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Honey peaches had soft and succulent flesh. After taking a small bite, one could lightly suck on it and the meat from the peach would flow into the mouth. They tasted incredibly sweet. Thus, honey peaches were more suitable for young children and the elderly to eat.

Before the large white peaches were ripe, they had a light green color. When the color of the peel slowly changed and approached a light white, then the peaches were ready to be picked. The skin of these peaches were tender and crispy, and the flesh extremely fragrant. Most young people loved this type of fruit.

Blood peaches were completely red and they had a lustrous and bright color. The flesh tasted fresh and, in one bite, even the juice that came out was a blood red color. It had a strong flavor that seeped into a person's mouth, filling it with flavor. This type of peach could nourish the blood and body. Thus, people who had just recovered from an illness and didn't have much energy would find great benefit from eating this type of peach.

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All of the peaches were packaged in delicately carved boxes to sell. Each box had six peaches in it and their weight exceeded five catties. The price was set at ten taels per box. Compared to ordinary peaches, which were only a dozen copper coins per catty, these peaches were extremely expensive.

However, the high price came with a reason. Ordinary peaches could not even compare to the ones cultivated on the Imperial Plantation, and the difference was like that between that of a peasant and a nobleman. After eating peaches grown at the Imperial Plantation, one would disdain the taste of regular peaches. There wasn't a lot of fruit grown on the back of the Imperial Plantation, so there was a quota implemented on the peaches. Only a hundred boxes of peaches could be sold a day and they would be sold out before the end of the day. Supply definitely did not meet the demand.

Once the lively and vivacious He Wanning found out that the peaches on the hills behind the Imperial Plantation were ripe, she could no longer sit still. She ran over to the Yu Residence and found out that Xiaocao was currently at 'Blossoming Beauty'. Thus, she also scurried over to the cosmetics and spa resort and burst into Xiaocao's private courtyard. She rushed towards Xiaocao, who was currently in the middle of swimming in her private hot spring and stated, "Xiaocao, you're really too much, you know?"

The so-called hot spring was merely a pool of water that had been heated. Mystic-stone water had been added to the pool, so bathing more frequently could improve one's skin texture and quality. Yu Xiaocao was currently wearing a swimsuit while she swam freely in the water that was about as deep as a person's height.

She was quite surprised when He Wanning had burst in. She swam over to the side of the pool and gazed in puzzlement at the other girl and asked, "What's wrong? How did I make you unhappy this time?"

"Since last year you've said that you were going to invite us to go to the Imperial Plantation to hunt and enjoy a picnic. However, you haven't followed up on that promise. I'll say, do you even have us friends in your heart at this point?" He Wanning lay down on a cushion next to the hot spring and splashed water towards Xiaocao.

Xiaocao swiftly dove into the water and avoided the other girl's sneak attack. She surfaced at a distance and smiled mysteriously, "Older Sister He, do you think I don't know what you're hinting at? You're just thinking about those peaches in the fruit orchard, right? If you didn't come today, I still would have sent out invitations to you, Older Sister Yuan, Royal Princess Minglan and Li Mengru to invite you all to experience the life of a fruit farmer!"

"Experience the day to day life of a fruit farmer?" He Wanning's eyes immediately lit up and an expression of eager interest crossed her face. Despite her obvious excitement, she said, "Hmph! You clearly know how to make us work for you to pick peaches. After all, you don't have to pay us for this work. I knew you were a money-grubbing little businesswoman!"

"You don't want to go? Suit yourself..." Yu Xiaocao stepped out of the pool and took the offered bath towel from Yingchun's hands. She sat down on a nearby couch and had Wutong dry her hair for her.

"Go! Of course I'll go! Why wouldn't I? This time of year, the hares are probably plump, so after picking some peaches we can go hunt some game too. In the evening, we can have a barbecue. If we stay too late, doesn't Royal Prince Yang's farmstead nearby have a courtyard residence for you ah? Then we can rest there..." He Wanning became more and more excited with every word she said. She couldn't help but stand up and spin in delight.

He Wanning bummed a whole body essential oil massage off of Yu Xiaocao's courtyard before she finally decided to leave. Before she left, she made sure to remind Xiaocao, "Don't forget to send an invitation. It needs to come quickly!"

That night, Yu Xiaocao sent out a few invitations to her good friends in the capital. She was inviting them over to the Imperial Plantation in two days to have fun. They were to meet at the three-story pavilion on the outside of the city.

That day, Yu Xiaocao rode her little red horse and brought along her two 'hunting dogs', Little Black and Little White. Right after she exited the city, she saw that there were already people waiting by the three-story pavilion. However, as she got closer, she noticed that, other than Royal Princess Minglan, Li Mengru and the two beauties of the capital, there were a few uninvited guests too.

The first to speak was Li Mengru who looked quite embarrassed. She glanced at her older legitimate sister and two legitimate younger brothers and softly apologized, "Younger Sister Yu, after I received your invitation, my older legitimate sister and two legitimate younger brothers were also very interested in your proposal, so...without asking for your permission, I presumptively brought them along. I'm truly very sorry!"

Li Mengru's older legitimate sister, Li Mengqi, had a relatively open personality. When she saw that her concubine-born sister was acting so carefully, she was afraid that they had stepped over Yu Xiaocao's invisible line and hurriedly said, "It was me. I was the one who coincidentally saw my younger sister's invitation and I was very interested in picking peaches, so I begged her to bring me and my younger brothers along. Younger Sister is kind and softhearted and couldn't refuse my request. Blame me instead of her ah!"

"Miss Li is taking it too seriously. Since it is a leisure trip, obviously the more the merrier. I don't have many friends in the capital, if you wish to come along, then I will be happy to take you. Why would I blame you?" Since these people already came, she felt no need to act the bad guy and make everyone else unhappy. It wasn't as if she didn't know how to be courteous. If these people were worthy of being friends with her, then she was happy to incorporate them in the future.

The Li Family's siblings were one thing, but...who was that weird-looking fellow that was salivating over Little Black and Little White? What was he doing here? Also, who was that handsome man next to him? He was so handsome that he looked like he came right out of a fairy tale. Why did he look so mysterious?

"Hee hee, Feudal Princess Jinan, these two hunting dogs of yours still haven't had a litter of pups yet? Is it because you can't bear to give any away that it's like this ah?" Ning Donghuan desperately wanted

these two 'dogs'. He even claimed that he was famous for having good hunting dogs and knowledge, yet he couldn't even tell the difference between a wolf and a dog.

Yu Xiaocao was too lazy to pay any attention to this guy. Instead she turned an inquiring gaze over to the other people there. Who the heck brought this idiot along? Someone needed to take charge of him as this fellow had some guts to try to provoke Little White. If Little White ended up losing its temper, then it was likely the wolf would bite this guy's pants off!

He Wanning let out a couple of fake coughs and looked away as she said in a somewhat unnatural voice, "These two are the young masters from Duke Rongguo's estate. They are named Ning Donglan and Ning Donghuan and they are the maternal cousins from my eldest sister-in-law's family. My eldest sister-in-law had gotten pregnant after eating your specially prepared medicinal cuisine and drinking the medicinal tea! Her maternal family came over and I don't know why but Duke Rongguo's youngest son came over too. When he found out that I had an outing with you today, he shamelessly pestered me to come along!"

He Wanning's eldest sister-in-law originally didn't have any big issues with her body. After she took more care with her food and drink and also began eating the special prepared foods that Yu Xiaocao prescribed, she had gotten pregnant within a few months. This news made the grand princess royal and Marchioness Anning incredibly ecstatic and they especially prepared a large amount of thank you gifts for Yu Xiaocao. Furthermore, they sent over the heir and his wife to express their gratitude in person to Xiaocao. They were so thankful that Xiaocao felt a bit uncomfortable by their expressions.

In the eyes of He Wanning and the other maidens here, it wasn't too surprising that Ning Donghuan came over as he had always been a hedonistic good-for-nothing. However, they would have never expected that Duke Rongguo's second son, Ning Donglan, who had a reputation of being a perfect gentleman, would also want to come. It was quite out of character for him and this surprised He Wanning endlessly!

"We're in luck! Quickly, quickly, we've almost caught up with them! I'll say, Little Yangzi, I don't think your charms are deadly enough! Your little lass doesn't even place a lot of importance on you. She's going out to play today but didn't even let you know in advance. If it wasn't for this young master's connections, you would still be in the dark!!" The person who spoke was a pale-faced youth dressed in green on a buckskin horse.

"Isn't that the precious grandson of Old General Lu? Wasn't his relationship with Royal Prince Yang quite bad? How come they're coming over together?" He Wanning had once been infuriated by Lu Hao's sharp tongue and had tried to whip him in retaliation. However, her skills with the whip were no match

for Lu Hao, who had spent years tussling with Royal Prince Yang. The gap in their skills was too great. She ended panting in exhaustion with sweat dripping down her face while the infuriating youth hadn't gotten hit even once. Thus, the two people's argument ended like that!

Yu Xiaocao's eyes momentarily softened when she saw that familiar handsome youth dressed entirely in black with the phoenix eyes riding on a black horse. She didn't even need to nudge her mount as Little Red headed over to Fierce Wind and tried to bite the other horse's ears.

Yu Xiaocao patted Little Red's head and stopped her from bothering Fierce Wind. She looked at Zhu Junyang with a smile in her eyes, "When did you get back to the capital? You look like you've gotten thinner. You still need to take care of yourself no matter how urgent your task is."

Zhu Junyang reached out a hand to stroke the little girl's tender face and the severe look on his face gentled, "Last night I had just gotten back...ever since I left the capital, I've longed for the food you make. Even the simplest porridge and stir-fried veggies you make are better than the most expensive delicacies. This prince wants to eat your Buddha jumps over the wall!"

Didn't he just say that even her simplest porridge and stir-fried vegetables were good enough? Yet he suddenly wanted to eat Buddha jumps over the wall. Just what was he trying to say? Yu Xiaocao knew that this fellow wasn't happy unless there was a meat dish on the table so the mirth in her eyes deepened. She nodded her head and said, "Alright, tomorrow evening you should come over to Count Zhongqin's estate and I'll make you some Buddha jumps over the wall...you got back to the capital yesterday; don't you need to show up at court today to report? Is it really okay for you to go out with us?"

"Not a problem! The emperor gave me a day off to rest up ah!" Zhu Junyang had been out of the capital for more than a month doing his task and had constantly thought of his little lass. The first thing he wanted to do when he got back was to see her. From his good friend, he found out that she was taking people to the Imperial Plantation to play around today, so he came along without even thinking about it.

"Ahem, ahem! Is it really okay for you guys to be like this when there are a bunch of other people around? All of us are just standing here ah, yet you guys don't feel the least bit embarrassed?! Let's go, let's go! Head out!" Lu Hao had just experienced first hand the lovey-doveyness between these two people and couldn't stand it anymore. He would have never expected that the cold faced royal prince, the cruel and vicious devil star, actually had such a gentle and sweet side of him. Lu Hao shuddered at the memory as goosebumps rose throughout his body. The legendary 'the tempered sword being twisted around a beauty's finger' was actually true!

The emperor raising the status of women wasn't without benefit. In fact, every noble-born maiden in the capital was quite skilled at horseback riding. In total, the group consisted of over a dozen young nobles. With their maidservants and servants added on, there were around a few dozen horses all headed down the capital's official roads. The peasant farmers, who were pushing or pulling carts towards the capital, all hurriedly went aside to let these nobles through. Judging by these people's clothing and attitudes, it was easy to tell that they couldn't afford to offend any of them. It was better to make way, right? If they had accidentally caused offense to one of these arrogant and noble masters, then they would likely have to pay in blood!

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Yu Xiaocao spurred her little red horse on. Her steed had seen a bunch of other horses around it, so its thirst for competition rose. It stretched out its legs and bolted off like a red whirlwind. In a wisp, it quickly left the other horses far behind it. Since Fierce Wind was a Ferghana horse, it wasn't difficult for it to keep up with Little Red. However, after spending a lot of time with Little Red, the black horse always allowed the little red horse to do anything it wanted. Thus, it kept half a horse head's distance from Little Red and ran neck to neck.

Yu Xiaocao turned her head around to look at the confident and calm Zhu Junyang and grinned at him. Fierce Wind was like his owner and always did little tricks to get the other horse to like him. Suddenly, Xiaocao heard the sound of another horse's hooves from behind and curiously turned around to look. She saw the elegantly handsome Ning Donglan, who was dressed entirely in white, riding a white steed that glided over quickly. His white sleeves billowed around him and his coal-black hair floated in the wind. His ethereally handsome face along with his heroic figure seemed to make him resemble a celestial immortal coming down to earth...

"Hmph!" Zhu Junyang had noticed that his little lass had her attention taken away by another man, so he felt quite unhappy. He couldn't stop himself from glaring at Ning Donglan with daggers in his eyes. Everything was good about his little lass. The only problem she had was that she was 'horny'! Of course, the type of 'horny' that he meant was that she really liked looking at beautiful things, which included handsome and good-looking men.

In fact, he recalled that when the little lass was only around eight to nine years old, she also regarded him with a stunned look on her face. Now that he remembered that scene, he felt quite pleased and self-satisfied. However, when the little lass revealed an admiring expression at other men who were good-looking in front of him, that good feeling rapidly changed into something else!

