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As soon as they entered the main entrance, they saw a screen wall against a decorative mountain. On top, the edge of the eaves were painted blue and there were patterns of pines and wintersweet on both sides. The circular décor in the middle was a landscape pattern. It appeared elegant and dignified.

With the support of Erya and Tanchun, Madam Liu walked to the door that connected the outer and inner courts. After walking a short distance, they had arrived at the festooned gate of the second-gate courtyard. With the help of the maidservants, Madam Liu walked up a few steps and walked through the festooned gate. As soon as she entered, a spacious and tidy courtyard appeared in front of her. When she looked to the left and right, there were corridors that connected the side buildings and main building. In the middle, there was an intersecting corridor paved with bluestone. The left and right sides were separated by a festooned gate.

There was a moon-shaped gate next to the wing rooms on both sides, which led to the east and west courtyards. On the east side, there was an exquisite garden with pavilions, a small bridge above a stream, and decorative stone mountains. It looked quite elegant. The courtyard on the west side used to be a school building, but now it had turned into the living quarters and study of the youngest son in the family, Little Shitou.

They followed the bluestone paved passage and quickly reached the main building, which had three rooms. There were also three side rooms on both sides of the building. The back of the building was surrounded by a terrace, which was spacious and tidy.

“You guys are finally here!” Lady Fang received the news that they would arrive today, so she had come to the Yu Estate to help out early in the morning. She had personally checked every single room, for fear that her adopted relatives weren't being taken care of properly. Before, when she was in Dongshan Village, the Yu Family had often taken care of her. Now that they were in the capital, she must pay special attention and help her goddaughter with the arrangements.

Upon seeing Lady Fang, Madam Liu's slightly anxious feelings were finally completely relaxed. She went up with a smile, pulled on Lady Fang's hands, and said, “Aiya, I felt like I was dreaming the whole way here. My heart is finally at ease now that I see Older Sister Xia. This is such a beautiful house, is it really ours?”

“Of course! It's really hard to find good houses in the capital. I had my husband wander around the capital for two or three months, yet we still couldn't find a suitable place. There were many people

eyeing this estate when it became vacant. Fortunately, we acted fast! You guys are also blessed. We were able to find a suitable house right after you guys made the decision to temporarily stay in the capital!" The Fang Family's residence was similar to this estate. It was also a three-sectioned estate with side courtyards. But, after all, it was the home of a military official, so it wasn't decorated in such a comfortable and elegant manner, like the Yu Estate.

Madam Liu thanked her with a smile, "Many thanks to Older Brother Fang and Older Sister Xia! If Xiaocao didn't say that she bought a house in the capital and it wasn't good to leave it empty in the first year, we wouldn't have wasted so much energy to come all the way here..."

Lady Fang smiled and said, "Younger Sister Liu, you're thanking the wrong person! It was Royal Prince Yang who handled all the matters regarding the purchase of the estate. He put in quite a lot of effort. It was because he personally handled the matters that we were able to buy the estate at such an affordable price! Oh, look at the time. You must be tired after traveling for so many days, right? First, go wash up and eat something. Rest earlier tonight. Tomorrow, my husband and I will treat you guys to a meal at Zhenxiu Restaurant to welcome your arrival."

Lady Fang, who originally had straightforward temperament, spoke to Madam Liu like she had lived in Dongshan Village for a long time. She was very amiable and there were no barriers at all.

Linglong and the maidservants in the estate took the Yu Family's belongings to their own rooms. Some of the important items were locked in the storage room. Yu Hang settled in the east wing, which didn't have grand furnishing but was very comfortable. Xiaocao and her sister lived in the west wing, which had three rooms.

Originally, the Yu couple had wanted Old Yu to live in the main building. However, he refused resolutely. With no other choice, Yu Hai and his wife had his father settle down in one of the three rooms in the east wing and become neighbors with Yu Hang.

After the Yu Family rested for a bit, a young maidservant came to tell them that dinner was ready. The dinner was prepared by the female cooks in the kitchen. In order to show their skills to the new masters, they made great efforts. There were a good variety of ingredients available. Not only did they have a variety of meat, but they also had all kinds of fruits and vegetables. The family had a lively and delicious dinner.

After dinner, Lady Fang noticed the tired appearance of the Yu Family members, so she got up and bid her farewells. Royal Prince Yang stayed for a little longer before leaving. The members of the Yu Family washed up with the help of the servants and went to rest.

Xiaolian originally lived in a separate room, but she couldn't sleep well upon arriving in a new environment. Thus, she took her pillow and went to sleep on the same kang bed as Xiaocao. The winter in the capital was cold and dry. When fixing up the house, Xiaocao had specially ordered to leave a room in both the east and west wings vacant to put in a kang bed. As long as they were comfortable with their living environment, it didn't matter what others thought. The floor in the main building was heated, so the room was as warm as spring. Thus, they didn't need to add anything to it.

“Younger Sister, is this house really ours?” Xiaolian was no longer that ignorant little girl in the countryside from five years ago. When doing business at the docks, she had met merchants from all over the world. Hence, she naturally knew the astonishing price of the houses in the capital and how hard it was to find a house.

Along the way, she had quietly observed the surroundings from the window. The people living nearby were all wealthy and respectable families, and their neighbors were all families of officials. The houses in this kind of location weren't easily obtainable! Although this house wasn't as big as their house in the countryside, it was still a three-sectioned official's estate with side courtyards. It must have been very difficult to buy this house!

Lying on the warm kang bed, Yu Xiaocao turned over to face Xiaolian and said with a smile, “If it's not ours, then whose house is it? Shall I show you the house deed? Do you want to check if our father's name is written on it?”

“Haha! Sometimes, I'm really afraid that these good days are all a dream. When I wake up, we are still living in the house with our grandmother. Our family is still cramped together in the rundown room beside the pigpen. Every day, there are endless chores and we also have to listen to our grandmother's shrill scolding. We also can't fill our stomachs.... I can tolerate all of these, but I'm most afraid that when you fall ill, our grandmother will tell us to throw you into the mass grave in the southern side of the mountains!” Xiaolian slightly choked up as she spoke.

Xiaocao also teared up. She patted Xiaolian's shoulders and comforted in a soft voice, “Rest assured that it's all in the past! There are still good days ahead of us. We must look ahead! You just have to wait to be a young miss of an official's household. When the time comes, I'll have my godmother find a good marriage for you and prepare a lavish wedding for you...”

“Humph! You only know how to tease me! How old am I that you're already talking about my marriage?” Xiaolian blushed slightly as she thought of that tall, handsome, and tanned youth from a fisherman's family. It must be because the kang bed was too hot. Yes, that must be it!

“You're not that young anymore. You'll be thirteen next year. In the previous dynasty, wasn't it common for people to get engaged at thirteen and married at fifteen?” Yu Xiaocao teased.

Xiaolian glared at her and said, “Don't just talk about me! We're born on the same day, so aren't you also going to be thirteen? Shouldn't you also start thinking about your marriage?”

“Do I still need to worry about my marriage? Isn't there Royal Prince Yang around? He has the status, the looks, and the ability. How many sons of officials in the capital can compare with him?” Yu Xiaocao showed off shamelessly.

Xiaolian widened her eyes and asked with a look of disbelief, “Are you really settled on Royal Prince Yang? He gives off the impression of being very cold and bad-tempered. His family background is also much higher than our family's. Last time, Younger Brother taught me a phrase—'incompatible due to one's superiority'. Are you two really suitable?”

“Only the feet will know if the shoes fit properly; only one's heart will know if they're suitable for each other. At present, he cares about me and I don't dislike him. So let's just leave it at that for now. There's still several years until I become an adult. At that time, if he doesn't change his heart and treats me wholeheartedly, then why not marry him?” Yu Xiaocao smiled gently.

Xiaolian stared at her for a long time, and then said, “Younger Sister, sometimes you give off the impression that you're a wise elder, but there are also times when you seem like a childish kid. There are a lot of contradictions on you. Just like the matter of choosing a husband. Others would be bashful when talking about it, but it seems so natural when you're the one talking about it...”

“What do you mean? Are you saying that I'm unabashed and shameless?” Yu Xiaocao reached into her blanket and attacked her armpits.

Xiaolian screamed and laughed as she begged for mercy, "No, I wasn't trying to belittle you. I don't know how to express it. Sometimes, I feel like you shouldn't be born in the Great Ming Dynasty because you're too reckless. You shouldn't be shackled down by common customs."

"Wow! You're starting to talk in a scholarly manner after studying with Younger Brother for a few days? Not bad ah. It's such a surprise to hear such high-level terms from you!" Yu Xiaocao stopped attacking her and evaded the subject under discussion.

As the sisters were chatting, the sudden scream from a maidservant outside and Yingchun's scolding could be heard, "What are you shouting about? I won't spare you guys if you disturb the masters' rest. Don't make a fuss. These two are pets raised by the masters. They appear frightening, but they aren't scary at all!"

"Yingchun, what's the matter?" Yu Xiaocao poked her head out from the quilt.

Yingchun carried Tiny in from outside and said with a smile, "Young Miss, it's nothing! A little maidservant got scared by Little Black and Little White. They are both lying in front of the door of the west wing, so we should do something about it. Where would be a suitable place for them to stay?"

Yu Xiaocao thought about it and said, "Aren't there three rooms in the west wing? Xiaolian and I each have a room. There's still one that's vacant, so why don't we just let them live there for now?"

Yingchun's eyes darted around. With her head lowered, she stroked the head of the obedient and cute Tiny in her arms and said, "Then let's have Tiny stay with this servant..."

"If the person you're sharing the room with doesn't mind the smell, then it's up to you!" In actuality, Tiny was very obedient and would never relieve itself everywhere. At night, as long as the door was left slightly opened, it would find a place to relieve itself.

"Tiny doesn't smell at all!" Yingchun said with a grin. She shared a room with Tanchun. Tanchun also seemed to really like the little roe deer, so she wouldn't disagree. There weren't any thirteen or fourteen year old girls who didn't like cute pets.

After she said that, Wutong came in. Seeing the little roe deer in Yingchun's hands and her excited expression, she said sullenly, "Today, I'm on duty with Qing'er. You should quickly bring the little roe deer back and rest. If you can't get up tomorrow, the deduction of your monthly wage will be doubled!"

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Qing'er was the maidservant assigned to serve Xiaolian. She had two personal maidservants and two lower ranked maidservants. They were all named after colors. Her two personal maidservants, Qing'er and Bi'er, were around the same age as Wutong. Hong'er and Cheng'er, who were younger, were twelve or thirteen years old and also very quick-witted.

Xiaocao and Xiaolian hadn't seen each other in a long time, so they had endless things to talk about. However, it was mostly Xiaolian talking while Xiaocao quietly listened with a smile. They weren't used to being served by others at all times, so they told Wutong and Qing'er to go rest in the side room. Qing'er was alright, but Wutong, who had gone along to Dongshan Village, was so exhausted from the trip that she immediately fell asleep upon touching the pillow. There were two people sleeping in the side room, so the sisters didn't continue to chat. After speaking for a while, they also went to sleep.

The weather was also very good the next day. They were living in their own home, so there was no harm in sleeping in. Yu Xiaocao, who was lying on the warm kang bed, huddled inside the quilt, unwilling to get up. The Yu Family members were used to working and waking up early, so they had gotten up early in the morning. Madam Liu still wasn't accustomed to having others help her change and wash up. It made her feel very awkward and restrained. If they were at Dongshan Village, she would have already rolled up her sleeves and went to work in the greenhouse in the backyard. Now, she was just sitting in the parlor room with a cup of honey water in her hands and didn't know what to do.

"Madam, Miss He from the Grand Princess Royal Estate and Miss Yuan from the Prime Minister Estate came for a visit to congratulate Second Young Miss for moving to a new house..." A maidservant, who appeared very likeable, came in to report with a smile on her face.

Madam Liu looked at her. What was her name again? There was too much going on yesterday. The maids all wore the same clothes and they were all around the same age. Thus, she couldn't immediately tell them apart. Wait, hold on. What did she just say? The young miss of the Grand Princess Royal Estate? The young miss of the Prime Minister Estate? Cao'er had only been in the capital for a short period of time, yet she had already become acquainted with so many noble young misses?

"Uh..." Seeing that the young maidservant was quietly waiting for her orders with her head bowed, Madam Liu pondered for a moment and asked, "Is Second Young Miss awake?"

“In reply to Madam, she's not! Perhaps she was too tired yesterday,” Xiaohuan replied in a soft voice.

Madam Liu frowned slightly and was somewhat at a loss. After a moment of hesitation, she said, “Wake up the second young miss first and ask her what to do.”

Pipa, who Xiaocao assigned to temporarily serve Madam Liu, softly reminded, “Madam, do you think we should invite the two young misses inside first and serve them some tea and pastries, so as to not neglect the guests?”

“Pipa is right. Let's do as she suggested!” Madam Liu quietly nodded, but her heart wasn't as calm as she appeared. The two girls were either a relative of the emperor or the daughter of a high-ranking official. She really didn't know how she should interact with them.

Fortunately, when Yu Xiaocao heard that the two older sisters had come for a visit, she swiftly washed up as if she was at war. She casually combed her hair into two braids and arrived just before He Wanning and Yuan Xueyan reached the parlor room.

“Younger Sister Xiaocao, this isn't right. You didn't even tell us that you're moving. If you did, we could do a housewarming for you ah!” He Wanning hadn't even appeared, but her voice could already be heard.

