help but palpitate suddenly. It looked like she had the halo of the main female character on her. She had truly walked into an unexpected good situation. Such an outstanding and handsome man was willing to wait for her...

Her head was still dizzy and confused even after she greeted her godmother and entered her small courtyard. A man's charms could truly make a person's head spin, especially those who were silently beautiful and had deep emotions!

At this moment, Zhu Junyang had already entered Prince Jing's estate. After talking to his lord father for a bit, he headed directly towards the inner residence.

Princess Consort Jing got up from the heated couch and pulled at her youngest son's hands. She inspected him from head to toe with red-rimmed eyes. She spoke in a voice that was choked with emotion, "Why are you wearing so little? Where's that ugly scarf that you always have around the neck? And where are your gloves? Just what are the servants around you doing? Such a big snowfall yet you're not even wearing a woolen outer garment?"

Head Steward Liu Fusheng, who had always personally served his master, felt that this was an inaccurate accusation. The master's entire set of outer clothing had been transferred to Miss Yu instead. What could he say about this? Naturally, he couldn't say anything! When the master returned back to the capital and left the Imperial Palace, the first thing he did was run to the Imperial Plantation to find his little lover. He even forgot his own mother. But if he said that, wouldn't that imply that his master was unfilial? Thus, he had to take the fall for his master.

Zhu Junyang supported his mother up and had her sit back down on the heated couch. He sat next to her on a nearby embroidered stool and had a smile on his face, "Lady Mother, feel my hands. They are quite warm and aren't even the least bit cold!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 459 - A Mother's Concern

"You ah you! You didn't even leave a word at home when you left to suppress a rebellion! Do you know how worried I was about you? Your second older brother fled to a border garrison without a word and we only get letters from him maybe once every two to three months. I'm worried about him constantly too, but even you don't consult with us before accepting such a dangerous task...the emperor is too much. There are so many high-ranking military officers at court yet he bypassed them and insisted that you go on the battlefield despite never having experience before. If something happened to you, what

am I supposed to do..." Princess Consort Jing became somewhat agitated as she went on and had to dab the corners of her eyes with a handkerchief.

"Lady Mother, aren't I perfectly fine right now and back? You really can't find more than a few people in the whole Great Ming Empire who can harm me! I'm completely safe. If you don't believe me, then how about I strip right now to allow you to inspect me?" Zhu Junyang had long become more patient under the tutelage of that lass, Yu Xiaocao. Thus, when he had to interact with Princess Consort Jing, he comforted her as if she was a young maiden.

Princess Consort Jing let out a laugh in amusement and slanted him a look, "Go ahead and strip ah! If you're brave enough to strip, then do you think I'm not brave enough to look? When you were only a wee thing, I even gave you a bath before! What on your body haven't I seen?" She used her hands to motion around something that was the size of a pillow while more laughter escaped from her lips.

Zhu Junyang was struck speechless. At that time, he had just been born and was an ignorant little baby. If he had the choice at the time, then he absolutely would not have allowed anything that would give his lady mother the excuse to make fun of him in the future!

Suddenly, Princess Consort Jing used a complicated expression to stare at her son. It made the hairs on Zhu Junyang's body stand up. What was his lady mother thinking now? Why were her eyes full of grievance now? Did his lord father bring in new concubines to the residence recently?

Princess Consort Jing had thought of the people she had sent out of the residence to get information. As his mother, she fretted over her son constantly yet the object of her worries was something else. Instead, as soon as her son left the palace, he rode at top speed towards the Imperial Plantation. Even though he passed by the prince's residence, he didn't think of stopping by to greet her. Everyone always said that when a girl matured you couldn't make her stay at home. It was the same for boys too!

"Little magpie gets a wife, forgets his mother at midlife..." Princess Consort Jing couldn't help but think of the common little ditty that she had learned when she was in the rural areas. Meixiang and Lanxiang, who were next to her, exchanged looks with eyes that were filled with mirth before they lowered their heads—Her Highness was feeling the bite of jealousy!

Zhu Junyang felt even more helpless now. All he could do was pretend that nothing had happened. Instead, he quietly asked the servants whether his lady mother had been eating well recently, how her sleeping had been, and if she had any discomforts of her body.