After he saw that the little lass hadn't noticed his jealousy, Zhu Junyang threw another look at the tactless Ning Donglan, who had caught up with them, and remarked in a very aggrieved tone, "Lass, what are you looking at so intently for?"

Yu Xiaocao finally stopped staring and sensed his displeased expression. She rubbed at her nose self-consciously and quibbled, "I wasn't looking at anything! I was just a bit amazed by Young Master Ning's horse. It was actually able to catch up with Little Red and Fierce Wind. I don't know what kind of horse it is!"

Who was she trying to fool?! Earlier she was staring blatantly at that handsome guy's face so much that the drool almost fell out of her mouth, yet now she claimed she was looking at the man's horse instead. He obviously wouldn't believe that excuse! However, Zhu Junyang had a good understanding of Xiaocao's personality and didn't bother to argue with her over this. Instead, he played along, "Older Brother Ning's beloved horse looks lively, has large intelligent eyes, a tall arched neck, delicate ears, strong sturdy limbs, and a light gait...it should be a very good example of a Yili horse—a very good breed!"

Ning Donglan, who was already neck to neck with Xiaocao, heard what Zhu Junyang said and revealed a gentle smile, "Royal Prince Yang is very knowledgeable. I spotted this horse in the middle of a herd of wild horses on my most recent journey. It took me quite a bit of effort to tame it! However, Falling Snow is probably the most lively and intelligent horse I've had..."

Everyone knew that Yili horses were incredibly beautiful, so Xiaocao couldn't help but glance at the horse a bit more. Little Red, on the other hand, was quite unhappy about this. The most lively and intelligent horse was this little white horse? That was an utter lie! The most lively and intelligent horse was right here!

Little Red thought that Falling Snow looked more and more like an eyesore, so it bunched up its muscles and sped forward in an effort to leave the little white horse behind. Although Little Red wasn't a famous breed, it had been fed with mystic-stone water by its master since it was young. Thus, most famous and good steeds couldn't beat it! Consequently, it leapt forward and left Fierce Wind and Falling Snow behind it by more than a horse length!

When they almost reached the fork in the road that led to the Imperial Plantation, Yu Xiaocao pulled on the reins and began to comfort Little Red. She was planning on waiting for the rest of her friends here before they entered the Imperial Plantation.

Ning Donglan waited until Falling Snow came to a stop and then leapt off his steed. He regarded his beloved horse, which looked exhausted, with a tender look on his face and then looked with astonishment at Little Red, who was currently being fed mystic-stone water by its master. He asked curiously, "Miss Yu, your precious horse truly has some unusual legs and can actually run faster than Falling Snow. I really can't find many horses that can do that! Perhaps...your horse is the descendant of the legendary Red Hare?"

Yu Xiaocao shrugged her shoulders and gently stroked Little Red's soft and silky mane as she casually replied, "I don't know much about horses. Little Red was given to me by my godfather when I was young and it was only a small yearling then, so I couldn't see anything special then. I never would have expected that it would become more amazing as it got older and that it has quite a bit of stamina. It's a bit hot-blooded in temperament though and always likes to bully Fierce Wind and other horses."

"Good horses all have bad tempers! When I was taming Falling Snow, I almost got kicked or stepped on multiple times. It was quite dangerous. Your horse actually runs faster than Royal Prince Yang's Ferghana horse, which is a top-notch horse. It must have some blood-line of Red Hare!" Ning Donglan noticed that his beloved horse, which was usually quite proud and aloof, was currently doing its best to curry favor with the little red horse. He was quite surprised by this turn of events.

Fierce Wind was not happy by this at all. It stubbornly inserted itself between Little Red and Falling Snow and even jostled the white horse away. Falling Snow also had a temper and opened its mouth to snap at Fierce Wind. Fierce Wind had a similar temperament as its owner. Other than acting gentle and sweet around Little Red, it was vicious and temperamental to all other horses. The two horses actually started to come to blows and began fighting. It was quite a thrilling sight!

Zhu Junyang could tell that his beloved steed had the advantage here and slanted a look while he crossed his arms around his chest and a cold smile appeared on his face. From time to time, he would throw a provocative look at Ning Donglan.

Ning Donglan saw that his beloved horse had almost been kicked a few times by Fierce Wind and frowned in worry as he said, "Although Falling Snow has an arrogant temperament, it's not the type to cause trouble for no reason. What's going on today? Miss Yu, is your Little Red a female horse?"

Yu Xiaocao naturally could tell that Fierce Wind was jealous and glanced at its master. Argh...this horse was truly too petty; it must have learned this from its master. After hearing the question, she laughingly led Little Red forward to avoid getting injured and nodded, "Yes ah! My Little Red is a mare and it's a very attractive female horse!"

“Hmph! Only knows how to attract outside bees and butterflies!” Zhu Junyang huffed coldly and had a displeased look on his face.

“Who are you talking about ah?” Yu Xiaocao immediately became a bit upset and her large eyes had a hint of danger in them.

“I was talking about the horse, who else would I be talking about?” Zhu Junyang immediately backed off and stared at the cause of all this trouble—Little Red.

Yu Xiaocao was still not happy, “That's also not okay! My Little Red is so sweet and obedient and didn't start this trouble. It was clearly the fault of someone else who shamelessly came forward. So shameless and brazen ah!” It wasn't as if she didn't know how to say things in a roundabout way.

Zhu Junyang was helpless against her onslaught and could only admit defeat now. He ordered Fierce Wind, “Fierce Wind, it's about enough, alright? It's not as if you have a blood-feud right now. Are you really going to fight until the other can't anymore? Come back!”

Fierce Wind resentfully turned around. As it turned, it took one last bite at Falling Snow's neck. Falling Snow's reactions weren't fast enough so it ended up with a bloody bite mark on its neck. However, Fierce Wind was still going easy on the other horse. Otherwise, the white horse would be missing a bit of flesh right now.

Falling Snow let out an anguished whinny and Ning Donglan hurriedly took out a handkerchief to treat his poor horse. Yu Xiaocao, who had been watching all of this, quite liked that pretty white horse so she wet her own handkerchief with some mystic stone water and offered it over, “Young Master Ning, use this to wipe Falling Snow's wound ah.”

Ning Donglan didn't refuse her good intentions and took the offered handkerchief as he washed the wound on Falling Snow's neck. He complained out of love, “That horse really bit down hard. Clearly the horse is like its master; both are irritable and bad tempered!”

As someone who shielded the short-comings of her loved ones, Yu Xiaocao wasn't happy, “It wasn't right for Fierce Wind to bite Falling Snow. I know you love your horse but you can't just blame other people unjustly.”

Ning Donglan inwardly thought, 'If Royal Prince Yang had restrained his horse earlier, would Falling Snow be injured now?' However, he could tell Xiaocao was protecting Zhu Junyang and didn't say anything more.

Zhu Junyang was over the moon when he saw his little lass defending him. It was as if he had just drunk a cup of ice cold water during the hottest day of the year. It was obviously that his little lass still had him in his heart and she wasn't bewitched by another pretty face.

After they waited for quite a bit, He Wanning and the others finally caught up with them. He Wanning had a dissatisfied expression on her face as she complained, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, is this how the host should be acting? Leaving the guests behind while you run off in front? Yes, we all know that your steed is amazing. When I get back, I'm going to have my father find me a good horse and leave the three of you guys in the dust next!!"

"Alright ah! This silly animal of mine took control of the situation and insisted on competing with Fierce Wind and Falling Snow. I wasn't trying to show off my horse. Older Sister He, don't blame me wrongly!" Yu Xiaocao suppressed the smile on her lips and patted Little Red's neck as she easily transferred the blame over.

He Wanning stared at Little Red with a covetous gaze. Little Red felt a bit uneasy by this and irritability stamped its hooves on the ground. He Wanning nodded her head, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, your horse doesn't look very impressive and I would have never expected that it would be on the same level as a Ferghana horse. If I'm not wrong, this horse of yours should be a mare right?"

After Xiaocao nodded her head in assent, He Wanning revealed an expectant expression, "Then, once this horse has a foal, it will go to me. I've already spoken and made this reservation. You're not allowed to give it to anyone else!"

"Who did you make an agreement with? Did you get this prince's permission yet?" Zhu Junyang once again felt like the little lass wasn't taking him seriously. She even agreed to send out Fierce Wind's and Little Red's future child out to someone else without even consulting him.

Yu Xiaocao and He Wanning both looked at him with similar flabbergasted expressions on their faces, "Why do we need to get your permission?"

Strictly speaking, He Wanning was actually considered cousins with Zhu Junyang. Other people were afraid of this devil-like Royal Prince Yang, but she wasn't, "This is strictly between me and Younger Sister Xiaocao, why are you butting in?"

Zhu Junyang huffed and said, "The little foal that you're talking about is also the descendant of Fierce Wind. Why can't I, as one of the masters involved here, also have an opinion?"

"Who says that Little Red's kid must be Fierce Wind's kid?" Yu Xiaocao didn't expect this fellow to be this aggressive that he wouldn't even allow other people's horses to breed with her horse.

Zhu Junyang's expression darkened even more, "What kind of owner are you? Haven't you seen the relationship between Fierce Wind and Little Red? Are you going to callously tear them apart?"

'What kind of eyes do you have to think that Little Red and Fierce Wind are in a loving relationship? Obviously it's only Fierce Wind who is shamelessly pestering Little Red and my Little Red hasn't yet agreed to this!' However, she could tell that Zhu Junyang was truly mad about this so Yu Xiaocao didn't bother to quarrel with him. The first step hadn't even been taken yet, so what was the point in arguing over the future of Little Red's children? There were better things to do!

"In front of us is the Imperial Plantation, do we want to go directly to the back hills or first go to the main building to rest a bit?" As the host, Yu Xiaocao couldn't spend all of her time soothing the hurt feelings of a certain someone. She needed to make sure she took good care of all of these noble-born misses and young masters.

He Wanning didn't even wait to consider before she said, "Let's go to the back mountains first! We can all make our own decisions there. Those who want to pick peaches can pick peaches. Those who don't can go hunting first. At lunch, we can have a barbecue with the hunted game and eat the free fruits as well!"

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The group followed the winding trail behind the Imperial Plantation and hiked towards the little hill that wasn't too far from them. Steward Wang, who was in charge of overseeing the Imperial Plantation, had gotten word of their arrival and hurried over with the staff to welcome them. These young masters and misses were all from noble families and one of them was actually their immediate superior, so they couldn't slight them one bit.

However, He Wanning felt like they were all in the way and directly ordered them away. Since they were here for an outing, it needed to be more rustic for them to have fun. The invitation from Steward Wang was completely ignored by everyone.

At the peach orchard, a beautiful sight greeted their eyes. Rosy and bright peaches hung from the branches and the weight of them made the branches bend down. Raising one's head would allow a fuzzy peach to hit one's forehead. The sweet scent of the peaches permeated the mountainside.

"Those of you who want to hunt go ahead. We can split duties. In any case, I want to pick peaches!" He Wanning impatiently picked a massive scarlet blood peach that had caught her eye. She wiped the fuzz on the peach with a handkerchief and began to stuff the fruit into her mouth. Her maidservant hurriedly stopped her and took out a water pouch that she carried to help her wash the peach clean before handing it back to her.

He Wanning bit down and bright red juice dribbled down from the corner of her mouth. She wiped the juice off with the back of her hand in an uninhibited manner and swallowed down the flesh and juice in her mouth. She remarked in a pleased manner, "So delicious! Apparently peaches that are just picked are even more fresh. This type of peach has a sour and sweet taste to it and it really stimulates one's appetite!"

Royal Princess Minglan personally preferred the juicy and rich honey peach. She carefully looked around and selected a honey peach tree from the orchard. She stood on the top of her tiptoes to pick a peach that had caught her eye. Her maidservant swiftly took it from her hand to help her wash it before handing it back to her.

Royal Princess Minglan held the washed peach in one hand while she picked another ripe peach with her other hand. The honey peaches that she picked were all placed in a basket held by a maidservant behind her. After picking five peaches, she finally stopped. She delivered the washed peach to her mouth and gently took a small bite. Then, she sucked at the bite and sweet and mellow juice immediately flowed into her mouth. It tasted as sweet as honey. After she finished sucking out the juice, she discovered that what was left in her hands was only the skin of the peach and the seed. The flesh of fully ripened honey peaches had already turned to juice. No wonder they were called honey peaches!

Li Mengru's two younger brothers were just at the age where they liked to play. When they saw that their older sisters had started to pick peaches without saying a word, they didn't want to be outdone.

They ran towards the peach trees they liked and began to pick fruit. For the fruit that were on the higher branches, they sat on the shoulders of others to help them reach.

Lu Hao couldn't control the strength in his hands. After attempting to pick a few honey peaches, he found out that he always ended up damaging the fruit so he switched his targets to the giant white peaches. Giant white peaches had firmer flesh and were not as delicate as honey peaches, so they were more suited to him. He placed the fruit basket that the staff of the orchards used at his feet and, before long, most of the basket was filled with peaches. The speed at which he picked peaches was even faster than the most experienced orchard hands.

Ning Donghuan had always had a more deranged temperament. When he saw everyone else spending time in the fruit orchard, he also changed his mind and began to pick peaches. After picking one, he rubbed it casually on his clothes a few times and then took a giant bite. Before long, three to four large peaches had already gone down his gullet. The coarse young man exclaimed, "I'm rich, I'm rich! These peaches are all for free so I need to eat as many as I can! I need to let all of my friends know that the peaches that they can't even buy can be eaten by me. I can eat as much as I want. Won't they be so jealous of me?!"