Yu Xiaocao went up to them with a smile. Seeing that their hands were empty, she joked, “Didn't you guys come for a housewarming? Why aren't there any presents ah?”

“Humph! You didn't even send us invitations, so why should we bring gifts?” He Wanning pinched her smooth and tender face and gently pulled it.

Yu Xiaocao rubbed her face and glared at her. Then she said to Yuan Xueyan, “Older Sister Yuan, look at her. She's bullying the young and weak.”

Yuan Xueyan smiled faintly and said, “Wanning, don't forget that you came to ask for a favor. If you offend her now, you might end up crying later!”

As they spoke, they arrived in the parlor room. Madam Liu stood up and gave them a slightly awkward smile. Fortunately, He Wanning had a straightforward personality. She quickly said, "Madam Yu, you're our elder, so please quickly sit down. Please forgive us for coming uninvited, Madam Yu."

"It's okay, it's okay... Cao'er, entertain the distinguished guests well. I'll go check on the stewards in the estate. Young misses, don't be courteous. Just treat this as your own home. I'll take my leave now." Madam Liu felt that the other parties wouldn't be comfortable with her around, so she got up to return to her room.

"Madam Yu, please do!" He Wanning watched Madam Liu leave, and then whispered to Xiaocao, "You take after your mother. You have fair skin, big eyes, and a delicate appearance. You and your mother both have such smooth, fair, and soft skin, is it because the environment in Tanggu produces a lot of beauties?"

Yu Xiaocao thought of the villagers, who had dark skin due to being constantly blown by the sea breeze. She giggled and said, "We're born beautiful, and it has nothing to do with the environment. As for the reason why our skin is so good, it's probably due to the handmade soap that we use and the flower tea that we frequently drink."

He Wanning touched her face, which had become much smoother, and said with a smile, "I must say, since I started using the handmade soap that you gave me, my skin isn't dry anymore and it has also become much smoother. My grandmother also said my skin looks fairer recently! I'm almost done with that piece of soap. When is your shop going to open ah? Older Sister Yuan said that you're doing some sort of membership system for that club of yours? What exactly is it? Quickly tell me."

Yu Xiaocao signaled Yingchun with her eyes and pointed at the fragrant flower tea on the table as she said, "This is the jasmine tea that I personally made. It tastes quite good. Try it! There's also honey cakes, which are new pastries that I told the kitchen to specially make."

After drinking a sip of jasmine tea, which had a strong scent of flowers, He Wanning exclaimed, "Though you came from the countryside, you're much more knowledgeable than us so-called noble young ladies. Let's use today's tea and pastries as an example. It tastes much better than all the teahouses and pastries shops in the capital! Tell me, what's the benefit of this jasmine tea?"

"Jasmine tea has the effects of clearing the liver, improving eyesight, and producing saliva to slake thirst. It can also relieve one's mood and delay aging. It's good for one's mind and body." Yu Xiaocao picked up



a piece of honey cake and ate it in small bites. She got dragged out of bed early in the morning, and thus she hadn't eaten anything at all."

When He Wanning heard that it had so many benefits, she quickly drank the entire cup in one breath. Then she said to Wutong, who was waiting on the side, "Give me another cup. Younger Sister Xiaocao, does your mother often drink jasmine tea? She looks very young and doesn't seem like someone with such a grown daughter!"

Upon seeing her embarrassing appearance, the elegant and indifferent Yuan Xueyan quietly glared at her. She seriously didn't want to admit that this shameless girl was her close friend. However, the jasmine tea had so many benefits that she also couldn't help but lower her head to take a sip. The fragrant scent dispersed in her mouth. Disregarding the effects of the tea, the taste alone was enough for it to be popular among people.

"My mother is thirty-one years old and has only started looking younger in these past few years. In the past, she had to do hard labor, and thus looked very haggard..." Since Yu Xiaocao often saw Madam Liu, she never really noticed her gradual change. After hearing He Wanning's words, she realized that her mother did look younger than when she first transmigrated over. It was mainly because her complexion had gotten much better.

"Then it must be because of these flower teas that you made! I don't care. With our friendship, you must let me be a member when your shop opens. You must also save me a portion of those limited flower teas and products." Although He Wanning didn't understand what a membership was, she reckoned that it wasn't someone bad. Thus, she decided to occupy a place first.

"Isn't that a given?" After she said that, Yu Xiaocao explained the membership system to her, "The membership system will have four levels. The lowest level is bronze members, which is only eligible to those who have spent over two thousand taels. They can get a 5% discount on all goods and services. Silver members, which is the next level, are people who have spent over ten thousand taels. They can enjoy a 10% discount. Those who consume over fifty thousand taels are eligible to be gold members. In addition to getting a 20% discount all on goods and services, they won't be restricted on a quota for the limited items. The highest level is diamond members, which is only for those who have spent more than two hundred thousand taels. Diamond members can enjoy a lifetime discount of 50% and the privilege of trying new products and services first. They will be provided with unlimited quantities of the limited items. All membership cards can only be used by the applicants themselves. If you lend it out, then your membership will be directly canceled."

This was Yu Xiaocao's initial idea for the membership system. It was also Yuan Xueyan's first time hearing her explain the details. She inwardly admired her for her boldness and means of doing things. Needless to say, He Wanning couldn't help but exclaim, "Oh my! Diamond members need to spend two hundred thousand taels of silver? That's a whole lot of money ah! But there's no lack of wealthy people in the capital. As long as the products are good, there will be people willingly delivering money to you guys! I'm not that greedy, so I don't need a diamond membership card. I'll be contented with a gold membership card..."

Yu Xiaocao exchanged eye contact with Yuan Xueyan, and then said with a smile, "Older Sister He, aren't you looking down on us? As the close friend of the two biggest shareholders of the beauty and health club, we definitely have to give you diamond membership ah! But, of course, if you really don't want it, then let's forget..."

"Who said I don't want it? I'll be more than happy!!" He Wanning looked at her with an expression that said 'I didn't misjudge you'.

"When things are rare, it becomes precious. For now, I only prepared ten diamond membership cards. The three of us will each have one. I'll send two to the empress so that she can give it out as a reward. There's also my godmother. The remaining five are for those rich consumers..."

Yu Xiaocao had originally wanted to save one for Madam Liu, but with her personality, she definitely wouldn't go by herself. Anyway, those with the diamond card had the qualification to bring one extra person along. At that time, she could just bring her to enjoy the various services. As for the other goods, that was even more simple. She could just buy them back for her whole family to use.

The membership cards had already been made a while ago. Royal Prince Yang contacted a famous blacksmith to make the cards. According to Xiaocao's request and repeated testing, a type of alloy steel was made by chance. However, due to low quantity, it was only used to make the diamond membership cards.

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The other membership cards, on the other hand, were made of thin iron sheets plated with bronze, silver and gold. The decorations on the cards were also different, with the bronze card featuring auspicious clouds, the silver card featuring the qilin, and the gold card featuring the vermilion bird spreading its wings.

Yu Xiaocao gave He Wanning and Yuan Xueyan each a membership card that gleamed bright and silvery. It was carved in the form of a relief, with a large, shining diamond in it.

Yuan Xueyan had read a lot of books, but she had never seen a description of this material in any book before. The diamond card was hard and had low malleability. She repeatedly scrutinized the membership card with a look of seriousness on her face and muttered, "This material, if it is used to craft weapons..."

Yu Xiaocao laughed heartlessly, "Older Sister Yuan, you thought of the same thing as Royal Prince Yang. This alloy was obtained by chance during smelting and it's not available in large quantities. There's not much that we can do with it except to make membership cards. However, Royal Prince Yang has already invited that blacksmith to the smelting workshop under the Ministry of Works, and he's been working day and night with those artisans under the Ministry of Works in hopes that the smelting method can be determined soon so that they can produce better weapons."

Yuan Xueyan's eyes sparkled, 'People always said that Royal Prince Yang doesn't do anything and won't become a successful person, but it seems that he still has an eye for politics. The emperor wasn't wrong in his choice—Royal Prince Yang might become a dark horse that will appear in the upper-class circle in the future, an able subject under the emperor!

He Wanning fiddled around with her membership card in fascination. Then, suddenly, she solemnly said, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, I've actually come to ask for a favor."

"Older Sister He is too polite. As long as I'm able to help, I definitely won't stand by." Seeing her seriousness, Yu Xiaocao also treated the matter with utmost seriousness.

"The truth is, it's somewhat unbecoming of me, a girl of marriageable age to be asking you this, but I know you're not the kind of person who holds to worldly ideals, so I've dared to come ask for your help," He Wanning paused, then, lowering her voice, she asked, "I heard that...Lady Fang only conceived her beloved son after taking your prescriptions?"

In her heart, Yu Xiaocao understood her reason. She had been in the capital for half a year, and she hadn't exactly been cooped up in her house, so naturally, she would have heard of some rumors and gossip before. Ever since the Grand Princess Royal married her husband, she had never had much luck with children. She only gave birth to He Wanning's father and an aunt of He Wanning's, who had died at a young age. He Wanning's father also only had her and her older brother.

When it came down to He Wanning's brother, they had not seen any legitimate children conceived although he had been married for three years. He Wanning's brother and sister-in-law were quite close, and could even be considered childhood sweethearts, but for the sake of the continuity of the bloodline, He Wanning's sister-in-law heartachingly made one of her maidservants into her husband's bed-servant.

That bed-servant put in quite the effort and conceived a child not long after. After ten months of pregnancy, she gave birth to the eldest concubine-born daughter. However, ever since she was born, neither the legitimate wife nor the bed-servant had any stirrings in their wombs.

He Wanning's sister-in-law was quite virtuous. She took in a few more concubines for her husband, but it had been more than a year and none of them had shown any signs of a pregnancy. The Grand Royal Princess's Household had yet to produce their third generation heir, and this matter had become the matter of concern of the entire residence.

When Lan Fang had given birth to Lin'er in her advanced age, the Grand Princess Royal had let her daughter-in-law visit to ask for her secret recipe to conceiving a child, but Lady Fang did not have any secret recipes, and only said that it was because her goddaughter had helped her to condition her body. At that time, Yu Xiaocao was still far away in Dongshan Village, and though the Grand Princess Royal had the intention to pay her a visit to ask for her secret, she was still prudent and did not visit them unexpectedly.

When the Grand Princess Royal heard her granddaughter mention that she was quite good friends with the goddaughter of General Fang, she was once again tempted to visit them and ask for the secret recipe. He Wanning's brother was older than her by eight years, so she had grown up being pampered by him. This was one of the reasons why she was so arrogant and difficult. However, she only acted like that around people that she disliked, so usually, she was still quite well-liked by others. Once she heard that her grandmother intended to ask for the secret to conceiving a child for her older brother and sister-in-law, He Wanning was naturally obligated to take on the grave task of testing the waters.

Yu Xiaocao was aware that she asked this on behalf of her older brother and sister-in-law, so she said, "I've read from an old book that the reason a person is infertile differs from person to person. For example, it's only because my godfather was suffering from an old injury from war that my godparents had difficulty conceiving. The problem naturally faded away once I managed to nurse him back to health."

If she had agreed straightaway, then He Wanning might not be so convinced, but she felt that Yu Xiaocao's reasoning made sense and thus she breathed a sigh of relief, "Younger Sister Xiaocao might've heard some rumors of my family's situation. My older brother is already twenty-five years old this year

and he's been married for nearly eight years, but he still has not had a son. A fortune teller once said our He Family would have difficulty conceiving heirs, and that we really can't rush it, but I don't believe him. I heard that you had been conditioning Lady Fang's body the whole time before she gave birth to your little brother in her advanced age of forty, which is why I've come to ask for your favor!"

Yu Xiaocao paused for a moment, then, she said, "I'll be frank with you, half of my medicinal skills were self-taught, so naturally I can't compare with those imperial physicians or skilled physicians among the common folk. The most I can do is give you some simple, local prescriptions. If Older Sister He doesn't mind, could I make a visit to your residence on another day to have a look at your older brother and sister-in-law?"

"I don't mind! How could I? I'd love to have you over!" It had to be known that, back then, in order to show his favor to General Fang, not only did the emperor expend the whole Imperial Hospital to help with his treatment, he even spread the news to call for renowned physicians from all over the empire, but none of them had succeeded in their treatment. When everyone had given up all hope, they received news that Lady Fang had actually managed to conceive a child after staying in Dongshan Village for a few months, and even gave birth to a healthy and lively Lin'er not long after. According to the pair of husband and wife, this could all be credited to the work of their goddaughter.

He Wanning had successfully completed the task entrusted to her by her grandmother, and she also obtained a diamond membership card that enabled her to fifty percent discounts, so she was in good spirits. After having a few pieces of honey cakes, she noticed that the Yu Household were all busily settling into their new home and felt a little embarrassed, "You've only arrived at the capital yesterday. We shouldn't have visited you and created trouble for you. Older Sister Yuan and I won't disturb you anymore. We'll definitely visit for your house-warming on another day!"

"We're sisters, so there's no need for these courtesies." Yu Xiaocao also had the intention to forge a good relationship with the Grand Princess Royal's household, and smiled, "I'll have to check on the growth of the crops and greenhouses at the Imperial Plantation tomorrow. What about the day after tomorrow? I'll make a visit to greet the Grand Princess Royal the day after tomorrow."

He Wanning gratefully held Xiaocao's hand, saying, "Alright, we'll definitely be waiting to welcome your arrival the day after tomorrow."