Princess Consort Jing felt quite pleased within her heart when she saw this. Her youngest son finally had the warmth of a human being and knew how to be concerned about her, his mother! However, she also remembered that the reason he had changed was because of another woman...ahem ahem, another maiden. Thus, her feelings became complicated again. Raising a son was only for the benefit of others ah!

“How's everything at the Imperial Plantation? Are the people at the Imperial Plantation doing well? The Imperial Plantation...” Princess Consort Jing deliberately used a voice full of grievance and a gaze filled with resentment to ask about the Imperial Plantation. This was her way of telling her youngest son that she knew about him visiting the Imperial Plantation earlier. Was he going to continue to pretend?

Zhu Junyang replied in a calm and collected manner, “This son really doesn't know how things are doing at the Imperial Plantation! In such a small period of time, even if I could fly, I wouldn't be able to get to the Imperial Plantation. Lady Mother, if you want to say, just directly say it. No need to beat around the bush!

“Oh, what's wrong? Did you meet up with that lass Xiaocao when you were halfway there? Are you pleased now that you've met up with the lass? Young one, you've truly gained skills! You know that it's important to curry favor with little maidens when you get back from a trip! Tell me, when will you bring a wife home for your mother?” Princess Consort Jing was pretty satisfied with Yu Xiaocao. When her son was gone for more than a month, the little lass was afraid that she was worried and would come over from time to time to chat with her to relieve her boredom. Furthermore, the lass came up with new and novel foods for her to eat. Princess Consort Jing pinched the flesh at her waist. It looked like she had gotten fatter recently!

Zhu Junyang's lips involuntarily curved up when the topic came to his little lass. His eyes also warmed up and gentled as he replied, “Lady Mother, that lass will only be thirteen by the New Year! Didn't the emperor himself state in the past that women should only get married and have children when they turn eighteen in order to not harm their bodies? We still have five years to go and I plan to wait!”

Princess Consort Jing deliberately pretended to be a bit upset and regarded him with a displeased look, “You're going to be twenty this year. If another five years pass, how old will you be then? Your older maternal cousin is only older than you by a year but he has children running around him! From what you're saying, just when can I hold a grandson from you ah?”

“Eldest Brother's son, Congsheng, already knows how to say 'grandmother'. Lady Mother, if you want to hug a grandson, it's not like you don't have any around.” Zhu Junyang wasn't going to fall for his

mother's tricks. His eldest brother's oldest concubine-born son was already two years old this year but he had never seen his mother coo over him.

“How is that the same? I'm only concerned about one of your most major turning points in your life!” Princess Consort Jing glared at her youngest son.

Zhu Junyang replied with a stubborn expression on his face, “Lady Mother, you should first worry about Second Older Brother ah! He's older than me by five years! Second Older Brother is not even as far along as me. I at least have a goal in mind and I'm striving towards it. He doesn't even have a person he likes right now and he's living at the border garrison. The army only has a bunch of old men in there so he'd be hard pressed to even see a female sow around...”

Zhu Junyang's manner of speech had become a bit more crude and direct after spending so much time with soldiers and eating with them. Although Princess Consort Jing wasn't very used to this, she was still happy for her son. Her youngest son had finally come back to the land of the living and no longer acted as if he was just going through the motions of living.

However, Princess Consort Jing found it very difficult to keep up her good spirits after hearing her youngest son's latest words. Having more sons just meant more headaches as not a single one of them was easy to handle! Sigh! Xiaocao's mother was right. The younger generation would always figure out a way for themselves so you might as well just let them go!

Zhu Junyang seemed to sense that his mother's mood was more downcast so he hurriedly tried to change the topic, “Lady Mother, this time, when I went to the north, I came back with quite a few furs and they are all top-notch specimens that you can't even find in the capital! This son will have the servants bring them in. You should see if there are any that you fancy so you can take them and then have someone craft some warm outer garments for you!”

Chests filled with furs were moved into the room. Princess Consort Jing looked them all over briefly. They were truly very good specimens that could not be bought in the capital. She snorted and then said, “Are these the leftovers that someone else has already picked through?”