Ning Donglan, on the other hand, was an elegant and cultured fellow. He was dressed entirely in white and had both of his hands behind his back. One of his hands held a fan that had an ornament attached to it that lightly swayed with his steps. His demeanor made him look like a peach immortal. However, this 'immortal' wasn't the type that disdained the mundane food of mortals. Whenever he saw a peach that caught his eye, he would also stretch out a hand and pick it off the tree. After washing the fuzz off of the fruit, he would happily taste the peach.

"All of you men are here picking peaches, are any of you going to go hunting? You guys wouldn't happen to be waiting for us young noble maidens to go instead ah?" After eating two peaches, He Wanning's stomach was no longer empty. Although her desire to pick peaches didn't go down, her desire to eat peaches had changed.

Ning Donghuan ran to a nearby pear tree and picked off a pear that was purple-green in color. He bit down and almost choked on the acidity of the fruit. He spat out the unripe flesh from his mouth and threw the pear onto the ground. After hearing He Wanning's question, he blew a loud whistle to summon a giant hunting dog. He patted the dog's head and proudly remarked, "With my Tyrant here, why do we need people to hunt? Tyrant, go show them your skills and hunt some wild peasants and hares for us!"

Yu Xiaocao glanced at Tyrant and discovered that it was a Tibetan mastiff. Tibetan mastiffs were well-known for being fierce hunters. No wonder Ning Donghuan loved this dog so much!

When he saw that Tyrant hadn't entered the thickets yet, Ning Donghuan boasted proudly, "My Tyrant was brought over from U-Tsang (historic name for Tibet) and it's very fierce! No dog in the capital is its match. It is truly the King of Dogs! Miss Yu, on another day, bring your Little Black and Little White along to scuttle with Tyrant alright?"

Yu Xiaocao let out a 'pft' of laughter. Tyrant was the best eh? In Little Black and Little White's eyes, that dog wasn't even worth a second glance! Although Little Black and Little White were usually good natured, they could actually make a fierce tiger back down when they needed to!

Ning Donghuan hurriedly added when she saw her expression, "Don't dismiss me so early. Tyrant is a mastiff and the Tibetan people use them to fend off fierce creatures. They will even fight off wild wolves."

Awooooo—Just as he finished speaking, he heard the frantic cry from his dog. Ning Donghuan's expression immediately changed and he exclaimed, "That sounds like Tyrant. Didn't you say that there aren't any fierce beasts in the hills here? What happened? That's not okay, I need to go take a look!"

Ning Donglan pulled his younger brother back and frowned, "If it is truly a vicious creature, it's not like you can do anything with your poor martial arts skills. Royal Prince Yang, if there are truly fierce beasts here, we can't just let this go. After all, Miss Yu spends a lot of time here at the Imperial Plantation working..."

Zhu Junyang had also thought of this point. However, when Ning Donglan pointed it out, he felt quite unhappy inside. He was the only one who needed to be concerned about his lass's affairs. As an 'outsider', why was this guy butting in? Did this fellow have other motives towards the little lass?

"For the past year, I've pretty much come to the Imperial Plantation almost every day from the capital and I never heard of any fierce beasts staying in the area. That being said, other than some shrubbery in the area, there's no thick forest here for vicious animals to hide in. There shouldn't be any real danger. Perhaps Tyrant accidentally fell into a trap that was dug by one of the nearby villagers? How about we go over and take a look?"

During their journey here, Little Black and Little White had run far in front of the horses. Yu Xiaocao had personally seen them run into the thicker areas of the back mountain. If there truly were any vicious creatures around, Little Black and Little White would have already warned her. Although she wasn't worried, that didn't mean Zhu Junyang wasn't. He couldn't let even one small detail escape his eye when it came to his little lass's safety. In a few days, he needed to have some people clean up the surrounding areas around the fruit orchard. Then, he was going to bring some people up from the farmstead and have them begin to patrol the nearby areas to make sure everything was safe. Only then would he be okay with having his lass spending a lot of time at the Imperial Plantation.

“Lu Hao and I will go take a look. After all, the two of us are well trained. The rest of you should stay here. Head Steward Liu and Bodyguard Dong will stay here to protect all of you!” Zhu Junyang pulled the eager and excited Xiaocao and He Wanning back, who had a face full of curiosity. He didn't need to worry about the other young maidens. These two, however, were always ready to get into trouble.

Yu Xiaocao's displeasure at being held back shown on her face. What was wrong with her tagging along? With these two hulking men along, would they really not be able to protect her, a tiny little girl?

Just as the two youths were about to head forward, they could hear some rustling in the nearby bushes. From the looks of it, it looked like a large creature was headed their way. Ning Donglan headed a few steps closer to Xiaocao and stood in front of her as he quietly reminded them, “Be careful! All of the young ladies should retreat back into the fruit orchard, the servants should keep an eye out...”

Just as he finished speaking, a giant black head revealed itself from the bushes. The creature's bright blue eyes looked at the group of humans in puzzlement. When Zhu Junyang clearly identified the animal, he immediately relaxed.

“Tyrant! What's wrong, Tyrant?!!” Ning Donghuan clearly saw what was being dragged along by that giant black head. Why did it look so familiar? This...could it be his Tyrant ah? Tyrant, who had no rivals in the whole capital, was currently acting like a dead animal in Little Black's jaws and whimpering and whining pitifully.

“Little Black, who told you that you could just bully other people's dogs eh?” Yu Xiaocao was very familiar with Little Black's personality. It loved to play around and could romp happily with the stray dogs in the village. If it was Little white, on the other hand, she could believe that it was that guy who started the fight. However, Little Black would never bully another dog without being provoked first.

Little Black tossed Tyrant onto the ground. When Ning Donghuan saw his beloved pet like this, lying on the ground not moving, he cried out and ran forward, "Tyrant, I rely on you to give me face ah, you can't be dead! What will I do if you're dead?" The distress on his face made it seem like his wife had died.

Ning Donglan couldn't stand his younger brother acting like this and poked his brother in the back with his foot to remind him to stop making a spectacle out of himself.

"This is not okay! Miss Yu, your Little Black killed my Tibetan mastiff that cost ten thousand taels to buy. You need to compensate me...just give me Little Black ah, Little Black is mine now! Otherwise, I'm going to cause a racket at your residence every day!" Ning Donghuan revealed his hooligan side and stared at Little Black with a covetous expression.

"Psh! You sure are hoping to get the better side of the deal here! Let me tell you, my Little Black is worth more than ten of your Tyrant!" Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes and gave a pointed look at Ning Donglan. Her intent was obvious, 'Quickly take your younger brother away. The fact that he's trying to blackmail someone in front of all of these people is really too shameless of him!'

Zhu Junyang felt the fires of rage rise up in his heart when he saw his little lass looking at Second Young Master Ning. He pulled the shameless Ning Donghuan, who was hugging the 'dead corpse' of his dog, up by his collar and pointed at Tyrant, whose eyes were still blinking and looking around. He growled, "If this dog of yours was killed by Little Black, then this prince would compensate you for your ten thousand taels! However, open your eyes wider, idiot! It was only scared silly by Little Black and doesn't dare to stand up around the other dog!"

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As if it was trying to verify their thoughts, Little Black shot a look full of disdain at Tyrant and then turned around to walk into the shrubbery. Tyrant could smell the scent of Little Black of leaving and slunk back up. It stuck its tail behind its legs, hid behind its master, and refused to go out again.

"Ah..." Ning Donghuan, who was still trying to be shameless, stared at his dog with a flabbergasted expression. Under the mocking look of Yu Xiaocao, he sheepishly said, "I didn't expect my Tyrant to be so smart. It knows how to play dead to avoid danger..."

Yu Xiaocao burst into laughter and looked at Tyrant, who was quite subdued but looked to be in fine shape, "Little Black wouldn't bully your dog for no reason. Tyrant must have tried to steal his prey! Little Black is quite bold and powerful when he is hunting. Whoever wants to steal his game without his permission will get punished! Alright ah! After that false alarm, let's go back to picking fruit. In the

afternoon, we need to send out a shipment. In order to allow everyone to fully enjoy themselves, I even had the workers stop working. Go pick some more and don't waste the time."

"You're truly taking us for a bunch of fruit pickers ah! Can you afford to hire us nobles as regular workers?" He Wanning scratched at her neck and she felt like her whole body was one big itch. She wished she could take off her clothes to scratch everywhere. However, after being instructed in the etiquette and mannerisms of a noble maiden for over a decade, she couldn't do something so impolite and could only resist the urge.

"Stop scratching, stop scratching! Qiulu, quickly take out a clean handkerchief and wet it with some water to let your young miss wipe herself down!" Yu Xiaocao noticed that He Wanning's neck had turned red from her scratching and hurriedly went over to stop her, "The fuzz on peaches are notorious for causing people to feel itchy. You have to be careful and avoid getting it on your skin!"

"How come you didn't mention this earlier?" Ning Donghuan acted as if he was a giant monkey who had been infected with lice as he scratched his whole body uninhibitedly. The more he scratched, the more it itched, and the more it itched, the more he had to scratch. His neck and arms were all red and excoriated from his efforts as if he didn't care that he might break his skin from scratching so hard.

Li Mengru's younger brother Li Haoming had also gotten some peach fuzz on his skin. He cried as he scratched his body. Luckily, the only parts that had gotten fuzz on were his arms. Li Mengqi held a wet handkerchief and helped him wipe it off.

Yu Xiaocao pointed at a small brook that wasn't very far from them and spoke at Ning Donghuan, "You all can go over there to wash off. When Little Black and Little White get back, we can go to the grass pavilion by the sea of flowers to take our noon meal."

He Wanning still wanted to continue to pick peaches and looked at all of the peaches in the trees. She wished she could pick them all down and carry them away. Even if she couldn't take them with her, she found picking fruit from the tree to be a very fun activity, "Those of you who want to wash up can do so, I'm going to continue to pick some more fruit."

Other than Ning Donghuan, the rest of the group stayed at the fruit orchard and continued to pick peaches. When they first entered the orchard, they ate peaches as they picked. Their bellies now were full and they couldn't eat any more fruit. The sweet aroma of ripe fruit was very calming. All in all, the sweet young maidens along with the young masters and all of their servants were able to pick all of the fruits that were needed to be sold in the afternoon before noon arrived.

A pile of game had already formed outside the orchard. There were wild hares, wild pheasants, badgers...everything that needed to be there was there. There was even a wild goat that weighed over a hundred catties! All of the game had been killed with a powerful bite to their necks. The wounds were quite small and even less blood flowed out. The only exception was the wild goat, which had its back legs dripping with blood and was quite mangled.

When Little Black came back again with wild Reeve's pheasant, Xiaocao patted its head and praised it unstintingly, "Little Black is so hardworking. We have enough game here! Go bring Little White back. In a moment, we'll barbecue some meat for you guys to eat!"

Little Black licked its master's hand and joyfully wagged its large fluffy tail. It shot another threatening look at Tyrant before it swiftly disappeared into the bushes.

"So fast!" Ning Donghuan salivated as he stared in the direction that Little Black disappeared in. He fawningly walked up to Xiaocao and said, "Such top quality hunting dogs, and you have two of them. What a waste, right? How about you set a price and transfer Little Black to me? Don't worry, no matter how high the price, I'm willing to buy..."

"Does it look like I lack money ah?" Yu Xiaocao was too lazy to pay him any attention and casually rebuked.

Ah...although Ning Donghuan was a profligate young master, he knew all of the news and rumors swirling about the capital. Fresh fruits and vegetables grown out of season, Blossoming Beauty's flower teas and cosmeceuticals, the specialty resort spa, and this fruit orchard gleaming with gold...The Yu Family's lass had only been in the capital for less than a year but she likely made more money than one could spend in a lifetime, no, multiple lifetimes. She truly wasn't someone who lacked money!

"Then tell me ah! What will allow you to give Little Black to me?" Ning Donghuan dispiritedly asked with his head lowered down as if he was trying to look pathetic.

"Little Black and Little White aren't considered mine. I don't have the power to decide where they go." In Yu Xiaocao's heart, these two were already past the stage of mere pets. They shouldn't be confined in a tiny little space in a residence as the deep forest was their true home. However, these two didn't seem interested in spending all their time in the great outdoors as they were very close to her. Perhaps it was due to the fact she had the multi-colored stone on her?

Unfortunately, Ning Donghuan didn't understand the complexities behind her words. Instead, his face lit up and he remarked with great emotion, "If they're not considered yours, then who are they owned by? Royal Prince Yang ah?"

As long as they weren't owned by Yu Xiaocao, Ning Donghuan felt like he would have no qualms bothering anyone else. His old father had said that Miss Yu was absolutely someone he could not afford to offend. Otherwise, he would have long resorted to some duplicitous methods to get his hands on one of her dogs. As long as she wasn't their owner, then it was all very easy to resolve. Even if the owner was the hard to connect with Royal Prince Yang, he was confident in his own skills and willingness that he would be able to get the prince to sell one of the dogs to him! The worst case scenario would be Royal Prince Yang beating him into a pulp. A few flesh wounds were nothing!

"No, they're not owned by any person! They are only owned by themselves." Yu Xiaocao thought that interacting with this idiot was truly too onerous. This guy truly had zero brains in that empty head of his.

