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Princess Consort Jing looked at Xiaocao's glowing face and smiled, "Lass Xiaocao, you look so excited. Did you discover another business opportunity ah?"

"Hee hee, Lady Mother, you truly understand me too well! I want to use this event as an experiment! If the other noble young ladies are interested, then I'll establish this as a regular thing at the dessert shop. Who wouldn't find it fun to make some tasty desserts on her own while showing off to all of her friends and then eating her favorite desserts?" Yu Xiaocao grinned like a little fox who had eaten her fill.

"From the way you're describing it, even I'm interested! My children always turn up their noses at my culinary attempts. If I could truly make some desserts that are delicious, then they will definitely be extremely surprised!" Zhu Junya raised an eyebrow at her group of little monkeys.

Lu Jiayu made a face as he quietly mumbled, "The ingredients will all be prepared by someone else, so it's not hard for anyone to make something that tastes good, alright? If it were me, I'd also be able to do it!"

Yu Xiaocao nodded her head in assent, "Other than being a good event for the young noblewomen, it is also suitable for parents and children to participate together. The parents and children can work together to experience the joys of working with their own hands while teaching the kids that it's not easy for food to come to the table. This is very helpful in the teaching of their children."

"Third Maternal Aunt! I also want to participate, is that okay ah?" Lu Jiawei's mouth was greasy from all of the treats he had eaten. He raised his small plump hand in excitement.

Yu Xiaocao smiled as she stroked his head before using a handkerchief to help him wipe off the oils and crumbs from his face. She said in a gentle voice, "Of course you can, alright? At that time, Third Maternal Aunt will teach you how to make adorable animal crackers and all sorts of gummy candies in different shapes."

"Can I take all of the food I make ah?" Lu Jiawei was most concerned about this point!

“Of course ah! At that time, Pei'er can bring back all of the desserts and candies you make so you can give them to your friends. You can tell them that you made them yourself so they'll all be jealous ah!” Yu Xiaocao pinched the little fellow's plump cheek as she outlined what could happen.

Princess Consort Jing asked in a somewhat worried tone, “What if someone decides to be sneaky and brings along a chef to steal your methods? Wouldn't that be bad?”

“The most important part about making pastries is the ingredients and their ratios. All of these things will be prepared in advance by the shop's employees. Using chocolate as an example, we absolutely wouldn't teach them how to make chocolate starting from the cocoa beans. At that time, as long as the participants melt them and pour them into molds, they'll be able to make the right shapes. As for the small cookies and biscuits, it's the same! That being said, it's not as if the desserts at my shop are easy to make once you know the ingredients. It takes skill and not just anyone can do it. Lady Mother, there's no need for you to worry ah!” Yu Xiaocao patiently explained.

Only after hearing this did Princess Consort Jing smile again as she tapped Xiaocao's head with a finger, “Just what is in that little head of yours to be able to come up with such weird and novel ideas all the time?”

Zhu Junya also regarded her third younger sister-in-law with a gaze full of admiration and envy. One absolutely could not compare oneself to others. She could only think of using her third younger sister-in-law's pastries and delicious food to attract other people to her party. The other lady, however, saw a perfect business opportunity. It was no wonder that every business that came out of her hands was popular beyond measure. She clearly had a creative mind and money-making opportunities just spilled out of her!

After they finished the noon meal, Xiaocao once again spent some time with Princess Consort Jing and her older sister-in-law in conversation before saying her farewells. On the way back to her residence, she saw that her husband was being uncharacteristically quiet, so she asked in confusion, “What's wrong? Your wife once again has come up with a new method of making money, but you're unhappy?”

Zhu Junyang sighed and pulled the soft and fragrant little lass into his arms. He gently whiffed at her sweet smelling hair and he quietly said, “It's not that I'm unhappy. I'm just afraid you'll become too tired!”

“Don't you know me by now? If you had me staying at home, being a leisurely mistress of the residence, I'd be bored to death! Being busy is better, ah, it gives me satisfaction!” Yu Xiaocao turned her head

around and gave her husband a peck on the lips. In any case, it was just the two of them in the carriage, so there was nothing to be embarrassed about.

The reality soon told her that her man, who had been patiently waiting in a drought for twenty some years, wasn't someone to be idly teased. When they arrived at the gates of their home and heard all of the servants respectfully welcoming them back, Yu Xiaocao angrily pushed away a naughty hand from a particular wolf out of her clothing before she picked up an enameled mirror to fix her mussed up hair. Then she reapplied some lip color to her mouth. After glaring ferociously at the fellow who was causing trouble for her, she lifted up the carriage curtain to leave.

As soon as Imperial Prince Xu, who was acting like a hoodlum in the carriage, stepped out, he resumed his cold image. However, when he stretched out his arm to help Princess Consort Xu come down, he looked very gentle and considerate.

The people living next to Imperial Prince Xu's estate were all high-ranking officials and nobles. When they saw this scene, they couldn't help but sigh in astonishment. Imperial Prince Xu clearly loved his princess consort very much! Not only did he stay by her side for almost a decade but his conduct towards her now was also very apparent. Who would have thought that Imperial Prince Xu, who always looked cold and callous in front of everyone else, actually had such a sweet side to him?

Zhu Junyang, who was now considered the perfect example of an ideal husband, revealed his wolfish side as soon as they entered the inner courtyard. He carried his little wife as he rushed towards their rooms to get closer to her. After entering, the servants in the residence only saw their masters after the moon had started rising in the sky.

Yu Xiaocao lay on the bed in exhaustion as her whole body felt sore from head to toe. The wolf by her side was carefully helping her massage her body. Wasn't the man supposed to get tired from doing husband-wife intimate relations ah? Why was this particular wolf still so energetic after doing it over and over again? Why was she the one completely exhausted by this?

However, this particular person was doing quite a good job at massaging her! Whether it was the amount of pressure used and the location chosen, it was all quite good. Xiaocao grunted comfortably and was about to fall asleep. Not long after she silently complimented that fellow, he started to become naughty again...

"Are you trying to make it such that I can't get up tomorrow morning, ah? Don't forget, I'm going back to my family tomorrow. If I get there late, just watch my younger brother come raging here, alright?" Yu

Xiaocao pressed down on the large hand that was being unruly and glared at him angrily. He wanted to go again? How many times had they done it since the afternoon? She absolutely could not allow this fellow to get away with this too many times!

The angry glare from Xiaocao, in Zhu Junyang's eyes, had become a flirtatious look instead and his heart started to itch again. The little lass's body was soft and sweet, and she always seemed to harmonize well with his movements even though she seemed a bit shy. It truly sent him to the peak of ecstasy time after time again...he couldn't continue down this road of thinking again as a certain body part was starting to become excited! After spending so many years interacting with the lass, he knew he couldn't poke her into a temper. Otherwise, the furious little kitten would make him suffer!

Zhu Junyang engraved the look of the lass in his heart and promised heartfully, "Alright, I won't torment you further! Go to bed early. Tomorrow morning, this prince will accompany you there!"

Yu Xiaocao naturally could feel a certain hard body part on him and gave him a doubtful look, "Are you sure you can endure this? Something bad isn't going to happen to you ah?"

"Shush! If you continue teasing me, this prince will take back what I said earlier!" Zhu Junyang held the beauty in his arms as he inhaled deeply. He could see her, touch her, but couldn't taste her. Naturally he wasn't happy about this, so his voice had a bit of sharp quality to it.

"How about...I use my hands to help you relieve some pressure?" Yu Xiaocao very soon regretted her decision to be kind. Wasn't this fellow's body constitution a little too good ah? Her hand felt so tired now! When she saw the look of pure pleasure on his face, she hatefully pinched him a couple of times on his arm.

Zhu Junyang stated, "Wife, please don't mess around. You can't take the consequences!"

Yu Xiaocao immediately became obedient after hearing this and closed her eyes, pretending to be dead. Suddenly, from beneath the covers, a large gurgling sound could be heard.

Only then did Zhu Junyang remember that the two of them had missed the evening meal. He ordered the maids outside the room to bring in some hot water and held his wife as they washed themselves clean before ordering their evening meal.

They were truly eating dinner a bit late today. The clock in the outside hall showed that it was eight in the evening, almost nine. Usually, by this time, there weren't any servants in the kitchen. However, the maidservants and senior servants in the courtyard all knew that their masters hadn't eaten dinner yet and had told the cook maids to stay in the little kitchen for them!

All of the foods on the dinner table were good for rejuvenating and nourishing the body, like soups and congee. The cook maids had a perceptive eye, which made Yu Xiaocao blush after seeing the dishes. Zhu Junyang's waist was once again pinched by his wife.

After finishing dinner, Zhu Junyang didn't bother Xiaocao again. The two of them slept soundly the entire night until dawn arrived. Zhu Junyang, as usual, did some martial arts to exercise while he was waiting for Xiaocao to get up. By the time she got up, he had already changed into suitable clothing and was waiting to eat breakfast with her. She had to admit that the cook maids were quite good. Yu Xiaocao ate happily and accidentally consumed too much.

Imperial Prince Xu's residence wasn't very far from the Yu Residence. In order to help Xiaocao digest her large meal, the two of them let the carriage follow them from behind as they strolled towards her maternal home. Behind them were the gifts they were bringing along and it filled six whole carts. The people walking by all couldn't help but regard this with obvious surprise.

In front of the Yu Residence, Yu Hai and his two sons were there looking back and forth, obviously waiting for them.

"They're here, they're here!" Little Shitou was the first to spot his second sister's figure in the distance and revealed a happy smile. He scuttled forward in large steps and pushed aside his second brother-in-law as he solicitously inquired after Xiaocao. He acted as if he was afraid that she had been bullied at the prince's residence.

"Second Older Sister, you have some dark circles under your eyes, did you not sleep well last night? Is it because you're not used to sleeping in a new environment?" Little Shitou directly ignored the 'head criminal' who had stolen his sister from him. He could sensitively tell that his second older sister wasn't at her usual, so he couldn't help but ask.

Yu Xiaocao glared at Zhu Junyang and then turned back to soothe her worried younger brother, "Don't worry, there's nothing I'm not used to. I was too excited last night, thinking about seeing you all today, so I was only able to fall asleep late at night. Don't you know that I, like my name, am like a tenacious blade of grass. I can live anywhere without any problems!"

Little Shitou finally felt himself relax when he saw the same brilliant and happy smile on his second sister's face. He couldn't resist the urge to give a verbal jab at his older brother-in-law, "If there's anything discomforting you in the future, don't force yourself to endure it. Our family's gates are always wide open for you!"

"Hee hee! With you, the future top scorer of the imperial examinations, as my backing, who would dare try to bully me? You should take this time to relax since you just recently finished one set of exams! As long as you do your usual during the court examinations, I have faith that you'll do just fine! Don't give yourself too much pressure. After all, you're only sixteen!" And that was considering the fact that this was the traditional way of counting one's age. In her previous life, someone as young as her brother would still be in middle school! In Xiaocao's heart, her younger brother was a genius and she had complete faith in him!

"Don't worry, Second Older Sister! My goal is to be the top scorer of all three sets of exams in the imperial court examinations!" If anyone else had heard Little Shitou's words, they would have absolutely thought that he was being too rash. In actuality, he had complete confidence in himself!

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In fact, Yuan Sinian was more nervous about the exams than Little Shitou. As soon as his disciple left the exam hall, he instructed Little Shitou to write down from memory the questions that appeared on the exam and the answers he had given. Then, he called a teacher over from the Imperial College to look over them together. As for the Four Books and Five Classics, they didn't need to concern themselves over that as Little Shitou already knew them by heart and could recite them forwards and backwards. As for his essay reply on the policy question, his unique and creative viewpoint made his master, the best scholar of his generation, praise him repeatedly. In Yuan Sinian's eyes, his young disciple was sure to become the best scorer in the exams! Unless there was a conspiracy going on!

As for the palace examinations, Little Shitou had enjoyed the benefits of his second sister's connections and had already seen the emperor a few times, so he wasn't scared at all. His second sister was right. As long as he did his usual, the exams would prove to be no difficulty for him!

Zhu Junyang helplessly watched as his wife's attention had been taken up entirely by his younger brother-in-law. He could only follow the two of them from behind in a silent manner. It was truly difficult to have a younger brother-in-law who was clinging onto his wife. Fortunately, his father-in-law and older brother-in-law, other than greeting his wife enthusiastically at first, were actually quite warm towards him.

After entering the Yu Residence, his wife had been sent into the inner courtyard and he had been left in the outer courtyard with his two fathers-in-law. Who wanted to spend that much time with those two old men? He wanted to spend more time with his wife, ah, hmp! Unfortunately, one of his fathers-in-law was Fang Zizhen and had decisively refused his request with the excuse that 'it was not customary' to allow him in. After all, the inner courtyard also contained his two mothers-in-law, his wife, and some sisters-in-law. As an adult man, wanting to go there where there were so many womenfolk was a ridiculous idea!

Alright, the fathers-in-law words were law today. Zhu Junyang wrinkled his nose and stayed obediently in the outer courtyard. He drank a bellyful of tea as he had to converse with his godfather-in-law about the army affairs in the northwest. In a few days, the two Zhao Generals would be heading back out there and it wasn't certain when they would be back again!

His actual father-in-law, Yu Hai, looked at all of the gifts that had been transported in and rubbed his hands in a somewhat awkward manner as he politely said, "Your Highness, we're not outsiders here. Why did you bring so much stuff along?"

"My lord father-in-law, the more precious and expensive the gifts I bring, the more it shows just how importantly and respectfully I view my princess consort and her family. You should be happy about this!" Zhu Junyang naturally knew that his father-in-law deeply loved his daughter. This man was the epitome of a father who adored his daughter and ended up treating him, the son-in-law, well as a result.

