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How did this little girl's brain develop into someone so smart? She had many great money-making ideas! It was impossible for him to not admire her! She was such a capable and gifted young lady. He needed to label her as his quickly, otherwise, someone was going to steal her away from him once they realized what an amazing girl she was.

It seemed like he had to do something to cheer the little lass up and put her in a good mood. He needed to see if he could shorten the so-called probation period. Hm...didn't the little lass want to buy a residence? He had many readily available houses in his hands, but she was not willing to accept his offers! As a result, he could only accompany her to help her find a suitable residence!

Most of the good houses in the capital had already been bought, so there were only a few suitable houses left. However, who would be willing to sell their home two months before the New Year? Ugh! This problem was causing him quite a headache...

Oh, that was right! Zhu Junyang wondered if the hidden guards he had sent out had any luck finding evidence. If he was able to find some evidence and information that could be used to blackmail Official Li family, then...

Not long after Yu Xiaocao was bestowed a reward, news came out that the right assistant minister of the Ministry of Appointments had taken many bribes. In return for those bribes, he helped them find jobs. In addition to that, his wife's younger brother had relied on the minister's backing to commit many crimes in the local areas. For example, he kidnapped women from ordinary families, killed people, and suppressed the people who tried to report him. He was not afraid of the consequences. Once, he even disguised himself as a thief and robbed another family. Furthermore, he burned their house after robbing them...A pile of well-documented evidence of all the deeds the minister's wife's younger brother had done was all gathered together. Along with the evidence, there seemed to be an invisible hand that was pushing the evidence forward, exposing all his evil deeds to the world.

Although Official Li had borrowed other people's powers to further his own interests, he had never killed anyone. Even so, his wife's younger brother's crimes had implicated him negatively. He was stripped of his position as an assistant minister and became a regular citizen. His family gloomily packed their things and entrusted a middleman to help them sell off their house quickly. He planned on using the money he earned from selling the house to buy some acres of land to live the remainder of his life as a wealthy man in his hometown.

His house was only one alley away from Count Zhongqin's Estate. It would be very convenient to communicate and commute between the two places. Furthermore, Official Li was known to be a culture snob, so his inner courtyards were decorated elegantly. After Zhu Junyang saw the inside of this residence, he was certain that this house should satisfy all the little lass's requirements.

There were many wealthy people living in the capital that wished to have an estate with a beautiful interior. However, Royal Prince Yang had already spread the news: he had already set his eyes on the courtyard. Those who were willing to compete with him for the house should prepare to bid with him for the house!

There were many in the capital who had the wealth and power to buy the house; however, they all fell short when they were compared to Royal Prince Yang who owned shops that gave birth to golden eggs. The wealthy merchants who had their eyes on the house also gave up the idea of competing against him when they heard the news that Zhu Junyang was also interested in the house. Even though the merchants were wealthy, they were afraid of his identity and power.

Since Royal Prince Yang had no competitors, he was able to buy the house at a very low price. The strange thing was that the deed of the house after the sale had Yu Hai's name written on it.

Who was Yu Hai? How was he able to make Royal Prince Yang personally buy a house for him? Since his surname was Yu, then could he be related to the newly appointed official, Official Yu? Didn't Official Yu have some kind of relationship to the royal prince? It seemed like the rumors were not groundless gossip! Royal Prince Yang had really fallen in love with Little Official Yu, who was still not an adult yet.

Soon, all kinds of gossip seemed to arise. Some envied Yu Xiaocao's luck because she was able to hold onto Royal Prince Yang's thick thighs; others sympathized with her because she was still a young and ignorant girl, yet she had already caught the eye of a cold and indifferent devil. It was such a pity!

Among the rumors, there was a rumor that Official Yu had a prescription that could recover a person's youth. The rumour was spread around by Official Li's wife and daughter. It had alarmed many people and many high ranking people were moved by this news. There were even public figures from jianghu that came knocking at Official Yu's door after hearing about the rumors. Those people were all pushed away by the people Royal Prince Yang and Official Yu had left behind.

Royal Prince Yang was angry at the injustice that Official Yu had faced, so he had dug out all the bad deeds that Official Li had done and caused him to lose his officialdom. As if it was not enough, he

forcefully suppressed the price of Official Li's estate and managed to buy the house for less than half of its original value...

It didn't matter how far the rumors had spread because a month before the New Year, Official Li's original house was renovated and its plaque was replaced with the plaque titled "Yu's Estate". It was rumored that the words on the plaque were written by the emperor emeritus himself! The people who were envious of this began to speculate: What was the Yu Family's origin? How were they able to form a relationship with the emperor emeritus? Who was it that had said that the Yu Family was a mere peasant household that had no backings? Perhaps the Yu Family's ancestors had once fought with the emperor emeritus to form this country. Then, they retired after the war was over and settled down in a small fishing village!

Alright ah! After the emperor emeritus came to the estate to freeload some food from them and ate his fill, he heard that Yu Xiaocao's family had purchased an estate. He had a sudden impulse to write and wrote these two characters for her on a whim. However, the emperor emeritus's sudden impulse caused people to believe that the Yu Family came from a strong background. The people in the capital, who had originally looked down on the Yu Family because of their poor background, suddenly all shut their mouths! After all, a loose tongue may cause them a lot of trouble. They didn't dare to insult the Yu Family anymore after they saw how Official Li was stripped of his title.

As soon as the twelfth month came, the Ministry of Revenue, who was in charge of the agricultural department, went on a leisurely holiday. The people working in the other departments were red with envy! Every time winter came, they would go on holiday. While people worked busily in the cold weather, the people in charge of the farming tasks would have their sleeves tucked up while they drank tea and chatted over a warm fire. In the previous years, while many of the other departments were busily working, they simply took a long vacation!

Now, nobody made fun of people who chatted with or came into contact with the peasant farmers. Some people even began to think that it was actually more comfortable to work in the agricultural department. This was because Official Yu had achieved a large feat and the people working in the agricultural department were able to appear before the emperor because of that. They even registered themselves and were bestowed a considerable amount of rewards. The people working the Qingshui yamen farming task would sigh as they walked. They kept wondering if it was too late to transfer themselves to work under Official Yu.

After she bought an estate and was on vacation, Yu Xiaocao decided to take advantage of the good weather to return to Dongshan Village. She planned on taking her family to the capital to celebrate the New Years!

After Zhu Junyan returned from the border, he handed his military power over and returned to being an idle royal prince. He didn't take up an important official position, so unless the emperor summoned him specifically, he did not need to attend the royal court every morning.

As soon as he heard that Yu Xiaocao was returning to Dongshan Village, he immediately sent up an account to the emperor asking the emperor for permission to take a short leave so he could inspect his fiefs. Zhu Junyang followed Yu Xiaocao's carriage as soon as she exited the capital. He only brought along a few close guards and servants.

"Ah! What a coincidence! Are you returning to Dongshan Village? I'm on my way to my fiefdom in Tanggu Town. Since we happened to be going the same way, let's stay together. What do you think?" He pretended to be surprised that they were going the same way, but his acting skills weren't good enough to pull it off.

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him. She was too lazy to pay attention to this fool! It was nice to have someone to accompany her along the way. They would be able to chat and joke around so she wouldn't feel lonely.

Zhu Junyang never had the intention of entering Tanggu Town. When they reached the crossroad where they were supposed to go on separate paths, Zhu Junyang directly followed after Xiaocao's carriage to Dongshan Village.

"Aren't you going to inspect your fiefs? Why did you head on this path instead?" Yu Xiaocao tried to embarrass him.

Zhu Junyang's phoenix eyes twitched slightly as he smiled and said, "Isn't Dongshan Village a part of my fiefdom? Besides, my estate is located in the West Mountains. I'm planning on resting there for a few days and then take a tour of my fiefdom. After all, my land won't suddenly grow legs and run away from me!"

"You're always so reasonable!" Yu Xiaocao ignored him and lifted the curtain of the carriage. She looked attentively at the passing scenery. She calculated the time and she realized that it had been half a year since she returned to Dongshan Village. During that half a year, she had returned to Tanggu Town once. However, during that visit, she had poured all her time on cultivating the profitable vegetables in the greenhouse pavilions. Even though she had seen her father, mother, brothers, and sister, she didn't

have time to return to the village. It had been five years since she transmigrated here. She gradually felt a sense of belonging among the honest and kindhearted villagers and the mountains and seas in the small village.

When she entered Dongshan Village, it was during the time that the elders had finished breakfast and had come out for a walk. Although Dongshan Village had just recently been invaded by Wokou pirates, it was doing quite well thanks to their savings and the financial support given to them by Royal Prince Yang. Dongshan Village was relatively wealthy compared to the nearby villages.

However, peasant families were still relatively frugal. This was especially true during the winter when the farm was idle. This was true for most peasant families except for the Yu Family, who had a stable income year-round. The peasant families ate two meals a day. They ate their breakfast at 9 o'clock in the morning and their dinner was around 4 to 5 o'clock in the afternoon.

The weather was great today; it was bright and sunny. The old people liked to sit in sunny areas to play chess and gossip after they finished eating.

“Old Yu! A few horse carriages arrived outside the village. Could those carriages be headed for your house?” An old man asked with a smile on his face as he raised his chin in the direction of the carriages. The old man who was playing chess with Old Yu was around sixty years old. He squatted in the direction where the horse carriages were heading. He squinted his eyes to see the vehicles better.

Only the Yu Family could afford to use a horse carriage in the village! Old Yu was really blessed. His children and grandchildren were all hardworking. His son's farming skill earned him the title of a seven-ranked official. Therefore, his son was on an equal footing with the county magistrate. Old Yu's grandson was talented at studying and was able to pass the county-level exams and become a county official despite his young age!

What was even more unexpected was the fact that his youngest granddaughter had become the first female official of the Great Ming Dynasty. She managed the Imperial Plantation for the emperor! A few days ago, the emperor had bestowed an imperial edict that praised Yu Xiaocao for her hard work. The emperor even gave her the title of a feudal princess!

Did you know what a feudal princess was? According to the operas he had listened to, the title of a feudal princess was only conferred to a marquis's daughter. Xiaocao sure received a great blessing after her near-death experience. Now, she was on equal footings with a marquis's daughter!

Tsk tsk! The Yu Family was amazing! Green smoke was coming from their ancestral graves! How much virtue did Old Yu accumulate in his previous life for him to have such amazing grandchildren that brought honor to their ancestors?

Old Yu looked back and squinted at the oncoming carriages for a while. He was uncertain as he said, "Who knows? Madam Liu and Xiaolian are at home right now. Dahai and his son are at the farmstead. If nothing unexpected happened, then they wouldn't have returned so early! Plus, the carriage doesn't look like it belongs to my family..."

"Could it be that Xiaocao has returned? Didn't you receive a letter from her two days ago stating that she had set up an estate in the capital? She said that it's not good for the estate to be vacant for the first year, so she is planning to bring you guys to the capital to celebrate the New Years?" Xiaocao's granduncle, Yu Lichun felt that the carriage was headed in the direction of his third brother's house. It couldn't be anyone else from the Yu Family, so it had to be Xiaocao!

"Grandfather——" Xiaocao stuck her head outside the window of the carriage. Even though she was still far away, Xiaocao couldn't help but wave her hands and shout at her grandfather when she saw his familiar figure.

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"Hey! Elder Brother, you actually guessed correctly! Sure enough, Xiaocao has returned!" How could Old Yu still continue to play chess? He took large strides towards the carriage and waved back at her to welcome her.

The sixty-year-old man who was playing chess with Old Yu hesitantly asked, "Lichun, since Yu Xiaocao is now a feudal princess, do we have to greet her on our knees?"

Yu Lichun chuckled and said, "Don't worry, Xiaocao is the most benevolent and righteous girl I've ever met. She won't put on a front! She is a feudal princess, but she is also from our Dongshan Village, and she is also a descendant of our Yu Family..."

He hadn't even finished speaking yet when the carriage stopped under the old elm tree at the entrance of the village. Xiaocao was clothed in pink paired with a silver mink fur cloak. She looked like a lovable and small girl as she jumped down from the carriage. The old villagers widened their eyes in surprise at the adorable little girl.

Was she still Yu Xiaocao, Old Yu's granddaughter? When they saw her in the past, she was as skinny as a cat. People thought that she would probably be unable to survive much longer, but she proved them all wrong. She had only gone to the capital for half a year, and they were barely able to recognize her because of how much she changed. The thin satin clothing that she was wearing shimmered in the sunlight, making the villagers unable to open their eyes. She was pretty and had a confident aura around her. There was no one in Tanggu Town who could even compare to her beauty.