However, Ning Donghuan became even more ecstatic, "They're not owned by anyone? Doesn't that mean they are masterless then? Then doesn't that mean that as long as I find a way to bring them back that they would be considered mine ah?" Whoever caught masterless animals would be considered their new masters. Wasn't that what she was hinting at?

Yu Xiaocao could sense his growing interest and had an inkling of what he was going to try to do. She gazed at him mysteriously and had a faint smile on her face as she said, "You could think of it that way. However, don't blame me for not warning you in the future. Little Black and Little White aren't that easy to get along with..."

However, Ning Donghuan didn't take her warning to heart. His mind was obsessed with the idea of getting these two 'hunting dogs' into his kennel. Naturally, this was the direct cause of his future sad predicament.

The maidservants and manservants moved all of the game to the grass pavilion. Little Black and Little White also came along, coming and going like a black and white whirlwind. They frolicked through the flower fields swiftly and scared the female workers who were working in the fields into shrieks.

Several barbecue racks had been set up on the flat ground next to the pavilion. The charcoal inside had also been lit up. The cleaned game was in the process of being strung up on steel skewers and Royal

Princess Minglan, Yuan Xueyan, and another few young maidens stood curiously at the side of the rack. They watched in fascination as the workers from the plantation swiftly made barbecue skewers from the freshly slain game.

The workers rubbed oil, flipped the meat, and added seasonings...it wasn't a simple process ah! He Wanning was extremely eager to try and dismissed one of the servants who was cooking and began to start working herself. Younger Sister Xiaocao had told her earlier that barbecuing your own food was the most fun.

When she picked up a skewer of potatoes that was still half raw and waved it in front of Xiaocao as if it was a precious treasure, Xiaocao was currently cooking the wild goat that was missing a leg. Why was it missing a leg ah? That leg had been savaged by Tyrant earlier and she had cut it off so she could roast it for Little Black and Little White. She had no interest in eating meat that already had saliva on it!

"Xiaocao, look at the potatoes I roasted. Don't they look great? They look so delicious!" He Wanning somewhat proudly raised the skewer of potatoes and used her other hand to wipe her forehead of sweat. The only thing she accomplished in doing was leaving three black lines on her face.

Yu Xiaocao took a look at the pathetic looking skewer of potatoes and wondered if she should stop the other girl from eating some. After thinking a bit, she decided it was better not to pour cold water on He Wanning's enthusiasm. After all, eating some potatoes that were half burnt and half raw wouldn't kill a person and would only cause some diarrhea at worst.

"Do you want to try some? This is the first skewer that I've ever roasted myself! If it was anyone else, I couldn't bear to let them try any!" He Wanning thrust the ash-covered skewer towards Xiaocao's mouth and resisted the urge to take it away.

Yu Xiaocao had a wide-eyed expression on her face as she politely refused, "Thank you! This is the first time you've roasted your own potatoes, so it's better if you eat it instead ah..."

"What's that expression on your face ah? It's potatoes I roasted, not poison....if you don't want to eat it, it's your loss!" He Wanning stuffed the skewer of roasted potatoes in her mouth in a fit of pique. The expression on her face immediately changed.

“Peh, peh, peh....so salty, so disgusting ah!!” He Wanning spat out the food that was in her mouth and beckoned to the maidservant beside her to give her some water so she could rinse her mouth.

Zhu Junyang came over with a skewer of chicken thigh meat that had been roasted until it was crisp and golden. He squatted down next to Xiaocao and stuffed the chicken thigh meat skewer into Xiaocao's hands. He took over the whole roasted wild goat that she was in charge of and easily flipped it, “Go have some fun ah. I'll take over this.”

Yu Xiaocao took off a piece of meat from the skewer and delivered it into Zhu Junyang's mouth while she also took a bite. She ate with relish, “So good! I never would have thought that Royal Prince Yang was also skilled at roasting meat ah!”

“Any soldier who has marched with the army knows how to roast meat. Whenever we have free time, we'll go out and hunt some game down to barbecue. Although I can't guarantee the taste of the food, I can at least attest that it's cooked through.” As he talked, he even shot a sardonic glance at He Wanning as if he was hinting at something.

Yu Xiaocao restrained the laughter bubbling up inside of her and split the chicken meat between the two of them. Then, she stood up and pulled He Wanning, who looked quite at a loss and said, “Let's go, I'll teach you how to roast meat skewers!”

Yu Xiaocao used the already skewered raw goat meat to show her how to control the heat, how to flip the meat, how to brush on oil and seasonings...to her, barbecuing some meat was super easy and came to her like it was nothing. He Wanning, on the other hand, was astonished at her skill. Although it looked deceptively simple, when she tried, she ended up frantically trying to do all of the right steps. The meat that Xiaocao roasted came out flaky and crispy on the outside and delicious on the inside. The meat that she cooked, on the other hand, always turned out black and sad on the outside and the inside was always half raw.

After going through many attempts, He Wanning had to stop in regret. It looked like she had no culinary talent! Now that she accepted the truth, she ate the cooked food to salvage her hurt pride and ended up monopolizing all of the roasted meat that Xiaocao had cooked. She had no other choice. The food that Xiaocao barbecued was seriously too delicious. No matter if it was wild goat meat, pheasant meat, or rabbit meat, they were all cooked and seasoned perfectly. Even the barbecued skewers of vegetables were as delicious as the meat skewers and caused people to continuously eat without stopping.

The prospect of roasting their own skewers was an interesting and fascinating concept to the young maidens. At first, enthusiasm ran high. However, once they tried a few times, they discovered that they either cooked the food until it was burnt or took it off too early when it was too raw. Furthermore, the skewers that they roasted were either salty enough to choke someone or not seasoned enough. They all had to admit that they didn't have the talent in this area and thus sat obediently in the grass pavilion to wait for the food to be done.

Naturally, the most popular skewers were cooked by Yu Xiaocao herself. After all, she had worked at a night market in her past life roasting skewers, so she definitely was very skilled at this. Even the seemingly cold and aloof Yuan Xueyan eagerly strove against Royal Princess Minglan for the skewers Yu Xiaocao made.

The two younger boys, Li Haoming and Li Haoyu, stood pathetically at the barbecue rack next to Xiaocao, waiting for the meat to finish cooking! Although Ning Donglan resembled an immortal on the outside, his serene appearance actually hid an avid foodie. In fact, he even fought for food with the seven year old Li Haoming. Yu Xiaocao's previously ethereal impression of him had immediately been shattered.

Lu Hao, on the other hand, had some skill at barbecuing. It was said that when he was stationed in the southwest in the past, he had spent a lot of time hunting in the forests and had consequently learned how to roast meat then. Although the flavor of his skewers were different from the ones Yu Xiaocao cooked, they were still quite good. Those who were too hungry to wait for Xiaocao's skewers to get done ate his instead.

As for Ning Donghuan, he had disappeared at the start of the barbecue and no one was sure what had caught his interest this time.

Before long, the whole wild goat with the secret seasonings had finished roasting. Zhu Junyang wordlessly shaved a plate of roasted meat and ripped off the one remaining back leg and delivered the food in front of Xiaocao. While he was keeping an eye on the goat, he had keenly noticed that his little lass had been busy cooking food for others and hadn't eaten much. He naturally cared a lot about his little lass. Thus, he took over cooking the skewers from her to allow Xiaocao some time to eat.

When He Wanning saw this, she started heckling him, "Royal Prince Yang, are you still my older cousin ah? How come when the goat was done you didn't give me a heads up? Is that taking care of your younger cousin ah? Is Younger Sister Xiaocao the only one worth of your care in your eyes ah?"

Zhu Junyang lightly glanced at her and coldly replied, "You have hands and feet, can't you get some yourself? You only care about your own pleasure and force other people to do work for you. Are you handicapped ah?"

"Tsk tsk...Younger Sister Xiaocao also has hands and legs ah!" He Wanning scooted over and reached out a hand to pick up a piece of roasted meat.

Zhu Junyang slightly turned his body away to avoid her hand and coldly stated, "Hasn't Xiaocao been using her hands to roast meat for you ah? Haven't you eaten enough meat made by her? She's been busy this entire time and hasn't eaten anything. What's wrong with me sending her some food to eat?"

"Oh ho, looks like you really care about her! Tsk tsk..." He Wanning mischievously glanced over. From the looks of things, she wanted to see if Xiaocao had a bashful expression on her face after hearing their conversation.

However, her expectations were completely off the mark. How could something this mild cause any waves in Yu Xiaocao? This was all too trivial for her! Xiaocao gleefully took the plate full of food without a change in her expression and began to eat. Furthermore, she motioned with her chin in the direction of the roasted wild goat and reminded the other girl, "Older Sister He, if you delay any longer, you won't even have any bones to gnaw on. This wild goat meat is much more fragrant than the meat from domesticated goats!"

He Wanning looked over and saw that everyone was surrounding the roasted goat. Slices of meat were quickly being cut and she could see the food disappearing before her eyes. She exclaimed, "Qiulu, quickly snatch a plate of roasted meat for me! Go now!"

The whole roasted goat had been coated with the specially prepared blend of secret seasonings that Xiaocao had prepared. The cooking heat was also well controlled, so the outside of the goat was golden and crispy while the inside meat was soft and tender. The fragrant smell of goat's meat hit everyone's noses and they all praised it without measure. He Wanning interjected, "Xiaocao, I heard that this year in autumn, the emperor wants to go to Weichang County this year to go hunting. At that time, you should also go. If any wild goats get caught, we can roast them to eat!"

"The autumn hunt at Weichang County? The people who are allowed to go have to be of a certain rank right? I'm only a sixth-ranked small official, how do I have the qualifications to go?" Yu Xiaocao also wanted to experience what an Imperial Hunt was like but she also knew that only certain people were allowed to tag along.

He Wanning blinked her large eyes a few times and slanted an ambiguous look in the direction of Royal Prince Yang. She pouted her lips and a devilish grin appeared on her face, "You may not have the qualifications but that doesn't mean other people don't ah! My older cousin is highly regarded by the emperor. If he asks for a favor to bring you along, it shouldn't be a problem."

Yu Xiaocao laughed and shook her head, "We'll discuss it more when the time comes. Isn't there several months before the autumn hunt?"

"Alright...I still hope you can come along. Besides anything else, if you bring along your Little Black and Little White, I'm sure you'll get a good result at the hunt. Perhaps you could even be rewarded by the emperor!"

He Wanning had decent equestrian skills when compared to the other noble maidens in the capital. However, to the noble masters born from military families, her skills were not that impressive. She had thought about this. If Xiaocao went along, she might even take a placing at the hunt and cause an upset among those arrogant fellows. Wouldn't that be grand ah?!

"Don't think too much about this. The autumn hunt is likely a contest of personal skill. If we rely on Little Black and Little White to compete, it'd be hard for other people to accept the win ah! That being said, we might not even be able to bring hunting dogs along!" Yu Xiaocao felt that He Wanning's delusions of grandeur were a bit too much.

He Wanning chuckled and said, "Who knows, perhaps we will be able to bring them along? This is the first autumn hunt of the Great Ming Dynasty and we might be able to have a loophole! Regardless, we first need to make sure you're allowed to go. If Royal Prince Yang is not willing to help, then I'll have my grandmother mention this in front of the emperor emeritus. If the emperor emeritus agrees, the emperor likely wouldn't disagree for the sake of face."

The two were currently discussing things animatedly when suddenly a wretched scream surprised them. Following that, they could vaguely hear the sounds of someone crying intermittently for help. He Wanning stopped talking and the two of them listened carefully. The voice sounded oddly familiar.

"That's Third Young Master Ning's voice!" Zhu Junyang came forward a few steps to reach Xiaocao as he alertly looked in the direction of the sound. After thinking about it, he realized that it had already been

about two hours since they last saw Ning Donghuan. From the panic in his voice, did the fellow encounter something dangerous?

Ning Donglan had rushed forward towards the direction of the voice as soon as he heard the first scream. Zhu Junyang raised an eyebrow at this. He never would have expected the scholarly and gentlemanly Second Young Master Ning was a hidden expert. If the other man wasn't skilled at martial arts, his bearing and speed would not be able to reach this current point. The screams continued and soon, a figure staggered out from the nearby thickets. Behind the person were two giant animals. One was black and one was white.

“Save me! Save me ah! Second Older Brother, quickly save me!!” Ning Donghuan spotted Ning Donglan speeding over and acted as if he had seen his savior. His steps quickened towards his older sibling.

Ning Donglan had noticed that his brother's clothing was now raggedy and all in strips. Despite that, his brother's body didn't have many flesh wounds on them. He only looked pathetic. As Ning Donghuan fled, Little Black, who was behind him, had noticed that reinforcements had arrived. Little Black wanted to play 'cat and mouse' with the offender and leapt forward to press his 'prey' beneath his giant paws. He revealed his sharp, gleaming white teeth and acted as if he could snap the youth's neck at any time.

When Ning Donglan saw this, he hurried forward and swept his fan horizontally in the direction of Little Black. Little White spotted his movements and sped forward to reach it. The two white colored figures met in midair and began tussling at breakneck speed. It was so fast that people couldn't make out who was the person and who was the wolf.