Yu Hai was about to continue to say something when he was stopped by Fang Zizhen, "Son-in-law is right! These gifts are his way of showing his filial piety to you. If you're too polite, then you're taking him as an outsider! Our family has raised our daughter for eighteen years and this fellow has taken advantage of it. What's wrong with taking some gifts from him?"

Zhu Junyang smiled and nodded his head at this. Suddenly, he discovered that Little Shitou, who had been at his side earlier, was secretly trying to sneak away out of the reception pavilion. His eyes caught him immediately and he asked, "Younger Brother, where are you planning on going? Spend some time with me and talk a bit. I heard that you did quite well at the exams this time..."

Little Shitou, who had been caught in the act, sat back down with a face full of disdain—who wanted to spend time with you? He wanted to go to the inner courtyard and ask his second sister how she had been doing lately! Although he had spent a lot of time traveling with his master and was often gone for a few months, he always knew that his second sister would be at home. As long as he got back, he'd be able to see her whenever he wanted to.

However, it wasn't the same anymore. Second Older Sister had gotten married and had been taken away from him by the irksome fellow in front of him. In the future, there was no one there who would pinch his cheeks anymore, lament that he had gotten thinner, and come up with all sorts of new foods for him. Over the past few days, he had spent a lot of time preparing for the exams and had gotten thinner as a result. However, Second Sister wasn't there anymore to make food to nourish his body. Wah wah wah...such a bad person to steal his second sister away from him!

Little Shitou ignored Imperial Prince Xu in a pique of anger but had been scolded fiercely by his father. Finally, he reluctantly described how the exams had gone but his heart had long flown into the inner courtyard to be by his second sister's side...

Yu Xiaocao had been pulled by her mother and godmother along into the small reception pavilion. After all of them had taken a seat, Madam Liu carefully observed her daughter from head to toe. When she saw that her daughter's cheeks were rosy and complexion looked bright, she felt her heart relax. The rims of Lady Fang's eyes were red as she smiled slightly to ask, "In the past two days, how have you been doing at Imperial Prince Xu's residence? Is the food to your liking? Are the servants in the estate hardworking ah? ..."

Her chain of questions came out so quickly that Xiaocao didn't know what to answer first. She could only pull at her godmother's hand, swaying back and forth as she smiled, "Mother, Godmother, don't worry ah! It's not as if you both don't know what I'm like. Have I ever allowed myself to be pushed around or bullied? Everything is great at the estate. Lady Mother has given me her most hardworking stewards and seniors servants and I also have Wutong and Pipa as my assistants. There's nothing for me to worry about in the residence!"

"Princess Consort Jing sent some servants to you? Which ones? What are their surnames?" Lady Fang had been born and bred in a noble family and had a good understanding of the darker sides of the inner courtyard. She was afraid that her goddaughter might be surreptitiously pushed around by these outside servants.

Yu Xiaocao picked up her cup and drank a sip of flower tea before she smiled reassuringly at her godmother and mother, "Don't worry ah! You already know the senior servant; she's Lady Mother's Meixiang!"

"Ah! It's her ah! No wonder the last time I saw Princess Consort Jing I didn't see her by her side! I had thought that she had left after getting married. Apparently, she had been transferred over to you! I must

say I'm relieved now. That lass Meixiang's temperament and personality are both acceptable!" Lady Fang paused for a moment and then added on, "However, you need to make sure you have a good handle on the head stewards in the residence and you can't just allow other people to appoint any servant to those positions. Imperial Prince Xu's Estate is very large, so do you have enough servants on hand? If not, I can lend a few at first."

"No need, Godmother! The maidservants I brought along as a part of my dowry are already enough! That being said, it's not as if the other servants in the residence are unusable. I'm having Wutong and Yingchun and the others keep an eye on them! The vast majority of servants in the residence are Ruizhi's people. Are you not able to trust the people he's appointed?"

In actuality, Yu Xiaocao had very little patience for the trifling issues involved in running a noble estate. Zhu Junyang also knew this. Thus, no matter whether it was the stewards or junior servants or the maidservants in the inner courtyard, he made sure to be very careful when selecting him. Since he had the ability to read other people's thoughts, it was easy as pie for him to pick out the bad from the good. Naturally, Xiaocao had full confidence in the people he had chosen.

Madam Liu and Lady Fang were both the type to view their son-in-law in a better light as time passed. With such a capable and talented son-in-law, they were quite happy and were able to relax after asking a bit more.

Yu Xiaocao...on the other hand, was not so reliable. The two mothers couldn't help but worry about her!

The two mothers then began to chat about more private matters. Yu Xiaocao's eldest sister-in-law, her childhood friend, was almost four months pregnant and her belly was already discernible. However, her complexion looked a bit wan and she appeared much skinnier now. Xiaocao knew that her eldest sister-in-law was having a more difficult pregnancy as her morning sickness was quite severe. In the past several days, she had been busy helping out with her younger brother's exam affairs as well as her own wedding, so she didn't have enough time to take care of the other girl. Now, when she saw her today, Xiaocao felt a bit apologetic. She stood up and walked over, holding her eldest sister-in-law's hand before taking her pulse.

Liu Huifang was a bit surprised by her actions but when she understood what Xiaocao was doing, a blush rose up on her face. It was a bit embarrassing. In Dongshan Village, her older maternal cousin was perfectly fine when she became pregnant. She was able to cut ragweed, cook food, wash the laundry...no chores at home were delayed then. However, when it came to herself, why did she end up being so fragile and pampered?

When she was three months pregnant, her father-in-law and mother-in-law were both so busy that their feet rarely rested. It was one thing to be unable to help them but it was another to add to their worries. However, she was quite helpless in this situation. Ever since she found out she was pregnant, she had become extremely sensitive to smells and couldn't handle many. In the past, the foods she liked to eat, such as chicken, fish, meat and eggs, were now all things that made her puke whenever she saw them. As for vegetables, she could only handle some whereas others caused her to vomit after eating them.

Unfortunately, the child inside her belly needed nutrition, so she often forced herself to eat food. However, the food she so painstakingly forced down often came back up again. After she vomited, she'd continue to eat with tears in her eyes! Yu Hang felt so bad seeing this that he wanted to find a famous doctor in the capital to treat her.

Her good friend's, her youngest sister-in-law's, wedding date was soon and she didn't want to add to the burden at that time, so she used the excuse of morning sickness being what it was in the early months and that it would get better later. Yu Hang had also been very busy at home lately, so he hadn't been able to find the time to look for a suitable doctor.

Liu Huifang knew Xiaocao had some medicinal knowledge but didn't expect that she'd be able to spot that she was feeling unwell in the blink of an eye. She was sure the other girl would be able to help after taking her pulse.

Madam Liu asked anxiously, "Your eldest sister-in-law hasn't been able to eat much and vomits all the time. I originally thought that as long as she passed three months it'd get better, but it's already been four months and it's still this bad. Cao'er, help her do something!"

Yu Xiaocao put her friend's arm down and smiled at the two of them, "Don't worry, it's all okay. The little guy is perfectly healthy. He's just being a bit naughty and making sure that everyone is aware that he is there!"

"Good, good, good! As long as the child is okay! However, it's not sustainable that your eldest sister-in-law is unable to eat. Only a short period of time has passed but she's thinned out so much. Cao'er, can you see if you can come up with some prescriptions for Huifang?" Madam Liu let out a sigh of relief as she held her daughter-in-law's hand. She smiled until the wrinkles around her eyes deepened.

“Eldest Sister-in-law's foundation is quite good, so, in her case, the benefits of medicine are not as good as good nutrition— I'll write down a few recipes suitable for pregnant women to eat and I'll have the people in the kitchens make some for her. I guarantee that these foods will make my eldest sister-in-law and her child healthy and strong!” Yu Xiaocao had the servants bring out some brush, ink, and paper from the small study in the courtyard. After considering it for a short time, she wrote down six to seven medicinal cuisine prescriptions that were suitable for nourishing the unborn child and replenishing the pregnant body.

Madam Liu gingerly took the piece of paper and carefully put it away. Originally, she was planning on taking the entire family back to Tanggu after her youngest daughter got married. Now, Madam Liu decided to change her plans. Her daughter-in-law's pregnancy was not very smooth and it wasn't suitable for her to endure a long voyage. Furthermore, there was no one as good as her daughter in nourishing and balancing a pregnant woman's body! After all, wasn't her Medicinal Cuisine House filled to the brim with customers every day? Not only was the food there delicious but it was also clearly very effective at healing ah!

On her daughter's wedding day, there were many matrons and ladies who were of much higher rank than herself, the mere wife of a small sixth-ranked official. Despite that, they were incredibly polite and courteous to her. Furthermore, many of them had privately thanked her, telling her that she had raised a good daughter. The medicinal cuisine that her daughter had come up with had healed many people and it was clearly very effective.

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Although her youngest daughter was now married, the two residences weren't far from each other so if anything came up it'd be easy for them to get in contact. Madam Liu made the quick decision to stay in the capital. The stewards in Tanggu were all experienced, so only Yu Hai and her eldest son needed to go back to keep an eye on things. She could peacefully stay by her daughter-in-law's side and wait for her eldest grandson to be born!

Yu Xiaocao watched as Xiaolian repeatedly congratulated their eldest sister-in-law and smiled, “Xiaolian, should I take your pulse too ah?”

Xiaolian immediately blushed a bright red and repeatedly waved her hands, “No need, no need...I just changed!”

In actuality, Xiaolian was quite looking forward to having children. Zhuang Xiaomo was an orphan and she knew that he thirsted even more than she did for affection. Thus, no matter how busy their seafood wholesale business got, he always carved out the time to accompany her. If they had a small baby linking them even closer together, wouldn't he be incredibly happy ah?

Madam Liu was so happy that her mouth was cracked wide open. When she heard that, she persuaded her eldest daughter, "Have your younger sister take a peek. Xiaomo isn't getting any younger and it is the right time for him to start having children to keep the family line going ah! Your younger sister must have some good prescriptions for fertility and nourishing the body. Once your body is healthy and strong, would you need to worry about getting pregnant ah?"

Xiaolian obediently stretched out her hand after hearing her mother's words, allowing Xiaocao to take her pulse. Although Xiaolian's body had been deficient in nutrients when she was young, she had been nourished over many years with mystic-stone water and had long recouped all that she needed. However, Xiaocao still warned her, "I know your family business is busy but you need to take care of yourself. Haven't you been training a few maidservants to be your assistants? There's no need to do everything yourself!"

In the past half year, her husband's business had been booming and he couldn't handle it all by himself. Thus, Xiaolian also became busy and was exhausted at the end of every day. After hearing her younger sister's warning, she asked somewhat anxiously, "Is my body okay ah? Will I have trouble getting pregnant..."

"Child, what nonsense are you saying? Don't you have your younger sister here? She was even able to cure the infertility problem of the heir to Marquis Dingyuan's Household. What do you need to be afraid of now?" The smile on Madam Liu's face gradually disappeared and a tone of anxiety was added onto her voice.

"Don't worry about it and scare yourself needlessly! Your body is quite healthy; it's just that you've been more tired lately! I'll give you two prescriptions to nourish your body. After drinking them for a month, you should be fine! However, while you're taking the medicine, you can't have any intimate time with Older Brother Xiaomo..." Yu Xiaocao didn't bring her medicine box along for this visit so she sent Yingchun back to get it.

In actuality, Xiaolian's condition was quite serious. Although her body had slowly recovered throughout these years, she had been poorly nourished when she was young. After being married for half a year, she didn't have more mystic-stone water to strengthen her and spent a lot of energy in managing her husband's business. If it had been any other doctor treating her, they would have said a lot and cautioned her that she'd need to rest and nourish herself for half a year.

None of this, however, was a problem to Xiaocao. All of the medicines in her box had been infused with spiritual energy, so after drinking a few prescriptions, everything would be fine. However, she still planned on privately talking to Zhuang Xiaomo. The maidens of the Yu Family weren't married over to work until they were tired to the bone. Why should they work like a man?

The kitchen followed Xiaocao's instructions and sent a goblet full of medicinal cuisine over. Liu Huifang sniffed lightly at the faintly fragrant medicinal congee and didn't have a bad reaction to it. She frowned as she took a small spoonful and placed it into her mouth. Eh? The taste was quite good. She ate a few more spoonfuls and didn't feel the desire to vomit come up. After finishing a whole goblet of medicinal congee, Liu Huifang felt warm and comfortable. Then, a feeling of something moving occurred in her abdomen. Was that the baby moving around? She held her little bump as a maternal glow seemed to come off of her body.

The news that Yu Hang's wife was able to eat something had transmitted to the outer courtyard. Yu Hang was delighted beyond measure and the smile on his face almost reached the back of his face—this was definitely the product of his younger sister's hard work, so now he didn't need to worry anymore! Little Shitou decided to be merciful to Zhu Junyang on account of him almost becoming an uncle and no longer treated him with disdain.

Yu Xiaocao had lunch in the inner courtyard and sat around afterwards to talk a bit. Before long, word came from the outer courtyard that it was getting late and time for her to head back. Madam Liu reluctantly escorted her daughter to the second gate as tears flowed down her eyes.

She wasn't sure the next time she would be able to see her daughter after she left. Madam Liu truly missed her.

Xiaocao hurriedly took out a handkerchief to wipe her mother's tears. She gently hugged her mother and softly said, "Mother, don't worry ah! His Highness treats me very well. We currently live on our own and I am the only mistress in the house. If you miss me, I'll come over a few times to visit!"

Madam Liu stopped her tears after hearing this. Lady Fang, however, interjected, "That's not okay! After all, you are a married woman now and can't always run back to your maternal home. If other people see this, what would they think?"

