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It truly wasn't easy to eat a meal at the Yu's Medicinal Cuisine House, especially the dish, 'Buddha Jumps Over the Wall'! Those without patience really wouldn't be able to get to taste it. It was still his father who had the clout—no, it would be more accurate to say that his old father had received a good disciple. Perhaps...the next time he invited people over for a meal, he needed to use his old father's name.

“Don't even think about it!” Yuan Sinian was able to see at a glance what his son was scheming and leveled a glare at him as he rubbed his full belly in contentment. He leaned back in his chair as he slowly said, “This old man needs to call ahead in order to borrow this private room. Today, if it weren't for the fact that that musclehead surnamed Zhao had something to do and ended up changing his reservation at the last minute, we wouldn't be sitting here right now! If everyone was like you, asking to use it to invite anyone over, then wouldn't the Yu Family's lass have a giant headache now? That being said, as the grand and magnificent prime minister of this dynasty, how could you have the face to take advantage of a young maiden's generosity?”

Prime Minister Yuan silently roasted his father, 'You're shameless enough, so how could I, as your son, also not be shameless ah? That being said, Miss Yu actually should be calling me 'uncle' as she's best friends with my daughter...'

“Oh right, find some time for your younger disciple brother and son to talk to them about the metropolitan examination! Impart them some tricks of the trade on how to take the exam! For this exam, I, your old father, have hope to produce another top scorer in the imperial palace examinations!” Yuan Sinian easily ordered his son around as if it were nothing.

Prime Minister Yuan slightly frowned and said, “Father, the emperor plans on having me take on some duties in relation to the exams. It's not suitable for me to communicate with exam candidates prior...”

“Has the head examiner been set yet?” Yuan Sinian continued his line of questioning.

Prime Minister Yuan shook his head, “We haven't gotten to that point. I and the Imperial Tutor should be picking one together.”

“Then resign ah! Your son and youngest disciple brother are going to be participating in the preliminary round, so it's best that you avoid rousing any suspicion. Otherwise, if they end up placing in the top two, other people will use this to attack you and claim that you fraudulently altered the exam results!” Yuan Sinian had quite a bit of confidence in his little disciple and youngest grandson. He had taught many students in his life and there were very few people he had encountered who had the talent and ability of his youngest disciple. He truly had high expectations for this disciple and was hoping that he would place first in all three sets of this exam. As the greatest scholar of his generation, being able to patronize his last disciple to get first in all three sets would allow him to leave this world without any regrets!

When he thought of this youngest disciple brother who was younger than his youngest son and younger than him by a few decades, Prime Minister Yuan couldn't help but grimace in discomfort. His youngest disciple brother's older sister was good friends with his daughter and called him 'uncle'. This really made the relationship web between them complicated and messy. In essence, it was all the fault of his old father to take such a young boy as his last disciple!

“Then that should be all set! Try to push back on becoming the chief examiner or being involved at all ah! When the Imperial College lets off for break, let's go to the Yu Residence and tutor your youngest disciple brother a bit on the matters of the preliminary round. That way, we can avoid him losing the grasp on first place due to being unfamiliar with the exam's customs!” Yuan Sinian didn't wait for his son to voice his opinion before coming to a final decision.

What could Prime Minister Yuan do? He was powerful and mighty at court, but he still needed to obediently listen to his father as he had no desire at past the age of forty to be beaten by a plank in front of all of his descendents. His old urchin of a father really made things hard for him sometimes!

“Go to the Yu Residence? Is that proper? The Yu Family is incredibly busy as they're currently preparing Royal Princess Jinan's dowry. That being said, who knows who's coming and going at their residence, it's better to have my youngest disciple brother come to our study...” Prime Minister Yuan wasn't able to continue his line of thought before being glared at by his father.

Yuan Sinian angrily growled, “Come to our residence? Can the chefs at our house compete with Lass Yu's culinary talents? Can they make food that causes the heavens to sing? Can they bake delicious and beautiful pastries? Your head is not screwed on right. Can it be that officialdom has made you stupid? Do you really believe that your youngest disciple brother needs your advice?”

The old man almost said these thoughts out loud, 'As your father, I see that you're working hard and I'm trying to find excuses for you to cadge a meal. That way your poor stomach can get rewarded with some tasty food ah!'

Little Shitou, who had been captured by his master and sent to the Imperial College, was now obediently settling down, throwing away all of his extraneous thoughts, and focusing his mind on studying. Although he already knew all of the essays in his books by heart and had an original and refreshing interpretation of these texts, he still had quite a harvest from staying at the most illustrious academy in the country being able to talk to all of these scholars, exchanging ideas.

Furthermore, the Yu Residence wasn't very far from the site of the college. Thus, he was able to return home every day and eat the nutritious meals that his second sister had personally made for him. Every night, he also had tasty midnight snacks and pastries. He was living an incredibly happy life. It was as if he had returned back to six years prior, when he was about to take the county-level exams. His second sister had especially gone to that simple and crude residence they had in Tanggu Town to cook for him. Although their conditions were not as good as they were today, his second sister still managed to come up with tasty meals for him every day then.

If it weren't for the fact that there was an eyesore thinking up excuses to cadge a meal at their home every day and showing his face to his second sister, then he would be even more pleased!

Little Shitou was like a fish in the water at the Imperial College. He also had very good relationships with the other schoolmates there. After less than half a month, he had made quite a few good friends there. This clearly was with the help of his second sister, using a tactic that she called 'snack diplomacy',

This was because he needed to take his noon meal at the Imperial College. Xiaocao felt bad that her younger brother was working so hard to study, so she especially made delicious and unique pastries for him every day. He brought them every day to school to eat. She made a large variety of food and they were all incredibly delicious. Even a tightly closed meal box was unable to conceal the fragrance within. Thus, it was obvious he had attracted the attention of other students.

The vast majority of students at the school were all going to participate in the metropolitan civil service examinations next year. At first, they regarded Little Shitou, this new student, with a bit of suspicion. They were either cautiously polite around him or ignored him coldly. Before Little Shitou could even start implementing 'snack diplomacy', the sweet smell of his meal box had already perked up the interest of some cold-looking students.

Most of these students were the sons of officials in the capital. Naturally, they knew about the Yu Family's line of businesses. Furthermore, Little Shitou was the younger blood-related brother of the

creator of the Yu's Businesses, Royal Princess Jinan. Royal Princess Jinan not only knew how to manufacture medicine, brew wine, cook medicinal cuisine, but she was also an expert at baking pastries.

The pastries that Princess Consort Jing had once given out at her banquets had caused quite a sensation in the upper circles long ago in the capital. The two beauties of the capital and Royal Princess Minglan's wedding banquets all had new dishes and refreshments there, which caused people to praise them endlessly. It was said that many bold guests had come over to congratulate Royal Princess Jinan's friends' weddings in order to eat at their tables. Thus, they had to add table after table at the banquet and it was quite a lively atmosphere!

Many people were now starting to plan, wondering if they should show up with a big present at Royal Princess Jinan's upcoming wedding the next year. That way they could enjoy some delicious food. It was possible that every table would have a big surprise! The fact that all of these powerful officials who were willing to throw away their faces for the sake of delicious food spoke volumes about her culinary talents.

Many families of the students here at the Imperial College did their best to find a way to break into Royal Princess Jinan's and Imperial Prince Xu's inner circle. Nowadays, Royal Princess Jinan's younger brother had appeared in their midst and always brought a box of pastries to 'tempt' them. If they didn't take advantage of this opportunity, then they'd be the biggest idiots around!

Although Yu Fan was young, he had a good understanding of the world and of how people worked. Second Older Sister was helping him smooth the way for him, so he naturally needed to treasure her work. At first, he only shared his food with a few schoolmates who expressed their goodwill to him. Afterwards, his friends increased and increased. During lunch, even the teachers and lecturers at the Imperial College would sometimes cozy over and ask him and his friends courteously about how their studies were going.

Therefore, his young personal servant began carrying more and more food boxes along and the contents inside became more and more rich and complex. Other than some light refreshments, there would even be some substantial dishes in the boxes. Thus, he and his friends could add some food to their lunches.

After spending more than a month there, he was now the student with the best social connections out of all of them. Although his 'snack diplomacy' only opened the way, his clever mind, likable personality as well as his sincere treatment of others caused many people and classmates to view him in a good light.

“Hey! Xiaofan, what delicious foods did you bring today?” Little Shitou's closest friend, the youngest son of a scholar at the Imperial Hanlin Academy, Zang Borui, came up from behind him. He patted Shitou's shoulder.

Little Shitou slanted him a look and asked, “So if I don't bring tasty things along, you wouldn't come over and greet me?”

“Haha, how could that be? To tell you the truth, at first, ah, I truly was coming over because of your food. After spending some time with you, I feel like you're a chummy fellow and worthy of my friendship, which was why I kept coming back. Do you think I, this older brother, would spend time with just anyone?” As he talked, he also inadvertently threw a look at his arch-enemy, Liu Hongzhang.

Zang Borui and Liu Hongzhang had been enemies since they were toddling kids. The two families had been fighting against each other since their father's generation. Neither wanted to back down from the other. Zang Borui's father was a fifth-ranked official at the Imperial Hanlin Academy and Liu Hongzhang's father was the consultant of the Communications Bureau and was also a fifth-ranked official. The two of them used a lot of effort to defeat the other.

There truly wasn't a great grievance or hatred between the two families! Their fathers, in their youth, only had a few quarrels now and then, leading to the two families not seeing eye to eye with each other. As soon as they saw each other, they did their best to put the other down. Now, even Zang Borui and Liu Hongzhang acted the same way too.

However, it turned out that these two people both had decent relationships with Little Shitou. In order to not embarrass their friend, the two of them would calm down a bit in front of him and would at most use their eyes to express their displeasure at the other.

Liu Hongzhang ignored the provocative look and spoke to Little Shitou, “In three days, on your birthday, it will also be coincidentally a break day at school. How about we use this opportunity to relax a bit and have a celebration?”

Little Shitou remembered the words his second sister had said yesterday and smiled foolishly, “My second sister had said that she was planning on having the family's Medicinal Cuisine House cater my celebration. I've already prepared the invitations. When the moment comes, you guys need to do me the honor of coming!”

“Does that even need to be said?” Zang Borui had a tall and strong figure and didn't look like a scholar. He somewhat resembled a military man instead. He hugged Little Shitou's neck as he chuckled mischievously, “Your birthday celebration will be held at the Medicinal Cuisine House, then...will the banquet have 'Buddha Jumps Over the Wall'? Will your second sister personally make a birthday cake for you? Will there be the Yu's fine wine there? Will there be...”

“The friendship between gentlemen is clear like water, no flavor but free of harmful substances like self-interest. As the son of a scholar at Hanlin Academy, do you not know of this?” Liu Hongzhang couldn't take it anymore and raised an eyebrow as he coldly remarked.

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“You're a gentleman? Then what are we, just nobodies?? Don't tell me that you don't lust after the Yu's pastries, good wines, and Buddha Jumps Over the Wall? What a hypocrite! Xiaofan, when the moment comes, just prepare a cup of plain water for him. He so badly wants to be a gentleman, so let him stay one!” Zang Borui exploded in anger and began to argue vehemently with Liu Hongzhang.

Little Shitou, who was stuck in-between them and feeling quite awkward, helplessly sighed within his heart before he said, “My dear friends, just what sort of hatred do you have between you two that make you fight whenever you see each other as if you're in a love-hate relationship? Let's get it all out in the open and decide whether you will both make up or have a clean break. Make it final, alright?”

Zang Borui had a more straightforward personality and frowned, thinking for a long time, before he finally stated with a stupefied expression on his face, “We don't really have a hateful history between us. But, what the hell is a 'love-hate relationship'? Xiaofan, can you stop spewing out these weird and bizarre phrases of yours?”

“You dare to claim that the phrases that my second older sister likes to say are weird. You're done! Be careful. My second sister might add some wasabi into your favorite matcha cake!” Little Shitou had a look in his eyes that said 'you're done for', which made Zang Borui's heart rate speed up.

“Don't tell her ha! Your second older sister is truly your second older sister and has a creative turn of mind when it comes to words. She doesn't stick to the norm and is ingenious in her way in using language to describe the world...” Zang Borui immediately turned pale after hearing this—although he had no idea what 'wasabi' was, he could tell from Yu Fan's expression that it wasn't something that was very good or tasty.

“Such a lackey!” Liu Hongzhang coldly spat those words out but his eyes hid a smile within them. A love-hate relationship? Just who was in love with this stinky little firecracker? As for hate, that was too

intense for him. He only liked to tease him occasionally as he thought that the other fellow's angry expression and antics, like a snarling little puppy, were quite interesting.

As expected, Zang Borui immediately exploded, "You're the lackey! Your whole family are lackeys! Hmph! You talk as if you're so high above but I've seen you. Every time Xiaofan takes out his pastries, you always eat your fill! Xiaofan, did you bring any Black Forest Gateau along today? I'm going to reserve them all..."

"Eh? Bear Zang, don't you hate eating chocolate flavored things the most? Why are you suddenly interested in Black Forest Gateau ah?" Little Shitou looked at him with a flabbergasted expression. He had already become accustomed to the two of them bickering all the time. Perhaps this was the way the two of them just liked to interact with each other? Or perhaps they didn't need him to mediate their conflicts at all.

Zang Borui slanted a look at Liu Hongzhang and chuckled mischievously, "Only demons would like the oddly bitter-sweet chocolate. However...if I'm able to prevent a certain someone from eating his most favorite Black Forest Gateau, then I will happily eat them down as if I was downing an unpleasant medicine!"

"What a waste of natural resources to allow a cow to munch on peonies!! Childish!!" Liu Hongzhang wasn't going to be scared by the other youth's words. The truth would come to light at the right moment. When had the fellow surnamed Zang ever won against himself? And he wanted to threaten him?

"What's wrong with being a bit childish if I can make you furious?" Zang Borui made a funny face and stuck out his tongue at Liu Hongzhang's backside. One of his other classmates, who was sitting at the side, saw all of this and looked at him with a weird expression. Zang Borui stared at him and aggressively said, "What are you looking at? Have you never seen a fellow as handsome as myself?"