“How could that be? Naturally I need to show the good things to you first, Lady Mother! The servants in charge of bringing these goods back went directly to the residence as soon as we got to the capital. They didn't make a single detour! If you don't believe me, you can go question Steward Sun in the outer courtyard.” Zhu Junyang really couldn't understand the way women thought. They somehow always

made a mountain out of a molehill and could be angry for half a day over the smallest things. Wasn't this just causing trouble for oneself for no reason?

When Princess Consort Jing heard this, she immediately revealed a happy smile. After all, this was the son who she had loved for almost twenty years, so it was right that he thought of her first when there were good things to be had. She casually picked out a fine weasel pelt and a beautiful sable fur before she stopped to say, "To gain the favor of a young maiden, you can't just rely on having a sweet mouth...nevermind, I'm pretty sure that tongue of yours doesn't know how to say anything that would gain her liking! This scarlet-red fox fur and this ferret fur are both good furs to be used to make some outer garments or a hat for young girls as they will make them look lively and cute. Tomorrow, you should bring them to that lass Xiaocao...also, you also need to send some to Lady Fang. Furthermore, you can't forget to send gifts to Dongshan Village as her biological parents and siblings are all there!

"Lady Mother is still the most thoughtful! Tomorrow, I'll send some servants to make a trip to the Tanggu area...Lady Mother, you seem to be healthier compared to before as your complexion looks quite good today!" At the very least, Zhu Junyang's ability to coax his mother into a happy mood had improved by a good amount.

His efforts had obviously paid off as Princess Consort Jing was so delighted that her mouth was wide open in a smile, "That lass Xiaocao always sends me some ingredients for medicinal cuisine and fully made meals every few days or so. I've been eating them and I feel like they're more efficacious than what can be bought outside. In the past, before winter even started, I couldn't leave the inside as my hands and feet were always icy cold. Now, I can even admire the plum blossoms in the snow without feeling chilled! For these past two years, I haven't even gotten a tiny illness during the winter. This is something that I would have never believed before."

Zhu Junyang was also genuinely happy for his mother and spoke intimately with her, "Lady Mother, if you like eating them, then have that lass make more medicinal cuisine for you and send it over. I'm sure it can make your body stronger. Xiaocao once said that using medicine to nourish the body is not as good as using food. If you eat properly, then it should be no problem for you to live until you're a hundred! Thus, you don't need to keep worrying about my future marriage. By the time this son's grandchildren are born, you will still be able to help me watch them!"

"You child, if I live that long, wouldn't I be an old witch by then?" The smile on Princess Consort Jing's face widened but she also lightly rolled her eyes at him. Suddenly, she seemed to think of something and said, "In your household, other than Liu Fusheng, there are just two other male servants. How can male servants be as detailed as maidservants? How about, you can pick two maidservants from my side..."

Before Princess Consort Jing could finish her thought, Zhu Junyang interrupted her with a waving hand, "Don't! You better not propose giving me bed-servants or anything like that! Didn't you say before that concubines and bed-servants are like bombs just waiting to explode and only make a household messy? If Lord Father suddenly came back with two young maidens, what would you think? That lass Xiaocao hasn't even agreed to marry me, so you better not make things more complicated than they are!"

Princess Consort Jing found his reaction simultaneously annoying and hilarious. She patted his arm a few times with a bit of strength and growled, "Stinky brat! Why did you start talking about me and your father? Your father is already how many years old? He's at a grandfather's age, so why would he ruin a young girl's life and bring her back?"

"Heh heh! My lord father is in the prime of his life right now. He has a strong and brawny stature that gives off a matured charm that younger men can't beat. If he really wanted to bring some young maidens home, there would be plenty standing in line. Lady Mother, you have to keep a close eye on him..."

"It sounds like you're itching for a spanking since you dare to say bad things behind my back! Meixiang, go and bring out the family laws!" Imperial Prince Jing had just finished his work in the study and it was around the time he usually ate dinner with his wife. Who knew that as soon as he entered her rooms he would hear his youngest son, who in his impressions was always a taciturn and gloomy fellow, actually making a joke at his expense. Was he dreaming at the moment or was the youngster being impersonated by another person? It didn't seem right for his son to be like this!