"Then...if you two miss me, come over to Imperial Prince Xu's Estate to visit! There are so many empty rooms in the estate, so pick any one to stay in!" Yu Xiaocao hurriedly said.

Madam Liu gave her a look and said, "Our two residences are so close to each other, so it's not proper for me to live at your place. That being said, your eldest sister-in-law is pregnant and as her mother-in-law, what would people say if they saw me abandoning her while living at your residence?"

"Then bring Eldest Sister-in-law along with you. I can personally make her some medicinal food to help her and then you won't need to be worried about her and your future grandson!" Yu Xiaocao wasn't just saying that to be nice. Although her husband had already resigned from being the army commander of Xishan Barracks, he was still in charge of the firearms camp! She was pretty sure after his vacation for his wedding ended, he'd have to go back there and work early and come back late. He might even stay there for several days in a row. With only her around in the giant estate, wouldn't it be boring? If her mother and eldest sister-in-law could frequently visit, then it'd be pretty swell for her!

Madam Liu felt quite tempted by this idea. Although her daughter-in-law was able to eat without puking today, she had truly thinned out too much recently and really needed to nourish herself back to a healthy weight. If her daughter could personally make some medicinal cuisine for her daughter-in-law, that'd be the best scenario...

At this time, Liu Huifang interjected, "Am I that delicate ah? I'm only pregnant, so do I need to live at the prince's estate and have Princess Consort Xu herself make food for me? In our village, there are plenty of pregnant matrons doing work in the fields. Some of them work up until they give birth! How did I become so delicate now? Mother, my body is fine, so let's not bother my younger sister too much! That being said, Younger Sister is a newlywed; it's not right for us to disturb them at this time!"

Zhu Junyang, who was waiting outside the inner gate to escort his wife, heard her words and inwardly nodded his head a few times. He and his wife were right in the midst of their lovey-dovey period and he definitely didn't want other people butting their heads in, especially that younger brother-in-law of his, who was standing right next to him. As soon as that fellow heard that his wife had invited Madam Liu to live at their estate, his eyes immediately lit up. Even a blind person could tell what thoughts were running through that brat's head.

How could he allow a clingy little brother-in-law to invade his territory?? Men were similar to beasts in many ways and they all had their own territories and guarded them fiercely. This was especially true of newly married men. They absolutely didn't want anyone to break their couple's bliss.

Little Shitou angrily glared at the man next to him, 'I naturally want to visit my second sister's house, especially since I'm her younger brother!'

Zhu Junyang stared back, 'Your second sister is my princess consort first and your older sister second. Remember that!'

Only now did Xiaocao, who had been conversing with her mother and godmother, sense the raging tension between the two men, one big and one small, in front of her. They were standing solemnly in front of her and staring at each other with serious looks. It looked like invisible daggers were flying in-between them as they conversed silently.

“Are you two—using your eyes to express your affections for each other?” Yu Xiaocao knew that her younger brother was deliberately picking on her husband and couldn't help but crack a joke.

“Wife...”

“Second Sister——”

Who would want to exchange affections with this guy?! The two of them looked away as their hearts moved in one.

Little Shitou had only seen his second sister when she had just entered the residence and hadn't had the chance to properly talk to her. Thus, he naturally didn't have the time to deal with his brother-in-law anymore. He scurried over to his older sister's side and pulled on her sleeve a couple of times. He even deliberately raised an eyebrow at Zhu Junyang.

Yu Xiaocao originally wanted to ruffle her younger brother's hair like she always did when they were younger but discovered that he was now taller than her. She could only pat at his shoulder as she smiled, “Before I realized it, my younger brother has grown up to be a young man. What sort of things did you talk about with your second brother-in-law earlier?”

Little Shitou grinned at her winsomely and said, “We didn't say much; I only urged him to treat you well...Second Sister, take good care of yourself and don't let yourself get too tired. My master said that he plans on having me stay in the capital in the future to get used to the official circles. With me around, if you need any help from me, please ask. Also, you need to visit me often as I'll miss you!” As he spoke, the rims of his eyes turned red.

Zhu Junyang fumed at the side. This stinky brat knew how to act cute and obedient in front of his wife. That wasn't the topic of the conversation at all! What he actually said was more along the lines of: "My second sister is such a wonderful person but, in the end, she was stolen away by a certain someone!" and "My second sister once said that her husband must be loyal and cannot take any concubines let alone any side consorts! Otherwise, she's willing to divorce her husband!" and "If you dare to bully my second sister, I will make sure to take my sister back and I don't care about the fact that you're an imperial prince and favored official!"

This stinky brat, how could he possibly think that he, Zhu Junyang, had the desire to take in any concubines? He married his wife so he naturally had to treat her well. Bullying her was not something that had ever crossed his mind. That stinky brat was just hoping for things not to go well between them! His hints at 'bringing my older sister back home' were clearly just him being sour about his sister marrying someone, right? Hmph! Since his second sister had married into his estate, she was naturally now a part of his family. If he wanted to take her back, it'd be a no go! Not a single window would be left open for that brat!

The grievances Zhu Junyang held towards his younger brother-in-law naturally couldn't be completely hidden. Yu Xiaocao was already used to the two of them not seeing eye to eye, so she ignored it. She first needed to comfort her younger brother as he was going to be participating in the court exams this next month. Doing well was the most important thing now!

"As the older brother-in-law, you're older than my younger brother by a few years, so how can you lower yourself to his level and squabble like a child? You're truly getting worse and worse with age!" Yu Xiaocao gave a sidelong look before turning back to Little Shitou, "If your second brother-in-law tries to bully you, make sure to tell me. I'll have your back!"

If Little Shitou had a tail right now, it would be raised up, pointing to the sky. Hmph, Second Sister truly still loved him the most. His older brother-in-law could only stand at the side now!

Fields of Gold Chapter 684

Zhu Junyang almost wanted to vomit blood. Just when did he ever bully this stinky brat? Clearly, the one being bullied was him, alright??? 'My delicate little heart has been wounded too heavily. I need a hug, I need some pets, I need some comforting, otherwise, I can't go on!!'

On the other hand, Little Shitou was so delighted by this turn of events that he proudly gave Zhu Junyang a knowing look and grinned in a cute way, "Second Sister is the best! Looks like the one that you love the most is still me! With those words, who would dare try to bully me?"

“Childish!” At his age, he still wanted to act spoiled in front of his older sister. The most annoying part was that this brat was acting spoiled in front of his wife. Zhu Junyang didn't want to admit that he was feeling incredibly jealous now!

Yu Xiaocao could feel the fury coming off of her husband as if it would solidify at any moment. She knew now that she had to spend a lot of effort to comfort this beast when they got back home. After conversing a bit longer with her younger brother, she finally gave out her invitation, “Three days from now, my residence will be holding the first 'tasting delicacies event' and I need a few young scholars to act as judges. At that time, you can invite a few of your good friends over.”

“Tasting delicacies event? Is this related to eating good food ah? You absolutely have to keep this on the down low, otherwise I'm afraid your entire residence would be filled to bursting!” Whenever he remembered the cacophony that was his birthday banquet, Little Shitou always felt some lingering fear. It had originally been planned to be a small family feast, so who would have thought that they would have to reserve the entire Medicinal Cuisine House in order to have enough food to feed all of the guests that had come over?

Yu Xiaocao simply described the event she was planning. It was just an event where the young maidens of the inner courtyard would make some delicious and creative desserts. Those desserts would be sent out to the outer courtyard, where the youths could judge them and decide which ones took first, second, and third place. Those maidens who placed in the top three would naturally get a prize. As for the prizes, Yu Xiaocao had already come up with a good idea. She was planning on giving a membership card to 'Creative Pastries' to the winners. This membership card gave them the privilege of getting half off everything at 'Creative Pastries'!

Oh ho, even the prizes were being used to advertise her not-opened next business! With this type of boss, did her businesses ever have to worry about not being popular?

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Zhu Junyang was unhappy, extremely unhappy! This period right after being married was supposed to be for the two of them to spend in bliss together. However, his new bride was ignoring him!

Ever since they got back to the estate after visiting her maternal home, his little wife had become extremely busy. First, she summoned over some craftsmen to build five large ovens and stoves in the

back garden. Then, she brought over all of the employees from her dessert and pastry shop to undergo some strict training. All of the servants in their residence had been ordered completely around by his wife, who was immensely enjoying all of this.

As the chief stewards of the inner courtyard and affairs, Meixiang and Liu Dequan did their utmost during this time period. This was the first time that Imperial Prince Xu's Estate was holding a big event and all of the upper class noble maidens, matrons, and noblemen would be attending. Thus, they needed to make sure everything was done perfectly in order to avoid the estate's reputation from being stained. As for the steward in charge of purchasing, he was even more cautious. Every day he would consult with the princess consort's store manager, Yangliu, as he was afraid that he might miss some important ingredient necessary for the event.

The vast majority of Xiaocao's time was taken up by the rearrangement of the back flower garden. Fortunately, the servants in the residence were hardworking and capable. Otherwise, being able to completely renovate the garden in two days would be a pipe dream! All she had to do was voice her ideas and the stewards of the outer and inner courtyard would immediately bring her vision to fruition perfectly. This was also the opportunity for the stewards, servants, and maids to show off their abilities to the new princess consort! Everyone employed in the residence worked their hardest as they were afraid that the princess consort might become unhappy.

Although they were technically employed by Imperial Prince Xu, who in the capital didn't know that their master was completely obedient to their mistress even prior to their marriage? After marriage, he had become the epitome of an ideal husband and seemed to wish to be stuck to their mistress's side. Those who had been picked out by Zhu Junyang naturally weren't stupid and they had long noticed that the princess consort was the one in charge here. Even though their master wasn't happy about the fact that his newly wedded wife was busy with the pastry competition during their honeymoon period, he still ordered all of the servants to do their best for her. Tsk tsk, who would dare to slack off now? If their mistress got angry at them, the master definitely wouldn't say one word for them and instead applaud her for being right. For the sake of their own futures, especially those in managerial positions, they needed to show off their abilities and allow their new mistress to regard them in a pleasant light.

Despite the fact that all of the servants were doing their utmost to help, Xiaocao still ended up doing a lot of work and was quite exhausted by all of this. In order to ensure that this event went off smoothly and up to her standards, Xiaocao had the servants running around throughout the day. At night, she would pick up her personal notebook and write down any ideas that came up. That way, she would remember to implement them on the next day. Sometimes she would stay up for half of the night in the small study in the inner courtyard.

When he saw his wife working so hard, how could Zhu Junyang bear to add to her troubles? He needed to love her, pamper her, and support her completely! Even though he was unhappy inside, he still continued along his perfect husband persona and helped his wife take on a lot of burdens.

No one knew who spilled the beans but the news about the 'making your own pastries event' had somehow spread on the second day. Starting from when she got up in the morning, Xiaocao had a wave of calling cards to receive and all of them were from prominent families. These matrons came over with their daughters who ranged from ages eight to sixteen to see her. Their mission was simple. They wanted to cajole an invitation to her upcoming event.

Originally, Xiaocao's intention in creating this event was to invite her second older brother-in-law's sweetheart over to play around and allow Princess Consort Jing the opportunity to see her future daughter-in-law. She was cognizant of the fact that the young maiden might feel awkward on her own, so she decided to invite over maidens from families that were familiar with their two families to accompany her. The idea to have them make their own pastries was also done to increase the fun at this event.

Princess Consort Jing and Xiaocao only planned on inviting over people they were familiar with. Thus, they only prepared twenty invitation cards. Princess Consort Jing was given ten cards and Miss Han was given five so she could invite her good friends over. Thus, Xiaocao was left with only five herself.

However, on the next day, since the morning, Xiaocao began to receive guests at the residence. Sometimes she even had to receive a few matrons and their children at the same time. She continued to receive calling cards until the evening and was so busy that she barely got to eat lunch. In one day, there were over twenty or so families who had left their cards. Some of these families, whether it was Xiaocao or her husband, had barely even interacted with them in the past and couldn't even be considered acquaintances. Despite that, they still shamelessly came over, begging for an invitation to the upcoming event.

In a short period of time, they had increased the number of guests at this event by almost double. Thus, they naturally had to prepare more materials for these people. Fortunately, Imperial Prince Xu's back garden was spacious, so all that was needed was to buy an extra stash of ingredients in order to avoid this party from becoming a fiasco.

As for the guests in the outer courtyard, it hadn't become crazy. Zhu Junyang had given invitations to his subordinates and military officials that he was close with. Little Shitou had given invitations to his group of five to six friends, whereas Imperial Prince Jing had given invitations to youths in his circle and the Han Family also had invitations...

Xiaocao was grateful that this event had been put together at last minute's notice. Otherwise, it wouldn't be just around twenty people who had come begging for invitations. The families who had gotten the news late and found out that they had missed out on their opportunity to sidle up to Imperial Prince Xu's Estate and have their daughters show off to promising youths in the capital not only wailed in disappointment but also became much more sensitive to the future movements of the prince's residence. That way, they could strike first the next time Princess Consort Xu organized a gathering.

On the third day, which was the day of the event, there were all sorts of carriages parked in front of Imperial Prince Xu's residence. From the insignias on these vehicles, one could see that almost all of the third-ranked and above official's families were here. Naturally, there were more people than that.

Princess Consort Jing had used this gathering as the perfect excuse to come over and see her daughter-in-law as it was the first time Xiaocao was holding such a large event after getting married. However, she didn't even get to see her daughter-in-law before she was pulled into receiving all of the higher ranked matrons who had arrived.