If Old Yu hadn't introduced her as his granddaughter, they would've thought that she was the daughter of a high ranking official! The two girls standing behind her were her maids, right? Even the maids were dressed more exquisitely than the daughters of the wealthy families in town!

“Grandfather, Eldest Granduncle, Grandfather Li...are you guys basking in the sun?” Yu Xiaocao greeted everyone intimately. There was no arrogance in her manner or tone even after her identity changed.

Old Li—the sixty-year-old who was just mentioned, had a slightly reserved smile on his tanned red face. He rubbed his hands and said, “That's right! The weather is great today...Xiaocao, did you just return from the capital?”

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head and was just about to respond when Yangfan's wife interrupted her, “Xiaocao, are you here to take your grandfather, father, and mother to the capital to celebrate the New Year? Sure enough, you've received blessings from the gods after all the calamity you faced. Ever since your head injury was cured five years ago, your luck has been getting better and better. You saved someone's life and even gave away your secret recipe. Then, you showed so much talent in the field of farming. Now, you're the first female official in our country! Tsk tsk...you've also been conferred the title of a feudal princess and an estate! Xiaocao is a really blessed girl!”

“Auntie, I should thank you! If you hadn't found me in time, then I probably wouldn't be alive right now! Auntie, I brought you some pastries from the famous Daohua Village's Pastry Shop in the capital. Please have some!”

Yu Xiaocao had just finished speaking, when Wutong who was standing behind her, took out a small exquisitely wrapped wooden box that contained some pastries from the carriage. The box was decorated with a delicate pattern and looked quite expensive.

Yangfan's wife had never seen such a beautiful box. The pastries inside must be quite expensive. She hurriedly shook her head and said, "We're all one family in this village. No matter who it was that encountered an accident, we will also help out. Quickly take the pastries back, Auntie cannot accept it!"

"Auntie, please take it! Even if we ignore the fact that you saved my life, you are like a sister to my mother. Consider this as a snack from your niece and accept it." Yu Xiaocao turned around and took the pastry box from Wutong. Then she stuffed the box in Yangfan's wife's hands.

Old Yu looked at them and chuckled. "Yangfan's wife, you should just take it since Xiaocao gave it to you. It's just a box of pastries, it's not that expensive."

The villagers enviously looked at the box of pastries. Their hearts sighed sorrowfully. Three years ago, Old Yu was closely controlled by Madam Zhang. He wasn't even given one copper coin by Madam Zhang. After he was brought in by his second son, Old Yu didn't lack any food or clothes. Old Yu's son also gave him a lot of pocket money to spend every month. In the past, he didn't even have the power to give away one piece of a steamed bun. Yet right now, he was able to say that the box of pastries was not expensive even though it probably was. Old Yu finally received his blessings and nothing could stop it!

"Eldest Granduncle, how is your health? I have prepared a New Year's gift for you. It might be difficult for you to carry it, so I will send someone to send the gift over to your house later!" Yu Xiaocao said affectionately as she looked at him with a kind smile on her face.

Yu Lichun smiled and said, "I don't lack anything at home, so there's no need for you to spend money on me...Third Younger Brother, it must've been hard for Xiaocao to come all the way here. She probably didn't even have time to eat lunch yet. Hurry up and take her home...Xiaocao hasn't seen your new house after it was repaired! Take her to go see it!"

Even though Yu Lichun had said that, he was still very happy. Xiaocao was a girl who knew how to repay other people's kindness. When she was sick, his family had given her family some money so they could afford to see a doctor. It was just a simple matter, yet she still remembered it deeply.

After they split households, her family's livelihoods got better and better. Xiaocao never forgot to send his family some things during New Year's and other holidays. When she started her business, she didn't forget to bring Yu Jiang and Yu Xi over to earn money together. Now, his family was not only in charge of purchasing seafood from other people, but his family also planted watermelons. He was able to sell the watermelons to a few nearby wealthy estates!

Now, his family had become the second wealthiest family in the village. This was all thanks to the care that Xiaocao's family had shown them!

Yu Xiaocao had always treated her eldest granduncle as her own grandfather. She took his hand and exchanged some words with him. It wasn't until her stomach started growling that Yu Lichun urged her to go home and eat. She finally said, "Eldest Granduncle, I will go to your house to bow and greet you for the New Year after I finish eating..."

Yu Xiaocao didn't ride the horse carriage to her house. Instead, she walked the familiar paths in the village. Not far behind her was the carriage that she was originally riding on. Behind that, were five carriages that were carrying specialty items from the capital. The villagers quietly began to gossip after seeing those carriages.

"Old Yu's house is certainly flourishing! Based on the items on these five carriages, she probably spent several hundred taels of silver! Xiaocao sure has a loose hand when it comes to spending! I bet the six-month salary she received as an official has all been spent on these five carriages!"

"What are you saying? Did you think Xiaocao lives only on her salary as an official? I heard that she had set up a braised food shop in the capital. She opened the shop as a partnership with a very distinguished noble from the capital. Based on the dividends, she could probably afford more than just five horse carriages!"

"The person riding on a horse next to the carriage must be Royal Prince Yang, right? How thick is Xiaocao's skin to actually make the Royal Prince Yang to personally escort her? I heard that the emperor values her farming skills. Just by looking at them, I can tell that the rumors are true!"

"Shuanzhu's wife, did you know that Xiaocao is back? She also brought a lot of goods back from the capital. The girl is quite generous; she gave Yangfan's wife a box of pastries from the capital. Just the box alone is probably worth several taels of silver! The pastries inside the box probably cost even more than the box! Your family has strong ties with the Yu Family, and your daughter is close to Xiaocao. I bet you will receive a lot of goods from the capital!"

"I really envy you guys for having close ties with the Yu Family. You guys are too far-sighted! Even if we had money, we still probably won't be able to buy those goods from the capital for sure! I don't even

know if I will have the chance in this lifetime to go to the capital and experience the atmosphere of the imperial capital...”

...

Xiaocao didn't know what was happening. Her return had created more topics for the villagers in Dongshan Village to talk about after their meal and tea. Xiaocao currently felt that Dongshan Village felt familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. Dongshan Village had changed a lot in the past six months. Some of the houses that were destroyed by the Wokou pirates were rebuilt on their original land. However, some villagers selected some other land to rebuild their houses.

When the Wokou pirates attacked, due to Xiaocao warning them in advance, the villagers at Dongshan Village did not sustain as many losses as the people in neighboring villages. Combined with the financial support given by Royal Prince Yang, the villagers were faring much better than other people. The villagers had discussed amongst themselves and decided that even if things were difficult at home, they should grit their teeth and rebuild their houses using tile and brick.

The newly built green brick buildings, the large stone courtyards, and the brand new wooden doors...the whole village looked familiar and strange. Old Yu began explaining as he walked next to Xiaocao, “Dongshan Village has become a wealthy village that is envied by the nearby villages! Not to mention, none of the other villages had all their houses built using green bricks and tiles.”

Because the Yu Family's braised food shop in the prefectural city had flourished, they had opened three other branches. The number of chickens, ducks, geese, and pigs that were needed in the braised food shops were immense. As a result, it was impossible to supply all the stores with the pigs from the Yu Family's pig farm.

Now, every family in Dongshan Village would raise a few pigs, chickens, and ducks. Liu Shuanzhu's family raised hundreds of chickens and ducks at the foot of the mountain and some families copied what they did. Anyway, it didn't matter how many livestock they raised because they didn't have to worry about not being able to sell them! The Yu Family wasn't the only family that needed livestock. The Zhou Family also needed a considerable amount of livestock to sell their roast ducks and chickens. The two family businesses gave priority to the businesses in Dongshan Village. Compared to the previous years where they depended on the sky and sea for their livelihood, the villagers' current income was ten times higher than it was previously!

As long as they work hard, then there will always be money to be earned! The boys in the village didn't have to worry about not being able to marry anymore because there were many girls from other villages that hoped to marry into one of the families in Dongshan Village. This was because the daughters from Dongshan Village all had a rich dowry. The doors of their soon to be husband's house would probably break down from the amount of dowry there was! In short, the people in Dongshan Village also didn't have to worry about marrying off their daughters anymore.

Dongshan Village's sudden wealth was naturally all thanks to the Yu Family. When Yu Xiaocao arrived in front of her family's newly built house, she couldn't help but become speechless. This...this was their family's courtyard? There were golden colored nails on top of the vermilion gate. There were two tall and mighty guardian lion statues in front of the entrance to the house. The tile roof was glazed red and yellow and the roof was supported by tall eaves on both sides! The wall of the courtyard was tall and was made from cyan-colored bricks. The wall was also decorated with glazed tiles just like the roof. From the outside, the house looked like the estates owned by high ranking officials in the capital!

Inside the gates was a residence with three separate courtyards in it. If Yu Hai hadn't prevented it, then the people Royal Prince Yang sent to build the estate would have likely built a five-courtyard residence for them! Most of the houses in the village only had one courtyard once they entered the gates. There would be three to five main rooms and east and west side rooms. They wouldn't have such a complicated residence like this. The large courtyard covered the smaller courtyard and the smaller courtyard was connected to the other courtyards.

When the house was first built, the married women in the village would exaggeratedly joke around, "Because they have such a large residence, I almost got lost when I went in!"

The only distinguishing feature that made the Yu Family's house different from the wealthy estates in the capital was that the wealthy estates in the capital were decorated with plants and elegant flowers. In contrast, the Yu Family's courtyards were all used to plant vegetables! Since it was currently winter, most of the vegetable fields in the courtyard were empty. Only the greenhouse located in the back garden was planted with vegetables that the Yu Family frequently ate.

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"This...is a bit too much, right?" Yu Xiaocao didn't expect that her own family's newly built residence would be so 'nouveau riche' in style. This type of building was considered quite luxurious for the standards of Tanggu Town, let alone a tiny fishing village.

Zhu Junyang, who had followed her in from behind, didn't have the same thoughts, "Although it can't compare with the residences one can buy in the capital, it's still considered quite decent!"

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him and said, “Do you know what's written all over this house ah?”

“What? A residence? How come I don't see anything written on it?” Zhu Junyang had a perplexed expression on his face. Did he miss something earlier?

“The words, 'We have lots of money', are written all over the residence in large, shiny characters. You didn't see that? We don't have that many people in the family yet we built such a large residence. Let's not even talk about keeping it clean but isn't this clearly telling everyone else: 'We have lots of money, quickly come steal it'?! The next time the Wokou pirates come to raid the coastline, they will definitely head straight for our home first!” Yu Xiaocao had nothing more to say.

Zhu Junyang thought that she was worried about her family's safety and stated in a confident manner, “No worries, this prince will send a few guards over to patrol the area! As for the cleaning, it's not like your family lacks the money to buy a few servants, right? If you don't feel like spending the money, then I'll buy them for you!”

“This is not a question of money! I'm afraid that the villagers might get other thoughts after seeing this!” In the past, her family didn't have much. When they originally split from the main Yu Family, their circumstances were worse than most of the others in the village. Now they were at a point where they could be considered a local wealthy despot, so wouldn't that bring resentment towards them?

Zhu Junyang used a finger to tap on her head and said, “Do you believe that if you guys built your home like everyone else's that no one would talk behind your back? Let's not talk about other things but your family has a thousand-mu farmstead and the greenhouse vegetable business in town. That's more than enough to make others feel jealous! If you want to prevent other people from acting maliciously from jealousy, then you need to increase the gap between yourself and those people. That way, you become something that everyone else can only look up to, a mark that they can only hope for!”

His reasoning was very clear. If you wanted to reach a point where other people couldn't pull you down, then you needed to climb to a height, like the clouds, where other people couldn't touch. That way, those who envied you and were jealous wouldn't dare to have those feelings Yu Xiaocao wasn't a slow-witted person. After hearing his words, she immediately understood his reasoning. The current Yu Family wasn't like before. Her father was now a seventh-ranked official and the emperor placed great importance on herself and had even given her the title of a feudal princess. Even if their residence was even more grand and large, other people would think that it was right and proper. In fact, if they tried to

be more discreet, it was likely that there would be people gossiping behind their backs stating that they were pretending to be poor. What was the point then?