Although Ning Donglan's martial art skills were quite good, Little White's speed was too astonishing. The wolf moved around at the speed of lightning and didn't give the man any room to counterattack. Since Ning Donglan had come along with Xiaocao and the others, Little White was already being lenient with him. Otherwise, the wolf would have bitten the youth already. Despite that, Ning Donglan's white clothing very quickly became torn in parts and he started to look quite bedraggled.

Ning Donghuan, who had been pinned down by Little Black, saw the rows of sharp white teeth that were only about an inch away from his neck. Little Black breathed out hot air that smelled faintly fishy. The puffs of air hit the youth's neck and made him even more frightened. He wailed in panic, “Miss Yu, save me ah, Miss Yu! I was wrong! I won't ever do this again!”

When Little Black heard 'Miss Yu', it raised its head slightly and looked towards the direction of its master as if it was trying to ask, “Master, can Little Black bite this bad man once to teach him a lesson?”

Ever since Little Black appeared, Zhu Junyang knew that they were not in any danger and didn't stop any of the young maidens from getting closer.

Yu Xiaocao leisurely strolled over. She first ordered Little White to stop fighting with Ning Donglan and then stopped in front of Ning Donghuan. When she saw his head to toe attire of 'beggars clothing', she stifled her laughter and stroked Little Black's neck as she gently asked, "Third Young Master Ning, how did you end up offending Little Black? You truly have skill if you were able to provoke him to this measure."

Ning Donghuan noticed that Little Black's jaws were much further from him now and decided the danger was gone. He stubbornly claimed, "How could I have the guts to provoke your Little Black ah?! You're the one who didn't train your hunting dog right! He's vicious and that's the reason why he bit my Tyrant and even injured me!"

Yu Xiaocao raised an eyebrow and inspected the fellow from head to toe. Other than some red areas on his skin from where he had brushed past some trees and shrubs, the rest of his skin was perfectly intact and didn't have a single inflicted injury. She laughed, "Third Young Master Ning, if Little Black wanted to bite you, do you really think you'd be able to run out of the thickets before he got to you ah? Is there any part of you that...has been injured by him ah?"

Ning Donghuan courageously pulled away the black wolf paws that were pressing him down and sat up, seeing that Xiaocao was inspecting him. He suddenly discovered that he was revealing parts of himself to her and hurriedly covered himself in shame. He shouted in embarrassment, "What are you looking at? Every part of me has been seen by you, so you need to take responsibility ah!!"

Zhu Junyang shot an icy cold glare at the hapless youth and he deliberately gave a warning look at a particular area before he coldly stated, "Who do you want to take responsibility ah? How should they take responsibility? Why don't you tell us your thoughts?"

Ning Donghuan hurriedly closed his legs and the expression on his face immediately changed, "Noth...nothing! I was just wondering if it is really okay for a young maiden to inspect a person like this."

"What's wrong about that? I haven't even mentioned the fact that you're exposing yourself to me. Since you want to play this game and wish to blackmail me, then I will have to go along. Little Black...show him

your strength!!” Yu Xiaocao's voice didn't hold the slightest bit of anger. Instead, her pair of large dark eyes were filled with mirth.

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Yu Xiaocao had just finished speaking when, with a tearing sound, one of Ning Donghuan's pant legs was ripped off, revealing the pale skin of his thigh and hair on his leg. All the noble maidens screamed in surprise and quickly turned around. Their faces were flushed red from embarrassment. As for the tattered pant leg, it was currently in the mouth of the innocent-looking Little Black.

“Take your hands off...no, take your mouth off!! Miss Yu, if you don't control your dog, I'm going to be butt naked! As a man, I'm not afraid of being seen, but I'm afraid of dirtying the eyes of all you noble maidens. Miss Yu, please have mercy and tell Little Black to let go of me!” Ning Donghuan didn't know where he should cover. He felt extremely relieved that he had worn underpants. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to maintain his integrity ah!

“I can tell Little Black to let go of you, but you must tell me honestly. What did you do to provoke Little Black? It's not easily angered.” Yu Xiaocao was very curious. This fellow had disappeared for the entire afternoon. Could it be that he had gone to annoy Little Black?

A gust of mountain breeze blew. The chilliness caused Ning Donghuan to hug his shoulders. He replied with a pitiful expression, “Didn't you say that, as long as I can tame Little Black and Little White, they will belong to me? It didn't seem like I should provoke Little White, so with my little skills in training dogs, I decided to go for Little Black. I didn't expect that it shouldn't be trifled with either. It won't hurt people, but it specially targeted my clothes. If you guys found me a little later, I would probably have to run away naked!”

Yu Xiaocao didn't pity him at all. This fool was quite bold to actually want to tame Little Black. She curled up her lips and sneered, “Third Young Master Ning, be glad that you came along with us and Little Black had met you several times. If you were a stranger, it wouldn't be your clothes that got torn but your body instead!”

Ning Donghuan imagined that scary scene and shuddered. So fortunate! Fortunately, Little Black recognized him. Otherwise, his body would become completely tattered. He would become the first person in the capital to be bitten to death by a hound...

“Young Master, Third Young Master...” Another dreadful scream sounded. They turned around and saw Ning Donghuan's personal manservant crying as he ran out from the thickets like there were savage beasts chasing after him.

Little Black had a lively temperament and liked to play pranks. As if it was a cat looking at a mouse, its blue eyes shined with excitement. Before it had spit out the pant leg in its mouth, it had dashed towards the frightened manservant. The manservant's legs immediately went soft and he fell to the ground. With a ghastly pale face, his whole body trembled, and his cries came to an abrupt stop.

“Young...Young Master! Help, the young master was eaten by a vicious dog! Help...” Seeing the familiar piece of cloth in Little Black's mouth, the manservant gathered all his remaining strength and let out a cry that shook the entire forest. He scared the birds that were returning to their nests and caused them to hastily flee towards the sky.

“What are you screaming about! You're the one who got eaten by a dog!! I, your young master, am fine!!” After putting on the outer robe that he pulled off from his attendant, Ning Donghuan walked over and kicked the manservant, who was desperately crying for help with his eyes closed. This guy was really useless. At the critical moment, he had fainted from fright and was of no help at all. It seemed like he should change his manservant to one who knew martial arts!

“Young Master! You're alright ah. That's great!! Waahhh... If something happened to you, this servant can only make up for this fault with my life!!” When Guizhu heard the familiar voice, he wiped his snot and tears, hugged his master's leg, and cried incessantly.

“Ning Donghuan shook his leg hard and said impatiently, “Alright, alright! Isn't this lord fine? Quickly get up and stop being so embarrassing!! In the future, work on becoming braver so that you won't faint from fright so easily. Otherwise, what do I need you for?!”

Guizhu got up from the ground and sobbed, “This servant was chased by a dog when I was a child, so I'm afraid of dogs. In the future, I will try to interact with the hounds at home as much as possible to overcome the weakness in my heart. I won't embarrass my master again! Young Master, that dog is too fierce, so we won't be able to control it. Let's give up?”

Ning Donghuan was so angry that he rolled his eyes at him. He gnashed his teeth and said, “Even if you don't speak, no one will think that you're a mute!” What else could they do other than give up? If you had the ability of taming this beast, then this lord would serve you like you were my master! However, he didn't dare to say this in front of Little Black for fear that he would really become butt naked.

Ning Donghuan, who had come back after changing his clothes at the plantation, felt that planting corn and potatoes was quite a novel experience. He clamored about wanting to experience the feeling of 'hoeing grain at noon' , and then went to work in the fields with a hoe. He Wanning also held a small basket of corn kernels and followed behind to sow the seeds. The soil stained her embroidered shoes and the hem of her dress was covered with dirt, but she was still in high spirits.

Yu Xiaocao hastily instructed Third Young Master Ning to ensure that there was a distance between each plant, and then she told He Wanning how many kernels she should sow each time. She had to run around in the field, which made her very mentally tired. It seemed like it was better to have less of these kinds of activities. It was too troublesome!

When the setting sun dyed the back mountain red, the group of noble young masters and maidens reluctantly left the Imperial Plantation. He Wanning's body was so dirty that she looked like a clay figurine, but she was very excited, as if she wanted to continue. She said, "Younger Sister Xiaocao, do you think that the peach pits we buried will sprout and bloom next year, and produce peaches?"

"Next year? There shouldn't be any problem with germination, but we will need to wait three years for flowering and fruiting. Just wait slowly!" The pit of the peaches that everyone ate in the orchard were buried in a reserved space by category. Almost everyone personally planted three to five peaches, saying that they wanted to eat the peaches that they grew themselves next year.

In actuality, with how they directly planted the core, there was a very low chance of germination. However, there was nothing to worry about since they had the mystic-stone water as a cheat. There was no 100% guarantee that they would all sprout, but at least 90% of them would successfully sprout.

"What? We still have to wait for three years ah!! I wanted to invite my friends to appreciate the peach blossom that I grew next spring." He Wanning looked at her broken fingernail with grievance and felt that it wasn't worth the loss.

Yu Xiaocao smiled and comforted her, "It's alright. I already told them to pay attention to the saplings. In the autumn, we will try to plant another hundred or so peach trees. We will also expand the planting scale of the other fruit trees. At the beginning of next spring, let's come enjoy the flowers. At that time, you guys can proudly introduce the saplings that you personally planted to your friends."

"We still have to wait until next spring to come back?" He Wanning pondered, and then said with a smile, "Didn't you say that the grapes will be ripe in two months? I have never picked grapes myself..."

The eyes of the other noble maidens suddenly brightened up. The lives of the noble young misses in the capital were very boring. They either read, practiced calligraphy, drew, or played the qin at home. If not, then they would organize flower appreciation parties or tea parties. It was really interesting to have such a fulfilling and novel outing. If they had another chance to come back, they would naturally be very happy.

“Older Sister Yu, can we also come to pick grapes next time?” Li Haoming blinked his big, dark eyes and asked with expectation. This time, he was able to come uninvited and have a good time thanks to Older Sister Mengru. He hoped that he could receive Older Sister Yu's invitation and rightfully come over.

There were more peaches and grapes in the back mountains. The reason for planting peaches was that peach blossoms could be used to make flower tea and peaches that weren't sold could be used to make preserved peaches and canned peaches. They planted more grapes so that they could save a portion to make wine. Wine mixed with mystic-stone water had low alcohol concentration and a sweet taste. It was good for one's health to drink it often.

Every time the emperor emeritus came, he would ask to bring some back to sate his yearning for alcohol. After all, he was quite old now. Although he was still in good health, the imperial physicians and emperor strictly restricted his drinking. However, with his temperament, he liked to drink from a big bowl and eat large pieces of meat. To not let him drink was the same as strangling him. He wouldn't be able to last for even a moment.

Fortunately, the imperial physicians said that he could drink the wine that he brought back because it was good for his health. It was a pity that there wasn't a lot. The Yu Family had only brewed a total of ten jars. He didn't bear to drink the wine that he brought back for fear that he would finish them too quickly, which would lead him to suffer in the following days.

Therefore, when he found out that Xiaocao was going to grow fruits in the back mountains of the Imperial Plantation, he urged Xiaocao to grow more grapevines. He even helped to get some grape plants. Now, there were about twenty to thirty grapevines in the back mountains. They all had green grapes that were about the size of a fingernail. Yu Xiaocao prepared to keep the grapes on twenty of the grapevines to sell at the fruit shops, and the rest would be used to make wine.

This time, when the noble maidens walked around the fruit orchard to help digestion, they had arrived at the vineyard nearby and saw the countless fruits on the vines. Unfortunately, it wasn't picking season.

When they heard Yu Xiaocao say that it would take one or two months to mature, they had to leave with regrets.

Now that He Wanning and Li Haoming had initiated this topic, the others also expressed their wish to come. Yu Xiaocao also seldom had the chance to come out to play with so many friends. Today, she had made friends with the bold and straightforward Lu Hao, the refined and gentle Ning Donglan, and the foolish Ning Donghuan. There were also Li Mengru, who had a bright personality, and the innocent and cute brothers, Li Haoming and Li Haoning. It was alright to arrange more of these gatherings.

Without hesitation, Yu Xiaocao agreed to send invitations to everyone when the grapes were ripe. She also said that she would teach them how to make wine and grape juice, which increased the noble maidens' anticipation.

Under the afterglow of the setting sun, the noble maidens and gentlemen appeared very tired, but they were still in high spirits. They chatted about the interesting matters during this outing in groups of two or three, and cheerful laughter could be heard from time to time. The carefree laughter made the glow of the sunset even more gorgeous. The birds returning from afar also stopped flying. Everything seemed to be fixed on the word 'happiness'.

However, the maidens, who had experienced the joy of labor, all felt some aching in their waists and backs. Normally, even when these young misses just wanted to drink water, the servants would have to put the cup into their hands. How would they be able to endure working in the fields?

As a result, these noble maidens gathered at the beauty and health club, 'Blossoming Beauty', the next day. After being exhausted, it was perfect to soak in a medicinal hot spring bath and have a spa. They all had a gold card at the club and didn't hesitate when spending money.

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Ning Donghuan signed and lamented, "Why isn't there a place for men to relax? Miss Yu, aren't you overly favoring women over men? This won't do. You should open up a health club for men so that we also have a place to relax."

Zhu Junyang immediately shot daggers at him and said with a frown, "Xiaocao is a girl, so how can she work with a bunch of men all day long? Don't cause trouble and make suggestions for bad ideas!"

Ning Donghuan rubbed his chin and said with a crafty smile, "If Miss Yu isn't interested, then I, Third Young Master Ning, will go for it! But, can you pass on the technique for back massage?"