Zhu Junyang had no problems bantering with his mother but whenever he had to interact with his solemn father, he immediately became obedient and docile, "Lord Father, this son won't butt into your affairs with Lady Mother. You can just have the servants send dinner to Dongxi Courtyard for me. Lord Father, Lady Mother, I will withdraw now!"

In actuality, Zhu Junyang was quite envious of the relationship his father and mother had with each other. Ever since that particular incident happened, his father had felt very guilty and needed to compensate, so he sent all of the other women in the residence out. Thus, he began the legend of 'Imperial Prince Jing only favors his wife' in the capital. His mother had been spoiled as if she was a young maiden and didn't need to worry for anything.

Fields of Gold Chapter 460 - Sweet Targe

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There wasn't a single noble matron or maiden in the capital who didn't envy the relationship between Imperial Prince Jing and his wife. As their son, Zhu Junyang was influenced by their examples. Whenever

the prince was in the capital, he always tried to eat all three meals with his wife and would even, from time to time, carve some time out to live with her in the villa. He even promised that when he had free time and when her body was healthy enough, he was going to take her out traveling to complement all of the things he hadn't done for her.

Zhu Junyang couldn't help but think of his future with the little lass. He absolutely wouldn't make the same mistakes as his father, who almost lost the object of his affections before he did his best to make up for all of his blunders. He wanted his little lass to forever stay under the protection of his wings so she could live a leisurely and pleasant life. He absolutely wouldn't give anyone the opportunity to harm her!

The next day, as soon as morning court ended, Zhu Junyang went directly to the Fang Residence. Along with him came all of the gifts he was going to give to Yu Xiaocao and the people of the Fang Residence. They were prepared on the previous night. When he was attending morning court, he left them outside the palace walls and had his personal servant Zhang Debao and Head Steward Liu keep an eye on them. The officials who were also heading into the palace all saw the chests full of top-notch furs and they couldn't help but take a second glance. There were even some who asked if these furs would be sold later on.

Recently, the northern borders haven't been quiet and, from time to time, the outer tribes would try to raid. Thus, the merchants who used to go to the north or the northwest had pretty much stopped their activities. After all, when they had to choose between making money or their lives, the scales tipped towards one and not the other. Consequently, furs that were as good quality as these were unable to be found in the capital.

Winter was here and if these furs were sold on the market, then the officials were planning on buying some for their womenfolk at home to make some warm outerwear so they could be happy.

However, after asking, they found out that the prince had no intentions of selling them as he was giving them to other people. Pretty much the whole court knew that Royal Prince Yang had been sent to the north with troops to suppress the rebellion, but having him reinforce the borders was only something the emperor decided at the spur of the moment. Before Royal Prince Yang returned to the capital, news of his successes had come back in waves.

They didn't expect that this guy would also have some good ideas to use his free time to buy large amounts of top-notch furs to bring back. It really made people envy him. They heard that the soldiers who had gone to the borders had also bought a lot of good things from the local hunters there. Obviously, the person who made the biggest gains still had to be the great behemoth that was Royal Prince Yang! It was one thing for him to buy these things, but why did he have to bring them out to

make other people jealous? Some of the imperial censors felt their hands itch and wondered if they should send up memorandums accusing him of misconduct!

The officials who had daughters around Royal Prince Yang's generation all wrung their hands now. They didn't think that the previously gloomy and cold Royal Prince Yang would suddenly do a 180. He not only finished the tasks assigned to him in a satisfactory manner and received the emperor's favor and rewards, showing that he had a boundless future, but he also became a lot more gentle and refined. Recently, he would even have a faint smile on his face and the look in his eyes had gentled considerably. He even knew how to send gifts to the person he admired. If they knew about this earlier, then they would have set a betrothal down with their daughters! They weren't sure if they still had the opportunity to do so now.

As for the little maiden surnamed Yu in the Ministry of Revenue, most of these people immediately forgot about her. She was only a little lass from the rural countryside and had a big gap in background from the prince. Even though she managed to latch onto General Fang's thigh and become his goddaughter, nowadays, not even biological fathers were reliable all the time, let alone a godfather. If Royal Prince Yang truly couldn't let her go, then he could just bring her in as a favored concubine instead. What trouble could a little lass from a farmer's family, with no background or power, cause for the legitimate wife who came from a good family?