The scenes that occurred at the mouth of the village flashed through her mind. The villagers who used to have amiable or indifferent expressions now all had fawning fake smiles on their faces. Even Auntie Yangfan, who was relatively close to them, had a bit of cautiousness added to her friendly manner. Before she had noticed it, she and the Yu Family had suddenly become an entity that was high above the other villagers at Dongshan Village. The times had changed and there was no way to go back...

“Dahai's wife! Xiaolian! Quickly come out and see who has come!!” Old Yu loudly announced as he stepped inside. From his steady gait and clear voice, it could be seen that Old Yu had been very healthy these past two years. His old body was still sturdy and strong!

Madam Liu and Xiaolian were in the back courtyard taking care of the greenhouse harvest. They could vaguely hear the noise in front and impatiently rushed out without even taking the time to wash the mud off of their hands. When she saw Xiaocao, Madam Liu couldn't restrain her emotions and ran forward to hug her daughter as her eyes filled with tears, “You're finally back! You've gotten thinner...”

“Mother...you've smeared Younger Sister's clothing with mud!” Xiaolian also felt tears well up. Her once tiny and skinny little sister, who previously resembled a starved kitten, was now an elegant and pretty young maiden! Although she was only a few minutes older than Xiaocao, she had acted as a protector of her younger sister since they were very young. The fact that her younger sister, who the doctors had proclaimed wouldn't live long enough to reach adulthood, was able to live until today was heavily related to her care.

“No worries, isn't it just a set of clothing ah? If it gets dirty, then we can just wash it! Mother, I missed you!” Yu Xiaocao could sense that Madam Liu had hesitated for a moment and hurriedly hugged her mother back. She made herself whine a little as if she was a little kitten begging for attention.

Wutong, who was behind Xiaocao, sneered inwardly, “Young Miss, this will cause other people to hate you, okay? There are so many young maidens in the capital who lust after a custom-designed set of clothing that is personally made by Modiste Jiang. You on the other hand, merely say 'it's only a set of clothing'. If those proud and arrogant young ladies could hear you now, what would they do?”

Just earlier, seeing her youngest daughter attired in expensive satin and silk damask gave Madam Liu a sense of strangeness. However, when her daughter started to act spoiled in her arms, it allowed her to find that her Cao'er was still the same. She wiped the mud off onto her own clothes and then patted her

youngest daughter's back and smiled, "You must be tired, right? Quickly go into the room and rest on the kang bed. Mother will make you some mutton stewed with noodles. It's the perfect dish for the cool weather!"

As she talked, she pulled her daughter into the room and had her sit down. Then she left the room to start making lunch for her daughter. From start to finish, Madam Liu only had eyes for her daughter. Despite being tall, Royal Prince Yang had been neglected this entire time.

Royal Prince Yang: ...

However, in front of his future mother-in-law, he couldn't put on the airs of a royal prince. The road to chasing a wife was long so he still needed to work hard!

"Xiaolian! Did you not eat enough this past year? I'm already taller than you ah!" Yu Xiaocao sat across from Xiaolian and grinned mischievously at her.

It was only after the two sisters had a good chat that Xiaolian noticed Royal Prince Yang, who had been ignored this entire time. She asked in a somewhat reserved manner, "Royal Prince, you're also visiting? What kind of tea do you want to drink? This commoner will go make some..."

"This prince only drinks the tea that Xiaocao personally makes!" Although Xiaocao's twin sister, Xiaolian, looked very similar to her, Zhu Junyang could faintly tell the difference between the two. Besides looks, Xiaocao's demeanor seemed to be a bit more clean and pure compared to her older sister. In front of other people, this fellow resumed his usual cool and lofty attitude.

Yu Xiaocao didn't even give him a look as she pulled Xiaolian down to sit again, "Don't bother with him. The tea leaves and hot water are all on the table. It's up to him if he wants to drink any or not!"

"Is that...really alright ah? He is a royal prince after all!" Xiaolian was still a bit apprehensive whenever she was around the expressionless Royal Prince Yang.

Yu Xiaocao reclined comfortably on the warm and toasty kang bed and pinched up a few roasted pumpkin seeds from the table on the kang bed. She cracked them with pleasure, "No worries! No one is

an outsider here, so there's no need to be so restricted. That being said, he may be a royal prince but I'm a feudal princess now! Hmph—”

Zhu Junyang looked somewhat helplessly at this 'arrogant person relying on favor'. He shook his head and chuckled lightly. After refusing Head Steward Liu's suggestion to have him brew tea, the prince personally picked up the hot water and steeped a cup of hot tea for both him and Yu Xiaocao. Yu Xiaocao gleefully received the hot tea and cheerfully took a small sip— one shouldn't spoil a man too much!

“Oh ho ah! Tiny!! What were you doing to cause you look in such dire straits?!” Yu Xiaocao spotted a murky little creature coming in from the door. After a closer look, it was unexpectedly the little roe deer who was muddy from head to toe.

When it heard the sound of Xiaocao's voice, the little roe deer excitedly plunged in and raised its forelegs in an attempt to climb onto the kang bed. Before it could jump up, Erya grabbed it from behind.

“Young Miss, you're finally back. I've missed you so much!! This time, are you going to abandon me here again when you go back to the capital?” The silly and honest Erya held the little roe deer as she impetuously inquired.

Yu Xiaocao looked at her and grinned, “Looks like Erya has gotten taller and fatter! Don't worry ah, when I go back to the capital again, I'll be bringing the whole family along to celebrate the New Years there!”

“That's fantastic! In this life, I never thought I'd have the chance to go to the capital. Is this servant dreaming right now?” Before Erya had entered the room, she was likely in the greenhouse pavilion in the back courtyard, helping with the planting. She was covered in mud too and wasn't much cleaner than the little roe deer. In addition, she had an ordinary appearance and her skin was on the tanner side. Her whole body was covered in dirt and she really resembled a wild girl in the countryside.

Wutong sneered and remarked in a voice that was neither loud or soft, “Young Miss said that she was here to bring her 'family' to the capital to celebrate the New Years. What status do you have to dare to consider yourself one of Young Miss's family?”

Erya glanced at Wutong and Yingchun, who were wearing clothes that were more beautiful than the young girls in town, and then picked at her own clothes in embarrassment. She scuttled to Xiaocao's side

and quietly asked, “Young Miss, are these two older sisters like Older Sister Yingtao? Are they also maidservants you brought from the capital ah?”

“They are, what's wrong?” Yu Xiaocao shot a faint look at Wutong and grinned at the straightforward maid in front of her.

“Are all of the maidservants from the capital this fierce ah? Older Sister Yingtao scolded me as soon as she met me and this older sister is doing the same!” Erya felt a bit aggrieved. They were all maidservants, so why did the other have to bully her?

Wutong was also a bit upset after being stared at by the young miss. She stammered an explanation, “Young Miss, this maidservant hasn't been instructed properly, so how could she serve you right now? She's not even trained enough to do the work of a third-ranked maidservant!”

“No one is born knowing how to do everything! As her senior, shouldn't you know how to teach her ah? Erya is a maidservant that I personally bought. She may not have anything else but I can definitely vouch for her loyalty!” Yu Xiaocao had other thoughts about this matter.

Wutong felt even more wronged now. It was clear that making a mistake once could steer the trajectory of one's life. She might not be able to make up for her error even if she tried hard for the rest of her life. However, she was going to do her best to let the young miss see that she had changed. Wutong vowed not to act like before and harbor other motives within her heart.

Throughout this, Zhu Junyang peacefully sipped on the wild tea that Xiaocao had personally roasted herself. At this moment, he raised his eyes to look at Wutong for a second and then looked down again. That lass Xiaocao had a group of pretty good servants around her. At least, none of them had impure thoughts. This maid called Wutong perhaps had other motives in the past but now had been infected by the lass's 'personal charm' and had promised to mend her ways. He would just let her be for now. If she wasn't suitable in the future, then he would find some excuse to let her go.

When Madam Liu went to serve the piping hot mutton stewed with noodles, she finally noticed that there was a large man in the room. She stared blankly for a second and then hurriedly said, “Your Highness, thank you very much for escorting that lass Xiaocao back home! Please eat the mutton stewed with noodles too while I go saute a few dishes for you...”

Zhu Junyang wanted to look at the sky in exasperation and howl, 'This prince is over 180 centimeters in height, but why is my treatment so poor here? Everyone is ignoring me for some reason.' However, he didn't have the guts to question his future mother-in-law at the moment, so he quietly replied, "Auntie Yu, there's no need to trouble yourself! Mutton stewed with noodles is perfectly fine!"

"Aiyo ah, I dare not accept this honor, dare not..." What did the royal prince just call her? Auntie Yu? Goodness gracious! How could she, a mere village wife, possibly allow this?

Fields of Gold Chapter 474

After he finished the evening meal, Zhu Junyang went back to the mountain villa. Xiaocao and her mother and sister congregated on the kang bed to talk. Xiaocao told Madam Liu some things that were happening in the capital and her thoughts about them.

As they talked, she suddenly remembered the residence that was halfway up the mountain that used to be the Zhao Family's. She asked, "Mother, I once saw Auntie Zhao when I was in the capital. She said that we can do as we see fit with their old residence. If the place stays empty for too long, it'll likely start falling apart from disrepair."

Madam Liu looked as if she had thought of something and said, "The Zhao Family's residence hasn't stayed empty for long periods of time. Before our family's residence was done, we spent over three months living there. Your father also goes there from time to time to take a look. He often repairs any damage and fixes the roof too. I and Xiaolian also often go up to clean up the place. Ah, right! Your Older Brother Zhao Han also enlisted in the military last year. However, he didn't go to the northwest area of the country like his grandfather and father and instead entered the navy for training. The neighboring village recently established a company of soldiers and he was transferred there. It's said that he did well and got promoted to a small ringleader..."

Xiaolian giggled and interjected, "Mother, his rank is called a platoon leader and he has around fifty soldiers under his command. A small ringleader makes it sound like he's a bandit!"

"Go, go, go! You know the most, okay? You even dare to make fun of your mother! Are you itching for a beating ah?" Madam Liu glared at her older daughter. This lass's guts seemed to be growing bigger with time and she seemed to want to tease everyone.

Xiaolian was afraid that her mother might fly into a rage due to humiliation and hurriedly placated her, "Alright, alright, alright! Whatever you say goes! A small ringleader is a small ringleader ah! Younger Sister, while you've been in the capital, Older Brother Zhao Han has come by a few times and even ate with us. When he saw that you weren't around, he even especially asked about you."

“What do you mean he especially asked about her? He was only inquiring out of politeness. Young maidens should know when to hold their tongues. Don't speak so much nonsense!” Madam Liu had long known what Royal Prince Yang felt towards her youngest daughter and was afraid this might be transmitted to him and cause problems. She hurriedly interrupted her older daughter's words and then continued, “That child Zhao Han is compassionate. Every time he has a break, he always comes over to help us out. After we moved into our new home, he started to reside in the residence halfway up the mountain since it wasn't too good for him to stay with us. Thus, that home isn't completely empty all the time.”

“When I visited Auntie Zhao, she complained that Older Brother Zhao refused to go to the army in the northwest and instead insisted on entering the navy. When the Wokou pirates came and attacked last time, he had been sent over with the other troops. I didn't expect that he would be assigned to a post that is so close to us.”

In Yu Xiaocao's heart, Zhao Han was the one other person besides her close family members who treated her kindness and warmth when she first transmigrated over. He was like an older brother to her. Not only did he do his best to take care of her and Little Shitou but he also accepted her odd and weird quirks without question.

After thinking about it, she realized that Older Brother Zhao Han had just reached eighteen years of age. He had been born in a military family and had been trained in his family's arts. It wasn't surprising that he had been recognized for his talents and been promoted to a platoon leader. If she had the opportunity, she was planning on making some pastries for him and find out how he was doing. That way, when she went back to the capital, she would be able to report on his well-being to Auntie Zhao.

The next morning, Royal Prince Yang sat boldly in the middle of the Yu Family's reception hall. In the capital, whenever he visited Xiaocao, there was always someone there with them. Whether it was Lady Fang herself or some maids and senior servants, they never had the chance to be alone. The little lass very rarely had the chance to go into the kitchen there, so he had started to miss the taste of her food.

Yu Xiaocao thought that she had gotten up quite early, but when she finished washing up, she realized that Royal Prince Yang had already drunk through several cups of tea. She looked at Zhu Junyang's 'pitiful, begging' expression on his face and became resigned to her fate of cooking in the kitchen. Inside the kitchen was a basin full of water and giant tiger prawns. She immediately ordered him in, “If you want to eat earlier, then help me peel these shrimp.”