"You?" Yu Xiaocao looked him up and down, and then said with disdain, "Would someone like you be able operate a high-class club? Don't make it into a dirty place. As for the massage technique, you and I aren't related, so do you think that I will generously pass on the secret massage technique to you?"

Zhu Junyang laughed and said, "People should know their own limitations. Just eat as much as the size of your bowl. Don't always be overly ambitious and take unnecessary risks!"

"I suggested you guys should open a men's club, but you guys didn't want to. Now that I decided to open it, you guys are shooting me down." Ning Donghuan was exasperated.

Yu Xiaocao chuckled and said, "Who said we're not opening it? The location has already been chosen. It's a farmstead in the suburb 2.5 km away from the capital. I reckon that it should be completed by next autumn."

"A recreational place specially for men? What interesting things will there be? Let's hear about it." Ning Donghuan, who was full of spirits again, asked with wide and curious eyes.

"It's a business secret, so I can't tell you!" Zhu Junyang had bought the farmstead in the suburb by chance. It wasn't very big, covering an area around 3000 mu. Xiaocao had mentioned to him that she wanted to build an entertainment castle integrating food, entertainment, leisure, and vacation. As soon as they bought the farmstead, they started making plans for it. The construction of the main building had already begun, and the design had already been completed. It was only a matter of time before its completion.

Although Ning Donghuan felt like there was a cat scratching his heart, he still had a sense of propriety. He didn't continue to ask and just said, "Then I'll be looking forward to your surprise! Ay...you two have taken up all the money-making businesses in the capital. Can't you leave a path for others to make a living?"

"Before Xiaocao came to the capital, I didn't see you come up with any money-making businesses. You're envious now that you see others making money?" Although Ning Donglan was his second older brother, he couldn't resist ridiculing his younger brother. He was nearly twenty years old, yet he still

wasn't doing any honest work and just hanging out with a bunch of wastrels all day long. What good prospects would he have in the future?

Ning Donghuan was silent for a moment, and then he went up to Xiaocao with a flattering expression. He said with a grin, "Miss Yu, we're considered old friends, so do you think...you can help this younger brother a bit? Can you teach me a way to make money?"

Yu Xiaocao gave him a sidelong glance and said with disdain, "Who's younger brother are you? I'm not that old to have such a big younger brother. My youngest brother is only three years old!"

"Miss Yu, Miss Yu...please don't be angry! I'm referring to myself as 'younger brother' because I'm willing to be your subordinate. This younger brother will listen to everything you say!" Ning Donghuan moved closer in a very fawning manner. Seeing his toadying gesture made Ning Donghuan really wanted to kick him away and pretend that he didn't have such a younger brother.

Yu Xiaocao quickly stretched out her hands to block him and said, "No, thanks. I don't dare to use the third young master of the Duke Rongguo Household as a lackey. However, since we are acquaintances, I'll give you a suggestion."

"Please say it!" Ning Donghuan wished he could honor Yu Xiaocao like she was the God of Wealth. He looked exactly like a servile servant as he nodded and bowed.

Yu Xiaocao couldn't bear to look straight at him. With a grin, she said, "Aren't there places for cricket fighting and cockfighting in the capital? Don't you boast about raising a lot of fierce hounds at home? You can train some fighting dogs and set up a dog fighting arena. Arrange a few dogfights daily and have people bet on them, or you can organize a godly dog competition..."

Ning Donghuan's eyes grew increasingly brighter as Yu Xiaocao spoke. In the end, he was so excited that he began to dance with joy. Yes, in terms of having fierce canines, was there anyone in the capital who could beat him, Third Young Master Ning? Training fighting dogs really wasn't a difficult matter for him. Although there were dog fighting games among the commoners, they were just small-scale games. If he could gather a group of like-minded people and make a high-class dog fighting arena, making money definitely wouldn't be a problem!

After that, Xiaocao taught him about some methods of under-the-table manipulations. For example, dogs that looked tall and strong would appear more likely to win. If they offered high odds, then it would attract people to place bets. Then they needed to use dogs that looked ordinary, but were actually very fierce, as the opponents. In this way, the 'banker' would naturally be the one making the money!

Ning Donghuan naturally knew no less than Xiaocao about these matters. The more he thought about it, the more feasible it seemed. Soon afterwards, dog fighting became popular in the capital and Ning Donghuan's dog fighting arena was full of people for every battle. Third Young Master Ning had earned a pot full of gold, which would be a story to be recounted later.

Under the afterglow of the sunset, the group reached the gate of the capital city. Upon their arrival, they encountered a group of carriages that seemed to belong to the relatives of officials. There were more than a dozen carriages carrying luggage alone. They were also accompanied by a famous escort agency.

An exquisite and elegant carriage among the group stopped in front of Xiaocao and the others. A slender arm reached out from the carriage and pulled away the curtains, which were embroidered with entwined branches and lotuses. A voice, like the tinkling of a spring and the plucking of strings, sounded from inside the carriage, "Older Cousin..."

Older Cousin? Yu Xiaocao looked at the Ning brothers. Could it be that their relatives had returned to the capital to report on their work? Did they not get the news?

In the midst of her thoughts, a beautiful young girl poked her head out of the carriage. She wore a light-colored silk dress inlaid with silver threads. A pale pinkish grey gauze skirt was fastened around her waist, and a moon-white gauze open front cardigan was draped around her. With her every movement, there would be a sense of flowing waves on the gauze cardigan. Her smiling eyes, which looked innocent and naïve, gleamed like black pearls. Her gaze was as clear as the streams under ten-thousand-year-old glaciers. It wasn't tainted by the passing of time at all. Her long, thick eyelashes were curled upwards like two small fans. Her soft lips had a dewy light pink color and was curled up to a beautiful angle. The elegant Yulan magnolia adorned in her hair buns and the graceful hanging jade necklace seemed to be able to shake the depths of one's heart as they swayed with the evening wind. With such a fresh and lovely face, and innocent and clean smile, she looked as beautiful as a celestial fairy who stepped into the mortal world. Even Xiaocao, who was of the same gender, couldn't help but be stunned by her beauty.

Upon making eye contact with Zhu Junyang's cold and indifferent gaze, that pair of clean and bright eyes sadly dimmed. The beautiful young girl lightly bit her lips and appeared dejected, which caused all the

males to have the urge to protect her. (Little Black: Nonsense! This wolf doesn't have that feeling!! Gets kicked away by the author.)

“Older Cousin, you don't remember Ling'er? When we were young, you ignored everyone and only liked to play with Ling'er ah!” The young girl's eyes didn't leave Zhu Junyang for even a moment. Others couldn't help but pity her upon seeing her gaze.

A slightly dignified female voice came from within the carriage, “Ling'er, you were only five or six at that time. Now, you have already grown into a young woman. Of course, your older cousin wouldn't be able to recognize you. Yang'er, we haven't seen each other for many years. How's your lady mother?”

Looking at the face in the carriage that was somewhat similar to his mother's, Zhu Junyang suddenly realized that his maternal aunt's family had returned to the capital. It seemed like his lady mother had mentioned this matter a few days ago. Later, he had left the capital for an assignment and completely forgot about this matter.

“Aunt, Nephew just came back to the capital last night, so I didn't know that Aunt was going to arrive today. Please excuse me for my negligence.” Zhu Junyang vaguely remembered that his maternal uncle had been serving as an official outside the capital for the past ten years, and thus his aunt's family seldom returned to the capital. In recent years, his lady mother had mostly stayed in the residence in Tanggu, so there was very little news about them.

Jiang Meiyun, Princess Consort Jing's younger stepsister, looked at him, nodded slowly, and asked, “Yang'er, where are you coming back from?”

Zhu Junyang lied with a straight face, “Nephew went to the Imperial Plantation in the outskirts of the capital to inspect the matters of summer planting. I met this group of kids, who went on an outing, so we came back together. Aunt, you must be tired from the travel. You should quickly enter the city and rest. I'll go pay my respects to Aunt on another day.”

Zhu Junyang wasn't on close terms with this aunt of his. When he was a child, he had faintly felt an uncomfortable feeling from her. Now that he could perceive her thoughts, he was even more unlikely to be on friendly terms with her. His aunt envied his mother's noble status and happy family, but she also wanted to cling onto his parents so that they could help her husband get a good position in the capital. How could anyone like someone with such thoughts?

Wu Junling widened her innocent eyes and looked curiously at her older cousin. Earlier, when they were in the carriage, her mother had pointed to the man in black, who was as handsome as a god who descended from the heavens, and said that he was her older male cousin. As a child, her older cousin really liked to play hide and seek with her. She couldn't help but have her attention be completely taken away by her older cousin, who had a strong figure and enchanting face.

The person that her mother mentioned that most was her aunt, Princess Consort Jing, who was dearly loved by all. Every time her mother mentioned this person, she would always have a sense of envy and unwillingness, as well as a mix of helplessness—a deep sense of helplessness to reality.

Her father's family background wasn't as good as her mother's. Her mother always carried the reservation and pride of an aristocratic family in her speech and manner. Although her father respected her mother, he could never become close with her. Besides the set dates, he always stayed in the rooms of those considerate and gentle concubines.

It wasn't that she didn't understand the resentment in her mother's heart, but she didn't know what to do other than acting cute and behaving in front of her father so that he would give her face and stay in her mother's room more often. Her aunt, on the other hand, was able to get the sole favor of Imperial Prince Jing. One must admit that she was really skilled.

People often said that children would more or less be influenced by their parents. Older Cousin looked like someone who appeared cold on the surface but warm inside. Perhaps, if she married into such a family and someone like him, she would be able to avoid making the same mistake as her mother and get her own happiness and life, right? Wu Junling looked at Zhu Junyang with clear eyes mixed with some inexplicable emotions...

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Zhu Junyang suddenly felt a chill in his heart. Could this be some sort of 'bad premonition'? He glanced at his so-called 'younger female cousin' and met a pair of beautiful, watery eyes. Although she and Xiaocao both had a pair of watery, big eyes, Xiaocao's eyes were always clear, bright, and full of life, which made others unable to resist smiling at her. She, on the other hand, had eyes that were like a deep pond in the morning. It was shrouded by a layer of fog and carried a sense of mysteriousness.

He couldn't help but concentrate all his energy to find out what his 'younger cousin' was thinking about at this time, but he was surprised to find that he couldn't perceive anything. It felt like he got rebounded by something, making his forehead faintly swell with pain.

'So strange, I have never had this kind of feeling before.' Although he couldn't perceive Xiaocao's thoughts, she was like a completely transparent person that his consciousness could freely shuttle through. However, there seemed to be something protecting his so-called 'younger cousin'. It was resisting and guarding against his consciousness. Could it be...that she practiced some sort of martial arts? Zhu Junyang frowned and looked at Wu Junling with an inquiring gaze.

Seeing that her older cousin was looking at her, Wu Junling revealed a pure smile and a shy expression on her face. With her head slightly bowed, she showed her long and tender neck. She knew that many men wouldn't be able to resist her looks. Could it be that, on their first meeting after so many years, her older cousin was also deeply attracted to her? Wasn't this what she wanted? With this thought, she slightly lifted her head and looked at the intoxicatingly handsome face.

Seeing her younger daughter's action, Jiang Meiyi looked at her nephew's incomparably handsome face. Her eyes slightly flickered. Her older stepsister's son had been granted the title of 'royal prince' at a young age. He was also given an important job and was a rather capable subject of the emperor. If her daughter could marry into such a family and marry her nephew with such a promising future, it would certainly be a great help to the Wu Family in the future. Thus, there was an extra hint of smile on her stern-looking face.

"Hey! Miss Yu, your Royal Prince Yang is about to be snatched away. Aren't you going to quickly do something?" Ning Donghuan revealed a rascally smile and looked as if he was waiting for a good show.

Yu Xiaocao glanced at the tall man beside her, and scolded in her mind, 'Attracting bees and butterflies.' Then, she said in an indifferent tone, "If it's something that can be easily taken away, then it must not belong to you. Do you think that it's worth it to have a bloody fight over something that doesn't belong to you?"

In regard to their 'flirting glances', Yu Xiaocao felt somewhat sulky in her heart. No wonder people often said, 'It was easy for something to happen between maternal cousins!' Sure enough, there was truth in the famous saying 'prevent fire, anti-theft, and guard against younger female cousins'!

Ning Donghuan quickly nodded like he was pounding garlic, and as if he was trying to fan the fire, he said, "Miss Yu is open-minded! It's hard to find a toad with two legs, but how can there be a shortage of talented youths with two legs in the capital? Don't you have one...no...two right in front of you?" After he finished speaking, he looked at his second older brother, 'Why did you poke me with your fan?'

This fool was a little too loud and attracted the attention of Wu Junling. As if a breeze had passed by a deep pond, ripples appeared in the depth of her eyes, 'It's true that the capital was full of handsome men and beautiful women. The two handsome men in front of her each had their own style. One was free and unrestrained, and there was a slight sense of fatal charm in his wicked smile. The other one was a graceful, fairy-like beauty, and his gentleness could warm the bottom of one's heart.

The noble maidens behind them were either passionate like fire, aloof like the moon, gentle like water, or playful like stars... Although she felt that she looked slightly better than them, the other parties each had their own unique charms. Could it be that...one of them had already claimed Older Cousin? No way! She must not allow something like that to happen. 'No one can snatch something that I, Wu Junling, wants!'