"Are you sick? Did you not take your medicine?" That other classmate wasn't in their usual circle of friends and they were mere acquaintances. Earlier, when he heard about Little Shitou's birthday celebration, he crept over silently, "Yu Fan, let me wish you an early happy birthday...would I have the honor of being able to..."

"Huh? Uh! The day before my birthday party, I will hand out invitations." Right after Little Shitou finished his sentence, a few more familiar faces popped out from nowhere as they all stared at him fervently. They all resembled little wolf cubs salivating over a big meaty bone. Little Shitou felt his head

start to hurt. He wasn't sure whether his second sister had prepared enough tables to handle all of these schoolmates who were cozying up to him. He braced himself and said, "If you all don't disdain it, when the time comes, you should come along and enjoy the festivities?"

"Not a problem, not a problem!" The nearby students in the Imperial College immediately revealed happy smiles and burst into cheers. There were some who were afraid they had missed their opportunity and hurried up to introduce themselves such that Little Shitou could hear their names. In the span of the time it took him to travel from the entrance gate of the academy to his classroom, he had promised to give out a dozen more invitations.

When he got home, he lamented to his second older sister about what had happened. Yu Xiaocao immediately had the manager of the Medicinal Cuisine House find all of the customers who had reserved a table on the day of his birthday and had them exchange their tables for a free of charge first class medicinal cuisine meal instead. Thus, they managed to take all of the private tables back. Then she had Little Shitou send out invitations to all of his teachers and classmates at the Imperial College.

Naturally, the invitations to the students were only restricted to the thirty or so people who were in the same classroom as him. Although the Imperial College hadn't reached a thousand enrolled students yet, it still likely had around eight hundred total. The Medicinal Cuisine House would burst open at the seams and still wouldn't be able to hold that many people. Xiaocao thought about this again and decided to invite the people back to their own residence instead!

The classmates who got the invitations were naturally incredibly gleeful. The students in the other classrooms, on the other hand, were green with jealousy. In the couple of days prior to his birthday celebration, wherever he went, Little Shitou could feel the angry gazes of other people staring at him from the side. He was so frightened that when class was done for the noon meal, he was too afraid to step out of the classroom as he wondered if he'd be stopped by people if he went anywhere else. At the end of school, he also had to be escorted home by his best friends.

On the day of his birthday banquet, his best friends: Zang Borui, Liu Hongzhang, Li Wenfeng, Huang Zixu, and Zhong Lifeng, arrived bright and early at the Yu Residence. They were taking on the honored duty of helping him receive his other schoolmates. However, when they entered the outer courtyard, they were immediately dominated by the imposing and majestic Imperial Prince Xu and they instantly became as docile as a flock of doves.

Once Zhu Junyang greeted the two Zhao Generals and had invited the teachers from the Imperial College into the reception pavilion to have tea, Zang Borui finally quietly came over as if he was frightened to say, "Wow! Xiaofan, you truly have a lot of clout to have Imperial Prince Xu help you greet

the guests! You even have the guts to bicker in front of him. If it were me, I'd be so scared that I would have peed my pants by now!"

"Look at your sorry state! The younger brother-in-law has the most power. Don't you know this fact? If you were Imperial Prince Xu's younger brother-in-law, he would also give you some grace!" Liu Hongzhang never gave up a chance to diss Zang Borui. Otherwise, he wouldn't be happy.

Zang Borui slanted him a look and said, "Hypocrite Zhang, speak the truth. In front of Imperial Prince Xu, don't you also want to pee your pants too?"

"I haven't done anything shameful, so why would I want to pee my pants?" Liu Hongzhang had to admit that it was hard to not be affected by Imperial Prince Xu's imposing aura. However, as a guest, he had a proper invitation in hand. Imperial Prince Xu was like the other host here, so what could he do to them? Was there anything for him to be afraid of?

"Little Shitou, how come you're not inviting your classmates here into the pavilion to sit?" A clear and sweet-sounding voice could be heard from behind them and it resembled the dulcet singing of an oriole. Zang Borui and the other four looked over and saw an elegant, graceful and beautiful young woman smiling at them.

"Second Sister, let me introduce you to them. These are my good friends!" Little Shitou introduced his best friends to Yu Xiaocao one after another and then he spoke to his friends, "This is my second older sister!"

"Hello, Second Older Sister!"

"Thank you, Second Older Sister, for allowing Yu Fan to bring your pastries to us every day!"

"Second Older Sister, you look even younger than Xiaofan!"

"Second Older Sister..."

Little Shitou couldn't stand the fawning and lackey-like actions of his good friends and hurriedly stopped them, "Just what are you guys doing by calling her 'older sister'? My second older sister has just turned seventeen and is younger than you all by quite a bit!"

"Although our second older sister is young in age, she has seniority over us all! Based on the relationship between us, your second older sister is naturally my second older sister. Second Older Sister, your matcha cakes and fruit cakes are incredibly delicious. I have never eaten such tasty desserts before in my life! Second Older Sister, your culinary talents are the best in the world!" Zang Borui was the most lackey-like of them all. He lavished compliment after compliment on her.

Yu Xiaocao would have never expected that her younger brother's good friends at school could be so amusing. She had thought that the students of the Imperial College were all die-hard bookworms. This youth surnamed Zang was truly too adorable.

"Today, I've prepared a wide variety of desserts. If you like anything, please tell the servants to get some. There's no need to be polite. Little Shitou, treat your schoolmates well as you shouldn't slight our guests ah!" Yu Xiaocao warned him a few times before finally saying goodbye to the students from the Imperial College. She went back with her Auntie Zhao and godmother into the inner courtyard.

"Wow——Xiaofan, apparently your childhood nickname was Little Shitou ah! So funny!" Zang Borui covered his mouth and grinned so broadly that he resembled a little mouse who had stolen some cheese.

"Is it as funny as the childhood nickname 'Big and Sturdy' ah?" Liu Hongzhang interjected before the other youth could react.

"Hypocrite Zhang! Do you want to fight??" Zang Borui immediately snarled back, acting like an angry up little rooster who had its neck and feathers all puffed up. Whenever his childhood nickname, 'Big and Sturdy' got mentioned, he felt his head hurt. He had been born prematurely and was quite weak and tiny as a baby, like a delicate little kitten.

His paternal grandmother had believed in the custom that 'a crude name makes a child easy to raise', and gave him the nickname of 'Big and Sturdy'. However, one had to admit that from childhood to now, he really didn't get sick very often. Once he reached adulthood, he was not only extremely tall but also very sturdy. When he started protesting against this nickname, no one at home used it anymore once he turned ten. However, it had always been his sore point and he would erupt in fury whenever someone mentioned it.

“Alright ah, alright! Can't you two see that this isn't the right environment for you two to fight? This is Yu Fan's good day today, so please calm down. you need to leave a good impression for Second Older Sister!” The eldest of the group of five and the one with the calmest personality was Zhong Lifeng. In one sentence, he was able to stop the two of them from blowing up.

Huang Zixu had the liveliest personality out of all of them and smiled brilliantly, “Xiaofan, can you bring us to the back kitchens to take a look at what sort of desserts are available? How about...we can go help ourselves?”

“Alright ah, alright! I agree with this plan!” Zang Borui immediately forgot the embarrassment of his nickname being mentioned and jumped up to express his agreement. Li Wenfeng's eyes also lit up as he nodded his head repeatedly.

Little Shitou was a bit embarrassed, “You are all guests, so how could I take you to the back kitchen...”

“Come on ah! Don't be such a worrywart. Just who are we to you? Go, go! Bring us to look around your residence's kitchens!” The group of youths heckled him and began to squeeze through the corner gate to enter the courtyard.

These fellows had long and lanky legs, so they very quickly arrived at the back kitchens. Because the birthday banquet was being catered by the Yu's Medicinal Cuisine House, the kitchen only had Yangliu and a few capable assistants from the pastry shop busily working. When they saw Zang Borui leading the pack into the kitchens, Yangliu immediately raised her eyebrows and put her hands on her hips as she hardly said, “Who are you ah? The kitchen isn't a place for random people to just come and go as they please. Go back out!”

“Older Sister Yangliu, it's me!” Little Shitou hastily came forward to help Zang Borui and revealed a bright smile on his face.

When she saw her mistress's younger brother, Yangliu put away her fierce expression. However, the kitchen truly wasn't a place for strangers to come and go. Thus she said, “Young Master, whatever you need, just tell one of the servants to come over. Why send these honored guests over to see such a crude area?”

“Older Sister Yangliu, Second Older Sister was the one who told us to come over and choose the desserts we like!” Huang Zixu gave a quick excuse and then scuttled over to the area where the pastries were held. Wow! Next to the wall was a giant stand with five shelves on it and it was completely filled with all sorts of cakes and pastries. It was truly a sight to dazzle a person's eyes. What was to be done? He wanted to eat everything that was there!!

Yangliu commanded her subordinates to give each of the guests a tray and asked, “Honored guests, what would you all like to drink? Tea? Fruit juice? Coffee? Or how about some fruit tea?”

Liu Hongzhang had strolled over to the beverage area while all of his classmates were selecting pastries. He had been attracted by the rich fragrance of coffee. The beverages could all be had at the Yu's Tea Shop, but coffee was the newest addition to the lot. Every day it sold out very quickly. Because the shop didn't take reservations for it, people who wanted it needed to line up for a very long time before they could buy some. Thus, he hadn't had the chance to try any until now!

“Could you give me a cup of coffee, please?” Liu Hongzhang naturally couldn't miss out on this opportunity.

“Alright. Do you want to add the cream and sugar yourself or would you prefer to have us mix it up instead?” Yangliu personally poured a cup of just brewed coffee in a cup and quietly asked.

“Older Sister Yangliu, mix it up to suit the average person's tastes! Older Brother Liu, although coffee has a very rich aroma, its bitter taste is not something to be underestimated and the average person cannot stand the taste of it alone. It's better to add more cream and sugar to it to make it taste better!” Little Shitou gave his opinion to help out. Compared to the bitter coffee, he vastly preferred the sweet taste of fruit juice.

In the blink of an eye, he noticed that his close pals were all crazily adding one plate after another on their trays. None of them seemed to be slowing down, so he didn't know whether he should laugh or cry. He hastily reminded them, “Are you all sure you want to take that many pastries back? The noon meal will be catered by the Medicinal Cuisine House. If you guys don't have any room in your stomachs to eat 'Buddha Jumps Over the Wall', then don't blame me for not warning you all first!”

“That's right ah! We're going to eat Buddha Jumps Over the Wall for lunch!!!” Zang Borui, who had taken the most pastries earlier, hurriedly put one small plate after another back on the shelves. He needed to save some room in his stomach such that he'd have enough space to enjoy the legendary delicacy—Buddha Jumps Over the Wall!

“Young Master, Young Master! A few of your schoolmates have arrived and your lord father sent me over to ask you, do you want to receive them in your study or have them all go to the reception pavilion?” Little Shitou's personal servant panted as he ran over.

Little Shitou thought for a bit and then ordered, “Take them to my study ah! The teachers are all in the reception pavilion. If we head over there, then it'd be hard for us to leave later on!”

“Right, right! Younger Brother Shitou is the thoughtful one here!” Zang Borui smiled foolishly as he held his tray full of beverages and desserts in his hands. He had bumped into something and now everything was clanking on top.

“Thank you, Older Brother Big and Strong, for your compliments!” Little Shitou's flippant reply caused the older youth to eat his own words. He closed his mouth dispiritedly. Liu Hongzhang was sipping coffee at the side and was appreciating his arch-enemy getting put in his place.

“Just what are you looking at?! It's all your fault, telling others my childhood nickname!! Is it that great to not have one ah? All that means is that no one cares about you at home, hmph hmph. Just wait. I'll find your weakness one day!!” Zang Borui angrily stuffed a piece of matcha cake into his mouth. Only the sweet taste of pastries was able to soothe his ruffled heart!

The lively Huang Zixu shot a glance at Imperial Prince Xu, who was helping receive the guests with a faint smile on his face. The youth's eyes roved around a bit and then he sidled over to Little Shitou to whisper, “Yu Fan, Imperial Prince Xu is as cold and hard as a giant ice cube. Our second sister is so delicate and weak, so how'd she end up liking him? Could it be that Imperial Prince Xu used his power and might and forced her to marry him ah? Don't worry, although our family's power and influence cannot compare to his, we can't allow him to take advantage of his position to bully other people! Even if we need to bring this fight to the emperor, we still need to save Second Older Sister from his evil clutches!”

“Older Brother Zixu, did you lose your mind ah?” Little Shitou rolled his eyes at the older youth and huffed, “Do you think that I, Yu Fan, am an unscrupulous person who would sell my own older sister for my personal glory and honor ah? Are you blind? If my second sister didn't like that guy, I would risk my own life to prevent their marriage!”

“That's right, that's right! Zixu, if you can't say something nice, then don't say anything at all! Earlier, our second older sister smiled so sweetly and happily, so how could she possibly be the one being forced

into a marriage? Our second older sister is so capable and talented, who could possibly force her to do anything?" Zang Borui had already become Xiaocao's faithful and crazy fanboy.

Huang Zixu thought about his own older sister, who was unable to do as she wished, and couldn't help but mumble, "No matter how capable she is, she is still a woman. Just how many women in this world are actually able to take their lives and happiness into their own hands?"

He said this with an undertone of deep emotion. His most beloved older sister, who was fully related to him, had actually been married off by his father to become the second wife of a widower. She was now the stepmother of a five year old. This only happened because that man, her now husband, was able to help his father in his career. At that time, he had also argued and fought for his older sister. Unfortunately, his father refused to listen to anyone. If Imperial Prince Xu had set his eyes on Yu Fan's second older sister, with his status and position, how could the Yu Family possibly refuse him?

The rumors all said that Imperial Prince Xu was a tyrannical and grim man who had cruel methods in his hands. He had also gone onto the battlefield and killed people as if they were nothing. Earlier he had just met the prince's eyes once and he was frightened until his heart froze and almost forgot to breathe. Yu Fan's second older sister was a delicate and delicate young maiden. Wouldn't she faint instantly as soon as Imperial Prince Xu glared at her? Huang Zixu was truly worried for Yu Xiaocao!

Yu Fan chuckled and put an arm around Huang Zixu's shoulders as he whispered, "You're truly thinking too much right now. Although Imperial Prince Xu normally looks quite fierce and vicious, in front of my older sister, he's as obedient as a house dog."