There were quite a few people in the capital with these thoughts and there was actually one who actually tried to act on them. This person was the Assistant Commander of the Fifth Army, a second-rank official, Qian Shi. He didn't care that it wasn't proper for the girl's side of the family to make the overtures. As soon as the idea came to his mind, he went to find Imperial Prince Jing to ask about this.

Prince Jing knew the temperament of his youngest son, so he didn't dare to hide this from him. He gave the excuse that the marriage of his son required the person in question to approve as well. Thus, he called Zhu Junyang in for this meeting. That Qian Shi said everything he should have said and even said things that he should not have mentioned.

The official pompously proclaimed in a voice that hinted that he was conveying a favor that he would allow the prince to marry his daughter while also keeping Yu Xiaocao as a concubine. He also stated that women should obediently stay in the inner courtyard and that letting them show their faces outside was an embarrassing thing! The other man huffed and puffed endlessly in a winding lecture.

Royal Prince Yang didn't wait for the other person to finish his thoughts before he ordered the official to leave the residence immediately. However, this Qian Shi tried to use his age as a weapon and even started to scold Royal Prince Yang in the manner of an elder. Imperial Prince Jing was not happy by this

turn of events. Zhu Junyang was his son and even he didn't dare to say too many harsh words to him. Why was an unrelated official posturing and gesturing like an elder in front of him, Zhu Junyang's own father? Did he think that he was dead ah? Right then and there, the imperial prince smashed his teacup and had his subordinates chase this shameless man out of the residence.

Zhu Junyang thought that this wasn't enough to vent his temper. Thus, on one day, when this official, Qian Shi, finished attending court and was heading home, he passed by a small, remote alleyway. The prince stuffed the man into a burlap sack and viciously beat the older man up. The assistant commander had been born in a military family and had also followed the emperor emeritus around, battling fiercely. Naturally, his skill at martial arts was quite good. However, in Zhu Junyang's hands, he didn't have a single chance to fight back. Furthermore, Zhu Junyang deliberately targeted this general's face and smacked him until even his own mother wouldn't recognize him.

This Qian Shi thought that this was too embarrassing and asked for some time off from court. For a long time, while he healed, he didn't attend court and also didn't dare to go out of the residence to manage affairs. This caused some significant losses to the assistant commander's estate. Regardless, he didn't want to go out with the injuries still prominently displayed as he was afraid that other people might laugh at him.

At this time, Royal Prince Yang didn't know that he had now become the target of everyone. From a calamitous star that everyone tried to avoid, he had now morphed into the ideal son-in-law in most people's eyes. After finishing court, he went directly to the general's residence with his eye-catching presents.

At this time, Yu Xiaocao was currently receiving the concubine-born daughter of a high-ranking official in the Ministry of Ceremonies. This young maiden was named Li Mengru and was older than Yu Xiaocao by two years. In this upcoming year, she was going to turn fifteen years old. Since her biological mother had passed away when she was young and she wasn't very favored at home, she didn't have the most easy life. Luckily, the legitimate wife of the household wasn't someone who couldn't tolerate concubine-born children, so she wasn't treated too poorly at home.

Although this lass had the same Li surname as Li Meirou, her personality was vastly different. The young maiden was gentle and sweet-tempered and was even a bit timid. When she talked, she very rarely raised her voice. Her interests lay in coming up and mixing up new cosmetics. Thus, her monthly allowance and any extra money she got during the New Years were all used on this hobby. It had been five years since she started this hobby, so she had gained some decent skills by now.

This maiden had an innocent and pure personality, so she always happily gave out any of the cosmetics she made to her legitimate older sister and her other concubine-born sisters when they asked for them. Furthermore, the girls she had good relationships with also received many gifts from her. Her hand-made products were at a point that, if she had the money to buy better quality ingredients, it was likely that all of the well-born maidens of the capital would chase after them.

Even though she wasn't able to use top-notch ingredients, her fame had still spread throughout these circles. Many of the maidens from official families used their connections with other people in an attempt to buy cosmetics from her. However, this young maiden felt that her skills and products were not up to par to be sold for money. Thus, whenever she made a new batch of cosmetics, she would send some out to other people. Even if she was so poor that she couldn't afford to buy the raw ingredients, she still refused to take other people's money.