Zhu Junyang had a dumbfounded expression on his face as he stared at the basin full of wriggling and jumping prawns. He had eaten shrimp before but, as for peeling their shells and getting them ready, he had never even had the chance to see it being done let alone doing it himself.

Yu Xiaocao sighed and picked up a prawn. To demonstrate, she pinched the head off and removed its shell and tail before deveining it. Then, she had Zhu Junyang attempt to follow what she did. Zhu Junyang's brows furrowed so tight that he could kill an insect when she stuffed a slippery shrimp into his hands. However, when he saw the little lass busily working in the kitchen, mixing up and kneading dough, he squatted down helplessly and started to clumsily clean the basin of prawns. He was very well aware that his lass had a crafty and odd mindset. If he summoned someone else in to take over his task, it was very unlikely that he would be able to eat some crystal shrimp dumplings for breakfast.

On this trip to Dongshan Village, Zhu Junyang had brought along Head Steward Liu and a personal bodyguard who doubled as a personal servant, Dong Dali, with him. The two of them entered the residence energetically with some prey they had hunted earlier. When Dong Dali got to the entrance of the kitchen, he suddenly stopped to a standstill and blinked his eyes in surprise. He had a flabbergasted look on his face—his valiant and godly master was actually squatting inelegantly on the floor, peeling shrimp.

Head Steward Liu had long gotten used to seeing odd happenings between his master and Miss Yu. He patted Dong Dali, who was frozen in astonishment, and reminded the other man, “Go clean up the game so we can add it to the noon meal later. Let me give you a piece of advice. Don't look at what you're not supposed to look at and absolutely do not say anything that you're not supposed to say!”

By the time the crystal shrimp dumplings had finished steaming, Yu Hai and his son had already rushed here from the farmstead. On their way back, they had also caught up with Little Shitou and Qian Wen, who were on their break from school.

“Wow! Second Sister personally made these crystal shrimp dumplings! Older Brother Xiaowen, you're lucky in food today. An invitation is not as fortuitous as a chance encounter. Stay with us and eat some dumplings, okay?” Little Shitou had grown considerably taller in the past half year and had almost caught up with Xiaocao. Although he still had somewhat of a childish air around him when he spoke, he had also added a bit of elegance to his demeanor.

Qian Wen looked at the familiar figure bustling about in the kitchen. She was no longer the painfully skinny, short little girl in his memories. She was still slender but now she seemed to have the figure of a pretty young maiden. Xiaocao seemed to have sensed his gaze and turned around to smile brilliantly at him.

She seemed to have grown more beautiful again. The features on her face had matured and her eyes were large and deep. She had pale and exquisite skin and the dimples on her cheeks were faintly discernible when she smiled at someone. He heard that she had successfully established greenhouse-grown vegetables and fruits in the capital. Her accomplishments drew lots of praise from the people there. He also heard that she was planning on building a new pharmaceutical workshop in the capital. Furthermore, she had been given the title of a feudal princess and been bestowed a fine residence in the capital. In addition, she had used the money she made in half a year to buy an estate in the capital that was recorded under Uncle Yu Hai's name...

He had originally thought that, as long as he worked hard, he'd be able to pass the imperial examinations and shorten the gap that had grown between them. However, why did it seem like the distance between them kept growing larger and larger? The memories of that little girl, who had a starving belly and was digging up wild herbs in the bitter cold, had gradually faded away from his mind. In front of him was a young lady he was familiar with but why did it seem like they had become more distant, like strangers?

He inhaled deeply and before he could say the words of refusal on his lips, the young girl had already spoken, "Qian Wen, I made some crystal shrimp dumplings, shumai, and soup dumplings. Stay with us and eat a bit!"

"No need." Despite being dazzled for a split second by that incandescent smile of hers, he still refused her good intentions. "I was off traveling with a few classmates before and hadn't gone home in awhile. I should go home first and see my family ah! You...when are you all going to leave for the capital?"

He had encountered the Yu Family on his way back and had already found out that they were going to travel to the capital to celebrate the New Years soon.

"We'll still be here for a few more days ah! My mother said that she still has a few things to pack!" Yu Xiaocao paused and then took out a few steamer baskets from the kitchen and placed them in his hands, "Since it's like that, I won't insist that you stay and eat with us. Take these with you when you go back and have Uncle Qian and Auntie Qian try them. Also, tell Xiaowu and Yafang to come by and play when they have time!"

Qian Wen didn't refuse this offer and silently left the courtyard with the steamer baskets in hand. Little Shitou stuffed a piping hot steamed dumpling into his mouth and grimaced when he got scalded, "Second Sister, I've missed your cooking so much ah! Your steamed dumplings are too delicious and

they look very appetizing too! If you open up a breakfast stand, I'm sure the business would be booming!”

Yu Hai lightly slapped the back of his son's head and rebuked, “Do you think your older sister is the same as you? Idle with nothing to do? She's in charge of the Imperial Plantation, with several thousand mu of fields to manage and harvest. How could she do other things when the emperor gave her such an important task?”

Little Shitou hadn't swallowed the food in his mouth so he almost choked when his father hit him. He covered the back of his head with a hand and made a sullen face. He then complained to Xiaocao, “Second Sister, just look how biased Father is! You're the only biological child in his eyes. The rest of us were just picked up from the side of the road. Father, if you hit me until I become stupid, who will become the top scorer in the imperial examinations in the future and bring honor to our ancestors ah?”

“Are you that certain that you'll be able to become top scorer in the imperial examinations in the future? Don't get too large for your pants and make a promise that you can't keep. Otherwise, you'll end up losing the entire Yu Family's dignity.” Yu Hai felt like he needed to knock this youngster's confidence down a notch so that he wouldn't end up with a conceited sense of self.

“Father, are you sure you're my real father ah? My self confidence has just been trampled into the ground. Second Sister, I need to eat delicious food to soothe my ego!” Little Shitou acted like an elegant little scholar when he was at the academy and all of the teachers there praised him for being accomplished despite his young age. However, whenever he was in front of Xiaocao, he would momentarily revert to his original personality—a young and childish little monkey who liked to act spoiled!

Yu Xiaocao advised her father, “Father, in the future, please don't hit Shitou when he's eating food. What if he ends up choking on it and loses his life?”

Yu Hai watched as Little Shitou coughed until his face turned bright red and felt somewhat regretful. Luckily, his son rapidly recovered and was back to normal. After hearing his younger daughter's advice, he also thought that it was quite dangerous earlier. Thus, he deeply engraved his younger daughter's words within his mind.

“Xiaocao, go look in the pot and see if the corn porridge is done yet!” Yu Hai and Little Shitou heard a familiar voice and turned to look towards it. They almost burst out into laughter. Royal Prince Yang, who

was dressed quite grandly, had just stood up from behind the stove with his entire face and body covered in grime. He looked quite messy and out of sorts. It was quite a hilarious sight.

Yu Hai let out a few fake coughs to disguise the smile on his face and pretended to scold his daughter, "Cao'er, how could you have Royal Prince Yang manage the cooking fire? Where's your mother and older sister?"

"Why can't he manage the cooking fire? He ordered a bunch of hard to make breakfast foods, so he shouldn't think he'd get out of this for free. Don't spoil him just because he's a royal prince. After all, I'm a feudal princess now but didn't I also make food as soon as I got back home?" Yu Xiaocao had also spotted the streaks of soot of Zhu Junyang's forehead. The fact that the devilishly handsome Royal Prince Yang had 'fallen' into dirt added a bit of adorableness to his image. This side of Royal Prince Yang had a breath of liveliness to him and was quite to her taste!

Royal Prince Yang cleared his throat and earnestly said, "Xiaocao is right. This prince is also experiencing how the common people live! The emperor himself has said that only by knowing the pain and difficulties of the commoners can we truly rule them..."

Fields of Gold Chapter 475

"Auntie Yu, I heard Xiaocao is back from the capital?" A familiar voice could be heard at the gate.

Little Shitou's eyes lit up and he didn't care that his mouth was still full of shaomai as he cheerfully exclaimed, "Older Brother Han, I heard that you've been assigned at the local company near our village. That's too good! In the future, it'll be more convenient to see you. Tomorrow I'm on my break. If you have free time, then you, my second sister, and I can go to that secret place to catch small fish. Second Sister hasn't been home for half a year, so whenever I went there alone I wasn't able to catch fish. Ai...I miss those days when we were able to catch fish in a half-broken pottery jar to make fish soup!"

"Even food can't make you be quiet! Have we ever stinted you on food or drink? You miss the days of before, when we had to eat coarse grain flatbread, drink bean porridge and couldn't eat our fill? What's to miss about that?" Madam Liu heard the sound of Zhao Han's voice and walked out of the back courtyard. She leveled a glare at her youngest son and then smiled in welcome at Zhao Han and invited him in to rest.

Little Shitou gnawed on a shaomai as he walked next to Zhao Han. He made a funny face at Madam Liu and said, "I'm trying to express the good memories I had with Older Brother Han in the past. Mother, you misunderstood me."

Madam Liu laughingly glared at him and then turned to speak to Zhao Han, "Cao'er's in the kitchen taking care of breakfast. Does eating here work for you today? Have you eaten breakfast yet? Today, you should eat all three meals at Auntie's place and don't take yourself to be an outsider."

Ever since Zhao Han enlisted in the navy, his figure had become more tall and sturdy. His height was about the same as Royal Prince Yang, so he was at least 180 centimeters tall. Perhaps it was because he was constantly on patrol in the ocean, but his skin was now a healthy bronze-tan color. The added color contrasted with his handsome face, making him seem much more masculine. He was truly suitable for the title of the 'walking hormone'.

"Auntie, to refuse your generous offer would be impolite of me. Don't busy around too much for my sake as I'm not an outsider here. This nephew will go into the kitchen to look to see if there's anything I can help with." As he spoke, his steps became somewhat more eager as he headed out of the drawing room. He walked over in large strides towards the kitchen.

Before he could get to the entrance of the kitchen, a slender and elegant young maiden came out. She was holding a ceramic pot that puffed out hot steam. The young girl was wearing a plum-red outer small jacket that was embroidered with gold thread and cinched in at the waist. The light corset on top of it was covered in fluffy white fox fur. The whole ensemble contrasted adorably with that flushed little face and made the owner seem incredibly cute. It was her, Yu Xiaocao! She was the odd and clever little girl with a boundless source of ideas! She had grown taller and into her features. She had gotten more beautiful...

"Older Brother Han? You're already this tall? And you've become more handsome. I almost didn't recognize you!" Yu Xiaocao raised her head to look at that tall and soldierly figure. She was stunned for a second before she finally recognized the other person.

Zhao Han couldn't help from stepping forward two steps to take the ceramic dish from her hands. His voice had a deep magnetic quality to it as he said, "Isn't that hot? How about I carry it instead? What did you make? It smells so good ah!!"

"How could it not smell good? This was the work of this prince making sure to...keep the fire going. My efforts cannot be missed!" Zhu Junyang's voice was full of displeasure. What was going on today? There were people one after another who were eyeing his little lass with a covetous interest. When he saw Zhao Han's outstanding appearance, Zhu Junyang suddenly felt a sense of crisis hit him.

Yu Xiaocao grinned and placated the prince, "That's right ah. You did half of the work needed to make breakfast today, is that okay now?"

Zhao Han's eyes slightly narrowed as he looked towards the peerlessly handsome man. Royal Prince Yang? He had long heard that this prince had taken good care of the Yu Family. Originally, he had thought that the prince appreciated the Yu Family's talents and culinary skills. Perhaps it wasn't as simple as that. His male intuition told him that Royal Prince Yang was interested in Xiaocao in another way!

"This subject, Zhao Han, greets Royal Prince Yang!" Although Zhao Han was currently holding a piping hot ceramic pot, he still greeted the other man with utmost courtesy.

"Alright ah! No one is an outsider here! No need to be so polite!" The tone of Yu Xiaocao's voice hinted that she was quite close to Royal Prince Yang. This made the slight frown on Zhao Han's face even more perceptible.