It wasn't just Huang Zixu who didn't believe him. None of his classmates did. They all stared at him with a look that said, 'Can you at least say a believable lie?'

"You all don't believe me? Let me prove it right now for you all!" Little Shitou's eyes flickered as a mischievous smile appeared on his lips.

He walked up to his father who was talking to Zhu Junyang and revealed a sincere look. He stared at the prince with a half-smile on his face as he said, "Future Brother-in-law, earlier I saw my second sister in the back kitchen. She said that she was wearing a set of purple clothing but didn't have any hairpins that matched with it. I remember that Wisdom Jade Pavilion seemed to have just finished carving a set of purple jadeite hair decorations yesterday and it would match my sister's clothing splendidly."

Although Zhu Junyang felt a burst of happiness when he heard himself being addressed as 'Future Brother-in-law', he hadn't lost his head over it. Ordinarily, when this youngster saw him, he acted like an angry little toad, puffed up with anger. It was as if he owed Little Shitou a few hundred taels or something. Today, on the other hand, he had flipped his attitude, so there must be something fishy.

He let out a bit of his ability and read the youngster's thoughts: 'Faster, go help my older sister get it. Don't you always do everything you can for her ah? It's time for you to show off your stuff!! Let my best friends see how sincere you are to her ah!'

This stinky brat was using him as a joke ah! His schoolmates were all a bit too imaginative, right? They actually thought that he, as the grand and magnificent Imperial Prince Xu, would actually use his immense power to force the Yu Family to promise their daughter to him...they all had too much time on their hands!!

However, he had to give face to his younger brother-in-law. He stared at Little Shitou for a bit with a faint smile on his lips until the youth finally looked away sheepishly. Only then did he raise his voice, "That set of hairpins was especially made for your second sister. This prince will go get it for her now!"

When he finished that statement, he whispered quietly into Little Shitou's ear, "Since you called me brother-in-law, I will play along with you this time. Remember that you owe me, your brother-in-law, for this ah!"

Little Shitou replied in a somewhat unnatural manner as he wasn't willing to admit his motives in doing this, "I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Do you think that you can hide your little tricks from me? If your older sister wanted me to get that set of hairpins for her, she would directly tell me and not play word gymnastics, saying that something matched something else. You, ah, always brag about how close you are with your second older sister but you don't really understand her personality! Also, young children shouldn't get into the habit of telling lies!" After he finished this, he used his large and powerful hand to ruffle his future younger brother-in-law's hair.

Little Shitou did his best to dodge the claw that was messing up his hair and growled, "I'm not telling lies. I'm just testing to see how much you care about my second older sister! Also, a man's head and a woman's waist are not areas where other people should be touching. So stop it!"

“Psh...you're a little brat who hasn't even grown facial hair, so what right do you have to call yourself a man ah? And you also know that a woman's waist is not to be touched, which makes it sound like you've tried to do that before! Does this prince need a brat like you to test my love for my future princess consort? All I need is your second older sister's approval, as for everyone else...this prince doesn't care!”
Zhu Junyang threw an aggressive look at the group of five who were peeking over in the distance. He glanced at all of them, scaring the five brats into complete silence.

Imperial Prince Xu's tyrannical aura had just been exposed. Just one glance from him was enough to cause a person's heart to start pounding. Furthermore, his oppressive manner and words had truly shown just how much importance he placed on Yu Fan's Second Older Sister.

“Who are you calling a bat who hasn't grown facial hair yet? I'm already sixteen years old! There are many guys at this age who are already fathers because they married early!” Little Shitou continued to hop around Imperial Prince Xu, who was taller than him by half a head. He resembled a tiny flea bouncing around. Although he claimed he was sixteen that was according to traditional method of reckoning , in actuality, he had just passed his fifteenth birthday.

Zhu Junyang ignored his complaints and reached out a hand to pinch Little Shitou's cheeks a couple of times and then turned around to speak to Yu Hai for a moment. Then, he took Hou Xiaoliang with him as he left the Yu Residence. His Treasure Pavilion had gotten a shipment of pink diamonds recently, and he had commanded the craftsmen to work overtime to make a set of jewelry. They should be done today, so it was just in time for him to give out his present during his future younger brother-in-law's birthday. The little lass would definitely look quite stunning wearing this new set of jewelry to receive the guests. The future Princess Consort Xu's good name was also his good name. Mhm! He needed to personally retrieve this set to look more serious and solemn!

When they saw Imperial Prince Xu leave, Yu Fan's five best friends immediately gathered over and they complimented Little Shitou to the heavens in an esteemed manner, “Xiaofan, you're too sick!! You even dare to quibble head on with that imposing face...”

“But, how come I feel like there was something fishy going on? Like you're not as strong as you seem ah?”

“Go scam! If Imperial Prince Xu stood in front of you, you wouldn't even dare to let out a fart. How do you have the face to claim that he's not as strong as he seems ah?”

“It would be the embarrassment of a lifetime to fart in front of Imperial Prince Xu. If I had a fart coming out I would definitely have to hold it back!”

“However, Xiaofan, Imperial Prince Xu seems to treat you quite well as the younger brother-in-law ah! He even strokes your hair and pinches your face. Even when he talks to you, he speaks in a gentle manner and has a slight smile on his face.”

“Now I truly believe that our second sister hasn't been threatened or forced into this upcoming marriage. From the way Imperial Prince Xu treats Xiaofan and Uncle Yu, it's more than enough to prove just how much he esteems our second sister.”

Little Shitou grumpily waved a hand, “Do I need you guys to say this? You were the ones who were doubtful, wondering if something bad was going on, and insisted on speculating on whether Imperial Prince Xu loves my second sister or not. You forced me to lose all face in front of that fellow!”

“Eh? Imperial Prince Xu found out what you were trying to do? Then why did he head out of the residence?” Zang Borui scratched his head as he asked in puzzlement.

“You're asking me, but who can I ask now? Let's go to my study and help me receive the other guests!” Little Shitou didn't want to continue on this topic. That fellow could do whatever he wanted!

Fields of Gold Chapter 664

They had originally planned on holding Little Shitou's birthday celebration before the metropolitan civil service examinations as a family. This would also allow him to relax a bit and avoid him from becoming too nervous and not balancing himself between work and rest.

Xiaocao planned on inviting Grandfather Zhao's family, her godmother's family, and a few of her good friends. In addition, she wanted to invite Little Shitou's master, Great Scholar Yuan, and a few of his good school friends. However, her only mistake was in assuming that this would be a simple matter. She had thought that holding the banquet at the Medicinal Cuisine House would be enough.

In general, the rooms at Medicinal Cuisine House needed to be reserved at least a week in advance. Xiaocao had quickly estimated the number of people and decided to reserve three rooms. That would have been more than enough space to cater her own family, Grandfather Zhao's family, her godfather's family, the guests that Zhu Junyang wanted, her own good friends and their husbands, as well as Little Shitou's schoolmates and teachers.

She didn't expect that once word got out at the Imperial College that things would change that much. Now, even the teachers who were invited were enough to fill one whole table. As for the students who got the invitations, they would be able to fill three rooms until they burst. Then there were the students who were usually mere acquaintances with Little Shitou who turned up without being invited; they ended up filling another table.

Somehow, the news that the Yu Family was getting food catered from the Medicinal Cuisine House had also reached the ears of the emperor emeritus and a few of the imperial princes. That was it! These old men, who loved food, had all scurried over with gifts along too. Then there were a few families who had good relationships with the Fang Family; all of them also appeared at the Yu Residence. It was so busy that the Yu Family and Fang Family's people had no time to deal with it all!

Fortunately, Xiaocao had taken all of the private rooms back from the Medicinal Cuisine House in advance. Otherwise, this banquet would become a farce that everyone would laugh at.

Their master's younger brother was having his birthday celebration, and it was turning out to be a big event. Thus, the chefs and servants from the Medicinal Cuisine House did their best. Every single dish was made to complete perfection. This meal was so delicious that those old gluttons ended up stuffing themselves silly. It could be said that both the hosts and guests at this celebration were immensely satisfied by this event. Before they left, every person also got a box of pastries as a gift. However, one shouldn't look down on this mere box of desserts. In the Yu's Western-Style Desserts Store, this tiny little box cost at least a few dozen taels!

There was only one shop in the entire capital, even the entire Great Ming Empire, that sold western-style desserts. As for those old dessert shops, like Daoxiang Village, who sold traditional style desserts, they were all incredibly happy that the 'Yu's Businesses' hadn't extended their reach into their territory. Otherwise, they would have no road left to live.

The manager of Daoxiang Village had once tactfully inquired Yangliu whether The Yu's planned on making traditional style desserts. When she reported to Xiaocao, her answer back was enough to set their hearts at ease—within the next twenty years, The Yu's only planned on making western-style desserts. This allowed all of the old and famous dessert shops to let out a big sigh in relief. Many things could change in the span of twenty years. Who knew what things would be like twenty years later?

After his birthday celebration passed, Little Shitou discovered that his relationships with other people had improved immensely. Within the Imperial College, whether it was the teachers or students,

everyone would show him a genial smile whenever they saw him. Those who were closer to him would even come over and greet him! When the students were debating, many of them would go and find him to exchange thoughts and ideas. It truly helped him to refine his own thoughts. Thus, at the college, Little Shitou was maturing at a breakneck speed.

When Yuan Sinian began quizzing his little disciple, he discovered that the youth's ideas and thoughts had matured greatly and that his essays had become more rigorous. If one had to compare, prior to entering the Imperial College, Yu Fan was like a young eagle who had just left the nest. Although he was quite dynamic, he was also a bit young and tender in his thoughts. Now he had already matured into an adult eagle, able to fight with the winds and soar the vast skies with complete ease. He had a long-term vision and loads of potential and was just waiting for his opportunity to fly up into the clouds.

Great Scholar Yuan didn't show much of his thoughts on the outside but when he returned back home, he was quite cocky and boastful in front of his son. Prime Minister Yuan felt quite helpless by this. 'Yes! You managed to obtain a good disciple! He has the talent to become the top scorer of the Imperial Palace Examinations. He has the potential to become one of the legendary scholars who got the top score in all three rounds of the palace examinations! What does any of this have to do with me, huh? For the sake of your good disciple, my younger disciple brother, I even needed to resign from the spot of the top examiner. Did you have to come over and flaunt this in my face ah? My dear father, have you forgotten that you have a grandson who is also going to participate in these exams? In your eyes, in your speech, in your heart, do you only have your precious disciple now? Did you displace your young grandson ah? Then what is my placing in your heart now, as the father of your grandson, ah?'

Fortunately, his youngest son's personality was like his and didn't depend on the attention of others. Everyday, his son would follow his usual routine and go to the Imperial College to study, then go back home to meditate and review his schoolwork. In addition, he would even sometimes ask for guidance from the little genius, Yu Fan. Hard work could make up for a lot of things, so he was confident that his son would be able to get a good placing in the metropolitan civil service examinations!

The days passed by one after another. In the blink of an eye, the capital had already entered the season of wind and snow. In the past, winter at the Yu Residence had a different atmosphere than it did this year. This was the last New Years that their youngest daughter was going to spend with their family. Thus, Yu Hai and his wife became busy at the start of the twelfth month as they wished to give their youngest daughter a perfect memory of this last holiday as an unmarried lady.

As the eldest sister-in-law, Liu Huifang had also come to the capital with the Yu Family. In the past, she had once come to the capital after getting an invitation from her good friend, her future younger sister-in-law, Xiaocao. The Yu Family's residence in the capital wasn't much different than the one they had in Dongshan Village. The only difference was that the furnishings were a bit more delicate and fine.

After Liu Huifang entered the capital, she began to learn how to manage a large residence from her mother-in-law and her younger sister-in-law's godmother. On the day of her younger brother-in-law's birthday, she had gained quite a bit of experience and had come into contact with a lot of upper class maidens in the capital. Although she was a bit reserved and restrained when interacting with them, she had slowly learned how to conduct herself. During the preparations for the New Year's celebrations, she had continued to help her mother-in-law and had come up with many good ideas and proposals.

Liu Huifang had grown up with Xiaocao and had personally witnessed the Yu Family's journey from rags to riches. She knew that Xiaocao was the one responsible for the sudden rise in the Yu Family's fortunes. It could be said that, without Xiaocao, they wouldn't have the current Yu Family.

After she married over, her husband had often mentioned that all of the businesses in the capital were the result of his youngest sister's hard work. As the eldest brother, he couldn't help her with much, so he naturally wouldn't be so shameless to ask for a piece of the pie there. In fact, even the Yu Family's properties in Tanggu were all a result of his youngest sister's efforts in setting up a good foundation. Their Tanggu seed breeding farm and fruit and vegetable business, as well as those prosperous shops at the harbor, all had the shadow of his youngest sister in them.

As the family's eldest son, he naturally needed to stay in Tanggu to keep an eye on the Yu Family's ancestral home and foundations. No matter how wealthy or prosperous the capital was, he wasn't the least bit envious. The size of one's head dictated the size of one's hat. Yu Hang was very well aware of his own abilities and was clear-headed enough to recognize his limitations.

He was afraid that a person's heart could change once money was brought into the picture. Thus, he would, from time to time, mention certain things in front of his wife in a deliberate manner. Liu Huifang naturally knew the worth of the properties and businesses of the Yu's in the capital. Every single one of them could be described as bringing in gold every day.

But what did that matter? She wasn't a royal princess and wasn't someone favored by the emperor like Younger Sister Xiaocao. Even if these businesses entered her hands, how long could she keep them there? It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that one could throw a stick and end up hitting a few nobles on any street in the capital. How could there not be any envious and jealous people eyeing these businesses? Wasn't the only reason why her younger sister was able to do so well because she had a powerful backing? If any one else tried, who could do it?

That being said, one needed to be content with one's situation. Huifang was already quite satisfied with her current life. She had grown up in times where things were lacking, where her family went hungry between meals and the only thing they could afford to eat were flatbreads made of coarse grain. She could still remember those days as if they had just happened. If it weren't for Younger Sister Xiaocao, her father, the pillar of their family, might have died long ago during that harsh winter. Without the Yu Family as a business partner, even if their family decided to raise chickens and ducks, they may not have been able to find a good market...