As the hostess, Xiaocao naturally couldn't be idle! Fortunately, her good friends, He Wanning and Royal Princess Minglan, gave her a big hand. These two had long swam in these higher-ranked circles and they had married husbands who were also high-ranking. Thus, they knew pretty much every single maiden and young matron who had received invitations to this event today and were naturals at interacting with them. With them in charge of the younger guests, Xiaocao was able to be at ease.

News had quickly spread that this gathering would allow them to personally make pastries. Not only did this pique the interests of the young maidens in the capitals but their older sisters-in-law and older sisters who had gotten married were also very intrigued. Thus, everyone who had gotten an invitation brought along their entire family. Mothers, daughters, sisters, and sisters-in-law of the invitation holders all arrived. Fortunately, Xiaocao had prepared a large amount of materials needed. Otherwise, this event would have ended up becoming a farce.

The spacious back garden in Imperial Prince Xu's Estate had been divided into two parts. In the middle was a bamboo thicket separating the inner side from the outer side. On the inner side was where the matrons and maidens were currently chatting, whereas the outer side had been prepared to allow the noble youths to taste tea, play board games, play at throwing arrows into a pot, and compete at archery. Imperial Prince Xu had pretty much gathered all of the talented youths in the capital in one place. Thus, from time to time, the matrons on the inner side would glance through the less dense areas of the bamboo forest separating the two sides in a telling manner.

A pure and clear stream ran through the inner and outer parts of the garden. On both sides of the water were low tables and colorful blankets on the ground. From time to time, one could see flower petals floating down the water...

Little Shitou and his close classmates saw this stream and couldn't help but laugh, "Looks like Imperial Prince Xu's Estate is trying to mimic the ancient people's 'winding stream party' ah! What an elegant sight!"

On the inner side of the garden, there were maidens, young matrons and children who had not yet reached the age of thirteen. Xiaocao simply outlined the rules of this competition and emphasized that there were three elements that were being judged: 'creativity', 'aesthetics', and 'taste'. The top three in each category would get a prize.

When the maidens and young matrons heard this, they all became incredibly excited. Xiaocao didn't bother to speak too much and very quickly proclaimed the start of the competition.

For the creative pastries competition, it was split further down into four groups: cookies, cakes, chocolates, and miscellaneous. The children aged ten and below had all been grouped up together. Under the help of experienced pastry chefs, they were learning how to make some simple cookies and chocolates.

These cookies and chocolates didn't take much skill to make. The competition had prepared a variety of animal and flower molds. All the children had to do was to use the prepared dough and the molds to press them into different shapes before placing them in the oven. After being baked, sweet and delicious cookies came out. As for the chocolates, all the children had to do was to pour the already melted chocolate into the selected molds. After the heated chocolate cooled, they could take them out of the molds. In order to avoid the kids from getting scalded by the hot chocolate, other than the experienced pastry chefs, each child also had two sharp-eyed maidservants at their side. Thus, safety was of paramount importance here.

As for the older children and maidens, they were able to do more hands-on work. They could mold the dough into the shapes of their own choosing and frost the small cakes with the provided frosting and jams and decorate them with chocolates. As for the chocolate group, they were able to add some novel and fun ingredients into the melted chocolate before letting them solidify...

winding stream party - an old Chinese custom in which the participants wait by a winding stream and compose poems before their cups full of rice wine float down to reach them

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The vast majority of these noble young maidens were in their teens, so they very quickly forgot the fact that this was a competition and gleefully began to enjoy creating their own desserts. There were dexterous young maidens who chose to decorate delicate little cakes with swirls of frosting and dots of bright jam. Then there were those who knew that they were more clumsy and chose, instead, to make their own chocolates. They added all sorts of nuts to them and some even melted fruit candies to add to the insides, which created a symphony of flavors. Some of them used all sorts of preserved fruits and arranged them together to create a colorful piece of art...

In short, this group of maidens had some that idly chatted with each other, some who put in a lot of effort into making their own desserts, some who happily judged other's works, and there were even some who couldn't resist the temptation to try out their own goods and gleefully sampled them in bliss.

The matrons who were here had also been infected by the liveliness and happiness of the young maidens. They walked out of the shaded pavilion to arrive at the setting where the young maidens were currently having fun. Some of them arrived next to their daughters to help them come up with ideas or give them tips. Some of them sampled a few of the failed products that had occurred so far. There were even some who washed their hands and began to personally experience the novelty of making their own desserts...

Princess Consort Jing had been silently observing the young maiden from the Han Family this entire time. This young maiden, who had been called General Mu, was a bit tanner than the other maidens because she spent most of her time in the southwest, where the sun was much harsher. However, she wasn't super tan as her skin was more like a healthy wheat color.

Her skin condition, on the other hand, was quite good. It had a good texture and seemed to glow with health. Her facial features were pretty and somewhat heroic. Her eyebrows were thick and her eyes looked pure and clear. When she was concentrating on her task at hand, her lips slightly curled up and one could sense a hint of stubbornness and perseverance coming off of her...

Compared to the other noble maidens, she was dressed much differently. She was wearing a set of simple and easy to walk in attire. Her hair had been combed up in a high bun and only a very simple jade hairpin acted as decoration. Her face was bare of cosmetics and she revealed a sort of pure and simple type of beauty.

Princess Consort Jing was very curious as to what type of desserts the Han Family's young maiden had decided to make. She pretended to inadvertently walk over. When she saw the 'masterpiece' in front of

the young lady, she almost burst into laughter. The pastry in front of the girl didn't look much different than the ones in front of the children around ten years of age. She had used the molds to make quite a few horse shaped cookies and there were even some that looked a bit crooked on the side as if they had been beaten with a rod. After baking, there were some that became a bit deformed.

Princess Consort Jing remembered what her second son had told her about this maiden. She had grown up without a mother and spent most of her life at the borders with her father, learning most of the things that young men did. Without a maternal presence by her side, there was likely no one at the borders to teach her any of the things that women were supposed to learn, such as cooking or embroidery. Her feminine skills likely ranked at zero.

Han Xiaomu wasn't just fooling around. In fact, she was just really concentrated on making her cookies. She wanted to create a scenery that showed a very powerful army at war, but the little horse cookies she made wouldn't stand up on their own. She was getting pretty flustered by this.

Princess Consort Jing saw how this child had ended up breaking a few cookies in a row without succeeding in letting them stand. She couldn't help but give her some advice, "You could sandwich two cookies together using a filling in between. There are soft candies, cream, and chocolate there. All of those could be used."

That was right ah! With two cookies stuck together, they'd become thicker and likely be able to stand up! A smile appeared on Han Xiaomu's face and she expressed her sincere gratitude to the graceful noble matron in front of her.

Princess Consort Jing observed the young maiden with increasing pleasure. Although the younger lady's bearing and demeanor was not as elegant and refined as the other noble maidens', she was a very courteous and thoughtful individual.

In the end, Han Xiaomu ended up choosing chocolate and strawberry cream to act as the filling. She had surreptitiously tasted them before and these two flavors were her favorites out of the bunch. She wasn't sure whether the host of this event would allow her to take these sandwich cookies home. Tomorrow, her martial brother would be going back to the border and it was the perfect opportunity to allow her father to try these cookies she had made. She had personally crafted them! Her father had always poked fun at her, claiming that the food she made wasn't fit for humans to eat. These cookies would definitely make him see her in a new light!

“Young Miss, I don't think horses eat bugs...” Princess Consort Jing saw that the young maiden was placing the finished horse-shaped sandwich cookies with some cookies that were shaped a bit like a wiggly worm together and couldn't help but open her mouth to let her know.

Han Xiaomu had originally had a lot of confidence in her 'very powerful army at war', but after hearing what the noble matron said, she looked again at the swords she had made. They truly did somewhat resemble earthworms instead. Amused, she burst out into chuckles. Princess Consort Jing noticed that the young maiden's laugh was open and unrestrained, which was very similar to her own daughter's personality. Thus, she also began to laugh too.

Zhu Junya, who had been at a nearby table with her children, saw that her lady mother was laughing merrily with a young maiden. She hurried over and asked, “What are you talking about to make you so happy?”

“Go! Go watch your children, there's nothing here for you to see!” Princess Consort Jing noticed that her daughter was currently rolling some cookie dough in her hands and even had some flour on her face. Although her voice was filled with disdain, she reached over with a handkerchief to wipe the flour off of her daughter's face.

Han Xiaomu watched this somewhat enviously. She had lost her mother at a very young age and had grown up with her father. No matter how good her father was to her, it wasn't enough to make up for the gentle love of a mother. At the border, she would sometimes see the common people interacting with each other, such as the deep love between a mother and her daughter. She would always observe them for a long time and imagine herself as that child who was being tenderly cared for. She would also comfort herself, telling herself that if her mother was still alive, she would be the same as all of the compassionate mothers out there and love her very deeply.

Her father had sensed the deep thirst she had for a mother's love and had drawn the five to six year old her into his arms and gently told her stories about her mother. When her mother was pregnant with her, her mother had been excited at the prospect of meeting her and would often hold her pregnant belly and talk to her and read stories for her. He told her that her birth had been very difficult and her mother had used all of her strength and life to bring her out in the world so that she may live. Before her mother had left this world, she had looked at her with a loving gaze. Her last words had been to implore him to take good care of their daughter for her...

Since then, she had never envied people for their mothers and didn't feel at a loss that she didn't have her mother by her side. This was because she knew she had the most gentle, most compassionate mother who loved her the most in the heavens, watching over her!

Han Xiaomu looked away and a gentle smile appeared on her face. She brushed away a naughty strand of hair from her face and lowered her head to knead the dough. She wanted to make a sword-shaped cookie that was very straight and wouldn't make other people mistake it as a worm. Suddenly, she felt something gently brush the side of her face. She turned her head around and saw that the noble matron from earlier was helping her wipe her face. Her large dark eyes shone with astonishment.

“Forgive me for being presumptuous—you had some flour on your face!” Princess Consort Jing had perceptively sensed the flash of envy that had gone through the young maiden. She felt sorry that she had lost her mother at a young age and saw that the young lady had something sticking to her face, so she couldn't help but reach over and help her wipe it off. It was only when she saw the obvious surprise in the young maiden's eyes did she realize that she was being a bit rude.

Han Xiaomu's eyes curved up into crescents and she quietly thanked her, “Thank you, my lady! You are truly a gentle and good mother!”

Princess Consort Jing wanted to say that she wasn't just a good mother but also a good mother-in-law! However, this maiden hadn't seemed to have detected her true status so she didn't want to say it out loud and scare her prematurely.

“Mmmm...cookies with chocolate filling are quite delicious ah!” Zhu Junya had already stepped forward and had taken one of the small horse cookies her future sister-in-law had made and bit into it. Her face had a look of pleasant surprise on it. The crispy fragrant cookies paired with the dense flavor of chocolate made the cookies taste even better than them on their own. How come she hadn't thought of this idea? She needed to make some sandwich cookies now instead of just making plain ones with her children!

Han Xiaomu watched in dumbfounded amusement as she saw a 'stupid big sister' boldly eating one of the cookies she had prepared to give to her father. A complicated feeling arose in her heart. Didn't her father say that the noble maidens in the capital were all hard to understand and kept their feelings hidden behind smiling faces ah? Then why was this maiden...matron similar to herself, open and carefree and someone who would easily offend others without even knowing?

Han Xiaomu originally didn't want to attend this event after receiving the invitation from Zhu Junxi because she felt like her personality wasn't suitable for hanging out around other noble maidens! Zhu Junxi didn't tell her the true motive behind this gathering as he was afraid she might be too embarrassed.

When he saw her hesitation, he knew exactly what sort of misgivings she had. Zhu Junxi did his best to describe the event in the most interesting way possible and also told all of the stories he knew about Princess Consort Xu to her. Han Xiaomu became incredibly intrigued in this character, who had taken an official's position at the Ministry of Revenue at the tender age of thirteen and had managed, in only a few years' time, to cultivate high-yielding wheat, corn, and potatoes. Furthermore, this legendary figure had established so many successful and popular businesses at the same time. She hoped that this future sister-in-law of hers wouldn't be like the vast majority of noble maidens who liked to laugh at others behind their backs.

However, Han Xiaomu didn't dislike this adorable young matron in front of her despite the fact that the other person had eaten one of her cookies. In fact, she quite sympathized with the other woman's direct and bold personality.

“Older Sister, are you eating someone else's handiwork again? Earlier a lot of young maidens had complained to me about this! For lunch, I have Zhenxiu Restaurant and Medicinal Cuisine House cater the food. If you become full from eating too many desserts and have no room to eat delicious foods, don't blame me as your younger sister-in-law for not reminding you ah!”

The sound of a crisp and clear voice paired with the direct words and a hint of laughter made Han Xiaomu involuntarily raise her head to look for the owner of that voice. She saw an adorable young maiden, dressed in a married woman's attire, happily walking over toward her. The smile on her face was so bright that it even made the glittering sunlight in March seem to lose its luster!

“Miss Han, are you having a good time ah? I'm the hostess of this event, so if there any aspects that are lacking, please forgive me...that's right, this is some tiramisu that I've made. Do you want to try some?” Yu Xiaocao had also seen Princess Consort Jing and her daughter surround this young maiden. She was afraid that it might become awkward and they would end up scaring off her future second sister-in-law! However, it looked like the three of them were getting along quite well.

Zhu Junya also belatedly realized that she had been a bit uncouth and might have angered the other maiden. She hurriedly apologized, “I'm sorry, just look at me, always barging around in an ungainly manner. Earlier I didn't get your permission before trying one of your cookies...how about I make one in return to make it up to you?” Her offer seemed a bit ridiculous seeing as the other person may not be impressed by her handiwork.