Li Mengru had had an introverted personality since she was young and wasn't very good at interacting with other people. If it wasn't for the fact that she was skilled at crafting cosmetics, it was likely that even her own sisters in the residence would forget about her, let alone the noble-born maidens in the capital.

Such an obscure and unknown person had suddenly received an invitation to go to Count Zhongqin's residence. The little maiden was quite perplexed by this turn of events. Her legitimate mother [1] was also very confused. Official Yu, who was currently a mighty figure in the capital, wasn't even polite to the daughter of an assistant minister. This concubine-born daughter of hers also had a quiet and timid personality and never strove for the spotlight. How did she suddenly get an invitation?

When Li Mengru received the invitation, she had no idea what to do. Her wet-nurse was the one who reminded her that she should ask her legitimate mother what to do. Her legitimate mother also didn't look highly upon this lass who was born in a farmer's family and had been titled a small official for her farming ability. However, ever since Assistant Minister Li had such a tragic outcome, she naturally wouldn't reveal this disdain outside as she wanted to avoid having a similar outcome befall her own family.

Currently, Assistant Minister Li and his family were the butt of all the jokes in the capital. The legitimate daughter of the high-ranking official in the Ministry of Ceremonies had also gone to that Flower Wars banquet. She had remembered her mother's advice to not be conspicuous and not reveal her true thoughts. Thus, she had managed to connect with a few other young maidens who were of the same mindset as her.

Assistant Minister Li's daughter, on the other hand, wanted to smash Official Yu to the ground at the flower war banquet yet she was the one who ended up in the mud. It was one thing to lose her own

dignity but she even pulled the hatred of Royal Prince Yang onto her family. When the high-ranking official from the Minister of Ceremonies found out, he especially called his daughter in and told her to describe exactly what happened. In addition, he repeatedly reminded her that this young maiden surnamed Yu was currently in the high tide, so she absolutely could not offend the other person. If she truly didn't like the other girl, she just needed to avoid her. This was to avoid having a similar outcome as Assistant Minister Li's family. Now they couldn't even help their patriarch satisfy his cravings for green vegetables, let alone get any out of season melons, fruits, or small tomatoes.

Li Mengru's legitimate older sister only had neutral feelings towards Yu Xiaocao. That being said, it wasn't as if their family lacked money and needed to fawn over the other girl for the sake of getting some green vegetables or out of season fruits. However, as the legitimate mistress of the family, she also couldn't alienate the other person and make her angry at them.

Consequently, when Li Mengru came over with the invitation to let her see, Lady Li very easily agreed to let her go. Furthermore, she instructed her concubine-born daughter to spend more time with other well-born maidens and make some more friends instead of spending all her time cooped at home messing around with a bunch of unrelated stuff.

However, how could she know that Official Yu, who she had no desire to offend, had sent an invitation to her concubine-born daughter exactly because that daughter liked to mess around with a bunch of unrelated stuff?

Early in the morning, Li Mengru arrived at Count Zhongqin's residence and said her greetings to Lady Fang before Yu Xiaocao brought her back to her own courtyard. Originally, when she found out she was going to meet the legendary Official Yu, she was quite nervous and anxious about the meeting. However, once she saw a girl shorter than her by half a head and around the same age as the younger concubine-born sister who lived in the same courtyard as her, her apprehension had almost disappeared.

When Yu Xiaocao took out a plate of small tomatoes to serve to her, Li Mengru's eyes became as wide as saucers and she revealed a bewildered expression. These bright red tomatoes, which were small and delicately shaped, were only given to a select few in her family. Out of the younger generation, only her legitimate older sister had the opportunity to try some. In general, such expensive and hard-to-get fruits were saved for serving important guests that came over to the residence.

She recalled the time her legitimate older sister had first tried this type of fruit and had minutely described the taste of these tomatoes: tart and sweet with a light heady fragrance that made a person feel instantly addicted. Just one bite was not enough to satisfy a craving! When her legitimate older

sister described the fruits, she even had an expression full of longing on her face. At that time, Li Mengru and her other concubine-born sisters were all so envious that they were swallowing back their saliva that had pooled in their mouths.