Yuan Xueyan, who had been pulled along to accompany He Wanning, had completely become her extra. At this time, she also got up and said, "The servant who makes the face powder has almost mastered the skill. Are you going to open this shop before or after the New Years? I'm afraid time will be a little tight if it's before the New Years."

Yu Xiaocao thought about it and said, "It's only about a dozen days before the New Year, not to mention the former Grand Tutor's residence is still undergoing renovation. I don't think I'll be able to open the business before the New Years. However, our skin care business doesn't need to be carried by the New Year's hype. As long as our products are effective, there's no need to worry about business."

"I already have a preliminary idea in my mind for the vanishing cream that you mentioned, and I've also experimented a few times. I estimate that I'll be able to come out with the finished product after the New Years. How's the progress of your cleanser and toner?" Yuan Xueyan looked cold, but once she had her focus on something, she would go all out.

"My maid Hechun is quite skilled. She has already produced the cleanser and toner and they are in the process of being tried out. The response has been good. Do you want to take some back to try?"

Yu Xiaocao had not expected that Hechun would be able to successfully produce the cleanser and toner that she had suggested in just her trip to and fro Dongshan Village. She washed her face with the cleanser today, and her skin felt quite clean, but it could be even better if the smell of the product was more refreshing. Once the maidservant heard her suggestion, she once again dove into the rear room to work on it.

When they were buying maidservants this time, they were lucky enough to meet a manager of a bankrupt rouge and powder shop and a woman who also worked there. Hechun had made the decision herself to buy both of them back, so now she had a total of six helpers underneath her and already began to look like a small manager herself. In order to have the opportunity to show their faces to their new mistress, those female workers gave their all to help Hechun with her plans and ideas. Their hard work was undeniably one of the reasons why the cleanser and toner were able to be produced so quickly.

Yu Xiaocao was very satisfied with these people. She decided that once the cleanser and toner were tested to be effective, each of them would be rewarded with a silver ingot, and she would also give them more rewards during the New Years.

He Wanning took the ceramic vial the size of a baby's fist into her hands and opened it. It was filled with a pale yellow paste-like substance. She sniffed it lightly and exclaimed, "It smells milky. Could it be that these cleansers are also separated into a few different types?"

"Yes, we've already determined the initial four types—'whitening', 'moisturizing', 'acne removal', and 'anti-wrinkle'. The same goes for the toners. Older Sister Yuan, when your vanishing cream is successfully developed, we can also make them in the same series. Then, the overall effect will be better." Yu Xiaocao pointed to the small vial in He Wanning's hand and continued, "Older Sister He, the one in your hand has whitening and moisturizing effects. The one Older Sister Yuan has is a part of the moisturizing and cleansing line."

He Wanning smacked her lips and said a little embarrassedly, "The both of you work so hard for the beauty salon and only I didn't do anything, yet I still got a diamond membership card... How about you change my membership card into a gold card?"

"Who says you can't help us? Your task now is to use our products, and make your skin white and tender. When the time comes, you'll be our living advertisement. At the beginning of spring, you only need to initiate a few more gatherings so the ladies of the capital can see how much you've changed. This will be your contribution!" Yu Xiaocao looked at her delicate little face, thinking, 'There's still three to four months before spring. Once Older Sister He takes care of her wheat-colored little face and turns it white and tender, she'll definitely become our living signboard!'

"I knew it, this was your aim all along! How else would you be so kind as to let me use these products?" He Wanning pouted, pretending to be upset.

"If you don't like it, you could return it to me. I remember that the second miss of the Grand Preceptor's household has slightly yellowish skin, perhaps she would be willing to give it a shot and enhance her skin..." Yu Xiaocao deliberately stretched out her hand to retrieve the small vial.

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He Wanning hurriedly hid the vial behind her back, crinkling her nose at Yu Xiaocao, "Do people do things like you? How can you take back things that you've already given away? If you can guarantee that my skin won't become this dark even when I'm constantly going out, then whatever, I'll be your living signboard!"

It was already near noon by the time she sent the two of them away. Yu Xiaocao rubbed her shriveled abdomen. She originally intended to sleep in, and, as she had not expected to be aroused so early, she only had a cup of jasmine tea and two pieces of honey cakes. She was so hungry!

"What's wrong? Do you have an upset stomach?" Zhu Junyang disregarded common practice and took long strides into the inner courtyard. He was even faster than the little maidservant who came to report his arrival. Seeing Yu Xiaocao clutching her stomach, he worriedly went to support her.

“I'm hungry~” Yu Xiaocao mewed, and the sound tickled Zhu Junyang's ears and heart.

Seeing the little lass's unenergetic form, Zhu Junyang's heart ached and he scolded, “Are all these servants dead? Why aren't you hurrying to the kitchen to prepare a meal? Do you not see how starved your mistress is?”

“Er...don't yell at the servants. I told them not to prepare my meal, since Godmother said we'd have lunch at Zhenxiu Restaurant. If I ate now, I wouldn't be able to eat later!” Yu Xiaocao noticed that his expression began to darken whereas her maidservants started to tremble while their faces turned pale. She was afraid that this black-faced devil would scare away her maidservants.

“Second Young Miss, the madam is asking if you're prepared to leave? If you are, we can head out to Zhenxiu Restaurant now!” Erya was indeed a very dense person. She excitedly rushed over, smiling sweetly at Xiaocao while she prattled on. She even shot the other maidservants a curious look when she saw them looking a little odd.

The maidservants all thought, 'Sister Erya is so great. She is unfazed by Royal Prince Yang's oppressive aura.' Inwardly, they were a little less contemptuous of this undisciplined little girl who came from the countryside.

Meanwhile, Erya thought, 'Royal Prince Yang is angry? Aiyaya, is this for real? Why didn't anyone remind me? I wouldn't be thrown out, would I?'

The other maidservants: ...

“Why didn't you wear a cloak before you came out? If these maidservants can't do things right, just send them away, I'll give you some disciplined ones!” Zhu Junyang was displeased when he noticed that Xiaocao was only clad in a thin layer of clothes. These wretched maidservants—did they feel contemptuous of his little lass? Was that why they were so careless in serving her? This cannot do—he must request his lady mother to send a few of her maidservants over, lest his little lass suffer any grievances.

The maidservants present dropped to the ground on their knees, pale-faced and begging for mercy. Only Erya was dazedly standing beside the second young miss, thinking, 'Why did everyone kneel all of a



sudden? Can anyone explain? What should I do? Should I continue to stand, or should I kneel like the others?'

"You're so impressive, Royal Prince Yang! You have an even greater authority here than I, the mistress of this residence! Don't you think your actions have crossed the line?" Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him, gesturing for her maidservants to get up.

The maidservants discreetly glanced at Royal Prince Yang, unsure of whether to rise or not. Erya rushed them, "Second Young Miss told you to rise, so why aren't you guys listening to her? No wonder Royal Prince Yang is mad! Hurry and rise, or are you waiting for your mistress to come and help you up?"

There were a few clever ones among the maidservants who quickly understood. They were the servants of the Yu Residence, so even if Royal Prince Yang had a high status, it was still a taboo for them to disregard their master's good intentions for an 'outsider'. These clever little maidservants quickly got up, and though they were still pale-faced and fear was still present in their hearts, they still stood respectfully beside their mistress. A second-rank maidservant who had been assigned to Yu Xiaocao asked for her permission before running towards the west wing. Royal Prince Yang was angered because the young miss was too thinly clad; she must quickly bring the young miss her cloak.

"Alright! Stop frowning, you're scaring the little maidservants. It's not good even if you only scare the flowers and grass! Erya, go and tell Godmother that I'm prepared to leave at any time!" Yu Xiaocao said to Erya after comforting the little maidservants while she put on her arctic fox fur cloak.

Once Erya received the order, she immediately ran towards the inner courtyard. Zhu Junyang witnessed this and his eyebrows creased. What was this? There's no sense of propriety at all!

Soon, the Yu Household had donned their best clothes that were mostly commissioned by Xiaocao when she was in the capital. They were the authentic crafts from Exquisite Garments. Although they were not made by Modiste Jiang herself, they still came from the skilled hands of the seamstresses of Exquisite Garments.

"You prepared such a bright set of clothes for me, and your sister, Xiaolian even coaxed me into wearing it. I think it's better if I change it..." The Yu Family was already used to Royal Prince Yang's appearances. Madam Liu only politely nodded at him before she complained to her youngest daughter.

Yu Xiaocao saw that her mother was wearing a dark red Qi-style attire that paired with an azure blue, pleated skirt. A lotus pattern was embroidered on the collar, cuffs and hemline of the skirt. The outfit made her mother look younger by several years. Not to mention, Madam Liu's skin was fair and her waist was slim. No matter how one looked at it, she didn't seem like a woman who already had a child over the age of ten.

“Mother, you look very spirited and young when you wear this, almost as if you're only in your early twenties! If we stood together, others would definitely only think that we're sisters, not mother and daughter!” Yu Xiaocao couldn't stop complimenting her mother as she clutched onto her arm.

Yu Xiaolian wore a light blue Qi-style attire underneath a light yellow jacket. Fox fur had been sewn at the hem of her collar and sleeves, making her seem youthful and cute. Hearing Xiaocao's compliments, she also chipped in, “You see, Mother! Don't you trust Youngest Sister's beauty standards?”

Yu Xiaocao saw her gleeful father at one side and smiled, “Mother! You really look good wearing this. If you don't believe me, ask Father!”

Yu Hai's eyes lingered on his wife for a long time and, upon hearing this, grinned, “Beautiful, you look really beautiful! You're as beautiful as when I first met you!”

Madam Liu's face flushed with color when she heard his words. She glanced at her daughters who were smilingly watching them and embarrassedly glared at her husband, “What nonsense are you spouting?! Are you not afraid that the kids will laugh? Let's leave now, best not to let our adopted family wait for too long!”

Madam Liu and her two daughters got into a horse carriage, while Yu Hai and Yu Hang each rode on a horse a small distance behind Royal Prince Yang. The three of them would occasionally softly exchange a few words.

Zhenxiu Restaurant had opened branches in both the east and west side of the capital. The east was where the wealthy people lived, whereas esteemed families would live in the west of the city. During the development of the capital in the previous dynasty, the officials would choose to live in the western side of the capital to make it easier for the emperor to summon them. The residence that Xiaocao bought could also be considered as the residence of an official of the previous dynasty. It was bought by Assistant Minister Li after he moved to the capital for his duties. As such, it was only a few minutes away from the Zhenxiu Restaurant at the west side of the city.

Third Young Master Zhou, Zhou Zixu, was currently discussing certain matters with the manager of Zhenxiu Restaurant. He had arrived early and waited at the restaurant's entrance as he heard that General Fang was holding a welcoming feast for the Yu Family today. From afar, he saw Royal Prince Yang atop his horse and beside him were both the father and son of the Yu Family. Then, his gaze moved to the horse carriage that followed behind them and smiled as he went up to greet them, "I've been waiting for you, Royal Prince Yang!"

Royal Prince Yang had already somewhat sensed Third Young Master Zhou's feelings towards Xiaocao, so he only coldly grunted before he led the company into the restaurant. Zhou Zixu knew that the well-known Royal Prince Yang had always been cold and aloof, so he did not take his response to heart. Instead, he turned to Yu Hai and ardently said, "Uncle Yu, it's been a long time since we last met. I didn't think that I would meet fellow villagers in the capital. This is also a kind of fate. Let me show my filial piety by treating you to this meal..."

"Zhou Family's little brat, didn't I say this meal is my treat? What are you doing, cutting in? Brother Dahai and his family will be staying in the capital until after New Year, will you be unable to find a chance to treat them to a meal?" Fang Zizhen angrily scolded Third Young Master Zhou when he came down from a private room upstairs and overheard his words.

Zhou Zixu hurriedly rectified, "It's my lack of thorough consideration. How about this, on the sixteenth of the last month of the year, I'll treat both Uncle Yu and General Fang's families to a meal. Please be sure to honor me!"

'The sixteenth of the last month of the year? That'd be three days from now. This little brat is quite considerate. The Yu Household would've had enough time to settle into their new home and rest in three days.' Fang Zizhen boldly patted his shoulders, "Alright! I agree on behalf of Brother Dahai. Now hurry, bring out the good wine and dishes, don't let our esteemed guests wait!"

"How could I? Uncle Yu is like my elder..." Zhou Zixu trailed off when he caught sight of a small, familiar figure stepping down from the horse carriage, and his face immediately lit up.

Xiaocao and Xiaolian were helped down first. The accompanying Wutong and Qing'er, learning from the morning's lesson, rushed to help their mistresses don their cloaks. The two extremely similar girls then reached out to a beautiful woman in her thirties and helped her down the horse carriage. The scene was quite pleasing to the eye.

“Oh? Your Imperial Majesty, isn't that the newly titled feudal princess, Miss Yu, down there?” Sitting by the window, Su Ran still had the heart to appreciate the view even on such a cold day. His eyes shone with surprise as he commented to the emperor who had come out in plain clothes to have a change of palate.

Zhu Junfan stood up and walked over. He hesitated for a moment when he saw two girls that looked almost the same, and said with uncertainty, “That...Yu Xiaocao is the one wearing the rose-colored jacket, right?”

Although the two little misses looked extremely similar and even their height and postures were about the same, Su Ran was still able to recognize Yu Xiaocao at one glance. Her clear gaze and animated expressions gave her away. “Your Imperial Majesty is wise.”

“Yu Xiaocao actually has a twin sister? We heard that many among the common folk would send away one twin when they were born for fear that they wouldn't be able to raise the both of them together. Either that, or they would drown one of them. Is that the truth?” Zhu Junfan's eyebrows creased together. This was all because of poverty!