Now, she was married to the eldest son of the Yu Family and was the envy of all of the young maidens in the village. She was living the leisurely life of a young matron in a wealthy family. Why did she need to get her panties in a bunch and let greed blind her own two eyes?

Thus, when her mother-in-law began to prepare her younger sister's dowry list and had called the whole household to her rooms to discuss this matter, she was able to view the long list of items and estates with a peaceful heart.

“Mother, I want to leave this wine brewing workshop to Older Brother. Take it off! This candied fruit and canned fruits factory is for Xiaolian ah! This newly bought farmstead only plants out of season fruits and vegetables and this refrigerated storage building is for Younger Brother...also, this, and this...take them all off the list!”

Yu Xiaocao had noticed that all of her industries in the capital had been written on her dowry list. Furthermore, the valuable items and properties in the Yu Family's treasury had all been added to her dowry too. Although she was extremely touched, she didn't know whether she should laugh or cry at this—her parents were truly too much. They were giving everything away from the family for her dowry, so what would they do in the future?

Madam Liu took the list out of her hands but didn't take anything off like she had hoped for. Instead, after thinking a bit, she added a few more precious items.

“As for hair ornaments and jewelry, we should go to a few famous shops tomorrow in the capital and see if there are any new varieties to be had so we can add some more for Cao'er. At Exquisite Garments, are the clothing sets we ordered ready to be picked up ah? Ah, that's right, I think Precious Shining Fabrics has gotten a new shipment of satins and damasks. Your godmother told us that we should get some bright cloud brocade...” Madam Liu chattered on for a long time and had her youngest son write everything down. That way she could avoid forgetting things in the bustle and mess of the end of the year.

“Mother! Did you hear a single word I said ah?” Yu Xiaocao had been ignored for a long time and helplessly opened her mouth again.

Madam Liu raised her head to look her in the eye before she lightly sighed, “Those businesses were all established by you after a lot of hard work and effort. Although they are under the name of the Yu's, who in the capital doesn't know that they are owned by Royal Princess Jinan? Your intentions are good in that you want to add some income to your brothers and sister, but if they took them, how would other people view them? Especially your younger brother. In the future, he is going to enter court and become an official. How will his colleagues view him then?”

Yu Hai also agreed with her, “Don't worry about the family anymore! As your father, I can't help but feel upset when I remember how you took on the responsibilities of the family at such a young and tender age. In the blink of an eye, it's now time for you to get married. The family's circumstances now compared to then are as different as the sky and the earth. No matter how good the relationships are between siblings, after they get married, they need to rely on themselves to eat and live. What's the point of relying on others all the time? Listen to us, your parents. Other than the Yu Residence in the capital, you need to take everything else!”

“Second Older Sister, the Yu Family has me and Older Brother! You just need to live your own life in a comfortable manner. If Imperial Prince Xu ends up hurting you, feel free to come back to our home. The Yu Family's gates will always be wide open for you.” Just as Little Shitou finished his words, two palms had hit the back of his head.

“Stinky brat, can't you say something nice for once?” Yu Hai and his wife took their hands back and glared at their youngest son.

Fields of Gold Chapter 665

Little Shitou rubbed his forehead, which had turned red after being hit. Earlier his words were a bit inappropriate. His second older sister was the family's most capable and daring person. How could she allow herself to be pushed around so easily? He smiled sheepishly at Xiaocao and continued, “In these past few years, the share of the profits that you've given us have been used to buy a few estates in the capital or in Jinwei Prefecture City. So we all have our own sources of income now! As for the rest of the profits, you should keep it yourself now to avoid other people gossiping that we're taking advantage of Imperial Prince Xu.”

Little Shitou hated it when outsiders claimed that the Yu Family were a bunch of social climbers. Clearly it was that fellow, Imperial Prince Xu, who insisted on clinging onto his second sister, but how did it become their family clutching onto him instead?

Yu Xiaocao knocked on her younger brother's forehead, pretending to be angry, "I, your older sister, haven't even married yet you want to split away from me? These businesses are all mine, so it's up to me on what I do with them. Who cares about what other people say? If you all think it's inappropriate to take all of these obvious businesses, then if I leave the farmsteads, shops, and residences that people don't know about to you all, would that be ok?"

She had been living in the capital for the past five years and had many businesses under her banner. However, Xiaocao didn't actually have that much free cash sitting around, piled into a giant gold and silver mountain, like other people thought she did. She had been influenced by the ideas of people in her previous life who were skilled investors. When she had money on hand, she used it to exchange for land, shops and houses.

Whether it was the government brokers or private brokers in the capital, they all knew about Royal Princess Jinan's little hobby. As soon as an appropriate property came into their hands, they would immediately head over to discuss with her. Consequently, Xiaocao had at least a dozen or so farmsteads on hand within the suburbs of the capital. Other than the shops that she used for her own businesses, she had around fifteen other shops that she rented out in the west and east sides of the city. Furthermore, she had around six to seven residences that were in prosperous areas of the capital. Her stack of deeds became a thick pile when placed on a desk and it was enough to cause many people to feel jealous.

When she bought these farmsteads, shops, and residences, she always put the master of the Yu Family, Yu Hai's, name on the deeds. The rental contracts she signed were also under his name. In other words, while Yu Hai was unaware, the Yu Family had already gained quite a few properties within the capital.

Yu Hai sighed endlessly within his heart. His youngest daughter had long begun paving the way for him, the head of the Yu Family. Argh! As a father, he was truly too useless to have his youngest daughter take on the responsibility of improving the Yu Family's lot!

"Alright ah, your mother and I will take these businesses and properties then. As for the shops at the harbor, you four siblings will divide them evenly amongst yourselves." Yu Hai took the deeds for the lands and properties over and felt that it was really quite heavy in his hands.

When Xiaolian heard this, she exchanged looks with her husband before saying, “Father, Mother! These are all the Yu Family's properties and businesses. As a married daughter, I won't step into this. You should give Younger Sister a share as a part of her dowry and use the rest for Younger Brother to establish his family. Older Brother and Younger Brother can split it as they see fit! Oh right, Younger Sister, you need to find a capable steward for the medicine manufacturing factory in Dongshan Village. Once you marry, it's not suitable for me as a married sister to continue managing the businesses under you.”

When she saw Xiaocao was about to say something, she hurriedly continued, “Right now, my household's seafood business is expanding larger and larger. Xiaomo can't handle it all by himself and needs someone to stay in the capital to keep an eye on it while the other goes back and forth between Tanggu and the capital. I truly don't have the time to manage the medicine manufacturing factory anymore...and you must not say that you want to give the business to us. In the entire Great Ming Empire, who doesn't know that the Yu's medicine business was created by Royal Princess Jinan? If the owner changes, who would still trust in it ah?”

In the end, the dowry list didn't lose a single thing and even continued to get longer and longer. Auntie Zhao had been invited over to collaborate on the dowry matter. When she saw the extensive number of things on the list, she couldn't help but be stunned speechless.

Almost all of the extremely prosperous businesses in the capital, other than Zhenxiu Restaurant, were on the dowry. The medicine factory, wine and alcohol distillery, flower and herbal tea house, candied and canned fruit factory, the large-scale refrigeration and orchard storage warehouse, the western-style desserts shop, Blossoming Beauty, Medicinal Cuisine House...in addition, the betrothal gifts that were given to her, such as Wisdom Jade Pavilion, the fruit and vegetable shops...almost half of the capital's businesses were contained within the dowry. The Yu Family was truly willing to pull out all of the stops on the dowry of their daughter. They didn't keep a single business they had in the capital for themselves!

In the entire capital or even the entire Great Ming Empire, this was probably the only dowry that was this excessive. The term 'five kilometers of dowry' was insufficient to even describe the amount of precious items and properties that were in this one. Auntie Zhao couldn't help but remark in a joking manner towards Lady Fang, “This Imperial Prince Xu truly has a good fate to be able to marry such a golden doll. Even if they split from his father's estate as soon as they marry, they wouldn't need to worry about their future. No, in fact, what they needed to worry about is how to spend all of the money they had on their hands!”

Busy days always flew by quickly. In the blink of an eye, the New Years had arrived. Xiaocao had a joyful and exciting last New Years with the Yu Family. Zhuang Xiaomo, as an orphan, didn't have any relatives in his family anymore. Thus, his first New Years as a married man was spent with his in-laws.

During the New Year's Eve dinner, Yu Hang helped his wife ladle up a bowl of Buddha Jumps Over the Wall. This medicinal dish enriched the blood, healed the body, and was incredibly tasty. Huifang immediately fell in love with it after tasting it once. Today, as soon as the first spoonful of tasty soup entered her mouth, she ended up frowning involuntarily as the urge to retch suddenly attacked her. She couldn't help but dry heave a few times.

“What's wrong? Where do you feel uncomfortable?” His wife's appetite had always been good and she ate everything with pleasure. When he saw her reacting this way, Yu Hang couldn't help but ask her out of concern.

Madam Liu also looked over in worry. When she saw that her daughter-in-law's complexion looked waxy as she held her stomach with an uncomfortable expression, she quietly asked, “Are you tired from being so busy lately?”

“Older Sister-in-law, let me, this divine doctor, take your pulse ah!” Yu Xiaocao leaned forward and held onto her right hand and then searched for the right place to take the pulse. She felt it attentively.

“What is it? Is there a problem?” Yu Hang was deeply concerned and inquired anxiously.

“The pulse is fluid, smooth and evasive, and feels like a pearl rolling around a jade plate...” Yu Xiaocao's heart had a shot of happiness go through as she deliberately cultivated a mysterious manner, reciting poetic words.

Madam Liu couldn't help but pat her as she scolded her with a smile, “Speak like a human being! Is your older sister-in-law okay ah?”

“How could she not have an issue? It's a major event!! A major, life-changing event!!” Yu Xiaocao had a very serious expression on her face and her tone was also very grave. It scared Yu Hang so much that his face immediately paled.

“Younger Sister, you are the little divine doctor that everyone in the capital respects. Can your older sister-in-law's illness be cured ah?” Yu Hang tightly held onto his wife's hand as his eyes turned red.

Yu Xiaocao saw that her joke had gone too far and hurriedly cracked a giant smile on her face, “My older sister-in-law's symptoms can't be cured by me. She can only completely recover about eight months later, when the melon is ripe and my little nephew comes out!”

Everyone at the table was stunned silent by this statement. It was quiet for a few seconds until she received another smack on her body. Madam Liu happily scolded her, “You naughty lass, were you trying to scare us all to death by saying it was a life-changing event ah? Your older sister-in-law is pregnant, so just say she's pregnant ah! Why do you need to scare everyone ah?”

Old Man Yu, who was seated at the head of the table, also finally reacted. He opened his mouth, which was missing a few teeth, and grinned, “Great news, our family will very soon have four generations under one roof! I didn't expect that I, Yu Liqiu, would be able to live until I could see my great-grandson one day.”

“Grandfather, on such an auspicious day, what sort of words are you saying? Your body is so healthy that I'm sure you'll live to the ripe old age of one hundred. Let's not talk about four generations under one room, I'm sure you can live until there are five generations under one roof!!” Yu Xiaocao giddily watched as her older brother fussed over her older sister-in-law. It must be a Yu Family tradition to pamper and love one's wife right? Uh...if it weren't for the fact that her grandfather had indulged Madam Zhang too much, then she wouldn't have climbed all over him and become such a nasty-tempered old woman!

When she thought of Madam Zhang, Xiaocao naturally thought of her younger uncle, who shared half of the same bloodline as her father. She couldn't help but ask, “Shitou, I heard Younger Uncle had also participated in the provincial exams that you took. Did he pass?”

“Ever since that event happened, Younger Uncle moved to the prefectural city and has been studying very hard. He finally managed to pass the county level exams after two years. This time, when the provincial exams were over, I met him outside of the exam room and chatted with him a bit. He said that he felt like he did well. As for whether or not he passed, I didn't pay attention. Why did you suddenly decide to ask about him?” Little Shitou didn't have a lot of feelings for this younger uncle of his. Furthermore, it was better to show respect from a distance with that mother of his too.

“Nothing much, it just popped into my mind to ask! After all, he is our grandfather's son...” Last time when she went back to the prefectural city and met up with her eldest paternal aunt's family, she heard that Madam Zhang had aged quite a bit as everyone in her household relied on her to live. She also needed to make money to send her son to school, so she didn't have it easy. As a mother who wanted her son to stand out among his peers, Madam Zhang would be delighted to do all that she could, no matter how bitter or tiring it was, to help her son, right?

This New Year's passed even more happily and joyfully after the Yu Family found out that Yu Hang's wife had good news. Yu Xiaocao ignored her family's protest and took the candied and canned fruit processing plant out of her dowry to give to her future nephew as a present. As for the little tyke, it had no clue that its younger aunt had just given it a giant present and was contently resting in its mother's uterus drawing nutrients to quickly get larger.

Everyone all said that this little fellow was certain to be very well-behaved. Other than its actions on New Year's Eve to show everyone it existed, it acted as if it wasn't there for most of the time. Liu Huifang didn't have the slightest bit of symptoms that other pregnant women commonly had. Sometimes, even she forgot that she was pregnant and would energetically follow her mother-in-law around to help with her younger brother-in-law's exam preparations and her younger sister-in-law's wedding planning.

Everyone in the family wanted her to rest more but she pushed away their efforts, “Am I that fragile ah? In our village, there are many matrons who are about to give birth but are still working hard in the fields with their giant bellies!”

Madam Liu had also heard the older generation mention that if a pregnant woman moved around more, it'd be easier for her to give birth. Furthermore, she saw her daughter-in-law bustling about for a few days without any problems, so she let her be. However, she would still warn Liu Huifang from time to time to not get too tired and make sure to rest properly.

Once the first month of the year passed, Imperial Prince Jing's Estate sent the letter of appointment and letter of ceremony to the Yu Residence on a fortuitous day. There was still more than a month's worth of time left before the eighteenth of the third month. Zhu Junyang had started to press his family to help him with the wedding.

Imperial Prince Jing's Estate had chosen four people who had complete luck; they were Princess Consort Duan, Duchess Rongguo, Marchioness Dingyuan, and the wife of the Director of the Board of Rites. The so-called 'complete fortune' was that these people still had healthy parents alive and well, a son and daughter each, a loving relationship with their spouse, and peaceful relationships within their siblings.