"Older Brother Han, this is the chicken soup I simmered in the ceramic pot. It's been on the stove on low heat for the whole morning and I also added some ginseng and Angelica sinensis. It's very good for nourishing the body! Let's try it together!" Fortunately, Yu Xiaocao was also quite intimate and close when she spoke to him. This made Zhao Han feel slightly better. However, from the tone of her voice, there was still a slight difference. Perhaps...he lost out on his opportunity with her?

Although Zhu Junyang was very jealous, he knew he needed to show his magnanimous side as the future husband of Xiaocao. Thus, he spoke in a manner that insinuated he was the host here, "Xiaocao is right. No one is an outsider here so there's no need to be a stickler to these convoluted and overelaborate ceremonies. You're a guest here, so spend some time here and try the lass's food."

Zhao Han tried to endure this but was not successful. He looked Zhu Junyang straight in the eye and sternly said, "Royal Prince Yang, although you have helped Uncle Yu, Auntie Yu, and Xiaocao a lot, you're still an outside man. Xiaocao has grown up and needs to think of her reputation. You should stick to the conventions."

The expression on Zhu Junyang's face immediately chilled and the temperature of the surrounding air seemed to have dropped several degrees. Only Yu Xiaocao was thick-skinned enough to not sense that anything had changed. Perhaps, in her mind, Zhu Junyang was the same as Little White: arrogant and cold while pretending to be cruel. In reality, he didn't have vicious tendencies. His cold expressions no longer had any impact on her anymore.

Zhu Junyang could tell that the little lass had no clue about the surging turbulence that was rising between the two men. She had such an innocent and carefree expression on her face. His gaze towards her held a bit of helplessness and a deep desire to pamper her. Love rivals couldn't be conquered through the usage of force. Instead, a true victory only came after you prevailed over them for your sweetheart's love.

A smile returned to Zhu Junyang's face as he went down that thought. Zhao Han noticed the rapid change in the prince's expressions and felt alarmed inside. Was it possible that something had happened between Xiaocao and Royal Prince Yang in the years he had been gone? Impossible! Absolutely impossible! Xiaocao wasn't even thirteen yet and hadn't started noticing men in that fashion. How could she possibly fancy Royal Prince Yang, who was temperamental to the extreme?

“Platoon Leader Zhao, it's not surprising you haven't heard yet and this prince doesn't blame you for your ignorance. This prince and Yu Xiaocao have already come to an agreement that we will be together in five years. In other words, when she turns eighteen, this prince will marry her. Therefore, to the Yu Family, this prince is not considered an outside man.” Royal Prince Yang revealed a bit of satisfaction when he saw the utter shock in Zhao Han's eyes. 'Young fellow, if you want to take what belongs to me, you first have to decide if you have the ability!'

“Oh right! Because of my sincerity towards her, the lass finally took pity on me. Xiaocao already promised that she'll get engaged with me when she turns sixteen. Thus, in actuality, based off of our verbal agreement alone, this prince is already Xiaocao's fiancé! Therefore, there's no need for Platoon Leader Zhao to worry about Xiaocao's affairs!” It was very clear what the prince was hinting at now: 'Xiaocao's already taken by someone else, so quickly shove away those shameful thoughts of yours!'

At the same time, Zhu Junyang rejoiced at his brilliant decision. Fortunately, he had struck first and gained the upper hand to make sure that his relationship with the little lass was very clear. Otherwise, by the time the little lass became romantically interested in men, perhaps he would be in the same boat as Zhao Han right now and be at a loss.

“What are you two talking about huh? Why are you both standing in the courtyard? Aren't you both cold? Older Brother Han, if you keep standing there, the soup in the ceramic pot will get cold!” Yu Xiaocao walked out of the kitchen with a stack of small steamer baskets in her hands that rocked precariously. “Hey you, come help me now, they're about to fall down!”

Zhu Junyang had already advanced towards her before she could speak. He took over the steamer baskets from her and stated in a voice that was filled with tenderness and complaint, "How can you possibly transport this much stuff with your skinny arms and legs? Let this prince take over! Little Shitou, go help your Second Sister to bring out the bowls and chopsticks. She was busy the entire morning in order to make us breakfast so she should rest now!"

Not bad, at least he knew how to take care of his girlfriend and took over the work of his own volition. Her man was quite warm and considerate now. Yu Xiaocao revealed a smile that seemed to glow with light and the dimples on the side of her face appeared, which enchanted the people around her.

Zhao Han lowered his eyes to conceal the sense of loss in them. Perhaps....this time, he had truly come back too late...

The breakfast spread was extremely sumptuous and everyone in the Yu Family ate to their heart's content and praised the food constantly. The only exception was Zhao Han, who seemed to eat without tasting any of the food.

After they finished breakfast, fellow villagers came one after another to visit the Yu Residence. On one hand, they were expressing their happiness to Yu Hai and the others that they had the good fortune to celebrate the New Years in the capital. On the other hand, they also wanted to show their 'reverence' to the newly-appointed feudal princess. Everyone thought that the ancestral graves of the Yu Family were now sprouting smoke. Not only did they produce an official in this generation but they also unexpectedly produced a feudal princess!

Along with Old Yu, Yu Hai and his wife bustled around receiving their fellow villagers and close neighbors. Zhao Han sat for a bit but soon used the excuse of having duties to do to leave. When he left, Little Shitou and Xiaocao escorted him to the gate.

Zhao Han had hesitated for a moment but could no longer hold back. He asked, "Xiaocao, just what is your relationship with Royal Prince Yang?"

"What's the matter? Royal Prince Yang is Second Sister's benefactor and superior? What else could there be?" Little Shitou supported his round little belly and unhurriedly followed behind the two of them to allow the food he ate to digest. When he heard Zhao Han's question, he looked at the two of them with a puzzled look and had to inquire further.

Zhao Han didn't follow up with Little Shitou and instead gazed deeply into Xiaocao's eyes as he stated in a very solemn manner, "Xiaocao, forgive me for being forthright. Royal Prince Yang...he's too wealthy and powerful to be a good match for you! He's not an ideal husband candidate!"

"Ideal husband candidate? Second Sister, you and Royal Prince Yang..." The one hundred thousand watt light bulb in Little Shitou's head suddenly lit up completely. If Royal Prince Yang was at this scene, he would definitely praise the boy with, 'Youngster, you did a good job!'

Yu Xiaocao was silent for a short period of time. She wasn't the least bit shy when she had to talk about the relationship between her and Zhu Junyang. She only discussed what was necessary, "I am also not certain at this point whether I like him that way or not. Although he seems cold-hearted and cruel in other people's eyes, he is never like that with me. He's always gentle and considerate around me and is very magnanimous. He treats me incredibly well and I can tell it is very sincere and comes from his heart! Currently, I can't think of any other man who can be better than him. Therefore, I have decided to give him a chance. If he still treats me well in the years before I turn eighteen and even treats me better than before, then why shouldn't I marry this kind of man?"

Zhao Han felt like his heart was currently in the middle of winter as it felt icy cold. He tried to backtrack and softly said, "Xiaocao, you're still young. Perhaps you don't understand the type of feelings we're talking about right now. So, don't make a hasty decision right now. I believe you should discuss this with Uncle Yu and Auntie Yu first. Having an adult's perspective on all of this might be able to help you see the whole picture."

"Thank you, Older Brother Han! I will be careful! We're going to stay in Dongshan Village for a few more days. If you're not busy during that time, come over and visit us!!" Yu Xiaocao had an innocent expression on her face as if she hadn't detected that his eyes held more than friendship in them.

"Zhao Han let out a deep sigh inwardly and turned around, "Recently, the battalion has been patrolling the nearby waters and I may not have an opportunity to visit. Let me first congratulate you guys and wish you all a pleasant journey to the capital..."

After he finished talking, he took one more deep look at Xiaocao and then turned around to resolutely leave. However, that tall and sturdy figure seemed a bit distracted...

The news that Royal Prince Yang had escorted the newly titled feudal princess back to Dongshan Village to visit her family traveled quickly to Tanggu Town. County Magistrate Zhao and many of the important people in town came over on the second day to greet these two large personas. Although the feudal princess was born in a farmer's family, Royal Prince Yang was a true bred and born royal! That being said, the whole area of Tanggu and its surrounding areas were Royal Prince Yang's feudal lands. It wasn't wrong for them to consider him as their master.

After County Magistrate Zhao greeted Royal Prince Yang and Feudal Princess Jinan, he exchanged a few courteous words with Yu Hai, who had the same ranking as him. He knew that Royal Prince Yang looked highly upon the Yu Family. In addition, their family had also produced a fifth-ranked feudal princess so he naturally wouldn't dare to slight them.

He reported on the affairs of Tanggu and its surrounding areas to Royal Prince Yang and also produced the annual tax records for the prince to look over. The harbor had finished construction in the autumn and was now open for business. There was a lot of commerce now in the area and it had become quite busy. Even the nearby Tanggu Town had also become more lively and many shops had been added in that time period. Thus, the amount of taxes that they collected had also increased compared to the previous year.

After Royal Prince Yang verified County Magistrate Zhao's work, he awarded the man with a few valuable trinkets and complimented him a few times. County Magistrate Zhao left the Yu Family's residence in a happy manner. Being able to show his face to Royal Prince Yang was a good thing. If he could enter the prince's eyes, wouldn't that mean his future was guaranteed?

Although many of the important people in town couldn't be like County Magistrate Zhao and have a legitimate reason to see Royal Prince Yang, that still didn't stop most of them from stopping by the Yu Residence. The stream of visitors seemed to be never ending. At the very least, the Yu Family was able to speak to the royal prince personally. Furthermore, this time, the prince didn't even reside in the mountain villa and instead took residence in one of the Yu Family's separate courtyards. Therefore, making a connection with the Yu Family could only give them benefits.

Ever since Yu Xiaocao went back home, the Yu Family's threshold seemed to have been stomped flat by the number of visitors who came to see them. After a while, Yu Hai couldn't take it anymore and went back to the farmstead in town to hide. They were going to head out to the capital soon, so didn't he have to make sure that everything was fine at the farmstead before he left? Yu Hang, as the eldest son of the family, endured another two days at home but then also fled to the farmstead in town. He saw no point in enduring these social visits as he found more value in managing the vegetables and fields in town!

Thus, the Yu Family only had females and the old left at home, so they could only apologize and not receive visitors. The eager social climbers were helpless now and could only leave behind their cards and presents before returning back without hitting their goals.

The residence had finally quieted down, so Yu Xiaocao started to organize and send the year end gifts to her relatives. Her eldest granduncle's family was given six boxes of the best pastries from the capital as well as a large chunk of venison. They were also given several bolts of fine cotton cloth that were dyed in bright colors. Furthermore, she sent some fine pastries and local delicacies to the families they had good relationships with in the village.

Xiaocao's maternal grandparents in Xishan Village were also given a lot of year end gifts and Xiaocao especially added a few valuable items as well. Currently, her eldest maternal aunt was entirely in charge of the piggery that supplied their pigs for their braised food shop. She had hired a few of the village matrons over there and the piggery was managed perfectly in her hands.

After they finished sending out their year end gifts, it was about time to travel to the capital. The Yu Family packed their clothes and necessities and entered the carriages. Under the envious gazes of their fellow villages, they left the village and started their journey. Other than the Yu Family, there was no one else in Dongshan Village who was able to buy a residence in the capital as well as have the opportunity to celebrate the New Years there.

“Younger Brother's break only starts ten days later. Should we send someone over to escort him over?” Little Shitou would only turn ten this upcoming year. Xiaocao wasn't completely okay with leaving him alone in Tanggu Town.

Royal Prince Yang was currently wrapped up in a giant, thick coat and spoke to his little lass, who was a bit anxious, through the carriage's window, “Didn't you ask Headmaster Yuan to take care of him ah? That being said, as soon as his break starts, Headmaster Yuan will also need to travel to the capital. Your younger brother is the disciple he is the most proud of. Even without you mentioning anything, he would make sure to take good care of Shitou. Oh right, your family's dumb little roe deer has caught up with us...”

Yu Xiaocao stuck her head through the window to take a look. Sure enough, there was a little black dot behind the carriage that was headed towards the carriage at top speed. The Yu Family weren't the only people headed to the capital as they had even brought Erya, a simple maidservant, along. They had asked Liu Shuanzhu's family to help them keep an eye on their house. In actuality, there wasn't much

that needed to be watched. Other than the few rabbits and hens in the back courtyard, there was only Tiny, the dumb little roe deer, that needed to be fed.

When they left, they had locked up all of the courtyards securely and given the spare key to Shuanzhu's wife. So how did this dumb roe deer escape from the back?