Su Ran thought about it and said, “There are some that send away or drown their child, but because the conditions of most families aren't good, often times, the milk of the mother isn't enough to sustain two children, so they can only choose one to feed, while the other's survival would depend solely on divine will, as its own body would be weak and frail.”

“Ai... Giving birth to twins was such a joyous occasion in the future, but our people... When can we truly become a strong country with prosperous people?” Zhu Junfan mumbled to himself, upset about these circumstances.

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“However, Yu Xiaocao and her sister are quite fortunate!” Seeing that the entire Yu Family had already entered the restaurant, Zhu Junfan returned to his seat and continued to tuck into Zhenxiu Restaurant's delicacies.

Su Ran shook his head, “When Miss Yu was born, she was very weak and frail. There were several times when she almost died! Her grandmother was very miserly, unwilling to spend money for treatment when the children were sick, so they all had to endure through it. That time, if it weren't for her father, who went to borrow some money from their relatives for her to see a physician, I really can't tell if she would be able to live until today.”

The emperor's hidden guards had already done a thorough check on her background when he first decided to place her in an important position. Which meant that in front of the emperor, any privacy of hers could no longer be considered as a privacy anymore.

Zhu Junfan was aware that the thing that changed Yu Xiaocao's fate was that small, plain stone. He would be lying if he said he was not tempted, but everything had their own fate. Even if he stole the multicolored stone from her, he would not necessarily be able to use it to its full potential. It was not his style to ruin the present situation for an unknown result. Why not temporarily let the little lass keep it, since technically, he was still able to use it, no?

“Beloved Official Yu and her family had just arrived in the capital yesterday. As the emperor, should I do something?” As such, under Su Ran's clear gaze, Zhu Junfan stood up and leisurely knocked on the door to the private room that General Fang had booked.

The person who opened the door was Royal Prince Yang's personal bodyguard. Seeing a dignified, handsome face that was somewhat similar to his master's, Dong Dali's face twitched, his voice sounding like someone was strangling him, “M-Master, H-His...”

Royal Prince Yang's response was, “Speak properly! I don't keep stutterers around. What this...Your Imperial Majesty, how are you here? And you only brought along Su Ran? Aren't you a little too bold?”

“We only found out today that our little cousin actually speaks so much! We didn't come here for you, we came here for Beloved Official Yu's welcoming feast! What about it? You don't welcome us?” The emperor stepped into the room with Su Ran following behind him, closing the door. It was fortunate that there were only private rooms on the second floor. All of the other customers were behind closed doors and did not notice what had occurred.

Everyone in the room stood up immediately after they heard Royal Prince Yang call out 'Your Imperial Majesty'. Fang Zizhen was about to lead the rest to bow to him when he saw him clearly, but Zhu Junfan stopped him, “We've come out in plain clothes today, there's no need for such courtesies. Please, sit!”

'You must be joking, who would dare sit down before you did?' Fang Zizhen hurriedly offered the main seat and personally invited the emperor to take his seat.

Zhu Junfan looked at the entire table of untouched dishes and smiled, "It's still Mingzhe's who is more reputable and able to order all of the limited quantity, signature dishes of Zhenxiu Restaurant. We were just next door, but we didn't get the same treatment!"

"Your Imperial Majesty, this official..." Who would dare claim to be even more important than the emperor? Cold sweat formed on Fang Zizhen's back when he heard this, as he stood stiffly, not knowing how to respond to the emperor's words.

"Why are all of you standing? Hurry, sit down and eat, the dishes are getting cold!" The culprit acted as if nothing had happened and picked up his chopsticks, digging into the boiled meat slices that he liked very much. When he tried to order this dish earlier, the waiter had informed him that they were all booked out. Hmph! If he wasn't afraid of revealing his identity, then he really wanted to use his authority to oppress them.

This was the second time the Yu Household—aside from Yu Hai and Xiaocao—met the emperor. However, he had not revealed his true identity the first time and only pretended that he was the heir of Prince Jing, so they were taken by surprise by his sudden arrival. For a moment, they were unsure of what they should do and whether they should dig in.

"Why aren't you all eating? Is it because the dishes aren't to your tastes?" Third Young Master Zhou asked, puzzled, when he personally brought in a plate of spicy chicken pieces to the room but saw that no one was eating.

"Spicy chicken pieces? This one is good!" In his previous life, Zhu Junfan originated from Sichuan, and loved to eat any and all that was spicy. He had not had a taste of his hometown's dishes for more than twenty years, so naturally, he was full of compliments when he saw that there were quite a few Sichuan dishes on the table.

"And this is?" Even though Third Young Master Zhou was the future head of the Zhou Family, he still did not qualify to meet the emperor. As such, he was unable to identify the person in front of him and only felt that he looked familiar.

Fearing trouble, Zhu Junfan shot everyone else a warning glance, "I'm Zhu Junyang's paternal cousin. I happened upon them here earlier and it was like the saying, 'a chance encounter is better than an invitation', so I shamelessly followed to take part in Official Yu's welcoming feast."

Royal Prince Yang's paternal cousin? That meant he was also part of the nobility. When he saw Chief Steward Su Ran who stood behind the emperor, Third Young Master Zhou's heart trembled. The one person, who could have the head steward court eunuch personally attend to him, and was also simultaneously Royal Prince Yang's paternal cousin, could only be...it could only be that person! Should he kneel and greet the emperor? Third Young Master Zhou was extremely undecided.

“Su Ran, what are you foolishly standing about for? Find a spot and sit down. There's so many good dishes you usually might not even be able to taste!”

Third Young Master Zhou squeezed out a smile as he said, “You...this is the top membership card of this commoner's restaurant. If you desire to come and have a meal here in the future, you need only show this card and you may order whatever dish you like. We'll even give you a 50 percent discount.”

He actually took the idea for membership cards from Yu Xiaocao, and made only ten of these top membership cards. It was really this restaurant's and the Zhou Family's honor if the emperor would accept this card.

“You're much more dexterous than your eldest uncle, little brat! The Zhou Family has a capable successor!” Zhu Junfan did not care whether he got the fifty percent discount or not, since his private treasury was currently full, but the temptation of being able to order whatever he wanted, including the limited quantity dishes, was very strong.

“Your dishes are very authentic! Very good, very good!” Zhu Junyang praised generously while he dug in.

Third Young Master Zhou was exuberant, “Thank you for your compliments! What else would you like to eat? Please, order as you like. There's no need to be courteous, just take it as a gift from this small restaurant...”

“Sichuan poached fish in chili sauce, mala tofu, steamed chicken with chili sauce, duck's blood and beef tripe in spicy soup, sliced beef and offal in chili sauce...” Zhu Junfan was not courteous at all. In a single breath, he had ordered multiple delicious Sichuan-style dishes. It wasn't often that he was able to leave the imperial palace, so he must eat until he was satisfied!

Third Young Master Zhou felt troubled when he heard the orders, and looked pleadingly at Yu Xiaocao, stuttering, “Your...Our small restaurant serves Sichuan poached fish in chili sauce and mala tofu, but this

commoner has never heard of steamed chicken with chili sauce, duck's blood and beef tripe in spicy soup, sliced beef and offal in chili sauce..."

Zhu Junfan glared at him, harrumphing, "You're so inflexible! Even if you've never heard of it, the person who taught you Sichuan poached fish in chili sauce and boiled meat slices would definitely have heard of it before! How is Sichuan cuisine complete without mala duck's blood and sliced beef and offal in chili sauce?"

"Xiaocao, you see..." Third Young Master Zhou was forced to seek help from Yu Xiaocao. However, he had plans to introduce a few new dishes for New Year's, and he was already discussing this matter with the manager. It would be great if he could take advantage of this opportunity and get a few precious recipes from Xiaocao.

Zhu Junfan knocked his chopsticks on his plate in order to get his attention and said, "Really, if you want someone to help you earn money, who'd do it if you didn't give them any benefits?"

Zhou Zixu was also quite bold. He grit his teeth and said, "Xiaocao, if you provide Zhenxiu Restaurant with a few new recipes every year, I'll give you one share of this Zhenxiu Restaurant."

"Only this restaurant, or all of the Zhenxiu Restaurant branches?" Zhu Junyang was aware that the Zhou Family had opened Zhenxiu Restaurant branches in other prosperous cities in Jiangnan. As Zhenxiu Restaurant was most likely going to become the Zhou Family's main business in the future and open branches all over the country, he thought to gain some benefits from them for his little acquisitive lass.

Third Young Master Zhou threw caution to the wind and said, "I'll give you ten percent of all the Zhenxiu Restaurants' profits!"

It was good to have a strong backing. Even if Yu Xiaocao ran out of recipes in the future, just based on her relationship with Royal Prince Yang and the fact that she had the emperor's favor, she was already the backing that Zhenxiu Restaurant and the Zhou Family could only hope for. It should be known that although the Zhou Family were imperial merchants, they still faced difficulty in establishing their name in the capital these past two years without a proper backing. If it weren't because Zhenxiu Restaurant's dishes were too good, then it probably would have already been taken over by other well-established restaurants with a strong backing.



Even if Yu Xiaocao was not lacking money, her eyes still lit up when she heard him promise ten percent of the profits of all Zhenxiu Restaurants. Moreover, his request was not very demanding—only a few recipes a year, not to mention, if Zhenxiu Restaurant earned more money, her share in the profits would also increase!

She was already feeling extremely blissful in her heart, yet Yu Xiaocao showed only a face full of resignation as she stood up. She looked at the emperor who was stuffing himself with the dishes on the table and sighed, “Indeed, I know how to make steamed chicken with chili sauce, duck’s blood and beef tripe in spicy soup, sliced beef and offal in chili sauce. Since there’s no time like the present, I’ll provide you with the recipes for these three dishes today.”

Third Young Master Zhou had expected as much. Yu Xiaocao was definitely his lucky star. It was too bad that Royal Prince Yang, who was always by her side, always kept a watchful eye. If he could marry her and make her the wife of the Head of Zhou Family, it would definitely be a blessing to the entire Zhou Family! But it was too late now. Third Young Master Zhou felt somewhat regretful as he led Yu Xiaocao to the kitchen.

When they heard that the proprietor had brought in a teenage girl to teach them a few dishes, the cooks in the kitchen felt a little displeased, but the proprietor was still watching from the side, so they could only pause their work and gather around.

However, their view of her immediately changed when they had a taste of the plate of steamed chicken with chili sauce that she made. The cooks present were all experienced people, so after watching her make the dish once, they already understood most of the steps to creating the same dish. Moreover, Xiaocao had the intention to teach them, and even patiently repeated several key points to the recipe. The ten main cooks of the capital’s western Zhenxiu Restaurant branch were quick to grasp the main points and created steamed chicken with chili sauce that did not lose to Yu Xiaocao’s at all!

“Give out free steamed chicken with chili sauce dishes to every customer dining in private rooms on the second floor today. From tomorrow onward, steamed chicken with chili sauce will officially become one of Zhenxiu Restaurant’s limited quantity dishes. The limited quantity will be twenty sets per day!” Third Young Master Zhou personally served the one that Yu Xiaocao made to General Fang’s private room on the second floor. Were you kidding? He absolutely must serve the man at the highest point of the Great Ming Dynasty with the best.

The ten main cooks of the kitchen did not feel contemptuous anymore, and instead looked at Xiaocao with a burning passion, waiting for her to teach them the recipe of the second dish. Sliced beef and offal in chili sauce and duck’s blood and beef tripe in spicy soup both required fresh duck’s blood and offal,

but Zhenxiu Restaurant imported their braised meat and offal from the Yu Family's braised food store, and as such, their kitchen did not have the required ingredients.

However, Zhenxiu Restaurant was able to achieve its current success because it had its resources, and all the ingredients that Yu Xiaocao required were brought to her very quickly. Yu Xiaocao rolled up her sleeves and was about to start cooking when suddenly, she heard a familiar voice shout, "Wait! Wait a second!"

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They paused only to see a plump figure nimbly squeeze through the crowd of cooks and appear at Xiaocao's side. He used his chubby palm to wipe the sweat on his face as he panted, "Miss Xiaocao, you've already finished teaching them the recipe to a dish? That's not fair, why didn't you wait for me, Fatty Wang!"

Pitiful him. When he received news of this, he immediately took a horse carriage and rushed over from the eastern branch of Zhenxiu Restaurant. He was in such a hurry that he still sweat a lot despite it being a cold, winter day. During the entire journey, he kept rushing the driver, but even so, he still missed a dish. Head Chef Wang's expression looked like he wanted to burst into tears.

The other chefs that he had pushed to the side could only suppress their annoyance, as Head Chef Wang ranked elder in Zhenxiu Restaurant. His culinary skills were extraordinary, and he was the exemplary chef among all the chefs. Many of the chefs present had been mentored by him before, so they could only swallow their discontent as he took up the best spot.

Yu Xiaocao smiled, looking at this familiar person who had grown plumper and said, "Head Chef Wang, it's currently lunchtime, is it really good for you to just ditch the whole kitchen and come here?"

"It's better if I come here alone. It's much better than if a whole group of people ditched the customers completely! The chefs in the eastern branch are more than capable, so it doesn't matter whether I'm there or not! Now, which step are you at? Don't stop, I, Old Wang, am still waiting to learn so I can go back and show my skills to the customers!" Head Chef Wang was still so carefree.

Yu Xiaocao pointed towards the chopped ingredients on the cutting board, "This dish is called duck's blood and beef tripe in spicy soup. The soup is bright red, fragrant, spicy and thick. It's suited to be served during the start of the year."