These four had noble statuses and, along with the matchmaker—Imperial Prince Jing's father, the honorable emperor emeritus, came over to the Yu Family to bring the betrothal gifts and money. Imperial Prince Xu's betrothal gift list made these four noble and high matrons, who had seen much of the world, completely speechless.

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Goodness gracious, was Imperial Prince Xu planning on moving from Imperial Prince Jing's Estate to the Yu Family's house? In addition to some of Imperial Prince Xu's own properties as well as some of the rare treasures he collected, nearly half of the treasury from Imperial Prince Jing's Estate had been emptied. This included a portion of Princess Consort Jing's dowry as well. The weight of the dowry was not light!! Imperial Prince Xu really wanted to make sure his future wife would have face.

However, when they saw Xiaocao's dowry list, they became speechless! When the sole daughter from Prince Jing's Estate married off to a distant place, her dowry consisted of a hundred twenty-eight chests full of precious items, causing all the young ladies from the capital to turn green with envy. It was probably impossible to fit all of Royal Princess Jinan's dowry into a hundred twenty-eight chests. It seemed as if this would become a new record for the most amount of dowry received! Look at the quality of her dowry; it was definitely something that an ordinary family could never compare to. No, it was probably hard even for a wealthy family to match this. It could be estimated that it would be difficult for someone to receive a dowry worth beyond this even after hundreds of years.

The most interesting part of this entire process was when the two families had to decide on the betrothal gift. This process would mainly be a discussion between the head of the family as the matchmakers mediated the conversation. The problem was that the matchmakers invited by the two families all came from prominent backgrounds. The emperor emeritus was alright. He missed Xiaocao's cooking, so he came running pretty quickly. But the main problem was that no one dared to order him to pass on the message between the two families! On the other hand, the emperor was already a busy man. It was already a great honor for him to show his face. Due to this, Yuan Sinian suffered; his legs were about to turn into thin sticks as he ran between Prince Jing's Estate and the Yu Family to pass on their messages.

Generally speaking, when it came to negotiating betrothal gifts, the bride's family wanted more betrothal gifts while the groom's family wanted to give fewer. As a result, it usually became an endless quarrel between the two families. When it came to the two families, after Imperial Prince Jing's Estate sent the list of betrothal gifts, the Yu Family looked through the list and started discussing which betrothal gifts they could take off from the list. After all, there was still a son in Imperial Prince Jing's Estate that was still unmarried. The two sons should receive the same treatment. If both sons gave out such a generous amount of betrothal gifts, Imperial Prince Jing's Estate's family property would all be used up.

After the matchmaker expressed the Yu Family's thoughts, Imperial Prince Jing's Estate not only did not subtract the number of betrothal gifts but also added a few more to the list. Princess Consort Jing told them that most of the betrothal gifts were saved up by her youngest son himself, and since he was willing to give, then no one else had a say in it. Her second son was stationed at the border and had stayed there for many years. Except for the occasional letters he would send to tell them that he was safe and healthy, he never came back. It was already difficult to find a female pig in the middle of the army stationed at the border, much less a woman. Even if Princess Consort Jing was worried about her second son's marriage, there was nothing she could do about it. Princess Consort Jing had been saving up betrothal gifts for her second son and she would have enough in a few more years.

Princess Consort Jing originally thought that among her three sons, it would be most difficult to arrange a marriage for her youngest son. After all, he was a difficult child when he was young. She was afraid of a tragedy where her son might accidentally kill his wife. She didn't expect the Heavens to bless her youngest son, allowing him to meet the right person early on. He was usually cold and stiff like a smelly stone, but unexpectedly, he matured early. He understood that he had to decide on his wife early on. As a result, as soon as his wife reached a marriageable age, he couldn't wait to marry her home.

Her second son, who had been the least worrisome for her when he was young, became the most problematic one. Alas! She wondered if he would be willing to take a leave of absence after receiving the news that his younger brother was getting married. The Great Ming Dynasty was becoming more and more powerful, and the country was prospering, so there weren't many wars at the border. Why was he still in the army? Why didn't he hurry back home and take a good look at the well-bred young ladies in the capital, so he could settle down early and marry? This unfilial son of hers didn't even know how to empathize with his parents' feelings!

In a gloomy mood, Princess Consort Jing added a few more pieces of valuable jewelry from her own dowry onto the betrothal list. She was still pondering whether she should add a few more profitable properties onto the list. Even Zhu Junyang started to wonder if his lady mother had forgotten that she still had another son. Were they actually trying to empty out the family's properties?!

"Lady Mother, there are already a dozen or so properties and shops in the betrothal gift list, so there's no need for you to add any more. Why don't you save your dowry for my second brother? Otherwise, he would think you're being biased to me, your youngest son again!" Zhu Junyang couldn't remain silent anymore. He felt that the more the bride's side asked to deduct from the betrothal gifts, the more his lady mother added to it. With this amount of betrothal gift, it was more than enough for him to marry an imperial princess with money remaining. Uh...that was just an example, after all, how could he marry an imperial princess? Wasn't that considered marrying a close relative? Furthermore, there was a generation between him and the current oldest imperial princess!

After Princess Consort Jing heard what her son had said, she put down her brush in her hand, sighed, and said, “Your second brother is hard to deal with due to his temper! It's no wonder that he feels that I'm acting biased towards you. Since childhood, he was the clever kid that caused me no headache or trouble. Your eldest brother will be the one who will inherit the title and estate in the future, so your father naturally took him under his wing and raised him personally. Your situation was special, so it was natural for me to pay more attention and care to you! I would have never expected that the child who appeared to be the most obedient would be the one hiding the most resentment and dissatisfaction in his heart. Your second brother joined the army seven to eight years ago, and he had never visited us once. He must still blame us!”

When Zhu Junyang led the troops to the northwest border, his second brother had already transferred to the southwest border. From General Zhao, he received news that his second brother was doing well. His second brother started off as a regular soldier and worked his way to a fourth rank commander. This was all due to the meritorious deeds he contributed during his time there. On his way back to the imperial court, he received news that his second brother had performed an outstanding job suppressing the bandits in the southwest border. He would definitely receive a promotion this year.

The reason that he didn't return to the capital for so many years was that Zhu Junxi initially had no vacation days due to his low military status. Later on, he became busy with earning military merits, so he really didn't have the time to return home. He didn't resent his family at all.

Zhu Junyang comforted her and said, “I have already written to my second brother, telling him the news that I'm getting married. I have just received a letter saying he would definitely be present since he's my elder brother. Lady Mother, you will soon be able to see your second soon, who you missed dearly!”

“Is that true? When did you receive the letter? Why didn't you tell me earlier that your second brother wrote you a letter?” When Princess Consort Jing heard this news, she immediately asked her youngest son to fetch the letter for her. She read the letter over and over again before she happily put the letter back in the envelope. She didn't return the letter to her youngest son; instead, she put it inside a jewelry box on top of her dressing table, like she was storing something precious. The box stored all her most cherished jewelry, and among them was a Monarch Green Jade head ornament from her youngest daughter-in-law.

Zhu Junyang's heart softened when he saw this scene. Even though his mother complained about her children, it was obvious that she cared for and worried about them. He remembered that before he met his little lass, his lady mother's health was not well, yet she was still worried about him. He believed that his mother's health deteriorated because of his condition. At that moment, he stepped forward and

embraced his lady mother's shoulder and said emotionally, "Lady Mother, you are the best mother in the world!"

Princess Consort Jing was surprised by his sudden hug. Ever since her youngest son fell into the water and was rescued when he was five years old, he disliked having close contact with other people. His temper became odder and more irritable as time passed. If it wasn't for Xiaocao's appearance, she didn't dare to imagine what her son would become! She never expected that she would receive a hug from her youngest son again. This reminded her of the time when her son was still very young and liked to stick to her embrace the most. His chubby little body was so soft and he smelled like milk...

After hearing her youngest son's emotional words, the rims of her eyes turned hot. At the same time, she felt extremely grateful. Fortunately, the Heavens had heard her pleas and sent Xiaocao to her son. Her youngest son was growing into a 'warm man'. Although he still maintained his indifferent and distant attitude on the outside, he was more and more willing to express his true feelings to the people he cared about! It was all thanks to that lass Xiaocao; she taught him well!

At the same time, Princess Consort Jing was feeling a little sour in her heart—she raised her son with great difficulty, but he was rushing to leave the nest and rush into the embrace of another woman. Alas, there was nothing she could do since her son had grown up; he was probably going to forget her after marrying his wife... Fortunately, she had a reliable daughter-in-law. Whenever her daughter-in-law had something good, she would immediately send it to her future mother-in-law!

"Cough cough!" Imperial Prince Jing had just finished attending to his official business. When he walked in, he saw the little brat holding his wife in his arms. He unhappily said, "What are you doing? Aren't you too old to be acting like a spoiled child? Quickly release this prince's wife. If you want to hug someone, you should head over to the Yu Family to hug your wife!"

"How can you talk like that to the child?" Princess Consort Jing found the situation to be quite funny as she happily punched her husband's body. She took out the letter her second son wrote and showed it to him, "Our second son is expected to return at the beginning of next month. I don't know how long he can stay. I don't even know when his next visit will be. I will arrange for the young ladies that I have taken a fancy to, to meet him when he returns, okay? This time, no matter what, I will make sure he will at least settle down on a marriage. Ah! Look at your sons, each and every single one of them caused me headaches! How old is your second son? He's almost thirty, right? Do you think you can find an unmarried man like him in the capital at such an age?"

When Zhu Junyang saw how his lady mother was nagging his lord father, he looked at him sympathetically. Then, he made an excuse to escape, "That...Lord Father and Lady Mother, my younger

brother-in-law will be taking the metropolitan civil service examination at the beginning of next month, so I'll head over to see if there's anything I can help him with..."

Seeing how her youngest son was leaving in a hurry, Princess Consort Jing sighed and said, "They say that a daughter will leave you after marriage, but having a son is no better! Look at him, he hasn't even married yet and he already threw us to the side. Tell me, how can a crude general like him help his brother-in-law who is taking a civil exam? Isn't he just using that as an excuse to meet his wife? There are around twenty or so days left before he marries his wife. At that time, he could look at her as long as he wants to."

"Yes, yes, yes! It's all my fault! Our son loves and dotes on his wife because he took after me!!" Imperial Prince Jing saw that his youngest son had left and that the maids had also tactfully retreated, so he started to fiddle with his wife's delicate and tender hands.

When Princess Consort Jing heard his words, her face flushed red. She glared at him and scolded him playfully, "Aren't you ashamed? What are you saying? Aren't you afraid that someone will overhear?"

Imperial Prince Jing peeled a grape, removed the seeds, and plopped it into Princess Consort Jing's mouth. He said, "We are the only two people in this room. Who will overhear us? Besides, I'm telling the truth!"

Princess Consort Jing ate the grapes that he fed her. She was feeling sweet and happy until she remembered the problem of her second son's marriage. She frowned again and said, "I don't care. When Junxi returns, you tell him that he will have to settle down on marriage before he can leave the capital. It'll be even better if he can marry her before he leaves!"

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"The younger generations will do well on their own! You ah! You worry too much!! Okay, when the time comes, I will bring the child to go on a blind date, okay? Alas, it's a sin to have too many children... oh right, our daughter will also be returning. She will be staying in the capital for a month. How about it? Are you happy?" Imperial Prince Jing mentioned his only daughter.

Princess Consort Jing was overjoyed by the news; she sighed and said, "In the past, we shouldn't have married our daughter to such a distant place. It takes over twenty days on the road for her to return to the capital. Isn't it a difficult journey?"

Zhu Junyang's older sister, who was the second oldest of the family, Zhu Junya , married Lu Nianhua, who was the eldest grandson of one of the founding fathers of the dynasty, Lu Changfeng. Lu Changfeng was well versed in literary and military strategy. He was also resourceful, and was known as 'the second Zhuge Liang '. In the past he followed the emperor emeritus to seize power from the old dynasty. With his brains and the emperor emeritus's brawn, the two of them swept everything before them and built the Great Ming Dynasty. If the emperor emeritus was the commanding officer in a modern era army, then Lu Changfeng was equivalent to the military chief of staff who assisted the commanding officer. The two people recognized and appreciated each other's talent and forged an extraordinary friendship.

After the emperor emeritus abdicated from the throne, Lu Changfeng retired to his ancestral home to live in seclusion. The children of the Lu Family were equally proficient in literacy and military affairs. They were said to be extremely talented people. However, Lu Changfeng understood the meaning behind the saying 'water surges only to overflow' . He set up a family rule, stating that no one from the Lu Family can take up an official post within the next three generations. The Lu Family completely withdrew themselves from the political arena.

The Lu Family's ancestral hometown was located in between the Guangdong and Guangxi districts. After he retired from his government post, Lu Changfeng opened a private school in his hometown. The school was originally dedicated to teaching the children of the Lu Family, but the reputation of the school spread far and wide. As a result, the private school gradually developed into an academy. The reputation of the academy located between the Guangdong and Guangxi districts was comparable to Rongxuan Academy.

When the emperor emeritus was young, he once joked with Lu Changfeng that the two families should become in-laws in the future. Unfortunately, the children of the second generation from both families were all male, so the matter remained unsettled. Later on, when Lu Changfeng's eldest grandson, Lu Nianhua, was being harassed by a group of hooligans, Zhu Junyang's second sister appeared. She was someone who defended the weak against the strong, so she fought the hooligans, causing the hooligans to run off. A heroic woman rescued a beautiful man and thus, the two became acquainted.

There was a very funny reason why Lu Nianhua was being harassed by the hooligans, but, at the same time, it was extremely embarrassing. His appearance was a mixture of all the best traits from three generations of his family. He had a delicate appearance and was often mistaken for a very beautiful girl when he was still young.

When Lu Nianhua was rescued by Zhu Junya, he was only eleven years old, so he was still short. It didn't matter what he wore, because even though he was dressed in men's attire, his delicate and beautiful face turned all the women around him green with envy. He actually looked like a young naive little girl crossdressing as a man at first glance. At that time, Zhu Junya was twelve years old and she inherited her

family's slender and tall figure. She was almost 1.65 meters tall. She had been practicing martial arts with her older and younger brothers at home, so she was more than capable of fighting against a group of hooligans.