Han Xiaomu, however, shook her head with a smile, "That cookie was only one of my practice attempts and it wasn't very successful. Older Sister, it's fine that you ate it and there's no need to apologize!"

Fields of Gold Chapter 686

Princess Consort Jing was rather pleased with the young lady's temper. Although she wasn't bothered about the trivial matters, she was still conservative and courteous. The rock that was weighing down her heart was finally removed. It seemed like her sons all had great eyesight! After all, she liked all three of her daughters-in-law!

"Everyone should rest up, have some snacks, and drink some fruit juice. This activity is established merely for everyone's pleasure, so don't tire yourself out! Our estate also offers packing boxes if you wish to bring home the cakes you made today!" Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but remind them after seeing how excited the children, young ladies, and the young married women were.

Zhu Junya impolitely took the small and delicate piece of tiramisu cake from her hand, and handed a piece to her lady mother first and then another piece of her future sister-in-law. After that, she took all the cakes on the tray that Xiaocao was holding and popped a piece into her mouth. While she happily savored the cake, she grumbled, "It's all your fault. The cakes and candies that you make are so delicious that I have already gained a few kilograms of weight recently!"

"Aren't you ashamed of saying that?! You have eaten a lot of the pastries and candies that your sister-in-law sent to your children, yet you turned around and blamed her! Is this how you should act as her sister-in-law? Fortunately, Cao'er has a kind heart because if it was someone else, they would have ignored you!" After Princess Consort Jing finished eating a piece of cake, she wiped her mouth with a handkerchief. Then, she smacked Zhu Junya's arm.

"Lady Mother, please slow down! It doesn't matter if you break my arm, just don't knock over the tiramisu cake that I'm holding!" Zhu Junya looked at the cake nervously before she stuffed another piece of cake in her mouth and continued talking, "I said that because I know that my younger sister-in-law isn't a narrow-minded person. If it was someone who had a strange temper, then your daughter can fake a smile at her!"

"You ah, you ah! You're already a mother, yet your temperament is still so carefree. My son-in-law doesn't even try to control you!" Princess Consort Jing tapped her daughter's forehead with her finger.

Zhu Junya giggled, "Your son-in-law likes my personality and believes that there's no need for me to change! Your son-in-law said that those who complain about their daughter-in-law making them lose face are all good-for-nothings! A woman's honor is acquired by a man! As long as he is strong and

outstanding, then who would dare to belittle him and his woman? Let's take my younger brother as an example. He returned from the army and earned a noble title all due to his own ability. As a result, wherever my younger sister-in-law goes in the future, she will be praised by others. About half of the people who came to the party today came because of my younger brother and my younger sister-in-law!"

"Stop spouting nonsense! If someone else overhears, they'll criticize you for blabbing nonsense!" Princess Consort Jing was rendered speechless in front of her unreliable daughter. Her daughter would speak her mind no matter what; she wasn't even afraid of offending other people!

"A person's lifetime consists of only a few decades, so why should we live in a world where we calculate our worth based on others' criticisms and compliments?! Lady Mother, I know that you're worried that I would suffer a loss due to this. But do you think that I'm the type of person that will silently endure being bullied? Even if there's someone I can't deal with, don't I still have your son-in-law to help me?" Wow, she was really good at showing off her lovey-dovey relationship!

Zhu Junya stuffed another piece of cake into Han Xiaomu's mouth. She savored the complex flavors of the tiramisu as she quietly listened to the conversation between her mother-in-law and older sister-in-law. She would be a fool if she didn't know the identity of the three people in front of her by now. She was proficient in literacy, war, and military strategy and tactics, so how could she be a fool?

Zhu Junxi that brat! Why didn't he tell her that his mother, Princess Consort Jing, would attend the party in person? She was caught off guard by his mother's sudden appearance! Fortunately, she had learned how to control her expressions in situations like this, so she wouldn't have to find a crack in the ground and crawl into it due to embarrassment. She tried to recall her earlier words and actions and realized that she didn't overstep her boundaries or said anything offensive. Han Xiaomu was relieved——she was going to remember this and teach that guy a lesson once she returned!

"Miss Han...Miss Han!" Her future sister-in-law called out her name, interrupting Han Xiaomu's thoughts. She raised her head and heard Zhu Junya ask her, "Miss Yangliu over there is teaching people how to make tiramisu. Do you want to give it a try?"

Han Xiaomu shook her head lightly, smiled, and said, "I'm clumsy, so it's quite impossible for me to learn how to make those delicate pastries. I think it's best if I try to perfect how to make simple sandwich cookies."

Princess Consort Jing nodded her head when she heard this. In her heart, she believed that Han Xiaomu was a good lady; she was someone who knew not to bite off more than she can chew.

When Zhu Junya heard this, she also dismissed the idea of learning to make tiramisu, “Then I also won't join in the fun. I need to watch over my youngest two children! I'll make some more cookies, so I can bring it home and let my husband and other children have a taste! Miss Han, you should do as you wish. I'll be heading over to have a look at my children!”

Princess Consort Jing used fatigue as an excuse to retire to a nearby pavilion to rest. Han Xiaomu was obviously relieved after she saw the mother and daughter pair off. Even though she was a generous and efficient person, she still felt uncomfortable in front of her future mother-in-law and elder sister-in-law.

Xiaocao was also happy with her future sister-in-law. She preferred people who were straightforward and easy to read compared to those who harbor their bad thoughts internally.

“Miss Han, if you want to make some delicate sword-shaped cookies, then you have to use a mold. If you mold them by hand, then I'm afraid you'll only be able to do it if you have a lot of experience!” Yu Xiaocao couldn't help but remind her this when she saw that she was kneading the cookie dough into sword shapes.

Han Xiaomu glanced at the place where the molds would place. She shook her head in disappointment, “But I didn't see a mold shaped like a sword?”

“You can ask someone to make one for you! It doesn't matter if you want a mold shaped like a sword, a spear, or other weapons because carving a mold isn't that troublesome. You can ask someone who is familiar with weapons to carve one for you!” Xiaocao had seen Zhu Junxi, her second brother-in-law, carve some small animals from wood to tease his nephews. As a result, she knew that he knew how to carve some simple shapes.

Han Xiaomu looked up and glanced at her. She pursed her lips and then summoned her maidservant over. Then, she whispered a few orders in the maidservant's ear. The maidservant accepted her order and then headed towards the other side of the garden where the bamboo forest is located. Yu Xiaocao taught her a few tips on how to spread the fillings evenly on the sandwich cookies. Han Xiaomu had gained a lot from Xiaocao's tips. The second batch of cookies finished baking; the sandwich cookies shaped like horses had turned out quite well.

Lunch was designed for people to serve themselves. There were various kinds of vegetable and meat dishes on display in the northwest part of the garden. All the tables were filled with plates of food. It was just as Xiaocao had said; all the signature dishes from Zhenxiu Restaurant and Medicinal Cuisine House were present. The dishes that were ordered from Zhenxiu Restaurant included: crispy roasted duck with fruits, roasted boneless chicken, eight treasure duck, braised mandarin fish with cream sauce, steamed bass with pine nuts, cuttlefish roe soup, stewed shark's fin, stewed pig knuckle in sauce...

There were also many famous dishes from the Medicinal Cuisine House. Of course, the most famous dish, Buddha Jumps Over the Wall, was present. They also had: braised duck with caterpillar fungus, yam congee, pork belly soup with eucommia hawthorn, mutton with codonopsis root, stewed carp with red beans and peanuts, ten powerful tonic soup, lily with chicken slices, stewed fig with lean pork, scallop soup with three fresh ingredients...

These were all bestsellers from Princess Consort Xu's shop, the Medicinal Cuisine House. It was a rare opportunity for them to have a taste. Many of the married ladies had longed to have a taste of these medicinal cuisines, so naturally, they wouldn't miss an opportunity like this. Since everyone was the same, no one laughed at each other!

After lunch ended, the pastries the noble ladies had made had finished baking. Although they enjoyed the process of making cakes, they also respected the competition rules. As such, they each selected the dish they were most satisfied with and wrote a sequence of numbers on it, and then placed it on a floating silver tray. The pastries traveled along the crystal clear canal and headed outside towards the gifted scholars.

The gifted scholars from the capital rated the pastries based on appearance, taste, creative concept, as well as other aspects. There were two first-place winners, three-second place winners, and five third-place winners! It was worthwhile to mention that General Mu had acquired one of the second-place prizes thanks to her pastry's "Shining Spear and Armored Horses" concept. To be fair, her work lacked technical skills. However, there were many generals outside that favored her work. In addition to that, her future husband asked the others for their support to help her win, allowing her to win one of the second-place prizes!

The first-place prize was a membership card that allowed 50% off at 'Creative Pastries'. The second-place prize was a 30% discount membership card, and the third-place prize was a 20% discount membership card! The well-bred young ladies and children were all excited about the grand opening of 'Creative Pastries' when they learned of its existence and that there will be discounts and big bargains once it opened. As such, they paid close attention to the news regarding the pastry shop.

Yangliu was currently in charge of the Medicinal Cuisine House, the pastry shop, and the frozen dessert and pastry shop that were now under the brand 'Jinan's Food and Drinks'. After Xiaocao got married, all of these businesses couldn't be considered under the Yu Family's branding anymore. Thus, all of them changed their names from the 'Yu's' to 'Jinan's'. This showed that Royal Princess Jinan was the owner of all of these.

Yangliu had trained a group of staff, and their skills had all matured by now. They were now in charge of the pastry and frozen dessert shops. Yangliu had always personally taken care of all the matters regarding the Medicine Cuisine House because of how important it was. However, thanks to the help from the shopkeeper and the head chef, she was able to have some free time to take care of 'Creative Pastries'.

After many years of experience, Yangliu had become an outstanding manager. Yu Xiaocao merely wrote out the basic design of the shop and gave Yangliu full authority to make the preparations for the grand opening. Soon, Yangliu was able to plan out a design that satisfied Xiaocao.

However, when 'Creative Pastries' finally opened, Xiaocao, who was the owner, failed to take part in the grand opening of the shop. She had already left the capital and was on a boat on the Grand Canal that was heading towards Jiangnan.

After a mere seven-day honeymoon, the emperor had summoned her to the palace. He asked her to inspect the experimental rice fields in Jiangnan as an imperial envoy. Last year, the Imperial Plantation had developed rice seeds that increased production. A portion of those seeds was sent to Jiangnan and was planted on the fields in the spring. Because Jiangnan and the northern regions had different climates and soil, the emperor feared that a change would happen with the high yielding seeds from the northern regions when planted in the southern region. As a result, he also set up a few hundreds of acres of experimental fields in the Jinling area of Jiangnan. The experimental fields were planted with the high yielding seeds harvested from the Imperial Plantation as well as the high yielding seeds created by Xiaocao.

The temperature was high and there was plenty of rain in the south. Normally, the rice paddy fields in the south ought to yield more crops than the fields in the capital. But the person in charge of the Jinling experimental fields returned to the capital and toured around the rice paddies in the capital. He felt his heart sink. Whether it was the rice seedlings in the suburbs of the capital or the sprouts, they were all late to bloom by half a month compared to the seeds planted in Jiangnan. However, the seedlings planted there were all more robust than the seedlings planted in Jinling experimental fields, so what was the cause?

The steward in charge of the Imperial Plantation in the suburbs of the capital jokingly said, "It seems like it's impossible to plant high-yielding crops without help from Royal Princess Jinan, right?"

The person who said that was merely joking, but the listener believed it. The person in charge of the Jinling experimental fields heard those words and remembered those words in his heart.

Fields of Gold Chapter 687

Due to Royal Princess Jinan's imminent marriage, the old official, who had the wellbeing of the people in mind, patiently waited for over half a month in the capital. He spent every day in the experimental fields located in the suburbs of the capital. He ate and lived with the tenant farmers; they exchanged planting methods and techniques.

The more he interacted with them, the more apprehensive he became. They obviously used the same steps when planting the seedlings, used the same types of fertilizers, and the managing procedures were also the same, so why was there such a difference between the seedlings they planted? The seeds were personally approved by the emperor and the old official had personally transported the seeds. There was absolutely no difference between the seeds or the planting process! Could the only difference be Royal Princess Jinan, who was now Princess Consort Xu?

Could the rumors actually be true? The farther the rumors spread, the more exaggerated the rumors became. It was rumored that Princess Consort Xu was a fairy of farming that descended to the mortal world from heaven. Because she took pity on how hardworking the emperor was for his country and the people, she descended to the mortal world to help with his worries and difficulties. She gave him high-yielding seeds to increase the production of the crops. There were even rumors that stated that the emperor vomited blood because he worked his heart out, trying to improve people's livelihood. Heaven was filled with emotions because the emperor loved the common people like his own children, so heaven sent down an immortal to assist him. It was not without reason that the emperor placed such great importance on Princess Consort Xu when she was merely a teenager!

Therefore the old official sent a sincere and moving memorial to the emperor. There was only one purpose in the sincere and moving memorial he wrote and that was to stir the emperor's emotions about the common people of the Jiangnan region and ask him to send Official Yu to Jiangnan. He wanted Official Yu to give guidance to the people in charge of the experimental fields in Jinling.

The emperor was worried when he received the memorial. He would've readily approved the memorial if the old official asked for any other official to be sent to Jiangnan. But the crucial point was that Yu Xiaocao was only on the fifth day of her honeymoon. Her seven-day honeymoon was not yet over, so it wasn't proper for her to intrude and send her on a business trip in the middle of it!

However, if he didn't keep this under control and give an official reply to the old official, he was afraid that they would miss the optimal farming period. He was a wise emperor that paid close attention to the farming development of his country and placed great importance on the people of his country. He was still frowning when he returned to the imperial harem from the imperial study. The empress couldn't help but ask about his concerns, and Zhu Junfan poured out his worries and misgivings.