Tiny had started living with the Yu Family not long after they split from the main branch. Since it was small of stature, there wasn't much meat on its bones so the family just raised it as a pet for the children. It had been four years since the roe deer started living with them but the animal was still the same size as it was when it first came to them. Although they called it the 'dumb roe deer', the little creature was quite clever and lively. Perhaps it could tell that everyone in the family was leaving and it had been 'abandoned' behind. Thus, it had somehow escaped from the back courtyard to chase after them.

Since she was afraid this little deer might be caught and eaten by someone, Yu Xiaocao instructed the driver to stop the carriage and wait for the little roe deer. Once it caught up, she brought it into the carriage. It wasn't much larger than a small hunting hound, so the little creature sniffed around excitedly at first, licked Xiaocao's hand, and then obediently laid down next to her feet. It was obvious that it thought that as long as it kept close to its master, it wouldn't be abandoned.

The little divine stone was currently in its golden kitten form and jumped in through the window. Although the divine stone was now able to take the form of a human, doing so used up quite a lot of spiritual energy to maintain it. Thus, it still liked to use its kitten form to roam about the world. While they were in the capital, the little divine stone often couldn't go out due to circumstances and could only hole up in the multi-colored stone to cultivate its energy until it was about to die of boredom. It seized the opportunity when they went to Dongshan Village to jump out of the stone and enjoy some fresh air!

“Young Miss, your family's pets are all so small and adorable! Especially this kitten with the shiny golden fur. This servant has never seen such a beautiful cat before!” Yingchun was still quite young and at the age where one liked tiny animals. As she talked, she stretched out a hand to try to pet the little kitten that was currently sleeping on its master's knees.

“Little Glutinous Dumpling doesn't have a good temper and doesn't like other people. Usually, it likes to roam around in the wild and I often don't know where it is. Yingchun, if you like small animals, you can help me take care of this little roe deer. It's the apple of my younger brother's eye!”

Yingchun joyfully pulled Tiny onto her lap. Perhaps it was because she had the scent of Yu Xiaocao on her body, but the little dumb roe deer didn't reject her and obediently stayed on Yingchun's lap and acted as a hand warmer.

“There are wolves! Protect our master!!” One of the bodyguards from the new residence had spotted one black and one white figure swiftly running around. At first he thought that they were large dogs but when they got closer, he suddenly realized they were too large and sturdy to be dogs. The expression on his face immediately changed and the hand on his weapon tightened. He ordered the other bodyguards to surround the Yu Family's carriages in a defensive circle.

Wutong was scared silly by the bodyguard announcing that there were wolves in their vicinity. She crouched down in a corner of the carriage as she frantically thought, 'As expected, being loyal comes with a price. Isn't this an official road that most people use? How can wolves suddenly appear? I heard the older servants at the residence tell stories before and they said that wolves only usually appear in large packs. How many wolves are there? I hope these bodyguards will be able to keep us safe.'

From the calm and collected manner of the little roe deer, Yu Xiaocao knew without sticking her head out to look that the wolves that the bodyguards hollered about were Little Black and Little White. These two usually didn't stay at the Yu Residence when she was gone and instead spent all of their time in the mountains. Little White had fought against the alpha wolf in the wolf pack and won yet he disdained becoming the leader. After spending a short period of time with them, it leisurely traveled back and forth between Dongshan and Xishan Villages, doing as it pleased. It still remembered that before its master left for the capital, she had asked it to keep an eye on her family.

Little Black constantly caused trouble in the mountains. She once heard that it had somehow provoked a giant bear once and was in dire straits. Luckily, this fellow was clever and led the bear to a pit trap that Yu Hai had set before. Afterwards, he scrambled back to the Yu Residence to bring the male master to the trap to reap the rewards. Yu Hai kept the bear paws, gallbladder and skin and sold the rest of the meat to Zhenxiu Restaurant. They made a tidy fortune from that windfall.

Yu Xiaocao could hear the ruckus outside as the bodyguards prepared for a fight. She clearly exclaimed 'Stop', which scared the two nervous maidservants, Wutong and Yingchun.

When she saw that her young miss was about to lift the curtain and leave the carriage, Wutong snaked out a hand to stop her as she stuttered, “Young Miss, it's dangerous outside. Stay inside the carriage and this servant will go out in your stead to see what's going on!”

Yu Xiaocao cast her a somewhat surprised look. When did this maidservant finally see the light? The originally selfish and arrogant maidservant, who had been so scared that she was about to wet herself, had actually gathered the courage to volunteer to go out...it looked like she couldn't keep judging a person by their past actions.

"It's no big deal. These two wolves have been raised by me since they were young and they won't harm me!" Yu Xiaocao smiled slightly at her and then patted gently at the hand that had a death grip on her clothing. The tone of her voice also became much warmer.

Yingchun, who had a bit more courage, opened her eyes wide and asked, "What? One can also raise wolves? Won't they bite people?"

"Animals have a sixth sense! As long as you care for them sincerely, they will also treat you well back!" Yu Xiaocao gazed at Wutong again and then lightly laughed. She jumped off the carriage, leaving Yingchun, who had stars in her eyes, and Wutong, who had a pensive look on her face.

Little Black and Little White had already grown into Big Black and Big White. The two wolves were currently on the outside of the defensive perimeter. Since Xiaocao had fed them mystic-stone water from when they were young until now, they were about larger than the average wolf by a third. At their shoulders, they were about as tall as a half-grown calf. When you added on their thick winter coats, they looked quite large and intimidating.

As they got closer to the carriage train, the horses stamped their feet uneasily and the bodyguards on the horses tensed up in preparation and tried to calm their steeds.

Royal Prince Yang had also dismounted from his horse when Xiaocao left the carriage. He was like a knight who was protecting his 'princess' from every side.

When Xiaocao got to the front of the carriage train, she saw Little White with its head lowered and teeth showing. The white wolf's appearance had thoroughly scared a nervous young bodyguard. Little Black was next to him, peering around as if it was trying to find something.

When it saw Yu Xiaocao's figure, Little Black's eyes lit up and it leapt up with a 'whoosh' sound. Its sturdy and large figure immediately disappeared from the sights of the bodyguards. One of the bodyguards looked around carefully and saw a black figure dashing out of the corner of his eye. When he turned

around to look, the black wolf had already entered the group of people and was rushing toward the feudal princess.

“Be careful!” The sound of the bodyguard's voice was choked in his throat suddenly. He rubbed his eyes. The heavens! What did he see? He couldn't believe his eyes! Perhaps...perhaps they had all seen wrongly and these two animals were merely large dogs that looked like wolves instead of being vicious wolves?

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Little Black, 'Are you blind? From which eye did you see this wolf bite someone? As long as you don't harm this wolf's master, I'm very reserved. This wolf isn't interested even if you stretch your neck over!'

“Little Black sit down!” Yingchun didn't dare to give orders to Little White, but in order to prove that the two were a new breed of dog that appeared fierce on the surface but had a gentle temper, she decided to issue orders to the one that was easier to control.

Little Black was stunned for a moment. It turned its head to look at its master, and then decided to give its master's maidservant some face. It sat down hesitantly and sulkily rolled its eyes at the city guards.

“Little Black, hand!!” Seeing that it had given her face, Yingchun excitedly stretched out her own hands and waited for Little Black to give her the honor of shaking its hands.

Idiot! Little Black gave her a major eye roll. However, for the sake of entering the city to stay with its master and drink the tasty water, it reluctantly stretched out one of its paws and placed it on Yingchun's fair hand.

“Little Black, turn around!!” Yingchun, who was in high spirits, continued to command Little Black. Little Black turned around in a circle impatiently, and then turned to find Xiaocao to pacify it, leaving Yingchun with a proud back view. 'Master, your maidservant is such an idiot!'

Yu Xiaocao patted its proud head and smiled mischievously. She waved the bone in her hands, and then...threw it past the crowd. She threw it...

The crowd only saw a black figure flash by them like a wind. Some of them thought that they heard the sound of the wind above their heads, but they didn't see anything when they looked up. Before they had

even lowered her heads, they saw a black belly whizzed past the top of their heads. When they looked into the middle of the crowd again, the 'big black dog' had already retrieved the bone that its owner threw and returned to its owner's side.

“Good!!” Cheers came from the crowd. With the bone in its mouth, Little Black gracefully paced around the crowd before returning to its master's side. It put it back into its master's hands with an expression that seemed to be asking for comfort and praise.

Little White, who was on the side, maintained a haughty and reserved appearance. As if it was looking at an 'idiot', it 'enjoyed' its brother's performance. 'This wolf doesn't know that wolf! It's such a disgrace to the wolf clan!!'

With Royal Prince Yang, who had a dark face the entire time, in the group, the city guards didn't dare to make things difficult for them. The city guards sent a silly low-ranked soldier to provoke Little Black and Little White to see if they would attack people. However, the two only looked at the soldier like he was an idiot and even revealed a disgusted expression when he put his hand in front of their mouths.

“Heh heh, Boss, these two aren't wolves. They're just big dogs that look like wolves! I grew up in the mountains, and I've never even seen a wolf king this big! Perhaps, they're really a new breed that Royal Prince Yang brought back from overseas.” The foolish soldier rubbed Little Black's head and hugged its neck like they were close friends. It was fortunate that the one he touched was Little Black. Had it been Little White, would he still be able to say the same thing?

Little White, 'This wolf isn't going to let that stupid human touch me like that dummy Little Black!’

Seeing this, the city guard bowed to apologize to Royal Prince Yang. Royal Prince Yang snorted coldly and didn't even look at him. After being ignored, he tried to explain his own difficulties to Yu Xiaocao.

“This is your duty, so Official Wang is a responsible city guard!” Yu Xiaocao gave him face by giving him a high evaluation. After a long hold up, the group was finally allowed to enter the gates.

After entering the capital, the two acted incredibly obedient as they guarded closely beside Xiaocao's horse carriage. However, they were too eye-catching. From time to time, there would be screaming or disorder. Little Black and Little White had innocent expressions on their faces, 'What does them being cowards have to do with us?'

However, it was inevitable that such powerful and majestic 'big dogs' would attract covetous eyes. Just like now, the prodigal son of Duke Rongguo had blocked the path of the carriage.

Duke Rongguo had gotten his son, Ning Donghuan, at an old age. Duke Rongguo's wife was in her forties when she gave birth to him, so she naturally doted on him excessively. An overly benevolent mother would result in a good-for-nothing son. Using his family background and measly martial art skills, Ning Donghuan led a group of prodigal sons of wealthy families in the capital to stir-up trouble everywhere. But, with Duke Rongguo around, he didn't commit sinister crimes like harassment and murder.

In addition to causing trouble in the capital, Ning Donghuan also had another hobby, which was hunting! He had average riding and hunting skills, so he was always searching for good hounds. In the rear garden of the Duke Rongguo Estate, a large area had been used to specially raise his hounds.

The hounds in Duke Rongguo Estate were very famous in the capital. In order to make things more fun, many children of noble families liked to borrow hounds from the Ning Family when they went hunting. Ning Donghuan had an open-minded and uninhibited character, so he never refused anyone who came to borrow things from him. Therefore, although he was profligate, he was quite popular among the children of noble families in the capital.

Today, Ning Donghuan went to the suburb of the capital to hunt with his group of friends. The pedestrians all avoided them when they saw the fierce appearance of the dozen or so hounds in his hands. He had good results today, especially the stag that weighed over a hundred catties. Tomorrow, he should have a plum blossom appreciation and roasted venison banquet and invite his close friends to have some fun.

He was bringing the game home in high spirits, but all of a sudden, his normally ferocious hounds became timid and wailed sadly for some unknown reason. Some leashes went limp in their legs and couldn't walk properly. The servants, who were holding their leashes, had to drag them forward, leaving a trail of defecation.

Ning Donghuan felt very embarrassed and his heart was full of confusion. When he looked up, he saw two huge dogs on both sides of a carriage. They were about half the height of the horses that were pulling the carriage. Their dignified and striking appearance made it hard for him to look away. Weren't they the prime example of the almighty canine in his heart?

“Ahem! Please stop for a moment!!” Ning Donghuan blocked the horse carriage. As if they were super glued, his eyes were glued onto Little Black and Little White. He completely ignored the frowning and cold-faced Royal Prince Yang, who was next to the carriage.