Her gaze became distant, but her smile was still sweet and pure, "Older Cousin, aren't you going to introduce them to us?"

Zhu Junyang looked deeply into her eyes. It seemed like he could penetrate into her skin and see the depth of her soul. Wu Junling felt a sense of fear due to his gaze, so she became more cautious in her behavior.

"It's too late now. Aunt and Younger Cousin should hurry into the city. After you guys have settled down, I'll introduce my friends to Younger Cousin. Official Yu and I need to report to the Ministry of Revenue. We still have work on hand, so I won't send you off." Looking away, Zhu Junyang had an indifferent expression on his face and a hint of coldness in his voice.

Wu Junling didn't hide her disappointment and softly said, "Work is more important. Older Cousin, please go do what you need to do."

Zhu Junyang watched as the Wu Family's convoy entered the capital before he turned to look at Yu Xiaocao and said in a soft voice, "Are you going back to the Yu Residence or Fang Estate? I'll follow you."

With a bit of anger, Yu Xiaocao snorted, "I'm not going anywhere! Older brothers and sisters, I'll treat you guys to a feast at Zhenxiu Restaurant. Are you guys coming?"

“Yes! Of course, I'm going!” Ning Donghuan cheered the most happily, “But, I know you're just saying it casually. Without making a reservation half a month beforehand, you won't be able to get a table in the main hall of Zhenxiu Restaurant, let alone a private room.”

Royal Princess Minglan gave the fool a sidelong glance, and then said to Xiaocao with a smile, “We want to go, but just look at our clothes. It looks like we just crawled out of the soil. We should quickly go home to wash up. Let's go to Zhenxiu Restaurant on another day. At that time, it will be my treat. So you guys just wait for my invitation.”

Yuan Xueyan seemed to have noticed something, so she faintly said, “Younger Sister Xiaocao, everyone's tired today, so let's meet again on another day. Let Royal Prince Yang send you back. Rest earlier.”

“No need, I know the way home!! Older sisters, when the grapes are ripe, let's meet for another outing.” Yu Xiaocao waved her hand and bid farewell to the noble misses. She didn't even bother giving Zhu Junyang a single glance.

Zhu Junyang vaguely felt that the lass was angry. He asked with slight confusion, “What's wrong? Why are you suddenly angry at me? What did this prince do to offend you?”

Ning Donghuan laughed even more happily, “Royal Prince Yang, it's not you who offended Miss Yu. It's your delicately pretty younger cousin who made Miss Yu unhappy!!”

“Who? Ling'er? How did she offend you?” Zhu Junyang frowned slightly as he tried to recall whether the lass from the Wu Family said or did anything provocative. Since the little lass was angry at her, she must have done something wrong. His little lass would never take the initiative to cause trouble.

Ning Dinghuan laughed even more loudly, “A love rival has appeared, so how can Miss Yu be happy?”

“No one will think that you're a mute even if you don't talk!!” Yu Xiaocao felt that this idiot was very annoying. She really wanted to pull out his annoying tongue and kick him aside.

“Love rival?” Zhu Junyang looked down at Xiaocao and carefully observed her every expression. He noticed that there was a look of awkwardness on her face for a moment. A part of his heart softened

and became joyful, "Lass, rest assured that this prince isn't a fickle person. Since I have settled on you, I will never change."

"Humph! Who's worried? Stop thinking so highly of yourself!!" Yu Xiaocao's expression became even more awkward. She stubbornly said, "Are Ning Donghuan's words even believable? What love rival? Don't forget that you don't have a formal status yet! You should know the consequence of not passing the observation period!!"

Zhu Junyang looked at the Ning brothers, who were enjoying the show, and glared at them fiercely. Then he continued to assure her in a gentle voice, "Don't worry, this prince will continue to work hard to strive to be formally recognized. No matter how good other girls are, they won't be as good as Xiaocao is in my heart!!"

Ning Donghuan had a very interesting expression on his face, 'I didn't expect that the cold-faced demon would meet his nemesis. He can actually say something so cheesy. Tsk tsk, you really can't judge a book by its cover!'

Ning Donglan saw that a faint look of danger appeared within Royal Prince Yang's eyes. He was afraid that his stupid younger brother would say something to trigger the other party, so he hastily pulled Ning Donghuan away. Under the dim moonlight, only a tall and small figure were left in front of the city gates.

"Come on, this prince will take you home! Let's go to the General's Estate, lest you think about unnecessary things alone at home." There was a hint of smile on the corner of Zhu Junyang's mouth. He really enjoyed the bit of jealousy that the lass showed. His little lass was finally beginning to understand!

The two were silent the entire way, and only the sound of the horses' hooves echoing through the spacious street could be heard. Yu Xiaocao finally could resist and suddenly looked up at the devilishly handsome face. She snorted and said, "If you're interested in that younger cousin of yours, then stay away from me. Based on my woman's intuition, she definitely likes you. If you're also interested in her, tell me earlier. Don't even think about having one foot on two boats and enjoying the happiness of both sides. Otherwise...humph!!"

The smile on Zhu Junyang's face deepened, and he said in a doting manner, "Woman's intuition? A mighty woman who's thirteen years old? Alright, this prince will promise you that I definitely won't give her any chance to be alone with me and have any hopes! This prince has said that you're my only wife in this lifetime. No one else can enter my eyes."

“My mother said a man who talks eloquently is the least trustworthy!” Yu Xiaocao snorted coldly and remained unconvinced. A moment later, she said, “Men are all attracted to appearances. Your younger cousin is quite pretty. Weren't you also looking at her in a daze earlier? It's easier to succeed when a woman pursues a man. Who knows, maybe you will be lured away by that white lotus one day! Don't be so sure!!”

Zhu Junyang raised both of his hands and had an aggrieved expression on his face, “I'm being wrongly accused ah. When did this prince look at her in a daze? Defamation, it's complete defamation!!”

Yu Xiaocao cast a sidelong glance at her, curled up her lips, and said, “You dare say that you weren't staring at her just now? I'm not the only who saw it. Everyone saw it!! Bodyguard Dong, didn't your master look like he wanted to dig his eyes out and stick them onto that 'younger cousin'?”

The innocent bystander Dong Dali had a fearful expression on his face. His eyes were opened wide as he stammered, “Miss...Miss Yu, this subordinate was standing behind my master just now, so I couldn't see his expression. So...”

One was his master, who he had served for many years, while the other, if there weren't any accidents, would be his future mistress. When sandwiched between the two of them, he would be in the wrong no matter who he sided with. He was in a dilemma and could only gloss over it by giving a vague answer.

“Forget it, I'm not asking you anymore! You're his subordinate, so it's natural that you will speak for him!” Yu Xiaocao glared at him, and then continued, “Anyway, I'm not blind and can see everything very clearly! Zhu Junyang, answer honestly. Did you stare at your pretty younger cousin?”

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'This little vinegar jar!' Zhu Junyang touched her head dotingly. She was really a sweet little burden. However, suspicion was the worst thing to have between couples. He didn't want to give his lass any chance to think about nonsense, so he decided to be frank, “Don't I have the ability to read one's thoughts? However, it seems like my ability doesn't work on Wu Junling. It was really weird, so I looked at her a few more times.”

Yu Xiaocao felt even more sour, “You can't read her thoughts? Wasn't the reason you chose me because you couldn't perceive my thoughts so there was no pressure and burden in our interaction? Now that there's another special existence, does that mean it's time for me, this rural girl, to be laid-off and go into retirement?”

Zhu Junyang didn't understand what 'laid-off' meant, but he knew the meaning of retirement. With a stern expression, he stared fixedly at the little lass. Zhu Junyang said in a deep voice, "You have already declared this prince to be guilty before you even know the full story? Is this how you think of me? Am I this unreliable in your heart?"

In face of Zhu Junyang's sudden anger, Yu Xiaocao was stunned for a moment. Then she bit her lower lip aggrievedly and didn't speak. Since Zhu Junyang expressed that he wanted to pursue her, she had been hesitant. There was a huge gap between their identities. On the surface, she pretended that she didn't care, but would there really be anyone who didn't care at all?

She had always thought that she was the only unique person around him, and this was also the only advantage that she felt she had compared with the other noble maidens in the capital. However, this advantage suddenly disappeared. How could she not feel sad about it? It turned out that proud and awkward youth, who gave her warmth, had quietly entered her heart. She cared, so she was afraid...

Zhu Junyang sighed softly. He reached out his hand to move a wisp of mischievous hair behind her ear, and then said in a soothing voice, "Lass, don't think about unnecessary things. She's different from you. When this prince is together with you, it feels like the air is filled with a refreshing scent. Even my breathing has become smoother and my entire body feels relaxed and comfortable. Your aura is transparent and clean. When I'm with you, I would never have to be on guard and try to find out your intentions. She appears pure and cute, but she gives me a somewhat suppressed feeling, like dark clouds shrouded above a mountain before rainfall."

Zhu Junyang's five senses were more sensitive than ordinary people. Even if he couldn't read the other party's mind, he could still intuitively feel it. He paused for a moment, and then said, "Besides, it's not that I can't see her heart, but instead there seems to be something blocking me. She either has some treasure that can restrain my ability, or she's so defensive and heavy guarded that my power isn't strong enough to see through her yet."

Xiaocao's expression became increasingly solemn because of his guess. She thought about it and said, "Based on your younger cousin's age, it probably isn't the latter. Could it be that...she has some sort of special item with a defensive function?"

"It doesn't matter whether she has a special item or not. The important thing is that there's no longer any misunderstanding between us, and you aren't angry at me!" In Zhu Junyang's eyes, Wu Junling was just an unimportant relative, and they just needed to maintain a decent relationship on the surface.

Yu Xiaocao was a little embarrassed as she kicked a small stone and mumbled, “Was it a simple misunderstanding? Even if you're not interested in your younger cousin, who can guarantee that she's not interested in you? Based on my woman's intuition, she definitely likes you!”

“Oh? What makes you think that she likes this prince?” Seeing that the lass wasn't sulky anymore, Zhu Junyang wanted to tease her.

Yu Xiaocao rolled her eyes at him, snorted, and replied in a matter-of-fact way, “When she looks at you, there are hooks in her eyes, which exude deep affection and bashfulness. The only thing that's missing from her face is that she didn't write out, 'Older Cousin, I like you. Quickly come flirt with me!' Also, the most important thing is that you have a face that attracts the attention of bees and butterflies. There's no sense of security at all!!”

“So it turns out that, in Xiaocao's heart, this prince is so handsome that you have no sense of security? This won't do. Tomorrow, I'll request an edict from the emperor to send me to the Xishan Barracks for training. I'll make myself tanner and uglier. That way, you won't doubt me anymore, right? But, you're not allowed to abandon this prince at that time.” The emperor had long wanted him to take charge of the Xishan Barracks. He also wanted to set up a military experimental base to study firearms, cannons, and so on. Zhu Junyang reckoned that a decision would be made regarding this matter when he returned to the capital to report his work. Thus, he mentioned this to the lass in advance.

Yu Xiaocao hesitated and looked at his pale and charming face. When she imagined him getting tanned and looking like Judge Bao , she couldn't bear to look at his face anymore. She suppressed her laughter and said, “Actually, you don't have to get purposely all dirty and unkempt. As long as you maintain your black-faced killer style and ignore all those young girls and female cousins, I believe that, with time, they will learn that it's impossible and withdraw.”

“They? Where did 'they' come from? Isn't it just Wu Junling, or do you have some imaginary rivals? It's fine to be jealous, so why find so many excuses? This prince likes to see you being jealous, okay?”

Zhu Junyang escorted Yu Xiaocao to the entrance of the Fang Estate and knocked on the side door. The doorkeeper yawned as he opened the door. Seeing that it was Royal Prince Yang and his young miss, he quickly smiled and had someone lead the horse to the stable in the back. He attentively said, “Young Miss, you're finally back. Master and Madam have been talking about you for several days. Royal Prince Yang, please come inside. This servant will go invite the master out...”

“No need. It's quite late now, so I won't disturb them. I'll come over to play go with General Fang on another day. Xiaocao, rest earlier. I'll go back now!” Zhu Junyang looked at Xiaocao affectionately with his phoenix eyes. His smile was even more dazzling than the bright moon in the sky.

After watching the back view of the handsome Zhu Junyang leave, Yu Xiaocao turned around and met the playful eyes of Lady Fang. She was slightly embarrassed as she said, “Godmother, why did you come out?”

“Well, isn't it because of your younger brother? When he heard from the maid that his older sister had come back, he was too impatient to wait and pestered me about coming out to welcome his older sister. Who knew that we'll see the scene 'Eighteen Li to Send-off' . Ay, a grown girl can't be kept at home. If we try to make her stay, we'll become enemies ah!” Lady Fang sighed.

“Godmother...who teases their own daughter like you?” Yu Xiaocao protested with a flushed face. She picked up Little Linlin, who had rushed over, and walked to the inner courtyard without looking back.

The mother and daughter chatted for a while, and then went to rest in their respective rooms. When Royal Prince Yang returned to the Prince Jing's Estate, he was called over by his lady mother.

“I heard that you came back last night, and then went out early in the morning. Did you go see the lass, Xiaocao?” She had worked hard to raise this son of hers for twenty years, but as his mother, she wasn't even as important as a little lass in his heart. Princess Consort Jing's heart was like an unripe plum—extremely sour.