The empress pondered for a moment and then gave him a suggestion, "The emperor can summon Miss Yu to the imperial palace and ask her for her opinion. Wouldn't that solve everything?"

In her eyes, Yu Xiaocao was not only a woman with outstanding abilities, courage, and insight, but she was also a woman who knew how to prioritize the overall situation over personal affairs. Ever since the time she courageously entered the dangerous northern region alone to save the horse farm, it was sufficient enough to display her courage and bravery. It was cruel to force the young couple to part early in their honeymoon since they were barely able to enjoy their time together. But...what if she was willing to leave?

On the sixth day of her honeymoon, Yu Xiaocao was summoned to the imperial palace. On her way to the empress's Kunning Palace, she ran into His Imperial Highness, the crown prince, who was heading to the imperial study.

"Official Yu, you don't need to act too polite..." Zhu Hanwen paused for a moment, but he still couldn't help but ask, "I heard that the day before yesterday, a party to start a new store was hosted at Imperial Prince Xu's Estate. It was lively and very successful. A few of my study companions from the imperial study were fortunate enough to be invited to the party. They even asked me to taste some of the cookies they personally made when they returned..."

The crown prince's expression was filled with grievances and regret. His expression seemed to be asking her, "Why didn't you invite me?"

'Can you stop staring at this official with such a cute expression on your face? It makes this official feel immensely guilty.' Yu Xiaocao was sweating buckets internally! 'Your Highness, your status as the crown prince is too precious, so I dare not to invite you. If something happened to you while you're traveling incognito, then wouldn't this official lose my head?'

“Then...if the crown prince wishes to have some cookies, then this official will bring a variety of flavors of cookies for you to choose from next time. The emperor has summoned me because he has an urgent matter he wants to discuss with me, so this official will be leaving first...” Chief Steward Su Chi watched as Official Yu sprinted towards Kunming Palace like her bottom was set on fire. He found the scene to be quite humorous. He held back his smile before he excused himself from the crown prince and also left.

Zhu Hanwen was stunned for a moment—Although Official Yu's legs were short, it seemed like she was quite a fast runner. Was he someone dangerous? Why would people avoid him in fear? 'Official Yu, my good cousin-in-law, it's not the cookies that I want. I also want to experience the joy in making cookies and be able to relax my body and mind!'

'A Buddhist monk can run, but in the end, he won't be able to run away from the temple! Isn't your shop, “Creative Pastries” having a grand opening soon? I don't believe that I won't be able to find an opportunity to go there and experience it myself! “Xiao Dezi, let's go. Let's go to the imperial study!!” He needed to ask his study companions about the date the pastry shop will be open and obtain some first-hand information. This way, he will be prepared once the time comes!

Yu Xiaocao had successfully fled from the Crown Prince. She wiped the sweat from her forehead and slowed down. When she turned around, she realized that she was standing opposite of Imperial Princess Yi. Yu Xiaocao hurriedly bowed at one of the imperial princes and princesses again.

“We're all a family, so Auntie Yu doesn't need to act overly courteous.” Imperial Princess Yi was twelve years old and was born with a slender and elegant build. She had inherited the imperial household's beautiful appearance with red lips and white teeth, big eyes, and a tall nose. She looked as adorable as a doll.

“I don't dare have Imperial Princess Yi address me like that!” Yu Xiaocao could tell that Imperial Princess Yi had something she wanted to say, so she couldn't help but began to sweat internally again. Had they all planned ahead to obstruct her path, right? Fortunately, she headed out early today, otherwise, the emperor would've punished her for being late!

“Why can't I address you like that? Official Yu has married my uncle, and I still haven't congratulated you yet!” Consort Li had given birth to Imperial Princess Yi and she had inherited her mother's gentle temper.

“Thank you, Imperial Princess Yi. Imperial Princess Yi is very considerate!” However, Yu Xiaocao was complaining in her heart; she thought that the palace gate was located too far away from the Kunning Palace. She couldn't help but wish she could step into Kunning Palace with just one step right now.

She had merely hosted a party to teach people how to make pastries, so what were all the imperial princes and princesses all concerned about it? Sigh...the people living in ancient times were quite pitiful, especially the imperial princes and princesses that lived deep inside the palace. They had a limited source of entertainment. Xiaocao cried out tears of sympathy for them, but she also felt she was fortunate: Fortunately for her, she didn't transmigrate into the palace, otherwise...her small life would be tormented left and right.

“That...When Auntie Yu hosts another party to teach people how to handcraft something, can you also send an invitation card to me? Danyi wants to personally make a cake for my imperial father and consort mother...” Imperial Princess Yi blinked her beautiful big black eyes as she looked at Yu Xiaocao expectantly.

Yu Xiaocao wondered whether she should build a small handcrafted DIY cake workshop in the palace to satisfy the curiosity of the princes, princesses, and the imperial concubines. She didn't dare to freely send invitations to the imperial children living in the palace. Who would be responsible if something happened to them?

“Uh...if the emperor and Consort Li agree, then the door to the Xu Estate will always be open to you.” Yu Xiaocao didn't dare agree to disagree, so she played dumb and pushed all the responsibility onto Imperial Princess Yi's parents.

Chief Steward Su Chi had promised his teacher that he would take care of Miss Yu when she was in the palace. He stepped forward just in time to save Official Yu who was being thrown into a dilemma, “Official Yu, the emperor is still waiting for you in the Kunning Palace...”

Although Imperial Princess Yi didn't receive a satisfying answer from her, she knew that her imperial father had summoned Official Yu into the palace for official business. As such, she could only helplessly watch as Official Yu left!

“Princess, you don't need to be sad. Didn't Princess Consort Xu tell you? You can just ask the emperor for permission to go to the Xu Estate! I heard rumors that Princess Consort Xu enjoys personally making pastries. She should have equipment and ingredients ready at home, so if you want to experience the

process of making cakes, it's not impossible ah!" The young palace maidservant gently comforted her master softly.

"But...it's so boring if I learn how to make pastries alone. It's more fun to do it with everyone else!" Imperial Princess Yi had learned from Consort Li's niece about the party Princess Consort Xu hosted. It received many praises from all the noble ladies in the capital a few days ago. It was a pity she was one of the imperial children, so she couldn't leave the palace at will. As a result, she missed this fun and creative party.

Yu Xiaocao finally let out a sigh of relief when she stepped into the doorstep of the Kunning Palace. She was really afraid that her path would be blocked by another imperial prince or princess again.

When the empress saw her arrive empty-handed, the empress jokingly said, "The delicious fragrance from the Imperial Prince Xu's Estate spread throughout the entire imperial city a few days ago. Why didn't you bring some pastries for me when you came to the imperial palace today?"

"Uh..." Yu Xiaocao choked on the empress's words. She pretended to be serious and righteous as she said, "This official was afraid that if anything goes wrong with the food this official brings into the imperial palace, then it would be used against me..."

"Alright ah! Your response is too fake. It's not like you haven't brought food into the imperial palace before. If I can't even trust you, then who would I trust?" Zhu Junfan said after she took a seat. He hinted at her to do as she wished.

Yu Xiaocao laughed mischievously and said, "This official is terrified of losing your favor..."

"That's enough! Stop with these empty words!" Zhu Junfan pointed at the cakes that were placed next to Xiaocao and said, "Have a taste of the craftsmanship of the new imperial chef from the palace. These are authentic pastries and snacks from the capital."

"Your Majesty, thank you for the reward——" Yu Xiaocao respectfully responded. Then, she picked up a piece of Glutinous Rice Rolls with Sweet Bean Flour and ate it with gusto. Hmm...it tasted pretty good! Huh? There seemed to be a strange taste inside the bean paste. If she hadn't been baptized by the mystic-stone water, then her five senses wouldn't have been this sensitive and she wouldn't have

detected the abnormality! She suddenly felt a burst of sharp pain from her stomach—damn it! It couldn't be! If the emperor wanted her to die, then he didn't even need to use poison ah!!

“What happened? What's this?” When the empress saw the expression on her face change into a painful one, how her lips turned purple instantly, and how she was holding her belly, she panicked and shouted, “Quickly summon an imperial physician!!”

“Who! Who actually managed to conceal themselves so deeply in the imperial palace?!” Zhu Junfan slammed the table in anger. Everyone in the imperial court was aware that he had summoned the Clerk of the Capital for Grain into the palace today. Yu Xiaocao's current identity was not as simple as a mere fourth-rank official, but she was also Imperial Prince Xu's wife. If something happened to her in the palace, Imperial Prince Xu might do something impulsive due to anger!! The person who poisoned Xiaocao wanted him to lose loyal officials and have those loyal officials turn against him. This would cause the entire country to become unstable! That person wanted to kill three birds with one stone with such a ruthless and extreme method!

“Uh...does that mean that the emperor didn't order the cake to be poisoned?” Yu Xiaocao became much calmer after she saw the emperor's and the empress's reaction.

“Are you doubting me? Do you have feces clogging your brain? You and Junyang are my right and left arms. How brainless do I have to be to cut off my own arms?” Zhu Junfan was so angry that he collapsed back onto his chair. He wished he could pry open her brain and check to see whether or not her brain was empty!

The empress walked forward and personally supported Xiaocao, who had slipped off the chair and onto the ground. Along with the palace maidservant, the two supported Xiaocao onto a soft couch. When the empress heard the emperor's words, she glanced at the emperor. For the emperor to be anxious to the point where he would start to curse, that just showed how much he valued Official Yu.

“Uh...since this was not...the emperor's intentions, then this official...will take the antidote...!” It was very, very painful! Her stomach was experiencing the same pain she felt when she needed to have surgery on her appendix when she was a child in her previous life. It was painful enough to cause her to die!

Fields of Gold Chapter 688

Yu Xiaocao clutched her stomach as she took out a jade bottle from her embroidered pouch. Then, she poured out two sparkling and translucent jade white pills and stuffed them into her mouth like she was eating jelly beans. She chewed the pills a few times before swallowing it.

“You...are you stupid?! If you have the antidote, why didn't you take it right away? Are you waiting until you see the King of Hell before taking the antidote?” Zhu Junfan was angered to the point where he started laughing. Just what kind of person was she?!

Yu Xiaocao smiled weakly at him and said, “Your Imperial Majesty, can you scold me later? Can you give me a cup of boiled water?”

When the empress heard her request, she immediately ordered her most trusted personal maidservant to fetch a pot of boiled water from the small kitchen located in the Kunning Palace. She was still afraid that something was wrong, so she used her treasured parrot to test whether the water was poisonous or not. Parrot: '...is the life of a bird, not a life as well? I'm getting implicated in this when I just happen to be present here!'

The empress personally helped Xiaocao up, then she took the cup of boiled water from her trusted maidservant to feed Xiaocao. Xiaocao expressed her nervousness as she endured the pain from her stomach— if she drank directly from the cup, how could she let the little divine stop release spiritual power into the boiled water?!

After she drank a cup of water that was filled with lots of mystic stone water, Yu Xiaocao felt as if her small life had been saved. Sigh! Why did this happen to her? Why would the traitors attack her when she was merely an innocent bystander? If they wanted to rebel or something, then they should just kill the emperor and the empress. Ahem...Amitabha, it wasn't that she had a vicious heart— it was because...it was because the poison had penetrated her brain and took control of her thoughts. That must be it!

The person who had planned this conspiracy had actually planned on killing the emperor, the empress, and her altogether. However, when Xiaocao entered the palace today, she didn't bring pastries like she usually did. The emperor and the empress hadn't touched the pastries on the table before Xiaocao arrived.

If Xiaocao brought pastries into the palace like she usually did, and if the emperor and the empress accompanied her to eat the poisonous pastries that Xiaocao had made by herself, then it would be a mystery as to what had caused the poison.

If an ordinary person had taken the poison, then the effects of the poison would've started to act up an hour after consumption. However, Xiaocao's body was different from ordinary people; her body was very sensitive to poison. She had a clean physique, so whenever she consumed poison, the effects of the poison would immediately take effect. This was the reason why she started to have stomach pain instantly after eating two pieces of pastries.

If everything had gone according to the traitor's scheme, then approximately one hour after Xiaocao left the palace, the emperor and empress would suddenly be poisoned. Although Xiaocao would also be poisoned, she had a panacea that could detoxify all kinds of poison. Nothing would happen to her after she takes the antidote. However, the same couldn't be said for the emperor and the empress...

When the time came, the traitor was just going to frame Imperial Prince Xu for poisoning the emperor and empress as an act of rebellion. Zhu Junyang definitely wouldn't idly stand by after being accused and would certainly resist. Then, the capital will be thrown into chaos and the traitors would take advantage of the chaos...my god! It was such a ruthless plan!

It was a pity that Xiaocao acted out of their expectations. Not only did she not bring pastries, but the effects of the poison also displayed itself in advance. She had unintentionally exposed their scheme. Otherwise, why would people say that transmigrators were the favorite children of the heavens?! Ahem, these children didn't know anything; they were only innocently stir-frying chicken!

When the imperial physician arrived, Yu Xiaocao had already recovered. She was inspecting the pastries on the plate. Although she didn't have much knowledge about poisons, the little divine stone was able to analyze the contents of the pastry in detail, including the effects of the poison as well as its toxicity.

The imperial physicians were tormented left and right when they arrived. Many of the imperial physicians were old and had white beards. They were impressed when they heard Xiaocao's detailed analysis of the poison. She was still in her teens, yet she had such a profound knowledge of medicine and medical expertise. It was no wonder the medicine manufactured by her shop was far superior in effect compared to the medicine manufactured by other shops!