Head Chef Wang turned his gaze to the cutting board and whoa, that was a lot of ingredients! He counted duck's blood, swamp eel, tripe, streaky bacon, ham, squid, sea cucumber...Wait a second, what were these ingredients? Why had he never seen them before?

Yu Xiaocao glanced at the ingredients Head Chef Wang was curiously looking at and smiled, "This is called 'yellow throat'. It's a main blood vessel at the heart of livestock like pigs and cows. It's very nutritious and the texture is crisp."

This time, Yu Xiaocao was making top quality duck's blood and beef tripe in spicy soup, so she was very demanding when it came to the quality of the ingredients. However, for such a big restaurant like Zhenxiu Restaurant, they still had a lot of stores in their kitchen.

She poured chili peppers, Sichuan peppercorn, ginger, garlic, and the Zhou Family's factory's chili bean sauce into the warmed peanut oil and stir-fried the ingredients on low heat until it was fragrant. Then, when the soup was ready, she fished out the whole spices and added seasonings like MSG, sugar and vinegar into it. After that, she sliced, diced and blanched the main auxiliary ingredients and added them to the boiling red soup. Once the soup was done, she poured it into a vessel and sprinkled spring onions on top. Then, she heated more oil, added the Sichuan peppercorn and chili peppers and fried them until they were fragrant, and quickly poured the oil onto the soup that was ready.

The process seemed simple, but the actual creation of the dish was not so simple. It was a good thing that all the chefs had more than ten years of experience in the culinary arts, so they quickly mastered the techniques and successfully made a pot of duck's blood and tripe in spicy soup. Yu Xiaocao tried the result of their cooking and indeed, the older ginger was spicier—Head Chef Wang made the most authentic dish. The other chefs' dishes were also quite good.

After Third Young Master Zhou served the steamed chicken with chili sauce which received the emperor's compliments, he hurried downstairs and waited in the kitchen. Once he saw another completed dish, he immediately said, "Let the waiters go to the private rooms and promote today's new dish. Duck's blood and tripe in spicy soup, priced at 88 taels and only limited to 10 sets per day!"

Except for the one that he had taken away, there were exactly ten sets of mala duck's blood that the chefs in the kitchen had made as practice. Xiaocao disdainfully looked at him, 'Cunning businessman— if he isn't cunning, he isn't a businessman!'

The ingredients required for the sliced beef and beef offal in chili sauce were a little more troublesome. It was made by braising cow's head's skin, heart, tongue, stomach and meat as its main ingredients, but

in this era, cattle were the main laborers in paddy fields, so if the plantation owner was able to rear a cow, it was equivalent to owning a tractor in the future. Who would kill their cows to eat? The beef sold commercially were all from old or wounded cows that were decommissioned from labor. They could only be found but never sought. Fortunately, Zhenxiu Restaurant was quite efficient in sourcing ingredients and actually met with one of these occurrences.

As it was a braising process, it would naturally take a longer time to make sliced beef and beef offal in chili sauce. Yu Xiaocao had Third Young Master Zhou inform the emperor that he would not be able to have the dish for lunch, and would need to return at night in order to enjoy the dish.

The chefs did not care how much work it took, as only when they had mastered the dish could it be theirs. They had already heard from Head Chef Wang that this young girl in front of them was extraordinary, and many of Zhenxiu Restaurant's signature dishes came from recipes that she had provided. Hehe! Indeed, cooking still required talent. Just look at her, even if one started learning in his mother's womb, he might still not have the years of skill and experience that they had when he reached her age, but every single dish that passed through her hands came out extraordinarily delicious!

The chefs perked up and watched as Xiaocao cut the beef into pieces and washed them clean along with the cow parts (cow's tongue, heart, head's skin, stomach). She then used seasonings like spices, salt and Sichuan peppercorn to braise them. First, she used a large, blazing fire to bring it to a boil before switching to a small fire, braising the meat until it was tender and soft yet still held together. Then, she lifted the meat out and allowed it to dry before slicing it into large, thin slices for later use. She used auxiliary ingredients such as chili oil, Sichuan peppercorn powder, roasted sesame seeds and roasted peanuts to make red oil that she then poured onto the meat. The finished dish looked bright and appetizing, emitting a strong and spicy aroma while the meat was tender and fresh.

It was already halfway through the afternoon when all of the chefs had mastered these three dishes. All of Zhenxiu Restaurant's customers had already left, and although the emperor had not been able to taste the beef slices and beef offal in chili sauce that he had longed for, he was still very pleased with the other two dishes. He, too, left, leaving behind the nervously trembling Yu Family who had not dared to touch their chopsticks and the host, Fang Zizhen. The dishes on the table had already gone cold, so Third Young Master Zhou had arranged for the kitchen to cook them a new set of dishes, and only then were they able to eat their fill.

The most pitiful of them all was Yu Xiaocao. She hadn't eaten much in the morning, then personally gave the chefs a culinary lesson at noon, so in the afternoon she was so starved she nearly collapsed. Head Chef Wang pitied her, so he made her a bowl of golden string noodles in chicken soup and she was finally able to fill her stomach eating that paired with the freshly made beef slices and beef offal in chili sauce.

When she returned to the private room on the second floor, everyone was drinking tea and having dessert as they waited for her. Zhu Junyang saw her enter and asked, "You must be tired. Have you eaten?"

"Will the kitchen be short of food? But once I get busy, I really forget anything. I've only had a bowl of noodles..." Yu Xiaocao unceremoniously dropped into a chair—it was too tiring!

"This...what is this!" Fang Zizhen pitied his daughter, but he did not dare to complain about the emperor out loud and could only sigh, "All of us had not been able to enjoy ourselves this afternoon, let's continue this evening and thoroughly enjoy ourselves?"

Yu Hai also felt uncomfortable seeing that his daughter had been busy for the entire afternoon and shook his head, saying, "Maybe another day! We've journeyed for days and haven't had enough rest yesterday. Cao'er has also been busy for nearly half a day, so we'll gather together some other day."

"Brother Dahai is right, I've been careless in my consideration! Oh right, I heard that Zhenxiu Restaurant has a booked reunion dinner event. How about we have our New Year's Eve reunion dinner together, the two of our families? It'd be merry!" Fang Zizhen suggested.

"Sure!" Yu Hai was unwilling to let his daughter celebrate New Year's with the Fang Family, since they had only 3 people, but if he kept her with his family, the Fang Household would definitely feel cold and empty. Why not have the two families celebrate together, so that it would be bustling and everyone was happy?

Once they were home, Yu Xiaocao slept like a log, and could only force herself to stay awake when she woke up the next day and went to do her rounds at the imperial plantation with Zhu Junyang accompanying her. The winter wheat grew very well, and the greenhouse was also well taken care of. The new batch of green, leafy vegetables was already being sold, while the others would follow some time before New Year's. Only now was Yu Xiaocao's worries put to rest.

She followed Zhu Junyang to the neighboring farmstead and pointed to the hill at the back of the plantation, saying, "Have you found the seeds I asked you to? Additionally, you have to find more experienced flower farmers. I plan to grow many varieties of flora on this few hundred mu of wide sloping land."

Zhu Junyang silently held her cold and soft hands and blew a breath of hot air on them as he replied, "Don't worry, I guarantee that I'll do a satisfactory job! But since you're in a hurry for these rose flower seeds, the quantity might not be a lot, and at most will be about three to four mu?"

"Three to four mu will be fine, at least it's better than nothing. What about the forget-me-not flower seeds? I heard that they have them in the Persian Empire. Your voyage fleet should pass by there." Yu Xiaocao looked at him with her eyes filled with trust.

When she was looking at him with such an expectant gaze, Zhu Junyang naturally wouldn't bear to see her disappointed, "I've already sent a messenger dove to them. When they return at the beginning of spring, they will probably be able to bring back a lot! You rarely go out, how do you know these things?"

He was well aware that Xiaocao had secrets, but he had never intended to prod and only asked casually. However, Yu Xiaocao panicked, inwardly berating herself for not being careful. She laughed drily, "I saw it in a book of peculiar things that I had procured by chance. I can't be sure if it's real, but why not try? Since your fleet is also passing by!"

Zhu Junyang watched the little lass's panicked expression and laughed, "Don't say it like that. The fleet belongs to the court, I'm only helping them manage it. However, the westerners have many types of machinery that I think are quite interesting. When this fleet returns, I'll bring you there to pick those that you're interested in. There's a kind of clock that stands on the floor, and when the time reaches exactly the hour, a small bird will come out and tell the time. I think you'll like it! At that time, I'll give one to you."

"Who gives others clocks as a gift?" Seeing that he did not linger on the previous topic, Yu Xiaocao recovered her animated expressions and rolled her eyes at him.

Zhu Junyang raised his brows and asked, puzzled, "Why can't I gift clocks? Is there a saying about it?"

"Giving a clock, giving a person his end! Isn't that inauspicious?" Yu Xiaocao's expression was saying, 'You're such a simpleton', and it gave Zhu Junyang the urge to pinch her tender little face.

"Alright, I won't say 'give'! Everything I own is yours, so you can go and take it yourself, does that work?" No one knew where he was learning this from, but Zhu Junyang was getting increasingly better at talking.

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head. Suddenly, slyness flashed in her eyes as she secretly giggled, "Have you heard of 'three injunctions and four virtuous things to do'?"

"Three Obediences and Four Virtues? Of course! But I'm not so demanding of my wife, mmm... You're fine just the way you are!" Zhu Junyang's lips spoke as though they were coated with honey today.

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Yu Xiaocao gave him a look that clearly said, 'you're missing the entire point here', and then explained, "The so-called three injunctions and four virtuous things to do I'm talking about are the new standards that men are judged by. These are not the antiquated and old-fashioned three injunctions and four virtues that you're thinking of!"

Zhu Junyang showed that he was willing to listen with all ears open. Yu Xiaocao held back a laugh and said, "Listen well. The so-called three injunctions are: One, you must follow your wife wherever she goes; Two, you must obey all of your wife's commands; Three, you must obey your wife even if she's wrong. The four virtuous things to do are: One, you must wait when your wife is getting ready; Two, you must remember your wife's birthday; Three, you must endure your wife's scoldings; Four, you must be okay with your wife spending money."

Zhu Junyang pretended to be flabbergasted when he saw the little lass sniggering endlessly. He contemplated her words for a bit and then said, "This prince has thought over what you said and I believe I can adhere to this new version of the 'three injunctions and four virtuous things to do'! Is there anything else you're dissatisfied with?"

Yu Xiaocao revealed an astonished expression. Was Royal Prince Yang truly not a transmigrator ah? If any other man in this era heard such 'disgraceful and rebellious speech', she would have likely been scolded to death or be given an indignant and furious glower. Why did this fellow never react in the usual way?

Once again, she started to reflect on the relationship between the two of them. If the man in front of her had been switched out for any other man in this era, who firmly believed in the superiority of men over women, would she be able to endure it? Royal Prince Yang, on the other hand, was able to embrace every part of her. Even when she espoused extremely shocking views or did something

completely out of the ordinary, he still supported her wholeheartedly. Such a man would be hard to find even in the modern era. What was she still hesitating for then?

Zhu Junyang suddenly sensed from the relieved smile on her face that something had changed. The rock in his heart fell down. The little lass had finally decided to open her heart and accept him. It looked like she believed in his sincerity. Excitement surged within him and he abruptly stepped forward and swept Yu Xiaocao into her arms and lifted her high up. He exclaimed in elation, "I'm so happy! All of a sudden I feel like a hundred flowers are blooming and a hundred birds are singing in joy! This prince is too elated today!"

Yu Xiaocao let out a scream out of shock when she was suddenly held and lifted up high. She cried out and forcefully hit Zhu Junyang's arm as she sputtered in displeasure and amusement, "What is wrong with you? Quickly put me down! My head's dizzy and I'm afraid of heights..."

Zhu Junyang revealed a grin that was somewhat childish and foolish as he said, "Xiaocao, today is a special day. This prince will never forget it! Don't worry, this prince will be able to follow the 'three injunctions and four virtuous things to do' to a T. Even if my hair turns completely white and I'm covered with wrinkles, I will go out with you whenever you go out. Any money you spend, I will give to you and I won't ever let you get bullied or pushed around!"

Head Steward Liu and Bodyguard Dong Dali ran over to see what was going on when they heard Yu Xiaocao cry out. Due to their hurry, they accidentally overheard their master's sweet and corny confession. It was so corny that they almost didn't know what to do with themselves. Dong Dali had an odd expression on his face as he thought, 'Oh my goodness, apparently you were this kind of master!'

Head Steward Liu had long gotten used to his master's weird antics and was afraid that this uncouth youngster might ruin his master's good situation. He forcefully dragged Dong Dali away. 'Master, this old servant can only help you this much!'

Yu Xiaocao, who had just been placed on the ground again, wasn't even able to stand up straight before she was pulled into a warm and sweet-smelling chest. Her face turned bright red as she lightly sniffed. Everyone said that ancient men didn't like to bathe, which caused them to have a weird and off-putting odor on their bodies. Her man, on the other hand, didn't seem to have this problem! He didn't have any body odor to speak of and his clothes even seemed to have a natural appealing scent coming off of them. This was the type of aroma she liked!



Suddenly, her chin was grasped by a large, warm and gentle hand. Her face, which had been buried in her man's chest, was softly turned up. She looked up and fell into those seductive phoenix eyes. His eyes seemed to be as deep as the vast ocean and as boundless as the night sky. Within them seemed to be stars flashing with brilliant light and it was enough to steal a person's soul away from them.