Zhu Junya had also mistaken Lu Nianhua for a young girl who disguised herself as a man to sneak out from her family. As such, she nagged him for a long time, repeatedly warning him to bring a few bodyguards along when he went out in the future. She also warned him to avoid going to secluded places alone and prattled on about how girls needed to know how to protect themselves. She chattered away with him, making her appear like a caring older sister.

When she found out that he was from the Lu Family, she even kindly escorted him home in person. When she met Lu Nianhua's mother, she told her not to blame her 'daughter' and that in the future, she should bring out her children more to gain knowledge and experience. This way, they wouldn't sneak out and encounter people with bad intentions...

After Lu Nianhua's mischievous mother found out what had happened, she had to stifle back her laughter until her stomach hurt. She pretended to go along with the story, by earnestly agreeing to the young lady's words. She even thanked her profusely for saving her 'daughter'. After sending Zhu Junya off, Lu Nianhua's mother told everyone the story as a joke when the family members gathered around for dinner.

Lu Nianhua was speechless. He was often mistaken for a young girl since he was a child, so he had long been accustomed to this. He remained calm and collected as he ate and drank. His grandfather suddenly remembered the promise that he and the emperor emeritus made and joked that the two families could finally fulfill the original promise.

Although Lu Nianhua was a year younger than Zhu Junya, he was mentally more mature. He was an eleven year old boy, but he had already begun to have hazy and good feelings towards the opposite gender in his heart. The figure of the attractive and intelligent young girl, who was clothed in red attire, brimming with high spirits had already left a quiet mark in his heart.

In the coming days, Zhu Junya would often invite the 'beautiful younger sister' along to attend activities she hosted, such as horse racing, going for an outing, and hunting in the mountains... Because she was surrounded by her older and younger brothers at home, Zhu Junya developed a tomboy temperament. As a result, she didn't play well with the young ladies from the capital, causing her to spend most of her time alone.

After meeting Lu Nianhua, she discovered that her 'younger sister' who was only a year younger than her, was very athletic. Whether it was horsemanship, archery, or life skills, the 'younger sister' excelled in them more than her. She was smart and was able to learn new things quickly. Zhu Junya both loved and admired her 'little sister', so the number of times she invited 'her' out to play increased. But Zhu Junya didn't understand why her 'little sister' had a habit of wearing men's attire. However, she knew that everyone had their own quirks and uniqueness, so she didn't ask.

Zhu Junya's temper was similar to He Wanning's; she was blunt and a little careless. Three years passed and during that time, the foolish older sister still didn't realize that her beautiful little sister was actually a man. That was until the year Lu Nianhua turned fifteen; he suddenly had a growth spurt, growing up from 1.6 meters to almost 1.8 meters in a year.

At the time, Zhu Junya had stared at Lu Nianhua, who was now half a head taller than her, with strands of a beard starting to appear around his mouth, and an Adam's Apple that was starting to become more prominent. She was dumbfounded—when did her younger sister suddenly turn into a stinky man? Moreover, he was a beautiful stinky man?! Zhu Junya couldn't accept the truth and became so angry that she ignored Lu Nianhua for half a year.

Lu Nianhua couldn't sit still. In the four years they've been together, that girl had slowly entered his heart, and now she wanted to run away? Did she think it would be easy? One shouldn't be tricked by Lu Nianhua's gentle, refined, and calm outer appearance because deep inside, he was a thick-skinned and black-bellied man.

In the past, it was Zhu Junya who would often come by, looking for him to play with her, but now, he was the one who would often run to Imperial Prince Jing's Estate. Zhu Junya was a year older than him; she was sixteen years old now. If Princess Consort Jing's health hadn't been deteriorating, then Zhu Junya would've already had a marriage set up for her.

When Princess Consort Jing's health was starting to improve, she started to worry about her children's marriages. Her eldest son was the heir to Prince Jing's Estate, and at eighteen years old, his marriage was already settled by his father early on. Her only daughter was sixteen years old and she was a lady now. Although every parent wanted to keep their daughter by their side for two more years, they still needed to start looking for a suitable partner for her. Otherwise, all of the good candidates at the appropriate age would all be snatched away by others.

She didn't know who her daughter's temperament took after. Her daughter was careless and negligent, and, as a result, she didn't play well with the other young ladies from the capital. However, her daughter

still had a close friend. Her daughter most often talked about a young lady from the Lu Family, named Lu Nianhua. She praised her for her beauty, intelligence, and capability.

Her daughter had never admired anyone else, but she was subdued by a young girl who was a year younger than her. If her health wasn't in bad shape and if she didn't need rest, she would've long visited the Lu Family to meet this outstanding young lady that her daughter often talked about.

However, during this period of time, her daughter seemed to be reluctant to leave and stopped mentioning Lu Nianhua. What happened? Did the two young girls have a quarrel?

While she was trying to find an opportunity to ask her daughter for the reason, a servant reported to her, "Lu Nianhua is seeking an audience." Zhu Junya, who was currently playing chess with her lady mother, had a sudden change in expression and firmly replied that she was not going to meet the guest.

Princess Consort Jing had long wanted to meet this 'beautiful and smart young girl' that her daughter had mentioned numerous times. She was under the impression that her daughter was just acting like this in a fit of anger, so she persuaded her, "Since the other party has taken the first step by coming here to look for you to reconcile and since there's no hatred between the two of you, you should meet her. Once the misunderstanding is resolved, the two of you will still be good friends."

She didn't wait for her daughter to reply when she ordered the servant to invite Lu Nianhua to the inner courtyard. Zhu Junya was flustered and exasperated, but she didn't know how to explain the situation to her lady mother. How did she even start to tell her lady mother that her friend who accompanied to play with her, whom she missed dearly, was actually a stinky man?

However, the facts made it impossible for her to continue being an ostrich. When Lu Nianhua heard that Princess Consort Jing invited him in, he was nervous and tensed for a split second before he quickly calmed down. Since he already had his eyes on the reckless and willful young lady, then he should remain calm when meeting her family. He needed to formally walk through the road to Imperial Prince Jing's Estate; otherwise, the young lady he had taken a fancy to would be snatched away by others!

Princess Consort Jing was speechless when she saw Lu Nianhua, who was 1.8 meters tall and was currently in the period where his voice was steadily changing. She had a helpless expression on her face as she gazed at her daughter. How careless and scatterbrained could her daughter be in order for her to mistake a man for a young girl that needed protection?

“You can't blame me! Who told him to have such an androgynous appearance? He has a face that would turn girls green with envy, so it's impossible for people not to misunderstand!” At that time, that was the argument that Zhu Junya made.

A pained expression appeared on Lu Nianhua's face: He didn't want to have such an appearance like this, okay? If he could choose, then he rather himself be a little tanner or uglier rather than having this type of appearance.

However, he was still the 'younger sister' she had 'protected' for four years. Seeing the pained expression on his flawless and delicate face, Zhu Junya's heart immediately softened. As Lu Nianhua deliberately pretended to be pitiful, she gradually forgave him for his deception.

Although Princess Consort Jing was sheltered by Imperial Prince Jing, she could see through Lu Nianhua's attempt to court her daughter. But she didn't expose him, instead, she happily watched the young man slowly win over her daughter's heart and step by step, walked into the young man's gentle trap.

Imperial Prince Jing had already investigated Lu Nianhua's background. He came from a good family background, his principles were good, and there was nothing wrong with his character. The only problem was that he was a year younger than his daughter. However, since the youth in question didn't mind that his daughter was older than him, then he was fine with going along with the flow. Princess Consort Jing was able to take another load of worry off her chest since she no longer had to worry about her daughter's marriage.

Everything flowed naturally. In front of the cunning Lu Nianhua, the simple and ignorant Zhu Junya was quickly captured. When Lu Nianhua was eighteen years old and Zhu Junya was nineteen years old, the two got married. At that time, Zhu Junya's dowry was splendid; there were so many betrothal gifts that the train of gifts could be seen five kilometers away. By the time the first chest of betrothal gifts were entered the Lu Estate, but the last case was still in Imperial Prince Jing's estate. This caused the young ladies from the capital to be extremely envious.

Fields of Gold Chapter 668 – Older Sister—in

After Zhu Junya and Lu Nianhua got married, one was meticulous and gentle, while the other one was generous and straightforward. Lu Nianhua doted on his wife extremely dearly after he finally married her with great difficulty. The two lived a happy and simple life. Both families were located relatively close to each other, so Zhu Junya would frequently return to her maiden home to accompany and talk to her lady mother, as well as help with managing the household. The relationship between the mother and daughter was even better than it was before the marriage.

Unfortunately, happiness did not last forever. The following year, Lu Changfeng returned to his hometown, and Zhu Junya followed them back to the region between the Guangdong and Guangxi districts. They were separated by thousands of miles and, in the ten years they were separated, her daughter had only returned twice to visit. A trace of melancholy flashed in Princess Consort Jing's heart. She regretted marrying her daughter to the kid with the surname Lu, causing the mother and daughter pair to live far apart from each other. In the past, she should've chosen a family located in the capital to marry her daughter to!

Alas! Her daughter married to a distant place, her second child was stationed at the border all year round, and her third child was going to be moving out once he got married. Imperial Prince Jing's Estate, which was big and grand, now appeared to be lonely and empty. As for her eldest son, after his wife gave birth to the eldest grandson, she didn't get pregnant again. Princess Consort Jing wondered whether she should discuss with her eldest son's wife whether they should invite Xiaocao here to take a look at her health, so she could give birth to a few more grandchildren. This way, the grandchildren could add more vitality to Imperial Prince Jing's Estate.

“Okay! Don't become upset over nothing, the younger generations will do all right on their own. Don't you have me by your side? In a few more years, after our eldest son can assume my responsibility, I will retire and become an idle prince. I will accompany you wherever you wish to go, okay?” When Imperial Prince Jing mentioned their daughter, the princess consort became unhappy. He knew why she was secretly worried, so he hurriedly explained his plan.

Princess Consort Jing's heart was feeling incomparably sweet, but she said, “You only know how to sweet talk, just promise me that by that time that your mind won't be preoccupied with thinking about your job and cause you to break your promise! After you retire from your post, we should buy a residence close to our daughter's residence. We should live in Guangzhou in the winter since it's warm there; in the summer, we should head back to the capital. We should rotate between the two sides!”

“Okay, I will agree to whatever you say! You're the decision maker of our family!” As long as his wife would stop being depressed, Imperial Prince Jing would promise her everything she wanted.

In early March, Princess Consort Jing's daughter, Zhu Junya finally arrived at the capital with her husband and children. Zhu Junyang was sent by his lady mother to pick up his older sister outside the city gate. His sister poked her head out of the carriage while excitedly waving her hands at him. She had ruddy cheeks, a bright smile, and her eyes had remained clear and pure. From this, he knew that her older sister had lived a good life these years.

After exchanging a few greetings with his brother-in-law, Zhu Junyang was surrounded by a group of small radish heads. When his older sister left the capital, she was already pregnant, so her eldest son was almost ten years old now. In addition to the eldest son, Lu Jiarui, there were four other children. All of her kids were male, and the youngest child, Lu Jiapei, was less than three years old. He wasn't afraid of strangers at all, grabbing onto his trouser without fear as he climbed up, huffing and puffing.

Zhu Junyang's mouth twitched slightly. In the capital, he was known as the 'cold-faced demon'. Not to even mention a child, even a half-grown man would become intimidated by his cold face. But why didn't it work when it came to his nephew?

His unscrupulous sister had a playful expression on her face as she watched her sons bully her younger brother. He understood now that his nephews inherited their thick skins from his older sister!

He resigned to his fate and bent down to pick up the two radish heads that called him 'Third Maternal Uncle' the most enthusiastically with one in each arm. Lu Jiapei, who was a little over two years old was afraid of falling, so he grabbed onto his hair and yelled excitedly, "So high! Third Maternal Uncle, lift me higher! I want to be lifted higher!!" The ear-piercing yells almost caused Zhu Junyang to become insane.

"Hahaha! I almost died from laughing. I never imagined that the grand and cold royal prince would be in such a difficult position! Husband, quickly record this scene down, so when we return you can draw it for my lady mother. She must have never seen this side of her youngest son like this, right?" Zhu Junya got off the carriage, showing no intentions of saving her third younger brother. She stood beside her husband with an amused expression on her face.

It was Lu Jiarui, who was the eldest of the family, that had the most benevolent heart. He glanced at his unscrupulous parents and sighed. He 'retrieved' his youngest brother, who was the noisiest, from his third maternal uncle and held him in his arms. Lu Jiapei was afraid of his eldest brother who acted more solemn and mature than his parents. Although his mouth had a pout large enough to hang an oil bottle from it, he still didn't dare to cause a fuss in front of his eldest brother.

Lu Jiayu, the fourth child, also obediently slipped off his third maternal uncle under his eldest brother's warning gaze. He looked around before stretching out his white and chubby little hand, and said in a milky tone, "Third Maternal Uncle, where's the meeting gift for Yu'er?"

"A meeting gift, Third Maternal Uncle, give me a meeting gift! Pei'er also wants a gift!!" Lu Jiapei who had remained quiet for fewer than three seconds started to clamor for a meeting gift.

Where would Zhu Junyang have the experience to know that he needed to prepare a meeting gift? Even if he took off all the accessories on his body, he still wouldn't have enough gifts for his five nephews. Lu Jiayu grabbed the ugly embroidered pouch on his uncle's waist and smiled evilly, "Third Maternal Uncle, this embroidered pouch with the pink pig sewn on it is very cute. Yu'er really likes it!"

His big eyes flashed with expectation; his eyes were saying, "Say that you will give it to me. Give it to me!"

If it was anything else, even if it was a top-notch jade pendant carved from ink jade, Zhu Junyang wouldn't even blink his eyes before giving it away. However, the embroidered pouch on his waist was embroidered with a lot of effort by his little lass who wasn't good at needlework.

Although he disliked the strange-looking pig named Peppa, he knew that if he gave the embroidered purse to someone else, then he would never receive another embroidered purse from his little lass in his life since she knew how to hold a grudge.