In the beginning, the group of old imperial physicians was discussing and analyzing the poison in the pastry. However, it soon became a discussion where the old imperial physicians were asking the Clerk of the Capital for Grain for medicine and medical advice.

On the other end, the emperor had arrested all the servants who had contact or who possibly had contact with the poisoned pastries. The key suspect was the newly appointed imperial chef, who was now imprisoned.

The imperial chef: 'I'm being wrongly accused! Isn't it simply a suicide mission if I poisoned the pastries that I personally made?! I'm not that stupid! Who did it? Who caused me to be wrongly accused? That culprit better not let me catch him, otherwise...I will stuff the entire plate of poisonous pastries into that man's stomach!!'

All the people who were working in the imperial kitchen that had contact with the ingredients as well as the people who took part in making the pastries, as well as the imperial chef who had left his post when the pastries were made, were all locked up. Even the palace maidservant who had brought the food from the imperial kitchen, as well the eunuchs and the maidservants who the palace maidservant had met on her way to serving the pastries, were all locked up. He would rather kill someone who was innocent rather than accidentally letting the culprit roam free! This just showed that the emperor had attached great importance to this matter!

Su Ran, who had recovered his health and was semi-retired, was also invited over. To be more precise, he actually took the initiative to head over to take care and interrogate the suspects after he heard that Xiaocao was poisoned in the imperial palace. The palace maidservants working in the imperial kitchen and the palace eunuch all turned pale and began to tremble like a quail when they saw Su Ran, the living King of Hell. Even if they haven't seen Head Steward Su Ran's methods of interrogation, they had at least heard of it from the rumors. The word 'extremely brutal' wasn't even enough to describe it!

Su Ran actually didn't need to use any method of torture to get information from them. The workers working in the imperial kitchen, the palace maidservants, and the palace eunuch that were involved in the incident spilled out all the information like they were pouring beans. They clearly explained in detail, everything they knew, including every sneeze or cough. They feared that those terrifying punishments would be used on them.

"How is it going? Are there any clues?" It was in the evening now and the emperor was sitting with a gloomy expression on his face. He drummed his fingers rhythmically on the table.

Su Ran's beautiful eyebrows were wrinkled into a tight knot as he faintly shook his head, and said, "This official suspects that this incident was a carefully thought out plan that was designed in advance. Otherwise, it would be impossible for it to be so flawless."

“What? Even you couldn't see a flaw in the scheme?” The emperor's complexion turned even uglier. Although Xiaocao had recovered, she was still poisoned in the palace. She had suffered and he needed to give her an explanation!

“This official believes that this incident should be related to the surviving members of the previous dynasty that are hiding in the imperial palace! In the past, there were thirteen spies who infiltrated the palace along with me. Over the years, we managed to only get rid of ten. There are at least three other spies hidden deep within the palace...” Since the spies hadn't made any movements over the years, Su Ran believed that the spies either chose to betray their original master or to hide themselves carefully until an opportunity arises. Could it be...this incident was the opportunity that they were waiting for?

“Use the ten great tortures on them. I don't believe that they won't confess the truth!!” Zhu Junfan was very anxious; he no longer cared about this title as the 'wise emperor' anymore! If he continued to tolerate this, then shouldn't he be embarrassed to call himself the emperor?

The anxiousness displayed on Su Ran's face did not disappear, “If they really are spies from the previous dynasty, then even if we slice off their flesh one piece at a time, we still would never get the information we need from them. Unless...”

“Unless what?” Zhu Junfan asked quickly.

Su Ran narrowed his eyes as he stared at Xiaocao who was resting on her cheeks and said, “Unless we have the legendary medicine that will allow a person to relax their mind and tell us all his secrets...”

“Is there such a medicine? Can you actually believe something that only exists in the legend?” Zhu Junfan secretly thought that the legendary medicine probably wasn't as effective as hypnotism! But the crucial point was where would he find a hypnotist?

“If we don't give it a try, then how would we know? Isn't Official Yu's existence a legend as well?” Su Ran looked at Xiaocao, whose head was nodding off while she was pouting in her sleep.

The corners of Zhu Junfan's mouth twitched. He wondered if Xiaocao had heard this, would she think of the outdated celebrity saying, 'please don't crush on me anymore, for I, your fairy sister, is just a legend'?

“What?” Xiaocao rubbed her eyes and looked outside. She saw that the sky was already getting dark, so she asked, “Ah? It's already dark now, will we be having dinner soon?”

“Little girl, why are you acting so carefree?” The person who poisoned you hasn't been found yet, and you still have the heart to eat dinner?” Zhu Junfan was both amused and angry!

“A person can't function properly on an empty stomach. I will lose my cool if I don't eat! This official hasn't eaten anything else from this morning until now besides the poisonous pastry! Had I known that I wouldn't be served lunch in the palace, then I would've eaten the entire plate of poisonous pastries. After all, the poison won't kill me, but I will definitely starve to death!” Yu Xiaocao rubbed her stomach which was growling in protest. She felt that today was quite an unfortunate day for her!

“Listen to her! She's only saying that because she has the antidote to the poison! The remaining poisoned pastries are evidence, so even if you want to eat them, you're not allowed to! Enough, I'll order the imperial kitchen to prepare a few simple dishes for you. It is as you said, people work better when they're full!” Zhu Junfan squeezed the bridge of his nose and stood up in an exhausted manner.

Yu Xiaocao stroked her embroidered pouch. It was a pity that she didn't bring any small snacks for herself when she entered the imperial palace today. Otherwise, she could've eaten those to sate her hunger for now. Upon hearing the emperor's word, she asked, “Your Imperial Majesty, aren't you afraid that the spy will try to make another attempt since we haven't caught him?”

“Do you think everyone else is as stupid as you? Since their attempt on your life was unsuccessful, do you think they'll try to commit another crime instead of hiding themselves? Besides, even if the spy is braindead and tries to poison my food, don't I still have you? I assume you don't only have one antidote pill in your jade bottle, right? I also want to taste what the poison tastes like!” Zhu Junfan unhappily replied.

Yu Xiaocao smacked her lips, shook her head, and said, “I'm afraid that I'll have to disappoint Your Majesty! The more complex the poison is, the more colorless and odorless it is. Think about it, only a fool will eat a pastry if it's exuding a strong scent unless they're looking to die!”

“Aren't you the fool? Weren't you the one who said earlier that you wanted to eat the poisonous pastries to fill your stomach?” Zhu Junfan glared at her.

Yu Xiaocao was not convinced, "I'm bold and daring because I'm confident in my skills. I'm confident in my antidote pill's effectiveness."

"Alright, that's enough! Don't be too smug, otherwise, you will fail a simple task due to overconfidence, causing you to lose your life!!" Zhu Junfan waved his hand in front of her with an impatient expression on his face.

Su Ran was long accustomed to the way the emperor and Official Yu interacted with each other. However, his successor, Su Chi, looked as if he had seen a ghost: this just goes to show how much the emperor favors Official Yu. Even when the emperor talked with the empress, he had never been as relaxed as he is right now. Official Yu was also courageous. The emperor merely said a word, but she had ten words ready to counter the emperor!

"Close your mouth quickly and look at the way you're acting. Even if you're not my proud successor, the most basic requirement for a servant is the ability to conceal your happiness and anger! At times like this, you should treat yourself like a piece of wood. You're unable to see or hear anything...do you understand?" Su Ran instructed his successor. Su Chi nodded his head firmly and lowered his eyes, pretending to act like he was a man that was made from wood.

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The little eunuch outside came over carefully and whispered a few words in the head steward's ear. Su Chi glanced at his teacher, and Su Ran stared at him and said, "What are you looking at me for, do I still have to teach you?"

"Your Imperial Majesty, Imperial Prince Xu is outside the palace doors, requesting to see you!" Su Chi stepped forward, closing the gap, and reported the news brought to him by the little eunuch to the emperor.

"Oh, he's coming to us to find his person!" What should've come had come, but Zhu Junfan's heart was relaxed. He wondered if that guy would flip the Kunning Palace after finding out that his wife had been poisoned in the palace. Hopefully, he would give them some face after seeing that Xiaocao was still alive and kicking, and not make too embarrassing of a scene!

"Allowed!" Zhu Junfan gave Xiaocao a look. If Imperial Prince Xu, that boy, got angry, only this lass would be able to put out his fire!"

Yu Xiaocao was puzzled, 'Your Imperial Majesty, my man is coming. What do you mean by giving me looks?'

"This subject greets the emperor!" Zhu Junyang's steps were rushed and hurried. He had been waiting outside the palace for a long time and didn't see his little wife leave the palace, so he felt something was wrong. After entering the palace, he used his abilities to find out from Kunning Palace's maidservants and eunuchs that his wife had been poisoned. He was so anxious, he almost 'flew' in.

Upon entering Kunning Palace, he looked for his wife. He saw her rosy cheeks and that she was sitting safe and sound in the warmed partition in the east side of the room. Only then did his anxious heart finally calm down.

"Husband...hubby...my lord!" Yu Xiaocao's address for her man changes three times in a row. The first address wasn't appropriate for the moment. The second address was too embarrassing, so she finally settled on the third address. When she read transmigration novels in the past, the female leads always addressed the male leads, who had high ranks or were princes, like that. She thought it was pretty interesting at the time.

As soon as the emperor's 'you may rise' came out, he saw Zhu Junyang taking long strides towards Xiaocao's side in two or three steps. The prince took her hand and looked at her romantically for a while before asking, "Is the poison gone?" This guy, how did he find out his wife was poisoned? Did he have eyes and ears in the palace?

Yu Xiaocao didn't answer the question and exclaimed in happy surprise, "Oh right! Your Imperial Majesty, I have an idea! My lord is the best at judging those tight-lipped tough guys. Let him help, maybe we'll have a breakthrough with the case!"

"Oh? You have so much faith in your man!" Zhu Junfan didn't have much hope. Even Su Ran didn't have any ideas. Could his cousin open someone's head and pick at their brains?

Yu Xiaocao had a completely confident expression on her face as she proudly said, "Of course! He's my husband, if I don't believe in him, who would I believe in?"

Zhu Junyang saw that she still had the energy to argue with the emperor and the rest of his unease was resolved. Hearing what Xiaocao just said, he frowned and said, "What? You still haven't found the

poisoner? They've hidden pretty deep! Your Imperial Majesty, this subject is willing to assist with the investigation!”

“Your Imperial Majesty, the evening meal is ready!” Su Chi's voice rang out once again.

Zhu Junfan waved at his cousin and cousin-in-law, “Junyang hasn't eaten yet right? Eat some to fill your stomach first before talking about this case! Earlier your wife said people can't function on an empty stomach. Skipping a meal will cause extreme hunger! The emperor doesn't send out hungry soldiers, come! Eat with us!”

The dinner was arranged in the Flower Hall in the warmed area of the western side of the room. Zhu Junyang wasn't an outsider so the emperor didn't pay attention to the formalities. When dining, not just the empress was present, even the Imperial Prince Zhu Hanwen was called over. After all, he was regarded as the successor to the country, being cultivated for so many years, and he would've been an easy target for the traitors.

Nearly half the chefs and workers in the Imperial Kitchen were arrested. Everyone was panicking, so only the Head Chef of the Imperial Kitchen was calm enough to make a table full of presentable food for dinner.

The dinner couldn't be counted as extravagant as there were only eight dishes and one soup. Compared to the luxurious palace banquets in TV shows, it was simple. There was Eight Treasures Soup, braised shark fin, braised deer tendon, imperial court lucky meatballs, steamed chicken, shredded chicken with vegetables, sliced sea cucumbers, fresh shrimp balls, and stir-fried water bamboo.

Su Chi stood at one side with a silver needle, testing each of the dishes one by one. The dishes were only brought before the masters when the needle didn't change colors. Xiaocao was already waiting with her chopsticks.

However, Zhu Junyang held down his wife's impatient hands and picked up a piece of deer tendon, took a bite, and chewed it carefully. After waiting a moment with no reaction, he put it into Xiaocao's bowl.

Xiaocao ate the warm deer tendon, blinked, and said, “Those pastries from this morning had slow-acting poison! My constitution is special and my tongue is sensitive to drugs so I could quickly detect it. Before

the poison took its course I was able to take an antidote.” This meant that their method would only work on fast-acting poisons and not on slow-acting poisons.

Zhu Junfan reacted to this by saying, “Beloved subject, was your pain this morning just an act to test me?”

“No! How could I dare try to fool the emperor? Alright ah, it wasn't all pretending. It was only half true and half faked. Your Majesty, I was really poisoned!” Yu Xiaocao ate the shrimp ball her man had picked for her, blinking her big eyes, pretending to be innocent.

The empress followed up with, “Emperor, the imperial doctors have confirmed that the pastries did contain deadly poison. Official Yu wasn't trying to deceive you!”

“Yes, Yes! It's just that my body reacts more quickly to poison so we could see through the enemy's insidious tricks in time—your majesty, how about this subject helps you try these dishes to see if they are safe?” Yu Xiaocao was dissatisfied with the speed that her man was using to pick up food and her stomach was gurgling in revolt. She thought of a reasonable excuse to eat the imperial food that had a variety of flavors and colors first.

The head chef, who was standing off to the side with his head down and trying to minimize his presence, was also trembling inside. Although he cooked these dishes by himself and none of them had been touched by anyone else, the pastry this morning had poison in it despite having no accidents in any part of the process. The new cook had nowhere to reason to!

Zhu Junyang disagreed, “This morning, the poison had already entered your body. If you were to get poisoned again, what if your body broke down?”

“I've already taken the antidote and will be immune to any poison for 24 hours!” Yu Xiaocao said with certainty, exaggerating a bit, “For the sake of the safety of the rulers of the country and the future crown prince, as an official, I should take the lead and lay down my life for them...”