That bewitchingly handsome face of his was getting closer and closer to her. Yu Xiaocao, who had never eaten pork before and only saw pigs running away, started to panic within her heart. Was her first kiss in her two lifetimes about to be taken away like that? So embarrassing, so nerve wracking, what should she do?

Wutong and Yingchun, who had followed over in the carriage, had originally been standing far away. When they heard their master cry out in alarm, they ran over. Unexpectedly, they came across the master being tightly hugged by a man. Heavens above! The young miss was being insulted! Yingchun pushed her sleeves up in preparation to run forward but was stopped by Wutong pulling on her sleeve, "That's Royal Prince Yang. If we go over now, we'll be killed instantly!"

"That still doesn't mean we should just watch while the young miss is getting bullied ah! Young Miss hasn't even turned thirteen. If Royal Prince Yang takes her innocence now, then even if she marries into Imperial Prince Jing's family in the future, no one will respect her! Older Sister Wutong, you're still too selfish, which is why the young miss has been ignoring you!" Yingchun spoke before she thought and couldn't care less about Wutong's feelings. She needed to throw off the other girl to 'save' her young miss!

Wutong's expression changed but she still refused to let go of Yingchun's sleeve. She explained her reasoning, "I'm not abandoning the young miss to save my own skin! Use your brain a little, okay? If we rush up like this, what if Royal Prince Yang blows up out of rage and does something out of the ordinary and ends up harming our young miss? Please, use that brain of yours! If you act impetuously without thinking, you won't even be able to help the young miss and may actually end up harming her!!"

"Then what do you think we should do?" Yingchun felt like her head was about to explode and was so worried that tears almost streamed down her face.

"I have an idea! Isn't Xichun on the farmstead helping to manage the greenhouse pavilions? Go find her and have her claim that there's something that she needs the young miss to look over!" In a moment of desperation, Wutong came up with a plan that wasn't too shabby.

Yingchun nodded her head and gave Wutong an apologetic look. She didn't have the time to properly apologize as she sped off to complete her mission. She was praying that she would be fast enough to bring Older Sister Xichun over to save the day before that Dengtu Zi , Royal Prince Yang, did something that was unthinkable.

The two maidservants thought that they were being quite discreet but they would have never thought that every word and action they said and did had already been heard by Zhu Junyang through his special ability. He glanced at the little lass's bright red little face, bashful expression, and watery doe-like eyes...he felt a bit regretful. Why did those two meddling maidservants have to be so loyal? They ruined his opportunity! However, he also felt gratified and happy that Xiaocao had such loyal maidservants by her side.

The little red mouth in front of him seemed to be crying out 'kiss me ah' 'kiss me ah'! He really wished he could go up and take a nibble but the sounds of hurried footsteps from the farmstead were getting closer and closer. He needed to think of his image in the little lass's maids. For his future, he resisted the tempting urge and bypassed this chance.

If he had kissed her in front of the maids, then, in the future, it was likely it wouldn't be easy for him to see Xiaocao! Right now, he was able to come and go as he pleased from the Fang and Yu Residences. One reason was because they were giving way for his royal prince title but the other reason was that he had never overstepped the bounds of propriety before. He couldn't break the trust of other people and become the stumbling block in their relationship now!

Those beautiful looking lips were just about to meet her own when they stopped and then slowly backed away. This made Xiaocao simultaneously feel relieved and a bit at loss.

Zhu Junyang lightly chuckled and said, "You're still too young. I have enough patience to wait for you to grow up. On the day that you become my fiancée, I will make sure to satisfy your desires—your loyal and anxious maidservants have come over. If I don't let you go know, then I'm afraid they'll view me as their enemy! The future is long, so no need to be in a rush!"

'Just who was in a rush?!' Yu Xiaocao's face turned an even brighter shade of red and she leveled a fierce glare at him before she forcefully pushed him away. What a loathsome fellow! Not only did he try to take advantage of her but he also had to say such provoking words! One couldn't lose one's guard against men. It was too easy to be taken advantage of by them!

“Young Miss, you are okay, right?!” Yingchun dragged Xichun along as she pelted down the road. She huffed and puffed as she stood in front of her young miss. She first inspected her young miss from head to toe and then puffed up her cheeks to eye Zhu Junyang warily as she inquired after her mistress.

Wutong hurried forward to pull the other girl back as she smiled, “Young Miss, Xichun came across a bit of difficulty when going over the accounts, so she wanted you to help look at them!”

“There's something off about the accounts?” Xiaocao had personally taught Xichun how to record and balance the account books. In fact, she had taught the maid how to use Arabic numerals and other accounting methods from the modern world, so most people in this era had no idea how to use it. Xiaocao swallowed the maids' white lie easily and looked at Xichun, “Where are the account books ah? Didn't you want me to take a look at them?”

“Uh...” Xichun was previously busy going over the account books at the year's end and had been dragged over by Yingchun without even knowing what was going on. She currently had a stupefied look on her face, 'Was someone going to tell her what was going on? What was she supposed to say now?'

Wutong hurriedly gave her a look and smiled to smooth things over, “Young Miss, it's cold out and the ground is frozen. You've already spent so much time outside. How about you go into the building on the farmstead, warm up next to a brazier, and drink some piping hot tea to thaw yourself? It won't be too late to look at the account books then.”

Earlier, she had been in Zhu Junyang's arms and was against his nice, warm chest that felt like a furnace, so she didn't feel cold at all. Now, after hearing Wutong mention it, she finally noticed the winter wind 'whooshing' around her. Although her outer cloak was thick, it wasn't able to block all of the wind from her. Wutong's proposal made perfect sense to her. She didn't even look at Zhu Junyang as she headed towards the building on the farmstead.

Zhu Junyang followed closely behind. The paths between the fields were wide enough to allow two people to walk side by side without touching each other. Thus, the two of them had left the other three maidservants inadvertently behind them. He lowered his head to look at the little lass who still looked a bit sulky to quietly say, “Your three maidservants are all pretty good!”

“Hmph, hmph!” Yu Xiaocao wasn't willing to pay any attention to him but she couldn't help but proudly remark, “Of course, you need to see who their mistress is!” “Yes, yes, yes! You have the best eye for people and you are the greatest. No one else can surpass you, is that right?” Zhu Junyang humored the little lass good naturedly.

Yu Xiaocao wasn't the type of person to stay arrogant and ignore another person. Furthermore, despite his royal status, the prince never tried to make her feel below him. In fact, he always endured her little tantrums so the anger in her heart subsided considerably. She rolled her eyes at him and used an arrogant tone to say, "As long as you know! In the future, don't provoke me so much, otherwise, hmph hmph..."

The three maidservants behind them were currently quietly discussing the previous situation. After Xichun heard the other two maids' explanations, she finally understood what was going on. Anyone who had eyes could see the regard and desire Royal Prince Yang had for their young miss.

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At first, General Fang and his wife didn't think Royal Prince Yang was the best match for their daughter. However, Royal Prince Yang soon showed that his behavior had changed and always treated their daughter well. Now, they were willing to let nature take its course. As for the Yu Family, they seemed to approve of Royal Prince Yang more and more as time went on.

However, Xichun still approved of what her two fellow maidservants did today. Prior to Xiaocao getting engaged, they absolutely needed to guard their young miss's innocence. They could not allow Royal Prince Yang get a single advantage off of her.

After she entered the building on the farmstead, Yu Xiaocao answered a few questions that, in her mind, were all things she had taught Xichun long ago. Although she had some doubts in her heart, she didn't inquire further.

Everything on the farmstead was going as usual. Even if she didn't come over for a dozen days to check on things, it would still be smooth sailing. Winter had begun and it had already snowed twice. This meant that the winter wheat next year would definitely have a good harvest. The greenhouse pavilions were warmed perfectly by the heated walls, so the vegetables growing inside weren't the least bit influenced by the dropping temperatures outside. It absolutely wouldn't be a problem for them to supply more than half of the capital's needs for the New Year's Eve family dinner.

On the day after she got back from the farmstead, Xiaocao had been invited to go to the grand princess royal's residence. He Wanning had long been waiting by the second gate for her. With her was the somewhat shy wife of the heir, who was also there to receive the guest.

The two of them politely exchanged a few greetings before He Wanning linked arms with Xiaocao. She looked at Wutong, who was behind Xiaocao holding a familiar gift box, and the smile on her face became more brilliant, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, we made you work hard again. Only someone like you would be willing to bring cherry tomatoes as a greeting gift! They are valuable without being too ostentatious!"

The term 'little or small tomatoes' didn't seem very elegant, so they were given a more pleasing name now and were considered 'cherry tomatoes'. He Wanning wasn't wrong. People who sent cherry tomatoes as gifts to others only did so to the people they had relatively good relationships with.

Yu Xiaocao revealed a smile, "Yesterday I went to the farmstead and picked a few while I was there. I know you like to eat fruits, so I not only brought some cherry tomatoes over but also picked a few watermelons and cantaloupes as well."

"You personally picked these? Younger Sister Xiaocao, you told me a while ago that you would bring me and Older Sister Yuan to the farmstead to pick tomatoes. However, ever since winter started, you haven't said a word. You don't keep your promises! Tell me, how should I punish you?" He Wanning had long wanted to personally experience picking her own melons and tomatoes in the greenhouse pavilions at the farmstead. However, Xiaocao had been busy since winter started, and she wasn't shameless enough to bother the other person.

Yu Xiaocao pondered this question and then replied, "Punish me by making me help you grow some cherry tomatoes and strawberries in your family's greenhouse then. By the start of spring, they should be ready to eat. What do you think of that?"

"Okay ah, okay ah! I like this type of punishment!" If her own family had their own cherry tomato and strawberry plants, that naturally meant that she could pick them whenever she wanted to eat some. He Wanning applauded this idea with both hands.

He Wanning's eldest sister-in-law quietly watched these two young maidens talk to each other. She was quite gratified that the two of them had a good relationship. If her younger sister-in-law had a good relationship with Godly Doctor Yu, then that naturally meant that Miss Yu would do her best to diagnose and treat her. Wouldn't that mean that, before long, she would also be able to have a cute and precocious son or daughter?

Yu Xiaocao first stopped by the main courtyard to greet the grand princess royal. The grand princess royal looked a bit similar to the emperor emeritus but appeared somewhat younger. She was the

youngest sister of the emperor emeritus and the two of them had an age gap of around eight to nine years!

The grand princess royal treated Yu Xiaocao in a kindly manner that also seemed to have a hint of intimacy entwined in. It was as if she was interacting with one of her own direct descendents. This made Yu Xiaocao relax quite a bit. He Wanning's mother, Marchioness Anning, on the other hand, was a bit more speculative as she inspected Xiaocao.

After spending some time conversing idly with the two elders, Yu Xiaocao was then invited to the wife of the heir's courtyard. The lady warmly welcomed Xiaocao.

After exchanging courteous pleasantries, the lady finally couldn't beat around the bush anymore and she stated in a somewhat embarrassed manner, "My issue...Wanning has already told you, right?"

Yu Xiaocao slowly nodded her head and said, "Please relieve your worries, milady. With my relationship with Older Sister He, I will do my best. I also mentioned that, in terms of infertility, there are many possible reasons. Some are caused from birth while others are from other reasons. The other issues tend to be easier to fix. With our current medical knowledge, the issues from birth are probably very hard to treat."

When the wife of the heir heard this, her eyes dimmed a bit and she sighed, "I already know all of this. So many years had passed and I had already decided to accept fate. However, when I heard what had happened with Lady Fang, a sliver of hope appeared in me again. Miss Yu, don't worry. If you are able to fix this problem, then the He Household will all be grateful towards you. If you can't, then that is just fate..."

Yu Xiaocao couldn't bear to look at her dispirited expression that had a hint of despair in it. She suggested that she feel the woman's pulse. The lady easily handed her wrist over and before Xiaocao had even started, the multi-colored stone on her wrist subtly flickered and the little divine stone's voice appeared in her head, [There's no need to check. Her body is perfectly fine! No illness!!]

Yu Xiaocao's hand paused for a second but she continued to take the woman's pulse. It was just as the little divine stone said. The wife of the heir had a body that was more healthy than the vast majority of people, so she actually shouldn't be having problems with infertility. Then...did that mean that there was an issue with Heir Anning instead?

“How is it?” The lady had a worried look in her eyes. It was clear that she desperately wanted to know but was also afraid of Xiaocao's answer, which all showed on her face.

“Your body has no problems, milady. There's nothing stopping you from having children.” Yu Xiaocao stated the truth.

The wife of the heir revealed a disappointed expression and lightly shook her head, “All of those other doctors, famous ones and imperial physicians, said the same thing as Miss Yu. However, so many years have passed but there's been no quickening in my belly...”

Yu Xiaocao hesitated for a moment and then softly asked, “You must know that infertility may not always be caused by an issue in the woman...”

The wife of the heir smiled bitterly and said, “I understand what you're trying to get at. It's been so many years and there's been no news from my abdomen. I've seen many doctors and they all told me I have no problems. Someone also once mentioned that perhaps my lord husband had an issue instead. For the sake of his future heirs, my lord husband restrained his displeasure and also had the imperial physicians take his pulse—everything was normal! Not surprising, after all, as my lord husband has a concubine-born daughter now. How could he have an issue with his body? Sometimes I can't help but think, did I commit too many sins in my past life so in this life I'm getting retribution and can't have children...”