"Third Maternal Uncle will give you your meeting gift once we return! This embroidered purse was given to your Third Maternal Uncle by your Third Maternal Aunt. I can't give it to you!" Zhu Junyang's attitude was very firm and his tone was very decisive, making sure there was no room for negotiation.

Lu Jiayu knew from his father and mother that things sent by a wife were something that must be cherished. It didn't matter how much the brothers threw a tantrum, acted shamelessly, rolled about, or cried, their father, who loved his children deeply, would never yield.

The fourth child from the Lu Family thought that he had seen through his Third Maternal Uncle's his aunt. Her eyes rolled around before he smiled sweetly and said, "Third Maternal Uncle, when we return, can you ask Third Maternal Aunt to embroider the same purse for me?"

Zhu Junyang immediately refused without even pondering it, "Your Third Maternal Aunt is very busy. She doesn't have the time to do needlework. Just look at your Third Maternal Uncle's entire body, this is the only embroidered gift that I've received from your Third Maternal Aunt. She doesn't even have the time to embroider clothes for her own husband, so where would she have the time to embroider a purse for you? If you want one, then ask your mother to embroider one for you!"

Zhu Junya's expression turned unsightly when she heard her younger brother's suggestion. One must know that her embroidering skills were at the same level as Yu Xiaocao. Asking her to embroider a purse was the same as killing her. She didn't have a choice but to reluctantly embroider her husband's personal items as well as his pouches. If she embroidered an embroidered pouch for her fourth child, then her other children would definitely pester her to embroider one for them. This meant that she wouldn't be able to leave the house for at least two months. She would have to hold a needle and a thread every day...it was just dreadful just thinking about it!

She hurriedly changed the subject, "It's getting late, so hurry up and get in the carriage. Don't make Maternal Grandfather and Maternal Grandmother wait until they're worried!" Like she was herding a flock of ducks, she made the group of little radishes get into the carriage. However, she rode on a horse with her husband. Since her eldest son was in the carriage, the four other children would not be able to escape from his grasp. She acted like she was in the right to leave her younger children in her eldest son's care. What a fraud of a mother!

Zhu Junyang was annoyed by the small group of radishes until he finally returned to the capital and sneakily left for the Yu Family's estate with fear still lingering in his heart. He looked at Xiaocao, who was currently pouting after she was forced by Madam Liu to embroider her veil. He suddenly said, "We should only have two children in the future. I would prefer it if both of them are girls as they're quiet and obedient. Boys are too loud..."

Yu Xiaocao looked up at him in surprise before she lowered her head, continuing to work on the veil as she asked, "Why are you talking about this out of the blue? What kind of trauma did you receive?"

"My older sister returned, bringing back five rotten little kids. Those kids are devils; they were so noisy that they almost broke a hole in the sky. It had been merely half a day but the back garden at Imperial Prince Jing's Estate looked as if a typhoon had suddenly blown through it. I pity my lady mother's precious flowers and plants. I don't know how many of them are able to survive!" Zhu Junyang would have a major headache whenever he thought of his five little nephews. He really admired his sister and brother-in-law for being able to look after a group of monkeys all day without going crazy!

"Your older sister returned? Should I pay her a visit?" She had heard her future mother-in-law, Princess Consort Jing, mentioning her only older sister-in-law numerous times. She had learned that her older sister-in-law was blunt and had a straightforward character, so it shouldn't be hard to get along with her...right? Who knew? But she would eventually have to meet her and find out about her true temperament and character. After all, a mother would consider all her children to be the best in her heart!

Zhu Junyang picked up the half-embroidered red veil from the little lass's hand and put it to the side. Then he started playing with her small hands, "Of course you need to! My older sister wants to meet you too! Our family doesn't care about the rule where you're not supposed to meet members of the opposite family before the marriage. My older sister has just arrived today, but my lady mother said that she will hold a welcoming dinner for them after letting them rest for a day. You have to come too! However, you must make some mental preparations. My older sister's five children...sigh, it's hard to explain in a few words ah!"

Yu Xiaocao secretly chuckled in her heart. The famous and outstanding cold-faced prince actually fell victim to his five nephews. It was not surprising since the children were still young, so he couldn't hit them and it would be hard to convince children to do as he said. It could be quite hard to deal with the kids. However, she still had some experience in dealing with children. Seeing how Little Shitou and Little Linlin were so attached to her was enough proof to show off her experience.

The next day, she woke up early in the morning and made strawberry, honey peach, apple, and tangerine flavored gummy candy. She also made lollipops in a variety of flavors and shapes and for pastries, she made egg tarts and cream puffs, which were pastries that were very popular among children. She also made several kinds of western-style mini cakes that she specialized in before packing all the food in exquisite boxes.

When she recalled Zhu Junyang's sorry figure when he was pestered by his nephews for a meeting gift, she took out the small cartoon animals carved from the leftover jade from the jade bracelet from the box, preparing them as meeting gifts for the children. After she was fully ready, she changed into a simple and stylish attire, adorning herself with the pink vermillion diamond hairpin and earrings given to her by Zhu Junyang. Her simple and low-profile outfit gave off a luxurious, exquisite, and lively appearance.

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Zhu Junyang personally went to the Yu Residence to pick up Xiaocao. He saw that she had a host of maidservants behind her, all of them carrying boxes full of candies and desserts. He remarked out of tenderness, "What are you doing up so early ah? Don't bother with that bunch of stinky brats and do this again in the future!"

"It's not a big deal. I have servants helping out so it's not a lot of work for me. It's nice to give the kids a treat!" Yu Xiaocao grinned at him as she took the hand he offered her and entered the carriage.

Zhu Junyang looked at the sparkling and shining pink rays of light that came off of the jeweled flowers in her hair. It made her exquisite and fair little face seem even more transparent and glowy. His eyes were stuck on her as if he couldn't look away. Glittery and shining jewels truly suited the little lass. In the

future, when Treasure Pavilion had more diamonds and precious stones come in, he needed to bring them all back to let the lass get first pick!

Yu Xiaocao felt her face turn bright red after feeling the fiery gaze at her back. This fellow was more and more unable to restrain the look in his eyes. In about half of a month, she was about to become his bride and then they would truly become one household. Originally, she had been quite nervous and keyed up, but this guy would always make his presence known and would express his red-hot feelings to her. It made her have a bit of happiness within the embarrassment within her. Gradually, her complicated feelings had gone away and she became more tranquil and calm. She was now convinced that he was her soulmate in this life!

Since they both lived in the western part of the capital, it didn't take very long for them to arrive at Imperial Prince Jing's Estate. As soon as they entered through the side door, a group of brightly dressed kids sped over noisily. Xiaocao knew already that these were Zhu Junyang's nephews from his older sister. She stopped and smiled gently at the little kids who were giggling as they ran towards them.

The youngest one of them was an adorable little fellow and ran the slowest. He did his best to keep up with his older brothers. His chubby and sweet little face was bright red with effort. As a toddler who hadn't reached the age of three, it was already pretty good that he could run steadily, so how could he possibly catch up with his older brothers, who were whizzing by? He was so frustrated by this that he was about to cry. Behind him was an elegant young boy who looked to be around eight to nine years old. He was following them at an unhurried pace. Although he looked quite leisurely, he kept his eyes attentively on his younger brothers and kept his speed the same as the youngest one as he strolled forward.

"Third Maternal Uncle, Third Maternal Uncle!!" Zhu Junyang's expression immediately changed when he saw the group of small devils running towards him. He felt his head start to hurt again.

He advanced forward a step to protect the little lass behind him as he was afraid that this group of little guys would knock into her. He picked up the four and half year old, Lu Jiayu, and placed him on his shoulders and then picked up two other boys, one in each hand as he stiffly said, "Why did you guys run into the outer courtyard instead of obediently staying next to your mother? What about Pei'er ah? If he fell, what would you all do?"

The second son, Liu Jiaqi, pinched the rock hard muscle on his third maternal uncle's arm. He was already eight years old and it had been a long time since someone had last held him up in the air. His maternal uncle was so strong and clearly looked a lot more difficult to deal with than his father (Lu

Nianhua: I, your father, am teaching you guys to be independent! I absolutely refuse to admit that I am weak!).

The third son, Lu Jialong, giggled happily. His personality took after his mother and he was quite simple-minded, which made Lu Nianhua quite worried about this son of his.

The youngest, Lu Jiapei, almost burst into tears when he saw his second older brother occupying the highest space that used to be his. He pulled on his third maternal uncle's pants and incessantly whined, "Third Maternal Uncle, Pei'er also wants to be hugged. Pei'er wants to be held up high!" He almost pulled Zhu Junyang's pants down from his antics.

Yu Xiaocao watched as Zhu Junyang wrangled with the kids. He resembled a Christmas tree with the children hanging off of him and the scene in front of her had unlocked a whole new view of Imperial Prince Xu. He was being pushed around by a herd of children. Despite the helpless expression on his face, his eyes were full of gentleness—this man would definitely become a good father who loved his children in the future!

Since Xiaocao could see the kids from her vantage point, Lu Jiarui naturally also saw the young lady, who had a smile in her eyes, behind his third maternal uncle. Her skin was so fair that it almost looked transparent. She had a pair of very large eyes, so big that they seemed like they could see straight through a person's soul. She looked so small, and it seemed like such a waste that she was paired up with his rough and crude third maternal uncle! His father had told him that a person's eyes couldn't trick people. His future third maternal aunt had a pair of eyes as gentle as water and resembled the purity of ice and jade. They were full of kindness and he could tell in an instant that she was someone who loved children and had a kind and gentle heart!

If Zhu Junyang knew that his eldest nephew from his sister, who normally seemed quite sensible and clever, believed that he wasn't good enough for the little lass, then he would definitely start vomiting blood—he had praised that kid for nothing!

When Yu Xiaocao saw that Zhu Junyang's clothing, which had been very tidy earlier, was now a complete mess, as if he was an eggplant that had just been trampled over, she hurried up to rescue him as his pants had been almost pulled down to his knees. She advanced forward and stooped over to hold the plump little fellow who was hollering at his third maternal uncle, begging to be held.

Lu Jiapei, who had been unable to find a place on his third maternal uncle to hold on, was almost about to cry when he suddenly felt someone pulling on his armpits. His two feet left the ground and he

immediately fell into a gentle and fragrant hug. It felt warm and soft and reminded him of the time when he was still a baby and had been held in his mother's arms.

Zhu Junyang was afraid that the little fat fellow would squirm along, causing the lass trouble, so he hurried over out of concern. When he saw the actual scene, he almost felt blood come up into his mouth. The young brat, who was usually as lively as a monkey, was currently nestled quietly into Xiaocao's chest. It was as if the disturbance he had caused earlier had just been an illusion. What annoyed him even more was that stinky brat had unexpectedly hugged his future wife's neck and had given a messy 'muah' on the little lass's delicate cheek!

“Mother said that Third Maternal Uncle had gone out to bring my third maternal aunt back. Are you my third maternal aunt ah?” Lu Jiapei's voice was sweet and tender. The Lu Family had good genes and all of the kids were as beautiful as porcelain dolls. The little fellow's large eyes were opened wide and he had a face full of innocence. Yu Xiaocao felt her heart soften immediately.

The three children on Zhu Junyang all turned their attention towards her. Lu Jiayu, who was riding on his third maternal uncle's neck, regarded the strange young maiden with curiosity. He blinked his large eyes and childishly corrected his younger brother, “That's not right, she only becomes our third maternal aunt after marriage. Right now, we can only call her 'auntie'! Nice to meet you, Auntie! I am Lu Jiayu and I'm the fourth in the family. Auntie, Yu'er really likes you ah!”

“Pei'er also likes Third Maternal Aunt!” Lu Jiapei was very attached to using this title to call her as he obediently leaned against her shoulders—Third Maternal Aunt smelled very good. It was sweet and fragrant and made him feel very comfortable around her!

The eldest son of the Lu Family, Lu Jiarui, saw how sweet his youngest brother was being and almost couldn't believe his eyes. If he had to choose the two people in his family who caused the most headaches, it wasn't his seven and eight year old brothers, who were respectively the second and third oldest in the family and at the stage where they were getting into trouble. Instead, it was the two youngest brothers. All of the trouble that came to them were self found and the youngest two somehow always managed to get into the thorniest situations.

He had never seen his youngest brother act so sweet and obedient before. Even when his youngest brother was still nursing from his mother, he had never been so quiet. Now, he was like a sweet little kitten, nestled obediently next to Third Maternal Aunt's bosom. If it weren't for the fact that he had kept his eye on this fellow, he would have been certain that his youngest brother had been spirited away and replaced with another boy.

The fourth son of the family, Lu Jiayu, was a bit jealous and blinked a couple of times. Then he began his campaign to swindle his younger brother, “Younger Brother, you've never ridden on Third Maternal Uncle's shoulders, right? The view is so good here, don't you want to try it?”

“No!” Lu Jiapei wasn't the least bit fooled by his brother's tricks and buried his face into Xiaocao's neck before breathing in deeply a couple of times. He closed his eyes in bliss—his older brother was definitely trying to steal his place from Third Maternal Aunt. Which idiot would want to cozy up to Third Maternal Uncle's hard and firm body (Author's note: Then who was the one crying and wailing to get into Third Maternal Uncle's arms and almost pulled his pants down?)?

Lu Jiayu's eyes flickered and then he extended his little hand, revealing a piece of toffee that was mostly half melted. He coaxed, “Older Brother has a piece of delicious candy here. If you come out of Auntie's arms, this piece of candy will be yours ah!”

“Don't...want!” Lu Jiapei found it difficult to resist the bait but ended up refusing. His eyes, however, were stuck on that piece of candy. Wah wah wah wah, he really wanted to eat candy ah. Maternal Grandmother's residence had such tasty candy! However, he also didn't want to leave Third Maternal Aunt's arms, so what should he do?

“Pffftttt...” When she saw the two little fellows interacting with each other, Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but let out a laugh. She gazed at Lu Jiayu with amusement and quietly remarked at Zhu Junyang, “This little fellow has a lot of tricks up his sleeves!”

Zhu Junyang huffed, “He must have taken after the Lu Family. My older sister is a very direct and frank person...”