Even if he saw him, he may not be able to make the connection between the handsome Zhu Junyang with the legendary black-faced death god. Royal Prince Yang wasn't in the same social circle as him, so they never had much interaction. Thus, it was understandable that Ning Donghuan didn't recognize him.

Yu Xiaocao poked her head out from the carriage and looked at the unfamiliar Ning Dinghuan with a frown, asking, “What's the matter?”

However, Ning Donghuan knew who Yu Xiaocao was. Due to the miserable situation of the Ministry of Appointments' Right Assistant Minister household, many of the noble families in the capital had strictly warned their children to never offend the new agricultural official, Yu Xiaocao. Otherwise, their entire family would only be able to eat dirt!

After Ning Donghuan recognized Yu Xiaocao, he had a bad feeling in his heart. It seemed like he wouldn't be able to achieve his wishes today. But, when he looked at the pair of black and white 'canines', he felt as if there were dozens of cats scratching on his heart. Thus, he decided to give it a try.

“So it's Your Grace the Feudal Princess. Please accept my, Ning Donghuan's, greeting!” It was never wrong to be polite. Even if the other party was unwilling to sell the dogs in the end, he wouldn't leave a bad impression, right...

Zhu Junyang's brows were tightly creased together, 'What does this brat want? What's with his flattering expression? Is he trying to seduce his little lass? This won't do. I must see what he wants—Oh! It's a false alarm, so he was after the two stupid wolves!!' His brows slowly relaxed and he looked as if he was waiting for a good show.

'Who's Ning Donghuan? Am I familiar with you?' However, one shouldn't hit someone who was smiling. Yu Xiaocao revealed a kind smile and asked, “Young Master Ning, is too polite. May I ask why Young Master Ning stopped this maiden's carriage?”

“That...may I know if these two dogs belong to the feudal princess's family?” Ning Donghuan's gaze had never left the two big wolves. He didn't beat around the bush and directly asked.

“That's right! They're usually raised in the mountains, so they have quite a wild temper. It's their first time in the capital, so they probably didn't offend Young Master Ning, right?” When Yu Xiaocao reached out her hands, Little Black automatically moved his head closer for its master to touch.

Seeing that the black canine was so intelligent, Ning Donghuan's desire to obtain it grew even stronger, “Feudal Princess, would you be willing to give me one of your two dogs? I'm willing to pay a lot of money to buy it!!”

He often wandered around the capital, and the good thing about this was he knew a little about everything in the city. He didn't understand why this little girl with the surname Yu bought Assistant Minister Li's old estate when the emperor had just awarded her with a property that made people envious.

However, this new feudal princess, who was born in a peasant family, had just arrived in the capital for only half a year. Even though the sales of the greenhouse vegetables were amazing, she probably didn't have much money on hand after purchasing the estate, right? So, she would probably be interested if he offered a lot of money, right? Ning Donghuan decided that, as long as the price was within ten thousand taels, he would swiftly agree to buy the dog!!

“You mean them?” Yu Xiaocao looked at the two giant wolves sitting beside the carriage, like guardians. She thought, 'Even if I sell them to you, would you be able to control them?'

Ning Donghuan looked at her brightly with full of expectant eyes, waiting for her reply. Yu Xiaocao showed a troubled expression and said, “These two are a new breed that Royal Prince Yang brought back from overseas. They have been with me since they were little palm-sized puppies, so they are like family to me. Young Master Ning, if I ask you to sell your family for money, would you?”

“Uh...” Ning Donghuan really wanted to say that he was willing to give away his younger step-siblings for free, as long as she was willing to give the two dogs to him! However, he couldn't say this out loud. He could only try asking again, “Don't you have two? You can just give me one. The price is negotiable...”

“The price isn't the problem.” Seeing that he wasn't easy to deal with, Yu Xiaocao let someone else handle the trouble, “They were given to me by Royal Prince Yang, so how can I just sell them away? If you can get the consent of Royal Prince Yang, then I'll give you one for free!”

After she said that, she looked at Zhu Junyang, who was just watching the show, with a warning gaze that said, 'See what happens if you dare to give away my Little Black and Little White!!'

Fields of Gold Chapter 479 – Jade

Although Zhu Junyang really wanted to send the two little eyesores away, he immediately spoke up when he received the look of 'help' from his future wife, "This prince gave them to you, so take good care of them! If you're short on money, just let me know! No matter how bad your financial situation is, you can't become someone who needs to sell dogs for a living!"

Ning Donghuan had finally realized that the imposing and dazzlingly handsome man beside him was the second person who his father warned him not to offend. Why was Yu Xiaocao ranked first and the fierce-looking Royal Prince Yang in second place? Of course, it was because of Duke Rongguo's self-interest.

If his son offended Royal Prince Yang, he would at most receive a severe beating. It wouldn't affect Duke Rongguo's Household in any way. (Ning Donghuan: Are you my real father ah? Did you pick me up from the streets?)

But, if they offended Yu Xiaocao, the former right assistant minister of the Ministry of Appointments was a prime example of the consequences. Duke Rongguo didn't want to lose the opportunity of eating delicious fresh greens and sweet fruits because of his unscrupulous son. Furthermore, they might not be able to buy the medicinal pills and syrups when they fell sick. They would have to take those bitter medicines, which wasn't very effective...

The first and second on the list were both in front of him, but Ning Donghuan still didn't want to give up. He couldn't move his eyes away from the two 'dogs', "Since these two dogs are so big, you probably have to waste a lot of food to raise them, right? So why don't you give me one..."

"Stop wasting our time. Even if there were twenty or two hundred dogs, this prince is still capable of raising them, let alone two! Hurry up and get out of the way. We're all tired from the long journey, so this prince needs to escort the feudal princess back to rest!" Royal Prince Yang couldn't stand these prodigal sons of wealthy families, and had an impatient look on his face.

"But..." Ning Donghuan still didn't give up.

Suddenly, a gentle voice, like a top-grade mutton fat jade, that could warm up one's heart in the cold wind could be heard, "Xiaohuan, what trouble did you cause now?"

This voice stirred the strings of a qin like a spring breeze. Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but look towards the source of the sound. What a pure and refined gentleman! He wore a long white robe and had a warm smile that could warm people's hearts on his gorgeous face. At that moment, his face appeared serene and pure like blooming spring flowers...

Speaking of beautiful men, Zhu Junyang, who was beside her, was worthy of that description. However, the person in front of them had a completely different type of beauty compared with him. His carefreeness and elegance weren't inferior to that of Royal Prince Yang's devilish charms. Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but mutter, "A beauty comparable to that of a jade and a peerless gentleman."

The still water ran deep.

The sound of the sheng could be heard as one danced on the surface of the sea;

Making beautiful flower-like ripples.

Just because you looked back once, I kept thinking about it day and night.

After you turned around, a wisp of fragrance came from afar.

The passing snow was shallow.

The scent of spring was strong.

And the smile was deep.

The emergence of a leaf led to a pursuit.

The blossoming of a flower opened up a new world.

Yearning for one person for a lifetime.

It seemed like the jade-like person was the only one left on the bustling street. Even the last trace of warm sunlight became inferior in front of him. Yu Xiaocao, who was used to the so-called beautiful men and handsome youth in her previous life, was deeply impressed by the appearance and demeanor of the person in front of her.

“Aiyo!” Yu Xiaocao, who was immersed in the temptation of the beauty, suddenly held her head and screamed. She angrily shouted at Zhu Junyang, “Why did you hit me?”

Zhu Junyang felt upset in his heart. He was very upset. No, he was extremely upset. His little lass was actually looking at another man in a daze. Her eyes were practically sucked in and unable to pull away. He acknowledged that the second son of Duke Rongguo, as the rumor said, had a unique aura and was incomparably handsome. However, he felt that he was also quite good-looking ah. With him, this gorgeous man, by her side, she still had the time to appreciate the beauty of others. This was the biggest insult to him.

“Is this prince better looking, or is he better looking?” Zhu Junyang asked childishly. Although he thought that, as a man, he shouldn't be considered about his own appearance, his little lass seemed to be a 'lecherous person'. Based on how she would occasionally look dazedly at his handsome face, it was obvious that she had no resistance to good-looking faces. Zhu Junyang felt quite happy that the little lass liked his appearance, but he had never thought that there would be a day that the lass would reveal a stunned expression upon seeing another man. Royal Prince Yang expressed, 'This prince is jealous!'

“You're both good-looking!” Yu Xiaocao looked back and forth between the two for a long time and made the conclusion after a careful comparison. One was devilishly charming, while the other refined and indifferent. They were both very pleasing to the eyes.

Zhu Junyang turned the little lass's face back to him and looked directly into her eyes. With a serious expression, he said, "You can only choose one!"

"Uh...choose what? It's not like I'm the emperor picking out whichever consort I like in front of me!" Yu Xiaocao felt that he was being somewhat unreasonable. Didn't she just take a look at a beautiful man? Was this necessary? Moreover, this maiden was just looking at him from the perspective of pure appreciation, like how one would appreciate flowers and sceneries. There wasn't any lecherous meaning, okay?

Zhu Junyang felt aggrieved, 'This prince is being unreasonable? Your eyes are practically glued to another person right in front of this prince, yet you won't even allow me to express my jealousy?'

Ning Donglan naturally couldn't ignore the fervent gaze that was on him. He looked towards the gaze and couldn't resist laughing. He was just wondering how a woman could be so unreserved and unabashed when she looked at him with a covetous gaze. It turned out that she was just an innocent child who could distinguish the beauty and ugliness of men. This child had a pair of good eyes that were full of intelligence.

"Second...Second Brother!" If there was one living thing that he could make him terrified from the bottom of his heart, then it would be his second older brother. His second brother appeared harmless, but, in fact, his heart was like a glutinous dumpling filled with sesame paste—he was a complete black-belly. Since he was young, Ning Donghuan had been disciplined by his second brother. However, he never succeeded whenever he tried to tattletale on him. For someone like his second brother, he must avoid him like the plague!

"Did you take a liking to someone else's pet? Ning Donglan nonchalantly glanced at the black and white... They were wolves, right? If he didn't see incorrectly, then they should be! But, with his third brother's character, that fool must have thought that the two wolves were a fine breed of dogs and wanted to take them home, right? When Ning Donglan thought of the lofty kennel in the middle of the back garden and the barking of the dogs, his hands itched with the urge to beat a certain someone.

"Second Brother..." Ning Donghuan watched him carefully and seemed to have noticed the change in his mood. He quickly stepped back and tried to explain himself, "I didn't have any intention to forcibly take them. We're currently discussing whether I can use a large sum of money to buy them..."

“Large sum of money?” Ning Donglan murmured and snorted, “If I remember correctly, you have already gotten your monthly allowances up to the end of next year in advance. You can't even take out a hundred taels, so where are you going to get the large sum of money?”

Yu Xiaocao pricked up her ears to listen to the brothers' conversation. Upon hearing that, she stared at Ning Donghuan with her eyes wide open. It seemed like this guy was just trying to fool others with his words earlier. Despite not having any money, he still acted in such a confident manner. In terms of being thick-skinned, this older sister really had to acknowledge you ah!

Seeing that she was staring at him, Ning Donghuan touched his nose and whispered to his second brother, “I don't, but don't you have some, Second Brother? If you want to, just one scroll of your calligraphy could be sold for tens of thousands of taels...”

“Did you steal the paper that I practiced calligraphy on again and sell it?” Ning Donglan's voice was filled with the sense of danger.

“No, I'm being falsely accused ah, Second Brother!! You have been travelling for more than half a year, so even if I want to steal it, I wouldn't be able to ah!” Ning Donghuan quickly made the gesture of swearing with a very solemn expression on his face.

Ning Donglan, who had just returned from travelling, glanced at him warningly. When he turned towards Yu Xiaocao and Royal Prince Yang, there was only a light-hearted and carefree attitude, “My younger brother has troubled the two of you. Zihong will apologize in his stead!” Zihong was Ning Donglan's courtesy name.

“It's okay...” Yu Xiaocao wanted to have a conversation with the polite and handsome man, but she was cut off by Zhu Junyang.

“He is him, and you are you! He's already an adult, yet he still needs his older brother to help him clean up after him? If so, why is he still running around outside? He should just hide in Duchess Rongguo's embrace and be a little baby!” Zhu Junyang's poisonous tongue was only aimed at people he didn't like. At this time, he was extremely dissatisfied with this handsome face in front of him.