“Eldest Sister-in-law! You absolutely cannot think along those lines! Xiaocao also said that having children depends on fate and timing. Perhaps, you and my little nephew haven't reached the right timing yet. Look at Lady Fang, she's older than you by a dozen years but didn't she manage to birth Lin'er without any issues at her age?” He Wanning had a good relationship with this gentle and sweet eldest sister-in-law of hers, so she couldn't help but try to comfort the other woman.

As for Yu Xiaocao, she had fallen into deep thought. Both husband and wife had no problems with their bodies yet they didn't have any children together. In her past life, she also knew of a couple who were like the heir and his wife. They had been married for a dozen years but had no children. They had gone to see doctors all over the place but everyone told them the same thing: their bodies had no problems. Despite that, they still weren't able to have children. Later on, the couple was unable to endure the pressure and ended up divorcing. They both got remarried and had children from those second marriages. It was as if there was something wrong when the two of them were together as if they were unable to have children together for some reason. Perhaps, the heir and his wife were also like that other couple?

That couldn't be right either! After all, the heir had taken in five to six concubines after his wife was unable to become pregnant but he still was lacking in heirs. Why did he only have one concubine-born daughter despite all these concubines?

“Forget it, Younger Sister. There's no need for you to comfort me. Fate and destiny rules over all and we can't change it no matter how hard we try. Right now, all my hopes are on the concubines in this residence. If one of them is able to bear a son for my lord husband, I will be happy. At that time, I can take the child under my name and then the family will have a legitimate heir too!” The wife of the heir had a resigned look on her face yet her eyes still flickered with sadness and grief.

The heir and his wife were childhood sweethearts and they naturally had deep rooted feelings for each other. In his youth, the heir had once promised to 'have only her in his life'. However, because she was unable to become pregnant, she personally destroyed that beautiful dream. She sent one of her personal maidservants to her lord husband's bed to become his concubine. At that time, her husband's eyes had a complicated look in them: disappointment, pity, and helplessness.

Following that, concubines entered the residence one after another and she had slowly become numb to all of this. She could never return to the bliss and sweetness she had before with her husband. Perhaps even the deepest love could be slowly worn away by the realities of life and time...

“Milady, Concubine Wen asks to be seen!” The clear and crisp sound of a young maidservant's voice could be heard outside of the door.

She lightly frowned and asked, “Why is she coming over now? Is Fu'er not feeling well again? Dingxiang, I currently have guests over and it's not convenient to see her. Please ask her specifically what she needs.”

“Yes!” The little maidservant had a voice full of respect. Before long, the curtain to the door was lifted up again and the maidservant politely came in and stated, “Concubine Wen said that Eldest Young Miss's cough has gotten worse again. The cough syrup in the residence has been all used up and she wanted to ask if you had any left.”

“It's very hard to get a bottle of Tongren Medicine Hall's cough syrup. That bottle was the last one the residence had. Tell the outer servants to go to Tongren Medicine Hall to try their luck and see if the shop



has any in stock!" The wife of the heir was quite careful when it came to her lord husband's only descendant.

After she sent the young maidservant away, the wife of the heir looked at Yu Xiaocao and smiled weakly, "I let you see a farce. Fu'er has been weak since she was born and especially sickly during the winter. She gets sick almost every two to three days and often has a cough. Poor thing, at such a young age she takes more medicine every day than she eats food. Luckily, Tongren Medicine Hall's cough syrup is quite effective for her. Unfortunately, the cough syrup and pills from the shop are all extremely hard to get even when you have money, so we have to try our luck."

There were very few people in the capital who knew that Xiaocao was the one behind Tongren Medicine Hall's new cough syrup and pills. She also didn't want more people to find out as it would be hard to fend against other people's jealousy. She smiled and said, "The medications from Tongren Medicine Hall are very popular, especially during the winter. Everytime new stock gets in, it barely hits the shelves before they're all sold out. I'm pretty sure the servants will come back empty-handed. My family bought a few bottles of the cough syrup and still has some left. Yingchun, go back to the residence and bring the remaining bottles of cough syrup here."

"How could you possibly bear to..." The wife of the heir also knew how hard it was to find some cough syrup. How could she shamelessly take someone else's?

"It's important to take care of children immediately, milady, so there's no need to be so polite!" Yu Xiaocao had a ready supply of the medications that other people found difficult to find. The cough syrup at home as well as the other pills were all personally made by her. Naturally, their effects were better than the ones sold at Tongren Medicine Hall.

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Yu Xiaocao thought that she was likely unable to help with their infertility issues. However, it wouldn't be an issue for her to help them heal and strengthen their only descendant in the residence...

Wait, earlier the wife of the heir had mentioned that the heir's only concubine-born daughter had been weak and sickly since she was born...an idea flashed through her head. She had probably found out the reason why the two of them were unable to have children!

"Forgive me for my presumptuous question, but what does your lord husband normally like to eat and drink?" Yu Xiaocao thought for a bit and then cautiously inquired.

He Wanning knew that Yu Xiaocao wouldn't ask this question without a reason and asked with slight curiosity, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, why are you asking this question? Are you possibly suspicious of someone in the residence tampering with my older brother's food and drink? That can't be true, right? The staff here all have simple backgrounds and I can guarantee there isn't someone who is trying to harm my eldest brother due to his position as the heir...could it be Father's political enemies?"

The young maiden's thoughts flew a bit too far! Yu Xiaocao shot a look at the other girl and didn't heed her. Instead, she continued to solemnly look at the wife to the heir in anticipation of her answer.

When the wife of the heir saw that she was quite serious, she couldn't help but think carefully before she replied, "My husband usually likes to drink mung bean milk the most so he has a cup almost every morning. He also loves any dish that contains tofu, so the residence's chefs and kitchen maids will always make different types of tofu dishes every day. As for other foods that he likes...ah, I remember! I like to eat celery and my husband will usually eat some with me..."

"My older brother also especially likes to eat barbecued and deep fried foods, especially once winter starts. He often hangs out with his friends to roast venison and mutton and he does that quite frequently." He Wanning chirped in to help explain and revealed several other foods that her older brother liked to eat.

Yu Xiaocao let out a sigh of relief in her heart. Sure enough, everything that they told her had met her expectations. She finally found out the reason as to why the heir and his wife had problems with infertility!

Although He Wanning usually looked cheerful and carefree, she had a conscientious heart that caught onto details. When she saw that the expression on Xiaocao's face had changed subtly, she hurriedly asked, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, are you implying the reason why my older brother and older sister-in-law haven't been able to have children are related to the foods my older brother likes to eat?"

The wife of the heir's previously dead heart once again was ignited with a flame of hope, "Miss Yu, is it really as Wanning says..."

Yu Xiaocao looked at the older woman and forcefully nodded her head, "I was able to come across a book of recipes once by chance. Inside, it not only described many ways to cook delicious foods but it also talked about the effects of eating certain types of food. Among them, it recorded that if a man constantly ate bean products, celery, and foods that were barbecued and deep fried, he would have problems siring heirs..."

“Is that true? Miss Yu, are you stating the truth? Then, the reason why my husband and I have been unable to have children is due to the foods he likes to eat and not because of an issue with my body?” The older woman's lips trembled and the mist of tears gradually appeared in her eyes. Apparently, the truth was just that simple. They had spent so many years striving in a different direction and had bypassed the actual reason.

The heavens knew how she had lived these past nine years. Their inability to have children had become a giant mountain pressing down on her heart so hard that she couldn't move. Its weight was so heavy that she felt like she couldn't breathe at times. Many a night, her tears wet her pillow completely; many a night, she spent sleepless until dawn. She didn't know how many times she loathed herself and she also didn't know how many times the thought of suicide rose up in her mind...

Now, she was finally able to break free of the fetters on her heart and her spirit could soar free again without the weight of that suffocating pressure. She finally could raise her head and look her husband in the eye without the shadow of guilt and let him know, 'The problem is not with me!'

“Lord...Lord Husband?!” Through the veil of her tears, the wife of the heir saw that tall and imposing figure that was engraved in her soul slowly walking towards her, getting closer and closer...

A large, warm palm wrapped around her two hands and a familiar voice sounded in her ears, “Zhen'er, you've had a hard time these past years...”

The wife of the heir no longer cared that there were other people around and buried her head into that familiar and warm chest. She sobbed as if she was a heartbroken child who had just been wronged.

The heir, He Junpeng, embraced his wife tightly within his arms and gently patted her back as he comforted her silently. In all these years, he had seen the efforts his wife had gone through to get pregnant and engraved it deeply within his heart. Although all the doctors told her that her body was very healthy, she still downed those bowls of extremely bitter nourishing tonics and tried every folk remedy that was available. She even tried the local treatments that people in rural areas had and pinched her nose to swallow a concoction made of plant ash and water.

Although she loved him with all her heart, she was the one who personally broke his promise of 'only having her in his lifetime' and allowed concubine after concubine to come in. On the day that his

concubine-born daughter was born, she cried for an entire night but still sincerely felt gratified that he had a daughter now...

He wanted to tell her, "Being able to have such a wife like you is the result of three lifetimes of fortune. Even if the heavens have decided that we would never have children, I have no regrets marrying you!" The wife of the heir very quickly calmed herself back down and looked at Yu Xiaocao with red eyes and nose. She stated somewhat bashfully, "Miss Yu, I let you see a farce!"

"Human nature." Yu Xiaocao had a perfect smile on her face and her eyes shone with sincere emotion towards the heir and his wife.

In actuality, when the inner courtyard had guests, as a man, He Junpeng shouldn't be around as it was considered extremely impolite to the female guests. However, the circumstances today were different and he was very concerned. When he heard that they had invited over the godly doctor who had helped General Fang and his wife treat their bodies, he couldn't restrain himself. This was the first time he did something outside the societal norms but he had to come back to hear the news.

However, he didn't expect that, as soon as he entered the inner courtyard, he found out that the reason why they weren't able to have children was related to the foods he commonly liked to eat. Regret immediately bloomed within him. If he had known earlier that the food he consumed was the cause of their infertility, he wouldn't have eaten one bite no matter how much he liked them.

He Junpeng looked at Yu Xiaocao and noticed that she didn't seem upset or angry, so he felt his heart settle a bit. However, he still seriously apologized to her, "Miss Yu, I was rude today, please forgive me!"

Yu Xiaocao calmly smiled as she shook her head, "Milord is being polite. Older Sister He and I are like sisters and you are her older brother, so there's no need to consider each other as outsiders, right?"

"Miss Yu is very generous and kind....do you know if, with my current situation, I still have a chance to father children?" He Junpeng jumped straight into the awkward conversation without any qualms and asked with a bit of urgency in his voice.

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head and suggestions flowed out of her mouth, "Since we know the root cause, it is easier to proceed from here! First, Milord and Milady need to change your eating habits. Try to cut down or completely eliminate bean products and celery. Eating too many barbecued or deep fried foods

is also not good for the body so do your best to not have any. Try to eat more garlic chives, Chinese yam, onions and other vegetables. You should soak wolfberries in water or brew them into a tisane to drink. Try eating more nuts like cashews and walnuts. I advise you to roast black sesame seeds and walnuts together before grinding them into a powder that you can mix with water. You should have a bowl of that every day. You can also eat more abalone, loaches, and other seafood. You can also buy some dried mussels from the dried food stores and use them to make congee or stir fried dishes...”

“Miss Yu...can you speak a little slower, please? I'm afraid I'm a bit slow and I can't remember everything. May I go get a brush, ink and paper so I can write this all down?” The wife of the heir appeared as if she had a new lease on life and her entire body was filled with liveliness and energy. He Junpeng noticed this and felt like his wife had reverted back to how she was nine years ago, when she first married him. She was so charming and lively then...

The lady looked at Yu Xiaocao and clearly wanted to say something. After hesitating for a while, she finally asked in an uneasy manner, “I heard that Miss Yu is quite talented at creating medicinal cuisine. I heard that Princess Consort Jing's body recovered because you made her food. Would you perhaps know any good medicinal cuisine recipes that are helpful for promoting fertility...”

Since the heir had been eating foods for a long time that suppressed his fertility, it made it hard for him to get his wife or his concubines pregnant. Even when his women did get pregnant, the children from that union would end up sickly and weak, just like that concubine-born daughter he had.

She did know of a few foods and recipes that could increase his yang energy. If she just gave them the recipes, it was likely the effect would not be as good as the dishes she made. After all, she could add mystic-stone water when she made the food, increasing the efficacy.

Since He Wanning was a good friend of hers, she decided to take on the task. Furthermore, the grand princess royal was the grand-aunt of Zhu Junyang. She was willing to do all she could to help the grand princess royal have a descendant.

“It's all set then! I'm going to go back to my residence to first prepare some useful medicinal cuisine for you. Once I'm done, I'll have the servants bring it over. I will also give you the recipes to make these foods once I'm done writing them down.” Yu Xiaocao didn't seem the least bit upset by the request, which allowed the heir and his wife let out a sigh of relief.

As soon as the lady opened her mouth to ask, she knew that her request was a bit presumptuous. After all, the recipes were the private property of Yu Xiaocao and she may not want to give them out.

Although her younger sister-in-law had a decent relationship with Miss Yu, they couldn't capitalize on this too much. If they ended up ruining the relationship between the two, she would feel incredibly guilty!

Fortunately, Miss Yu wasn't a stingy or petty person. She not only didn't take offense but also personally offered to make some medicinal cuisine for them. Marquis Anning's estate would remember this good will from her. In the future, if the Yu Family or Fang Family came across any troubles, they would definitely do their utmost out of friendship and duty to help them.