Lu Jiayu saw that the beautiful auntie was laughing at him and his face turned red. He bashfully took back the hand with the toffee in it and said, “I'll hold onto this for Younger Brother. Mother said that we shouldn't eat too much candy as our teeth will turn black!” An expression asking for praise surfaced onto his face, ‘Quickly compliment me for being sensible, compliment me for thinking of my younger brother...’

“Eh? Then, does that mean that candies and pastries I brought today won't be used ah?” Yu Xiaocao deliberately had Wutong open up a box of strawberry flavored gummy candy, revealing a set of delicate and pretty red soft candies. When the lid was taken off, a dense puff of sweet scented air permeated

the surroundings and succeeded in drawing all of the children's attention towards the box. They were all staring at it avidly.

Six year old Lu Jialong stared at the red candies that he had never seen before for a long time. Finally, he couldn't resist from saying, "Mother said that as long as we brush our teeth after we eat, we can still eat a few sweet things! Isn't that right, Fourth Younger Brother?"

"Mhm mhm, Third Older Brother is right! If we brush our teeth after we eat candy, our teeth won't hurt and won't turn black...that's what Mother said!"

Lu Jiarui suddenly had the urge to cover his face when he saw the gluttonous expression on his fourth younger brother's face—had the family ever shorted you on food or drink? This was the first time they were meeting Third Maternal Aunt but he was losing face for all of them! What a disgrace! ...however, the candies that Third Maternal Aunt brought over really smelled very good, which made them hard to resist!

Lu Jiapei, who hadn't reached the age of three, couldn't bother to think too much anymore. His eyes glowed as he looked towards Xiaocao as he sweetly said, "Third Maternal Aunt, can Pei'er try a piece of candy ah? Pei'er will taste them for his older brothers ah!"

Yu Xiaocao restrained her desire to laugh and pinched the little fellow's bun face as she said in a voice full of tenderness, "You're such a clever little fellow!"

At this moment, the group of little fellows had already climbed down from their Third Maternal Uncle's body and surrounded Xiaocao. The spurned Zhu Junyang stood quietly behind Xiaocao as he was afraid that the herd of monkeys might bump into her. Oh ho! He was treating Xiaocao as if she was a delicate porcelain doll that needed protection!

Lu Jiarui quietly observed this scene. It was as if he was seeing the way his father and mother interacted with each other. The way that Third Maternal Uncle treated Third Maternal Aunt must be the type of 'true love' that his father talked about, right? It must be a fortunate thing to be able to meet one's true love in one's lifetime, right?

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Just as he was lost in his thoughts, a beautiful box appeared in front of him. Inside were brightly colored red and yellow candies that all gave off a dense, sweet aroma. He raised his head and saw Third

Maternal Aunt's innocent and sweet smiling face. It looked incredibly dazzling. The young woman in front of him said, "Try some. Auntie personally made these fruit juice gummies. The red ones are strawberry flavored, the yellow ones are tangerine flavored, the pink ones are honey peach flavored and the green ones are apple flavored...go ahead and find out which one you like the most, okay?"

Lu Jiarui took the candy box and smiled politely at his third maternal aunt, "Thank you, Third Maternal Aunt!" Then he took all of the boxes from his younger brothers and handed them over to the assistant behind him.

"Eh? ...Eldest Brother." Lu Jiayu was just about to pick up a piece of red fruit juice gummy but the box in front of him had suddenly disappeared. He angrily raised his head and discovered that it had been taken away from him by his eldest brother. He immediately reverted back to his pitiful demeanor and gently called out to his sibling.

"Are you telling me that the Lu Family's customs allow you guys to surround Third Maternal Aunt in the outer courtyard and beg her for candy to eat ah? Did you all forget what Mother and Maternal Grandmother told us to do when we came out ah?" Lu Jiarui was incredibly stern and solemn as he addressed his younger brothers.

The four little fellows were not afraid of anything or anyone under the heavens but they were all scared when their eldest brother's expression turned dark. When they heard his question, they exchanged looks before lowering their heads down. Only the youngest, Lu Jiapei, who was in Xiaocao's arms, acted differently. He hugged her neck and cutely said, "Mother told us to come out and welcome Third Maternal Aunt...Third Maternal Aunt, Pei'er's been very obedient and hasn't been horsing around. Can I eat a piece of sweet candy ah?"

All of the children of the Lu Family had inherited the Lu Family's good looks, especially the little devil, Lu Jiapei. Not only did he inherit all of the good-looking genes from the Lu Family, but she could also see within his eyebrows a hint of Zhu Junyang's shadow. Everyone said that nephews resembled their maternal uncles. When the little fellow grew older, he would definitely become a bewitchingly handsome young man!

Yu Xiaocao stole a kiss from the little fellow's cheek and held him as she headed towards the inner courtyard. She gently said, "Of course! In a moment, our sweet treasure Pei'er can get a whole box of candies as a reward ah!"

Lu Jiapei gleefully clapped his plump little hands when he heard this. Suddenly, he climbed closer to Xiaocao's ears and quietly asked, "Third Maternal Aunt, can you help me keep the box safe ah? When Pei'er wants to eat some, I'll go find you!"

"Why is that ah?" Yu Xiaocao felt that his request was a bit odd.

"Fourth Older Brother will trick Pei'er out of his candy ah!" Lu Jiapei pouted pitifully as he brought up his fourth brother's dark past.

Yu Xiaocao grinned until her eyes crinkled up into lines. Lu Jiayu angrily glared at his youngest brother when he saw him tattling to Third Maternal Aunt but he didn't dare to refute it. This fellow always used little tricks to swindle his brothers out of their things. Thus, the other three were on the lookout for him! As for his eldest brother, Lu Jiarui, there were two things stopping him from doing the same thing. One was that he didn't dare to and the other factor was that whenever his eldest brother got something good, he rarely used it for himself and would always share with them, his younger brothers. Thus, he didn't need to try to cheat him.

"Everyone will get their own box ah! When you're finished eating them, Auntie will make more for you! Whoever tries to steal or cheat candies from other people will be punished and will never be able to eat candies or desserts made by me!" Yu Xiaocao propped up the youngest fellow's fat butt. Although the little guy wasn't very old, he was quite heavy.

Zhu Junyang, who had been walking silently behind her, reached out and took the little fatty over to hold in his arms. Lu Jiapei wasn't happy about this. Who would want to suddenly trade a fragrant and soft hug for a hard and icy cold one?

Just as he was about to protest, Zhu Junyang silenced him with one sentence, "If Third Maternal Aunt gets too tired, in the future, she won't be able to make any delicious candies or pastries for you!"

Lu Jiarui sighed in his heart when he saw his maternal uncle easily grasping his youngest brother, who was the devil incarnate, within his hands. He opened his mouth to say, "Third Maternal Aunt, Second Younger Brother has just finished growing in his adult teeth, Third Younger Brother is in the process, and Fourth Younger Brother and Fifth Younger Brother aren't supposed to eat too much candy. You shouldn't go through the effort to do this..."

“The candy that I make won't hurt one's teeth! However, you can't eat too much and at most can eat five pieces a day. Do you all remember this?” Yu Xiaocao could tell that the eldest one of the bunch was being very courteous to her. A little kid, who was only ten, had taken on the responsibility to teach and guide his younger brothers. It really made one admire and feel sorry for the young boy.

At home, under the rules of their mother and eldest brother, they could only eat one piece of cake and one candy a day. When they heard Xiaocao say that they could eat five pieces of the new candy in one day, the little radishes immediately became giddy. Within their hearts, they now viewed their third maternal aunt, who was both beautiful and talented at making candies, as a little immortal girl who had saved them from the sea of bitterness.

With the chatter of the little radishes surrounding them, they very quickly arrived at the inner courtyard. In the corridor, there was a young woman standing next to Princess Consort Jing as they admired the camellia flowers together. She had thick brows and a heroic air around her. In addition, she had an aura of a free spirit surrounding her.

Zhu Junya heard the sounds of them talking and raised her head to look towards the middle of the courtyard. She saw her children grouped around a young maiden who was dressed entirely in pink. Her usually energetic boys were all obediently holding onto the corners of the maiden's clothes and walked quietly by her side. From time to time, they would even reveal looks of admiration and worship towards her. Even her eldest son, who was always the most wary of strangers, had a calm look on his face as he walked with his fourth younger brother's hand in his. He was quietly listening to the young lady talk.

“Third Maternal Aunt, are you sure you're not a little immortal girl from the heavens ah? You're so amazing! You even know how to grow strawberries and cantaloupes out of season ah!” The one who spoke was the second son of the family, Lu Jiaqi. He loved eating strawberries the most. Unfortunately, the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi didn't grow strawberries, so he had only eaten strawberry jam before. Furthermore, this jam had been sent to him by his maternal grandmother.”

Lu Jiayu immediately piped up, “Third Maternal Aunt must be the reincarnation of the little immortal girl in charge of candies in the heavens. Third Maternal Uncle has some doggone luck in order to encounter her! Third Maternal Aunt, have you ever thought about it? Third Maternal Uncle really doesn't match up to you...”

Zhu Junyang suddenly felt his hands itch. What was wrong with this group of little brats? Couldn't they think a bit? After all, if he hadn't struck first to get close to her, would they have a Third Maternal Aunt then? Did they want to be able to eat delicious candies and desserts?

Lu Jiaqi flashed a quick look at Third Maternal Aunt and surreptitiously pinched his fourth younger brother as he quietly hissed, "You're so dumb! If Third Maternal Aunt changes her mind and doesn't marry Third Maternal Uncle, then Third Maternal Uncle will marry someone else. Then, Third Maternal Aunt won't be our aunt anymore, right? Then would she still make delicious candies for us to eat ah?"

Lu Jiayu's eyes opened wide when he heard this and he covered his mouth with his hands. What should he do? He couldn't take back the words he just said earlier, right? Would Third Maternal Aunt really listen to him and decide to not marry Third Maternal Uncle?

"Third Maternal Aunt, in actuality...although my Third Maternal Uncle's face is a bit stinky and he looks a bit too feminine and has somewhat of a bad temper...he's really not that bad. Aren't you a little immortal girl ah? Be benevolent and take him into your care ah! Otherwise, he won't be able to get a wife even when he gets old and it'll be quite distressing!" Lu Jiayu wasn't a bit like a four year old kid and was quite eloquent for his age!

Yu Xiaocao had been quite amused by the children's childish words and thoughts. She could tell, however, that there was someone observing her. She raised her head and saw a heroic and free-spirited beautiful young matron who was gazing at her with a smile on her face. Yu Xiaocao knew then that this was her future older sister-in-law.

Zhu Junyang's older sister didn't resemble him at all. Although her features were quite pretty, she was more handsome than stunning. Her eyes were pure and clear and her smile was frank and open. In actuality, out of Imperial Prince Jing's four children, only Zhu Junyang resembled Princess Consort Jing in appearance. All of the others took after their father. When Zhu Junyang was born, Princess Consort Jing had once muttered to her husband that her youngest son and daughter were birthed incorrectly. They should have had their genders switched.

This was a lamented fact! Zhu Junyang had also expressed that he was willing to switch appearances with his older sister. When he was younger, he was constantly being mistaken for a girl by other people and it had caused him a lot of trouble ah!

Princess Consort Jing introduced the two of them to each other and they politely greeted each other before heading into the reception pavilion. Zhu Junya was afraid the children would cause trouble and sent them off to the side hall to play after they showed her the boxes of candy they received. These kids would be a bit quieter with a snack to eat.

However, she would have never expected that her youngest son, who could never sit still, was clinging to his third maternal aunt's bosom like a sweet little boy with his box of candies in his hands as he asked, "Mother, Pei'er will be very, very good. Pei'er will sit here and quietly listen to Third Maternal Aunt and Mother talk and I won't disturb you two. Can Mother let Pei'er stay behind ah?"

Zhu Junya wondered if her son had been swapped out for another boy. Ever since this kid could crawl, he was never willing to obediently stay in someone's arms. However, he was currently quietly sitting in her future younger sister-in-law's arms as he obediently shared the candies he loved the most. Something was going on today!

Princess Consort Jing had a gratified look on her face as she remarked, "Our Pei'er has a connection with Lass Xiaocao! Lass Xiaocao always gets along very well with children. In the past, ah, her youngest brother liked to stick close to her at all times and always listened to whatever she said! Now, he's only fifteen years old but he's about to participate in the metropolitan civil service exams this spring and enter officialdom. Furthermore, the Fang Family's only son, her godmother's son, also wants to spend all of his time at the Yu Residence. Even his mother takes a back seat to her!"

Following that, she described the fate that had linked her to Xiaocao to her daughter, "Ya'er, if it weren't for this lass, Xiaocao, I don't know if my body would have lasted long enough for me to see you today ah! Imperial Physician Zheng had once privately talked to your lord father about my condition but I was very well aware of how bad it was. He said that my body wouldn't be able to last more than five years! Look at me now! More than two sets of five years has gone by. Not only has my body completely recovered but I'm also becoming younger with every passing day ah! Everyone says that I look like I'm in my early thirties and that when I stand next to your eldest brother, we look like brother and sister! Just look, I've skipped a generation now!"

Although the words made it seem like she was complaining, she was extremely happy as she said all of this. Which woman didn't like to be beautiful and want to spend more time in their youth?

"This daughter also believes it is true! When we stand next to each other, we truly look like a pair of two sisters. Younger Sister-in-law truly is capable. Please tell me your secrets in conserving and preserving one's health!" Zhu Junya spoke quickly and pulled at her mother's hand, which looked even more tender than her own, and complimented it zealously.

Princess Consort Jing patted her daughter's hand and looked towards Xiaocao, "Since these are all secrets, we absolutely cannot let it leak outside! However, you can have your younger sister-in-law prescribe some medicinal cuisine and teas for you to use. Furthermore, she can select some proper skin

care cosmetics at her shop for you too. At that time, you can put it on my credit. After all, I am one of the only diamond card members at 'Blossoming Beauty' and I get half price off of everything!”

Even Zhu Junya, who lived in the faraway two provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi, had heard of 'Blossoming Beauty' and the name struck her silent. In the Hubei and Hunan regions, any noble matron who had a set of 'Blossoming Beauty' skin care items was the envy of all of her peers. Every noble lady in the capital wracked her brains to use her network to get a set of 'Blossoming Beauty' cosmetics as well.