Zhu Junyang sensed his mother's thoughts, so he quickly explained, “This morning, Lu Hao came to find me and said that he wanted to go on an outing in the suburbs. I didn't expect to meet Xiaocao and her friends at Sanli Pavilion outside the city. Thus, we went to the Imperial Plantation together. Lady Mother, Son had gone out to play and made Mother worry about me.”

“Humph, lip service! Didn't you just go meet your little lover? You must have had fun with Xiaocao today, right?” Princess Consort Jing also knew that he had gone out with Lu Hao. Since he was a child, her son didn't have many close friends. Lu Hao was one of them. Recently, her son had been busy with work and wasn't often in the capital. It was understandable that he wanted to relax when he returned. Besides, Xiaocao was a daughter-in-law who she liked. So why was she being so unreasonable?

“Lady Mother, Xiaocao knows that you like to eat plums, so she specially picked several early-ripening plums. Do you want to have a taste?” Zhu Junyang was relieved to see that his lady mother wasn't targeting Xiaocao. Since ancient times, the most difficult thing to deal with was the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Fortunately, his lady mother had a rather close relationship with Xiaocao. In the future, when the lass married him, there wouldn't be that many problems. How could he bear to let his little lass suffer grievance?

“Plum? Isn't there at least half a month more before they ripen?” When Princess Consort Jing was in poor health, she had a poor appetite and her digestive system wasn't very good. Imperial Prince Jing had heard that plums could promote peristalsis and improve one's appetite, so he searched for different types of plums. Since then, Princess Consort Jing had also fallen in love with fruits that had a sweet and sour taste.

Zhu Junyang explained, “The fruits facing the sun are exposed to more sunlight, so they ripen earlier. Why don't you have a taste?”

He opened the small basket that he was holding and removed the cover inside, revealing the dark purple colored fruit inside. The plump and dainty plums exuded a faint fragrance, and one couldn't help but like them with one glance.

Princess Consort Jing picked up one and put it in her mouth. When she took a small bite, the purplish-red juice flowed into her mouth along her lips, and a sweet taste seeped into her heart. She swallowed the bite of plum in her mouth and said with satisfaction, “I didn't expect that Xiaocao could grow fruit trees so well. This plum is twice as big as the lemon plums that I used to eat. It's also much sweeter and doesn't have an acrid taste. It's the first time that Lady Mother has eaten such a delicious plum.”

“Son also brought back white peaches, honey peaches, yellow peaches, and blood peaches. Xiaocao personally picked them for you. They're very fresh!” Zhu Junyang constantly tried to help the lass Xiaocao leave a good impression in front of Princess Consort Jing.

Princess Consort Jing didn't eat a lot for dinner. She ate two plums and a peach before she was advised to stop by her son. The mother and son chatted for a while, and then Princess Consort Jing suddenly thought of something and said, “That's right, in the evening, I received news that your aunt's family arrived in the capital today. They will rest tomorrow, and then come visit us the day after. I heard your aunt's daughter, Ling'er, looks like a little fairy. When that lass was a child, she was very pretty and lovely. Before she left the capital, you really liked playing with her. You often made her cry and didn't know how to act more tenderly towards girls. Are you free the day after tomorrow? Let's meet your aunt and your little green plum together.”

“Tomorrow, I need to go report my work. I don't know if the emperor has any other arrangements. So let's talk about it the day after tomorrow!” Zhu Junyang didn't like the three words 'little green plum', so he automatically ignored it.

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When he went to attend court the next day, he handed in his assignment and immediately asked for orders to go to the Xishan Barracks. He even declined the short break that the emperor gave him. He didn't even stay in the capital for a moment, as if there was a vicious dog chasing behind him.

As a result, when Zhu Junyang's aunt and pretty younger cousin came to visit the Prince Jing's Estate, he was already at the Xishan Barracks and leading a group of recruits, who had just joined the army this spring, to train in the mountains. When he occasionally returned to the capital, he would either be accompanying his mother or staying beside Xiaocao. He didn't give the 'little green plum' any chance to get close to him at all, lest a certain vinegar jar got flipped over.

After corn and potatoes were planted in the fields, it was time for summer. No matter if it was the Imperial Plantation or the fruit orchard, there were special personnel managing the fields. From time to time, Xiaocao would go to check on things at the scene. At other times, she just stayed at home, eating a bowl of iced fruits.

On this day, Yingtao, who was in charge of the pharmaceutical workshop, and Yangliu, who was responsible for the back kitchen of the braised food stores, came together. After they greeted the young miss, Yingtao took out the account book for this quarter and showed it to her young miss, “Young Miss, our pharmaceutical workshop is too small. We're incapable of supplying the capital and all the surrounding counties because the medical pills and liquid are always short in supply. Should we expand the scale of the workshop?”

“Expand the scale? The workshop in the capital has only been in production for less than half a year, yet the production scale needs to be expanded again? Yingtao, aren't you too dedicated to your work?” Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but marvel. If this girl lived in modern times, she would definitely be a career woman.

Yingtao's lips pursed into a smile. The affirmation from her mistress made her feel as if she had drunk an ice-cold drink during the hottest period of the summer—the coolness went to the bottom of her heart. She humbly replied, “It's not that this servant is capable. When Young Miss was in Dongshan Village, you formulated a set of production rules and procedures. As long as the medicinal materials are ready and workers take charge of their own jobs, this servant just needs to control the ratio of the medicines,

which is very easy to handle. Young Miss, you probably don't know but many spies from other medicinal herb stores have infiltrated into our workshop. They worked for us for a long time, but all of them failed to accomplish their task. Young Miss, how can you be so wise as to come up with such an effective method of production? It's seriously such a good way to keep a secret!"

Yu Xiaocao casually flipped through the account book. This quarter's production volume was higher than the previous quarter. This was expected since, during the last quarter, the workers were all novices and still needed more practice. The output was a bit lower than Dongshan Village's, but they soon caught up during this quarter.

"What's more, the reward system that you set up—get more pay for more work done—has aroused the enthusiasm of the workers. Several managers were given some shares of the pharmaceutical workshop, so they wished that they could stay in the workshop for 24 hours a day. They're working very hard!"

Yingtao became increasingly excited as she spoke, gesturing with her hands and feet. If the managers working under her saw like this, they would definitely be shocked. Head Manager Yingtao, who was usually very dignified and steady, actually had such a lively side. It was only in front of her young miss that Yingtao would only reveal the truest and purest side of herself.

Yu Xiaocao had Yingchun to serve a bowl of fruit shaved ice to Yingtao and Yangliu. Yingtao, who was just in high spirits, immediately stooped down and covered her stomach, sighing, "Master, this servant can't eat cold food these few days. It's such a torture to not be able to eat cold food in hot weather. This servant misses the fruit shaved ice made by Master. But, when I try to make it myself, I can never get the right taste."

Yangliu took the bowl, but she didn't immediately eat it. With her head lowered, she looked at the shaved ice in the bowl and muttered, "There's peach, watermelon, cantaloupe, and cherries. Are there cherries in this season?"

Yingchun replied with a grin, "Older Sister Yangliu, the peaches, cherries, and strawberries are all preserved canned fruits. Young Miss said that it will taste better with the canned fruits. Young Miss also said that, when she has time, she will teach us how to make ice cream. The strawberry milk ice cream and vanilla ice cream that the young miss made last time were so delicious!"

Yangliu hesitated for a moment, and then she finally lifted her head to look at Xiaocao. She said in a soft but firm tone, "Young Miss, this servant wants to leave the braised food store!"

“What? Are you not happy working in the braised food store? Or is there someone bullying you? Tell me, I'll support you!” Yu Xiaocao had noticed that Yangliu seemed to have some concerns on her mind, but she didn't expect her to make such a request.

“No, no one is bullying me. The braised food store is already on track now, and the head chef in the kitchen is experienced so he doesn't need me to guide him. Now, it doesn't matter whether this servant is at the braised food store or not.” Yangliu felt that she had become unnecessary to the braised food store. Every day, she just symbolically wandered around the kitchen twice.

No matter if it was braising meat, or making all kinds of roasted ducks, roasted chickens, and smoked meat, her guidance wasn't needed anymore. She had become a dispensable existence. Her job was too easy compared with Yingtao, and thus her ambitiousness gradually eroded.

“Then...do you have some other plans in mind? Let me hear about it!” Yu Xiaocao wanted to create opportunities for the people around her so that they could discover their own specialties and do the things that they liked. Weren't Yingtao and Hechun both very passionate with their work? When Yangliu served by her side, she liked to cook. Thus, she sent her to manage the back kitchen of the braised food shop in the capital. She hadn't expected that this wasn't what she wanted.

Yangliu's character wasn't as lively as Yingtao's, and she usually buried everything in her heart. However, for the sake of not having a mediocre future and for her own dream, she bravely said what she thought in her heart under the encouraging gaze of Yingtao, “Young Miss, didn't you make a lot of beautifying and nourishing pastries? When this servant was serving by your side, I learned how to make some pastries. I want to open a pastry shop comparable to that of famous pastry shops like 'Daoxiang Village'.”

A gratified smile appeared on Yu Xiaocao's face as she looked at Yangliu with a gaze full of appreciation and encouragement, “Good idea! I have long wanted to open a Chinese and Western fusion pastry shop, but I have been busy and there wasn't a suitable helper. So the plan was delayed. Since you have this intention, go back and write down your ideas about the shop. After that, find some quick-witted and nimble-fingered female workers. I'll find some time to train you guys. Let's try to open the shop within a month.”

With the support and encouragement of her mistress, Yangliu was instantly full of confidence. When they were in Tanggu Town, she often helped her young miss to make various kinds of delicious pastries.

Many of them were new to her, and they all tasted excellent. There was no need to worry about the sales.

“Okay! This servant will go back and sort out my ideas. I'll present my plans to Young Miss tomorrow!” Yangliu stood up in a somewhat impatient manner.

Yu Xiaocao chuckled and said, “You don't need to be in such a hurry. It's not too late to go back after eating the shaved ice. I always thought that Yingtao was the most impatient among you guys. I didn't expect that Yangliu, who usually appeared gentle and unhurried, is also an impatient person!”

Yingtao refuted, “Young Miss, why are you dragging this servant in when you're talking about Yangliu? I'm no longer an ignorant person. When the managers in charge of the medicine stores in the capital sees me, they all call me 'Head Manager Yingtao'. This servant is very composed now!”

“Is that so? May I ask, our composed Head Manager Yingtao, who was the one dancing with joy and almost jumped up from her chair earlier?” Yu Xiaocao looked at her with a teasing gaze and asked jokingly.

Yingtao giggled and said, “There's no need for this servant to put on airs in front of Young Miss. That's so exhausting ah!”

Xiaocao lightly poked her with her finger and said, “Oh, right, you just mentioned that you wanted to expand the scale of the pharmaceutical workshop. What are your plans?”

As soon as they started talking about work, Yingtao immediately sat down in a serious manner. She did indeed seem somewhat like a dignified boss, “Young Miss, recently, there are a lot of pharmacies from other regions that want to cooperate with us. This servant has done some research. Tongren Medicine Hall, which we are currently working with, has over a dozen branches, but it's impossible for all the prefectures in the country to have a branch of Tongren Medicine Hall.”

She paused for a moment, and then continued, “At present, the pharmaceutical workshop in Dongshan Village is capable of supplying Tongren Medicine Hall in the Jiangnan region. The workshop in the capital can barely manage to supply the eight or nine branches of Tongren Medicine Hall in the central and northern regions. If we want to cooperate with other pharmacies, then our production quantity is far from enough!”

“Therefore, this servant thinks that we need to first increase the production of pediatric medicine. In this way, in regions without Tongren Medicine Hall, sick children won't have to consume bitter medicine. They would be able to take the liquid medicine and syrup produced by us. Then, if we're capable, we should expand the production of other medicinal pills and try to sell the medicine produced by our Yu Pharmaceutical all over the country!!” Yingtao's eyes glowed very brightly and she seemed to be moved by the prospect she imagined.

While she expressed her ideas, Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but lightly nod, 'This lass Yingtao really does have the potential to be a career woman. Since she is so motivated, I can't let her talents be buried.'

“Alright! Let's do as you said. Don't worry and boldly implement your ideas! No matter how things turn out, I'll be there to support you guys!” Yu Xiaocao provided both of them with affirmation and encouragement, and she also praised, “Do you guys know? Your master lacks nothing but talented individuals, who are full of drive and capability, like you guys! Work hard and, when you guys reach a suitable age, I will restore your commoner status and find a good husband for you...”

“Young Miss!” Yingtao interrupted her word with a flushed face and exclaimed, “You're also still a child barely in your teens, yet you're already worrying about our marriage? Let's forget the matter of returning to a commoner status! This servant holds the secret medicine formulas in my hands, so I'm afraid of being tricked and marrying someone with ulterior motives. I have already thought about it. When this servant reaches twenty, I'll marry one of the stewards in the household and continue being your capable assistant!”

Yingtao was also a bold speaker. Although she was somewhat shy, she still clearly expressed her thoughts. She, Yangliu, Wutong, and Pipa weren't children of the servants of the Fang Household . They were orphans bought from outside the household, and thus they had nothing to do with the Fang Family and Lady Fang's maternal family, the Xia Family. Lady Fang had probably also considered this point when she assigned them to serve the young miss.