“Shut up!” Zhu Junyang didn't care what she said and confiscated her chopsticks, in case she decided to 'lay down her life' for them. Then he would be left all alone in this world, what would he do then? Thinking back now, he still was a little scared. If Xiaocao didn't have a habit of carrying antidote pills

around with her and if the poison was a little stronger, he would probably be looking at a cold corpse of the lass right now. At the thought of this, the dark demon in his mind started to move.

“Alright, alright! I'll shut up, is that better? Don't get so worked up, calm down, calm down!” Zhu Junyang's emotional changes were clearly sensed by Xiaocao who was sitting beside him. She was afraid that if he lost his temper then he would flip the empress's Kunning Palace so she quickly pacified him.

Zhu Junyang threw away the chopsticks in his hands and hugged her tightly in his arms. He felt the warmth of her body and smelled the fragrance coming from her hair. The panic he felt calmed down a little, “As long as you're well, then I will be well!”

“Ok, ok, ok! Both of us will be well, living until we are a hundred with a group of children and grandchildren!” Yu Xiaocao's small hands smoothly slipped from his waist to his back, gently patting him, and softly soothed him.

Zhu Hanwen had naturally never seen such an intimate action before and his face turned red with embarrassment. The empress, too, sheepishly looked away and pretended to tidy up the dishes.

Zhu Junfan coughed in a very obvious manner and said, “You guys should be careful not to show off your love all over ok? Eat, eat, the food is becoming cold!”

Next, Zhu Junyang continued doing things his way, picking some food, taking a bite, and leaving what was left for his wife to eat. At the end of the dinner, Xiaochao felt she was only half full. She drank a sip of tea and weakly asked, “Where's the dessert?”

The head chef who led the eunuchs to clear the table thought, 'Princess Consort Xu is pretty brave. She just had a scare this morning with the pastries, but now she still dares to ask for dessert.'

He bowed and said, “Your Highness, there are only two imperial pastry chefs in the imperial kitchen. One of them is on vacation, and the other is...” This meant she shouldn't be thinking about dessert.

"Then... cut a platter of fruit and bring it here! Strawberries, cherries, muskmelon.... these fruits, bring whichever ones you like!" Due to the greenhouses, these fruits were available on the estate in the suburbs of the capital and should be placed on the market.

The head chef glanced at the emperor. Upon seeing him nod his head, he said, "Yes, I will go wash some of them by hand right now."

Zhu Junfan then continued on the topic before dinner, "Junyang, see, Su Ran still hasn't come back. There is no progress in the investigation. Since your wife thinks highly of you, how about... you go over and take a look? "

Zhu Junyang had long wanted to find out the guy who wanted to harm his wife. He was naturally duty-bound. He wasn't gone for long. Before Xiaocao could even finish eating her plate of fruit, they already had an answer.

It turned out that on the way from the imperial kitchen, the palace maid who was serving the meal had met a fellow villager, an ordinary eunuch who was not astonishing in appearance. She was stopped to say a few words. As they spoke, the food box was placed on the railing under the porch, and that was when something went wrong.

This little eunuch was someone who was moved by money. He accepted the money of a fellow eunuch who had regular contact with him. They wanted him to stop his fellow villager maidservant who was in charge of passing the food along and say he wanted to marry her. The maidservant got mad and scolded him before picking up the food box to take it back to Kunning Palace.

After extracting this information from the fellow villager eunuch, Zhu Junyang caught the eunuch who had paid the money. When they caught him, the eunuch saw that the matter was revealed, and he bit through the poisonous pill in his mouth and wanted to commit suicide. Zhu Junyang forced down an antidote pill into the eunuch and saved him.

Zhu Junyang used his mind-reading ability and assaulted the eunuch's mind. He found the person behind his actions, who was a spy who entered the palace at the same time as Su Ran. He was an old eunuch who had been guarding the cold palace for more than 20 years.

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This guy was hidden pretty deep. Ordinarily, the old eunuch was eccentric and seldom had contact with others. The cold palace was also seen as an ominous place, so many of the palace maidservants and eunuchs took detours to avoid it which made it easier for him to do things.

After finding out what was happening behind the scenes, Zhu Junyang summoned his ability again and found two secret accomplices from the memory of the old eunuch. After confirming that the old eunuch and his accomplice had no more information to offer, he took the two culprits who poisoned his wife and began torturing them. He pulled out their nails one by one, and then their arms and legs were torn off from their joints. They resembled dolls destroyed by a naughty boy.

When Zhu Junyang came out covered in blood, Su Ran's hidden imperial guards went into the torture chamber to take care of the rest and immediately vomited. The scene inside was no different from that of a slaughterhouse. The two prisoners only had their heads attached to their bodies and they were still lying in the pool of blood, wailing. Most people would have nightmares after seeing such a scene.

"It's over?" Yu Xiaocao saw her man come out in white clothing. The clothing was a bit short and tighter on the shoulders. It was obvious that he borrowed clothes from Sir Su. After he came forward, a faint smell of blood came to her nose. She took Zhu Junyang's hands and asked affirmingly.

Zhu Junyang touched her small head. His grim face melted like snow and ice and his eyes became gentle, "It's all over. We can go home soon!"

Zhu Junfan looked at the list Su Ran handed over and nodded at his beloved subject. Su Ran left Kunming Palace and waved. Several hidden guards appeared. He said a few words, and the hidden guards scattered and left.

"I don't know what these remaining evils of the previous dynasty are thinking. Now that the country is peaceful and the citizens are at peace, the situation is all good, but they are still thinking about the restoration of a lost country. Is it not good to live in peace and contentment? What are they doing?" Zhu Junfan drank a sip of cold tea and waved a hand at the maidservant to give him another cup with an expression of weariness.

Yu Xiaocao gave an inappropriate yawn and said blearily, "It's all caused by power. The change in a dynasty is driven by the change in times. However, the remaining survivors of the previous dynasty don't think this way. They feel that they have been robbed of their throne and their country. They want to steal it back..."

"Ahem!" Zhu Junyang interrupted his wife's words and softly said, "Are you tired? Come back with me to rest?"

"Oh ok!" Yu Xiaocao nodded her head and rubbed her sleepy eyes. She was helped up by her man who had already gotten up to leave. She took a few steps toward the doors of the palace before thinking of something. She stopped and asked, "Your Imperial Majesty, why did you ask me to come to the palace today? I was interrupted by the poisoning case and almost forgot!"

The emperor looked at his cousin and concisely said, "Official Wu, who is in charge of the experimental rice fields in Jinling, attaches great importance to this crop of experimental rice. He would like to invite you to go over and give some pointers."

Yu Xiaocao hadn't opened her mouth before Zhu Junyang took over and said, "Your Majesty, this subject's wedding leave hasn't ended yet, we are still in the newlywed phase..."

"Junyang ah! Both of you are my most trustworthy subjects. The more capable someone is, the heavier their burdens. Therefore, you should put the affairs of the country first. You have to have the mind of someone willing to sacrifice their family to save everyone, serving the people wholeheartedly with the dedication to the public and your jobs...." Zhu Junfan said all these great principles, which made it difficult to refuse, "However...you still have two days of your wedding leave... We are not unreasonable either. Let's wait till after your wedding leave to travel out of the capital!"

Zhu Junyang ground his teeth. After two days, he would have only been married for seven days. After being a virgin for twenty years, he hadn't even had his fill of holding his soft and delicate wife yet. Now he was to be forced apart from her like the cowherd and the weaver girl. It would be strange if he was willing!

His little wife had no conscience. Her eyes were shining and her face was full of eagerness. Over the past ten years after her transmigration, she had experienced the difficulty of ancient rural life, the sweetness of having a golden finger business, the prosperity of the capital, and the magnificence of Northern Territory scenery...

After living two lives, she had never experienced the pleasant scenery of Jiangnan before! Small bridges, flowing water with homes, a misty rainy Jiangnan, these words were derived from books or the mouths of other people, but they were only descriptions in the end.

If it wasn't because the time wasn't right, she definitely would have happily left for Jiangnan. Eh...seeing her man's unhappy face, she felt that she shouldn't reveal her thoughts to avoid his narrow-minded revenge at night!

Although Zhu Junyang was completely unwilling, he could not violate imperial orders as an official. He made the final struggle, "Your Imperial Majesty, my wife has been badly poisoned and should be observed for several days to avoid having a relapse..."

"Junyang, do you doubt your wife's pharmaceutical skills?" Zhu Junfan dug a hole for his cousin.

Yu Xiaocao immediately expressed that she was in good health and that the poison had been completely cured! Imperial Prince Xu expressed frustration with this pig of a teammate—'Wife, just who are you siding with?'

"Junyang ah! We can understand your mood, but the farming season doesn't wait for anyone, so... It is better for the Clerk of the Capital for Grain to leave early." Zhu Junfan had an apologetic expression, but his attitude was firm and unquestionable.

Zhu Junyang returned home unhappily. After a healthy release, he hugged his wife and said, "Honey, if you leave, what should I do? I don't want you to leave..."

Yu Xiaocao snuggled in his arms and reluctantly said, "I don't want to leave you either...if you could ask for leave, we could go to Jiangnan together like we were on a honeymoon trip."

"Go to Jiangnan together?" Zhu Junyang thought about this phrase, and suddenly a charming smile appeared in the corner of his mouth, "Yes! Why didn't I think of it? Hahaha..."

"What? What did you think of?" Yu Xiaocao asked puzzled. She was a little curious. She supported her head with her arm and looked at her man who was laughing happily.

"The emperor made you an imperial envoy to Jiangnan. Just think, you're a young lady and Official Wu is an old man over fifty years old. Isn't your safety very important as well? We must send someone to protect you! I will go to the palace tomorrow and ask for this job! When the time comes, won't we be going together?" Zhu Junyang was so elated that he almost went into the palace to ask for orders that night.

When Yu Xiaocao heard this, her pear-like mouth opened, and she planted a kiss on her man's lips. She praised, "Who is this man? How is he so smart? This is a good idea, the two of us go together for work, but it'll be a vacation that we can charge as a business expense....hahaha! However, will the emperor agree?"

Zhu Junyang looked at his little wife and gave her a deep kiss. He let go of his wife who was out of breath and confidently said, "Don't worry! Leave this matter to your man. If the emperor doesn't agree, I will stay in the palace and not leave."

The next day early in the morning, Imperial Prince Xu got up earlier than was needed for the morning court session. When Su Chi announced, "Imperial Prince Xu asks to see you", the emperor was still sleeping with the empress in his arms!

He finally had a day where there wasn't an early morning court session, so what was this Imperial Prince Xu thinking? The genius, it was dawn and he was coming to bother him. 'It had better be some important matter otherwise, we will teach him a lesson!' Zhu Junfan got up from bed angry, put on his usual clothing, hastily washed his face, and had someone lead the prince into the imperial study.

"You mean... you want to escort the imperial envoy to Jiangnan? After thinking an entire night, you finally came up with an idea to avoid separation from your wife? You really are promising!" Zhu Junfan resisted a yawn and threw the scroll in his hand at his cousin's head. Did his cousin come over so early in the morning, ruining his sleep, just for this matter?

Zhu Junyang let the scroll fall on him. He picked up the scroll that was on the ground and patted the dust off of it. He schooled his face and said, "Your Majesty, after the poisoning case against you and the Clerk of the Capital for Grain in the palace, it's enough to show that the remaining survivors of the previous dynasty have focused on the Clerk of the Capital for Grain. Furthermore, right at this time, you are sending her to Jiangnan. The road is full of dangers! She is your most useful subject and has great achievements! She is beneficial to the nation's economy and livelihood, so she can't have any accidents!"

"So?" Zhu Junfan listened to this and also started paying attention. However, the poisoning case's target seemed to be him, the empress, and the clerk of the capital for grain, and Imperial Prince Xu. He and the empress were in the inner palace, where it was safe. Imperial Prince Xu had excellent martial art skills and had few people who were able to be his opponent. Only Yu Xiaocao, who was a woman with not enough strength to bind a chicken, would leave opportunities for the opponent to attack when she left the capital for Jiangnan.

“See, Your Majesty! There are few people you can find in the capital that can match my skills, even in the entire Ming Dynasty. This subject and the great imperial envoy is husband and wife, which is even more convenient for all-day protection. What's more, this subject's wife, as you know, is a very active person. If she were to come up with an idea, how could others stop her? To sum this up, this subject thinks that I am the best choice to escort her!” Zhu Junyang had good reasons and a selfless appearance.

“Humph! Don't try to sound so dignified! You just don't want to be separated from your wife, right? If the great imperial envoy wasn't your wife, would you offer help so actively?” Zhu Junfan stared at him with a knowing look.

Zhu Junyang saw that the emperor agreed with his point of view and gave a sigh of relief inside. A little smile appeared on the corner of his mouth, and he said, “Your Majesty, don't you agree with me? Then give me an official order?”

“Humph! Don't think you are the only option available!” Zhu Junfan couldn't stand looking at his pleased expression. 'Interrupting our dreams so early in the morning, yet you want us to let you go so easily?'

Zhu Junfan's lips curled into a smirk, “Chief Steward Su seems to be quite free recently!” Su Ran left all the affairs of the palace into the hands of Su Chi, leaving only the position of the head of the hidden guards for himself. Normally he didn't have many things to handle. Su Ran's martial art skills were not any worse than Zhu Junyang's. Head Steward Su was also a eunuch, so there would be no suspicion that the woman would be unfaithful and he could still protect her closely...

“Your Majesty, you can't do this!” Zhu Junyang cried out. “Chief Steward Su is suitable in all aspects but you also forget that he is the target of the remaining survivors of the previous dynasty too. Wouldn't it be even more dangerous if he went?”