Ning Donglan withdrew the faint smile on his face. He stood ramrod straight and looked directly at Royal Prince Yang, who was looking down at them while sitting on his horse. There seemed to be a flash of lightning and storm between them.

“Young Master Ning, don't mind him. This is just how Royal Prince Yang usually acts!” Yu Xiaocao also thought that Zhu Junyang had gone overboard with his words. The other party's third brother didn't do anything unforgivable. Didn't he just have the impossible desire to buy my family's Little Black? He didn't try to forcibly take it from them! However, that was probably thanks to her identity as the feudal princess. Had it been someone else, would he really not rob them?

“How does this prince usually act?” Zhu Junyang's voice was filled with a sense of danger. The temperature around him seemed to have dropped several degrees and it felt like a snowstorm was coming. The bodyguards around him were all on alert for fear that their master would get angry at any moment. Xiaocao's two little maidservants had never seen this side of Royal Prince Yang. They were so scared that their faces had turned pale. They hugged each other tightly as their teeth chattered, making a clear 'chattering' sound.

Yu Xiaocao quickly pacified him, “You have a great temperament, but your mouth never spares anyone!”

“Humph!” At least she was tactful. Zhu Junyang withdrew his imposing force, but he still felt somewhat uncomfortable in his heart, “This prince naturally wouldn't give face to those that I don't like!”

“Feudal Princess, on another day, Zihong will take my younger brother to personally visit and apologize to you. We won't delay the feudal princess from going home any longer!” Ning Donglan was surprised at Royal Prince Yang's tolerance towards Yu Xiaocao. Of course, he wouldn't have a conflict with the royal prince on the streets, but he still had to say some courteous words.

“No need! This prince and Feudal Princess Jinan won't take this trivial matter to heart!” This shameless brat actually wanted to use this excuse to look for his little lass. No way! He must put an end to any possibility of interaction between the two! Zhu Junyang had already taken Ning Donglan as a lifelong enemy and was prepared to be alert at all times.

Seeing that the dangerous situation had been resolved, Ning Donghuan, who was hiding behind his second brother, stuck his head out and weakly said, “Feudal Princess, please consider it again. The price is negotiable...”

“There's no need for reconsideration. I have already said that they are the same as family to me. If I asked you to sell your second brother to me, would you be willing?” The expression on the other three people's faces all changed due to the example that Yu Xiaocao used.

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Zhu Junyang, 'Hmph, Yu Xiaocao, you're being so unfaithful. Not to mention that you're staring at the other party and coveting his beauty, but you also want to buy him and keep him at home? Do you think that this prince is dead?'

Ning Donglan, 'This child speaks so recklessly. Had it not been for her young age, I would have thought that she was flirting with me!'

Ning Donghuan, 'Feudal Princess, if you like him, please take him away. I won't take a single coin. Gods knows how much I want to get away from my wicked second brother!! Why don't I exchange my second brother for one of your dogs?'

Yu Xiaocao realized that she had said the wrong thing, so she laughed hollowly and said, “Although my analogy isn't very appropriate, my meaning is apparent. I won't sell them. Then...both Young Master Ning, let's bid our farewells here and never meet again...”

When the carriage moved, Ning Donghuan almost rushed up to pull on the reins. Seeing his rather forceful movement, Little Black, who was originally looking at the new surroundings with a foolish expression, suddenly showed a fierce gaze and revealed its sharp teeth, which appeared very gleaming and frightening. Ning Donghuan's beloved dogs cried in sorrow and couldn't even stand up due to their weakened legs.

The onlookers cried out in fear and fled away for fear that the big fierce dog would bite anyone it caught. When Xiaocao, who had gone back into the carriage, saw the situation, she softly called “Little Black!” With that, the previously ferocious 'big dog' instantly returned to a fawning attitude. It went back next to the carriage and tried to stick its head into the window. However, its head was too big and ended up being stuck.

Yu Xiaocao pushed hard to get its mouth out. Seeing Little Black's sad expression, she patted its big head and pacified it, “It's getting late, so let's go home!”

'Miss Yu, since you're reluctant to give away these two, when they have pups, can you give me one?' Ning Donghuan still didn't want to give up. It wasn't easy to encounter a world-renowned canine, moreover, two of them at the same time. Just one of them was more powerful than all of his hounds together. Thus, he really didn't want to lose this chance.

"Let's talk about it again when they have pups!" Yu Xiaocao shrugged her shoulders without giving a definite answer. Her Little Black and Little White were both male, and there was no way that she could control when they had pups.

"It's a promise then..." There was no way that Ning Donghuan, who was obsessed with dogs, couldn't identify the gender of the two wolfhounds. "Tomorrow, I'll send over several dogs that are going through the dogs that are in the heat. Hehe, what do you think?"

'Send dogs over? So that they can be extra meals for Little Black and Little White?' Oh right, she had never seen Little Black and Little White bite other people's dogs when they were in the village. On one hand, it might be because the dogs in the village always ran away in fright when they saw the two of them. On the other hand, the two were very confident about their identity so they were unwilling to bully the weak. She was curious whether the two would bite dogs if they were hungry.

"Let's go! No matter how much you look at them, you still won't be able to obtain them!!" After the horse carriage had gone far away, Ning Donglan kicked his third brother's, who was still looking eagerly at them, butt.

Ning Donghuan's eyes darted around, and then he suddenly looked at his handsome second brother with bright eyes, like a big dog begging for food. Ning Donglan pinched the area between his eyebrows, sighed, and asked, "What do you want? Just say it and don't make that disgusting face."

"Heh heh..." Ning Donghuan laughed hollowly. He moved closer to his second brother and fawned, "Second Brother, you're the top among the capital's Four Gentlemen. You're the best in terms of appearance and talent. You should have also seen the stunned look in the feudal princess's eyes earlier, so..."

"Use human speech!" Ning Donglan glared at him with contempt. He and his older brother were both intelligent and steady, but his third brother was completely different. He had turned into such a ridiculous person. He seriously didn't want to admit that he was his real younger brother!

“I'll guarantee with my own reputation that the feudal princess definitely likes you... Aiya, Second Brother, why did you hit me again?” Before Ning Donghuan could finish speaking, his second brother had interrupted him with a smack.

Ning Donglan gave him a sidelong glance and snorted, “Reputation? Do you even have any? Please think before speaking, okay! Didn't Father already say that we can offend anyone except Miss Yu? You're damaging her reputation in public. If she hears about this, you can just gnaw on cabbages and radishes in the future!”

“Uh...” Although Ning Donghuan was a meat lover, he wasn't someone who only consumed meat. He had a rather balanced diet. He couldn't help but shiver at the thought of the lack of good food on the table in the future, “Second Brother, aren't we just having a chat between ourselves? There's no way that it would reach other people's ears. As your younger brother, I must state the facts. If the feudal princess is really interested in you, you should just sacrifice yourself a bit!”

If Miss Yu became his second sister-in-law, wouldn't those two wolfhounds belong to the Ning Family? As her younger brother-in-law, she probably wouldn't mind lending them to him for a few days, right? Moreover, after Miss Yu married over, they could have greenhouses in their family's farmstead, and they could plant all the vegetables and fruits that they want to eat! In that way, they wouldn't have to send people to line up in front of the fruits and vegetables shop every morning... A suspicious liquid substance was flowing out of Ning Donghuan's mouth.

If they weren't in the middle of the street, Ning Donglan would have kicked this fool far away! This brat seriously didn't have a filter! Not to mention the fact that there was only a moment of astonishment and no romantic interest in her gaze at all, but the possessive attitude of Royal Prince Yang, who was beside her, alone was enough to show that Miss Yu was already taken!

To offend the powerful and unapproachable Royal Prince Yang for the sake of a girl, who hadn't even grown up, was something that anyone with a brain wouldn't do! Moreover, how old was Miss Yu? Twelve? Thirteen? He was already twenty-five years old. If he was born a few years earlier, he would be old enough to be her father. How could he take an interest in such a young child?

When Ning Donghuan got home, he received a beating from his second brother. He complained to Duchess Rongguo, “Mother, Second Brother is bullying me again! Be honest, don't you think that my words are right?”

In regard to her second son, who was talented but not very close to her, Duchess Rongguo always spoke in a slightly careful manner. Although she felt bad for her youngest son, she didn't dare to agree with him, "Your second brother is right to be concerned. For marriage, the mutual affections between the two sides is very important. Otherwise, it's not a marriage but a feud! Although this Miss Yu was quite capable, she was still young, and it's still hard to determine her temperament. Your second brother appears to be indifferent to everyone and everything, but in fact, when someone with such temperament falls in love, the feelings will last a lifetime. So, I don't really want him to have anything to do with Miss Yu..."

"But...Mother, those two dogs are extremely rare fine breeds..." Ning Donghuan hoped that his second brother, who was seven to eight years older than him, would be able to have a good life partner, but he also couldn't let go of Little Black and Little White.

Duchess Rongguo poked his head helplessly and said, "It's no wonder that your second brother needs to discipline you. You want to sell your second brother for the sake of two dogs?"

Ning Donghuan's head drooped like a defeated rooster, and he could only say, "Tomorrow, I'll send over several good-looking female dogs. I don't believe that there are only cats that don't eat fishes!"

Little Black, 'This wolf isn't a cat, and I'm not interested in female dogs! Even when the little female wolves in the mountains tried to flirt with me, this wolf can still resist the temptation. You want to know what this wolf yearns for? Of course, it's the tasty water in my master's hands. This wolf will take as much as I can get!'

It was almost dusk by the time they returned to the Yu Estate. The two families lived not too far from each other, so Lady Fang had calculated the time that the Yu Family would arrive at the capital and came to the Yu Estate in the early morning to help tidy the house. The kitchen was also stocked up with fresh fruits and vegetables. Needless to say, things like grains, seasoning, and so on had been prepared a long time ago.

A small portion of the servants of the Yu Estate were transferred from the General's Estate to help out, while the rest were bought from the official intermediaries. There were servants who had been dismissed by families in dire situations and servants from families that had committed a crime. There were also some servants who were strictly trained to serve the families of officials. Now that there was a feudal princess in the Yu Family, they were no longer considered unimportant low-ranked officials. Thus, the head of the official intermediaries were especially attentive!

“They're here, they're here!!” The ones waiting at the entrance were the doorkeeper, the steward of the outer court, and Tanchun. Upon seeing the carriage turning onto the street in front of the house, the young girl exclaimed with a crisp voice that was full of excitement.

“Open the door. Quickly open the door to welcome the masters to the capital!” The steward in charge of the outer court was selected from the official intermediaries. Allegedly, he used to be a steward of a certain official who had committed a crime. He was capable, but his loyalty needed further observation.

When the horse carriage stopped in front of the main entrance, the doorkeeper tactfully placed a small stool beside the carriage as a footrest. Zhu Junyang got off his horse, went forward, and stretched out his hand to help Xiaocao off the carriage. The servants in front of the Yu Estate and imperial bodyguards, who followed him to Dongshan Village, were astounded upon seeing this. To be able to have Royal Prince Yang support her off the carriage, they must reevaluate the importance of their masters in their heart.

Some other servants swiftly put a footrest beside the carriage in the back. Yu Hai jumped out of the carriage first. He had originally wanted to ride a horse, but it was more comfortable to sit in the carriage in the cold winter. Thus, he was persuaded to ride in the carriage with his wife by his children.

Madam Liu got off the carriage with the help of her husband. When she saw that the grand entrance and high walls weren't much different than that of their house in Dongshan Village, the fear in her heart gradually disappeared. So what if this was the capital? The officials in the capital didn't live more luxuriously than them ah!

However, she felt somewhat uncomfortable with these pretty maidservants, who eagerly came to support her. They were all delicate young girls who had hands that were more fair and tender than her, yet they served her cautiously for fear that they would make mistakes.

The clever Tanchun noticed the slight awkwardness of the madam, so she quickly said to Erya, who was standing on the side foolishly, “You're Older Sister Erya, right? It's quite cold outside, so you should quickly help the madam inside!”

Upon hearing her words, Erya, who didn't know what to do in front of this group of pretty maidservants, finally found her place. She smiled gratefully at Tanchun, and then walked up to Madam Liu. In a silly manner, she said, “Madam, Erya will support you. Be careful when walking up the steps!”

With someone familiar around, Madam Liu gradually relaxed. She looked back at her children, who were surrounded by the servants, and her youngest daughter, who had carefully made all the arrangements. After that, she nodded and quietly entered the main entrance.