The grand princess royal invited Xiaocao over to have lunch with them. Marchioness Anning, He Wanning, the heir and his wife were also there. The couple finally had an answer for their troubles and hope for the future. Thus, they were naturally very solicitous and warm towards Xiaocao throughout the meal. From the way the two of them treated the guest, both the grand princess royal and Marchioness Anning could tell something was different and accordingly viewed Xiaocao with a higher evaluation.

The grand princess royal soon found out from her grandson what had happened earlier. That evening, when Xiaocao was about to leave, the grand princess royal pulled on her hand to say something, "This old woman is being presumptuous, but I must call you 'Xiaocao' right now. Xiaocao, this old woman will always remember the kindness you have shown Marquis Anning's estate. In the future, our residence and the grand princess royal's estate will always be open to you. You're always welcome to come over as a guest."

"Grand Princess Royal, you are being too polite. As a doctor, I have a benevolent heart. As long as I can help someone, I will do my best to help them." Yu Xiaocao thoughtfully replied in a courteous manner.

After the grand princess royal said her farewells to Xiaocao, she turned to her son and daughter-in-law to state, "Everyone always mentions that Yu Xiaocao was born and bred in the wild countryside, but she has a generous and kind heart. In my eyes, that makes her much better than the vast majority of noble maidens in the capital! Although Wanning has a more hasty personality, she has a good eye when making friends. The Yuan Family's lass and this Xiaocao are both quite outstanding and worthy of friendship!"

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When Yu Xiaocao got back, she pondered thoughtfully for a long time before she finally decided to make 'eucommia lower body strengthening soup', 'northern groundcone kidney strengthening soup', and 'morinda root and pork tripe soup'. All of these would help the heir increase his fertility. For his daily tea, she planned on replacing it with wolfberry tea instead. Furthermore, she wrote down exactly what he should and should not eat on a daily basis...all in all, it turned out to be several pages worth of information.

After looking at her dismal brush handwriting, she felt that it wasn't too presentable (Zhu Junyang quips: "What do you mean by 'not too presentable'? Even three year olds who have just started to learn how to write have better handwriting than you!"). The only person in her family who had good handwriting, her younger brother, wasn't on his vacation yet, so she dragged Royal Prince Yang into this mess and made him rewrite everything she wrote.

When the bags filled with specially prepared medicine and the medicinal cuisine recipes arrived at the grand princess royal's estate, the grand princess royal noticed the familiar calligraphy on the notes. She shook her head in amusement. Everyone said that her grandnephew had his eye on that preteen Yu Xiaocao and was willing to do almost anything for her. Originally she thought that the rumors had exaggerated things. Now, however, she knew that the rumors weren't necessarily false!

She sent the sacks full of medicines to an imperial physician and a few other famous doctors who were in the residence. It wasn't that the grand princess royal didn't trust Yu Xiaocao but, in regards to the heir of the Marquis Anning's estate, she needed to be cautious!

The imperial physician and the other famous doctors looked at the prescribed medications and also carefully examined the medicinal cuisine recipes. They couldn't help but slap the table in astonishment. All of the materials here were for gently replenishing the yang energy in the spleen and kidneys, and they were novel and valuable! These old fellows had never thought of using medications and food in this manner before.

The grand princess royal watched as the old men discussed animatedly between themselves and remarked in a displeased tone, "Have you all seen enough? How will this medicinal cuisine impact my grandson's situation? If they can be used, then quickly have a maidservant go make some. The earlier he takes it, the faster he'll get better."

The imperial physician and the other famous doctors nodded their heads one after another and said, "They're fine! All of these are astoundingly effective recipes. Would you...happen to know which genius prescribed these recipes? Would you be able to introduce us to this person?"

The grand princess royal gently shook her head and said, "That godly doctor doesn't want to be known in this world, so..."

Many of the godly doctors in the world were solitary and very rarely left their abodes. They also tended to have eccentric personalities and didn't like interacting with other people. When the grand princess royal explained it in that way, the other doctors expressed their understanding. When the other doctors finally left, Imperial Physician Liu, who had come from the palace, was silent for a bit before he finally asked, "Your Imperial Highness, if this old man didn't guess wrongly, these recipes were all made by Feudal Princess Jinan, right?"

"Who can say for sure?" The grand princess royal quirked up an eyebrow and picked up the teacup by her hand before lowering her head to take a small sip. She replied without a hint of emotion.

Imperial Physician Liu smiled, "Your Imperial Highness must remember that the Eldest Imperial Prince was once deathly ill and the imperial physicians found themselves helpless. Only Feudal Princess Jinan was able to cure him with her folk remedies. Unfortunately, this old man was not in the palace that day. Otherwise, I would have asked the feudal princess for some tips and pointers. Every doctor has their own habits when prescribing medicine. This old man has once researched Feudal Princess Jinan's methods and it seems quite similar to the recipes seen today."

The grand princess royal raised her eyes to glance blandly at the old doctor. This old man clearly was the most shrewd and innovative imperial physician in the palace. He hadn't gotten his reputation for coming up with treatments for obscure and unknown diseases for nothing. Originally, when she invited him over to treat her grandson and his wife, she also held onto the hope that this man would be able to create a miracle and fix their infertility. Unfortunately...luckily, her granddaughter had a reliable friend. It looked like Marquis Anning's future was saved!

While Heir Anning was energetically consuming his medicinal cuisine and downing medicinal tea, the preparations for the New Years were in full swing at the Yu Residence. Everyone in the estate was busy. Although their New Years Eve dinner had already been booked at Zhenxiu Restaurant, they still needed to prepare an adequate amount of vegetables and meat. After all, the Yu Family was planning on spending the entire first month of the year in the capital.

The Yu and Fang Residences were not far from each other. Lady Fang was afraid that the Yu Family might find things difficult as it was their first time in the capital celebrating the New Years. Thus, she came over from time to time to help out with the management. Her personal maidservant, Linglong, also came along and she was a hardworking and diligent girl. She was sent to Madam Liu to help her train a few new maidservants.

Every year, the whole family worked together to make delicious foods to celebrate the New Years. This was the first time Madam Liu had to manage it on such a large scale. Every day, the stewards and senior



servants asked her for instructions or reported on matters that were going on in the residence as they were in charge of managing the lower-ranked maids and servants. Luckily, the stewards and senior servants were quite capable. In addition, Xiaocao and Lady Fang came over from time to time to help arrange things. Thus, Madam Liu started out quite frazzled, but, over time, she slowly got a handle on things and it became second nature to her.

On the 28th of the last month, Little Shitou braved the snows and wind to travel to the capital with Headmaster Yuan. As soon as Headmaster Yuan entered the capital, he didn't even bother going back to his own family and instead went directly to the Yu Residence. His reasoning was simple: he was escorting his little disciple home.

When Headmaster Yuan arrived at the Yu Residence, every word he said hinted at one thing: he missed Lass Yu's food. Yu Xiaocao was grateful for his treatment of her younger brother, so she naturally wouldn't refuse his request. She personally went into the kitchen to craft a table full of delicious dishes. She also invited the emperor emeritus over to partake in the meal.

"You're being too biased ah, Lass Yu!! You've already been in the capital for more than half a year but you never invited Fifth Lord over for a meal before. However, as soon as this fellow surnamed Yuan appears, you easily make a table full of food to greet him. The difference in treatment is too obvious, right? That's not okay, I need to order a few dishes to soothe my broken heart." The emperor emeritus was currently stuffing his face with red-braised pork as he complained.

Yu Xiaocao had long gotten used to the emperor emeritus's old urchin antics and suppressed a smile as she said, "Feel free to order whatever your heart desires. As long as I can make it, I'll make sure that you won't be disappointed."

"I want Kung Pao chicken, chopped bell peppers with fish head, sweet and sour pork chops, sweet and sour crispy pork..." The emperor emeritus remembered the delicious foods he had eaten in his past life and his saliva almost dripped down his face. It wasn't easy for him to encounter a transmigrator who knew how to cook so he needed to sate his cravings now.

Headmaster Yuan was unhappy by this turn of events, "Your Imperial Majesty, can you finish all of the food you just ordered? This food is so good, so it'd be a pity to waste any of it ah! If you want to eat more, then you can come back another time with me!"

"Old Yuan, you made a mistake! I already said that today I'm the Fifth Lord and not the emperor emeritus. I need to punish you...in a moment, you're not allowed to touch a single dish that I ordered.

Hmph, hmph!” The emperor emeritus was already displeased that he had to fight for food with this old glutton. He grinned evilly as he craftily stated his requests.

Headmaster Yuan wasn't going to go down without a fight, so he hurriedly said, “Fifth Lord, are you really able to finish that many dishes? How about this, I concur that I spoke wrongly. I'll punish myself by drinking three cups of wine, how's that?”

The emperor emeritus immediately snatched the wine jug off the table and growled, “You certainly know how to get every advantage possible. This jug of grape wine was brewed by Xiaocao personally. It has a smooth and mellow taste, and it's obviously a top-notch product. There's not much wine left in the jug, yet you 'punish' yourself with having to drink three cups. Is this a punishment or a reward ah? You're so sly that you even thought of this, huh? That's not okay, I need to punish you to drink three fewer cups of wine.”

This table only had Little Shitou and Royal Prince Yang attending the two old urchins. When they saw the two old men, who had a combined age of around a hundred and fifty, fighting like two kids over a jug of wine, the two youngsters exchanged helpless glances and pretended that they couldn't see anything as they continued to eat the delicious food in front of them.

Yu Xiaocao came in with a platter of sweet and sour crispy pork and saw Headmaster Yuan and the emperor emeritus on the verge of starting a fist-fight over a jug of wine. She hastily went forward to stop them, “Today is for eating and sampling delicious food, so you absolutely cannot drink too much alcohol. If you two become drunk, wouldn't that be an offense to this table of scrumptious food? If the two of you like this wine, then when you leave, both of you will get a jug each!”

When they found out that they both could get a jug to take home, the two old fellows decided not to fight anymore. They pushed their winecups away and started to eat with gusto.

In the blink of an eye, New Year's Eve arrived. The Yu and Fang families were currently sitting in a privately reserved room at Zhenxiu Restaurant, resting after they finished their New Years Eve dinner. That evening, fireworks and firecrackers went off nonstop throughout the capital. Yu Xiaocao sat in front of the window in the private room and watched as brilliant blossoms of light erupted in the sky. She somehow started reminiscing about her family in her previous life.

Were her younger brother and sister doing well there? She had an unexpected accident on what was supposed to be a happy day, so she wasn't sure if her younger brother would feel guilty about this. As

time passed, the pain from hurtful situations should dim. She hoped that her younger brother and sister would be able to get together in happiness and remember the good times...

“Hey! What are you thinking about? This prince has been waving at you for almost half a day but you haven't reacted one bit!” Zhu Junyang was dressed entirely in black and was wearing a black overcoat that was threaded with red embroidery at the edges. He was seated high on a large horse and had his head raised to look at her. Under the radiant light of the fireworks, he looked incredibly enchanting with the snowy ground as his background.

“Why are you here? Did you eat your New Year's Eve dinner?” Yu Xiaocao lay on the windowsill with half her body outside. She had a somewhat misty smile on her face.

Zhu Junyang raised an eyebrow and an alluring and bewitching smile appeared on his face, “Lass, did you drink wine? This prince knows a good place to view fireworks. Do you want to come?”

“Go! Why wouldn't I go?” Yu Xiaocao propped herself up with two hands on the windowsill. With the alarmed cries from the Yu and Fang families surrounding her, she leapt out of the window. Her silvery laugh seemed to fuse with the snowy landscape as she exclaimed, “I'm coming, make sure to catch me...”

The Yu and Fang families had reserved a private room on the third floor of Zhenxiu Restaurant for their New Year's Eve dinner. Once again, they were on the third floor! The room was dead silent for two seconds before cacophony exploded. Xiaolian, who had also been admiring the fireworks at the window with Xiaocao, was currently frozen in a position with her arms stretched out. Her younger sister had jumped down from the third floor and resembled a large and brilliant butterfly as she fell down with her clothes trailing behind her in the snowy winds. She only had the time to brush against her younger sister's clothes but wasn't able to grab onto her...

Below them, Zhu Junyang was stunned for 0.1 seconds before he stepped forward like lightning to where the little lass was following. He stretched out his two muscular arms in preparation to catch the little lass's light body.

“Hee hee hee...so provoking and addicting!” Yu Xiaocao grinned like a fool when she fell into Royal Prince Yang's arm. She grabbed onto his clothing and her large eyes seemed to be clouded over with mist, as if she was in a fog.

Thwap, thwap, thwap! Her small butt had suddenly been slapped by a large hand three times. The smile on her face immediately disappeared as she glowered angrily at Zhu Junyang. She forcefully bit down at his chest and snarled, "Bad man, you even dare to hit me!"

Unfortunately, Zhu Junyang's chest muscles were too hard and he had also had the padding of his winter clothing. She was only able to bite onto a scrap of silk fabric. Zhu Junyang very rarely saw the little lass act in such a childish manner and an enchanting smile curled onto his lips as he said, "Lass, you got guts. Don't you know that it was so dangerous earlier? If this prince wasn't able to catch you time, what do you think would have happened?"

"What could have happened? My head getting splattered on the ground, right? Cracked open, spilling blood...hey, you hit me again! You're such a bad person, bad person! I'm going to bite you to death!" Yu Xiaocao grabbed the hand that had hit her again and forcefully bit down.