

## Folly 121

Chapter 121: The Difficult Liu Zian

The scholar stared at Mu Shuangshuang for a long time, with a look as if he wanted to say something but hesitated.

"Is there something on my face?" Mu Shuangshuang pointed to herself and asked.

"No, gentlemen do not eat food that comes as a gift, I..."

"Haha..." Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but burst out laughing.

These ancient scholars are really interesting—better to starve than to lose integrity.

But why does this sound awkward to her? When people are starving, what's the point of talking about virtue?

"What are you laughing at?" The scholar stiffened his neck, his face turning red, yet he still stared at Mu Shuangshuang intently.

"Nothing to laugh at. Didn't you say you don't eat food that comes as charity? The bowls at our house are still unwashed. Do you want to wash them for us? I'll pay you, and you can use that payment to get some of our bread. How about it?"

Mu Shuangshuang pointed her finger, and the unwashed bowls piled together appeared before the scholar's eyes.

"Why should I wash dishes for you?" The scholar frowned.

"Then why do you want to eat? Don't tell me, just because you're a scholar, you don't need to work? You think a scholar's feet never touch the ground? Seeing as you have hands and feet, have you never done any work?"

Doing no work with your limbs, not knowing the difference between grains, having no money, and unwilling to work, do you really think of yourself as an official?

Looks like when I go back, I have to train Xiao Han well, so he doesn't become a bookworm like this, always feeling superior just because he reads.

"You..." The scholar was poked in the sore spot by Mu Shuangshuang, and his expression turned serious instantly. "Who said I've never worked? I'll wash the dishes for you."

With that, the scholar squatted by the wooden basin and began washing the dishes for Shuangshuang. As soon as a bowl was lifted from the basin, it was in his hands for less than a second before it clattered and flew out.

Just as it was about to hit the ground, Lu Yuanfeng stretched out his foot and caught the bowl perfectly.

"Impressive, Lu Yuanfeng, you're so quick to react," Mu Shuangshuang marveled.

Just now, watching the bowl fly out, she was already prepared to pay for it, but Lu Yuanfeng ended up catching it. This guy, his skills are really outstanding. She was starting to believe again that this silly boy came from the military camp.

As for the expression on the scholar's face, it was even more embarrassed now. His surname is Liu, called Liu Zian, from Liu Family Village, sixteen years old, and his parents are farmers.

In recent years, the Liu family parents relied on farming, selling grain, raising pigs, and selling pigs to support Liu Zian's studies.

Fortunately, Liu Zian did them proud by topping the rank in the children's examination the first time, becoming a scholar, and is now a student at the county's school. With the Autumn Examination coming in August, he has no funds for his trip to Qianzhou Prefecture to take the exam.

Liu Zian couldn't bear to see his parents suffer for his exam travel expenses, so he took out books he no longer needed, hoping to sell them for a good price in town. But being shy, he didn't dare to shout and hesitated before approaching those he found pleasing to ask if they wanted the books.

The result was predictable; those he found pleasing did not want the books.

Liu Zian hurried out without bringing silver, and now, utterly hungry, he stopped in front of Mu Shuangshuang, but he didn't expect her mocking words to entirely stir up his fighting spirit.

Liu Zian lowered his head and continued washing dishes, this time being extra careful not to let the bowl fly out. But his dishwashing skills...

In his hands, a bowl didn't get cleaner; instead, it got dirtier.

"Shuangshuang, who is he?" Lu Yuanfeng placed the bowl into the wooden basin and walked over to Mu Shuangshuang to ask.

"A worker. Help me finish washing the dishes, and I'll pay him."

What Mu Shuangshuang said was light and casual, but Liu Zian froze.

Clearly, what Shuangshuang said was different from what he imagined.

He thought the little girl in front of him would mock him.

"Hmm, that's nice. Are you tired? It's so hot; should I buy you a bowl of mung bean porridge?" Lu Yuanfeng glanced at the still dirty bowls and then turned his head away.

"No need, I just drank water. If you want to eat, buy it yourself."

Taking advantage of the break in washing dishes, Liu Zian began observing Mu Shuangshuang. She was wearing a loose gray garment; the color was very dull, with no sense of beauty, and she was skinny, with only bones visible when she stretched out her hand.

Someone like that should be forgettable in a crowd, but she wasn't that way.

From the moment she stood there, people's eyes around were naturally drawn to her, always feeling like there's something different about her compared to others.

This girl is really peculiar!

Liu Zian finished washing a basin of dishes, and half an hour had passed. During that time, Mu Shuangshuang sold six more pieces of bread, leaving only four.

"All done." Liu Zian walked to Mu Shuangshuang and pointed to the stack of dishes on the ground.

"Hiring a laborer for a day costs six copper coins, and my bread is four copper coins each, paired with a bowl of soup, totaling five. Now you can choose to have a meal and take one copper coin with you, or take five copper coins and go eat noodles elsewhere." Shuangshuang nodded.

"I don't want the one copper coin. Give me a bread and two bowls of soup." Liu Zian swallowed hard, the feeling of hunger was really unbearable.

"Alright!"

Mu Shuangshuang cut the remaining four pieces of bread together, gave one to the scholar, one to herself, and two to Lu Yuanfeng.

Liu Zian ate quickly; in no time, a piece of bread was gone. After eating, he was still a bit unsatisfied, finding it surprising that something made by a village girl could be so delicious.

After Liu Zian was done eating, Mu Shuangshuang started getting to the point.

"Do you understand the laws of the present dynasty?"

Lu Yuanfeng's eyes had been on Mu Shuangshuang the whole time. He knew that Shuangshuang kept this helpless young man for a reason.

The one who eats feels indebted. Even if Liu Zian earned this meal with labor, he still felt he owes the girl in front of him.

"Yes, what are you asking for?"

"Then tell me, if I write on a piece of paper that you owe me ten thousand taels of silver and then take your hand to press a fingerprint, does that mean you owe me ten thousand taels?"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't understand ancient laws, but she knew in the modern world, something like this definitely wouldn't work.

The matter of Mrs. Jin making her father press a fingerprint worried her constantly.

"Of course not, a contract is not child's play. Without witnesses, how can a single person's words be taken as fact?"

"What if he was a witness?" Mu Shuangshuang pointed to Lu Yuanfeng, and Liu Zian instantly deflated.

"I... I don't know." It's not in the books.

Now she figured it out; that issue is indeed a hidden pitfall.

When she goes back, she must make her dad retrieve that paper with the fingerprint.

"By the way, do you have any books about the laws of the present dynasty?"

As the girl before him spoke increasingly oddly, Liu Zian looked at Mu Shuangshuang with suspicion.  
"What... exactly do you want to do?"

"Why should you care? Do you have it or not?"

"No..." Liu Zian replied honestly. "But I have it at home."

"Then it's definitely too late. How much were you planning to sell those books for before?"

#### Chapter 122 The Big House of the Blackhearted

Mu Shuangshuang asked Liu Zian for the reason for the books because she thought they might be useful in the future.

Whether it's to take them back to teach Xiao Han and Little Zhi to recognize characters or to find characters she needs in those books herself.

"I brought out ten books, ten wen each."

Liu Zian didn't take advantage of Mu Shuangshuang. He originally bought those books for more than ten wen each, some even for twenty.

"Five wen each, you've used them for so long, there's some wear and tear." Mu Shuangshuang bargained.

Liu Zian hesitated. Five wen per book meant he could only sell them for fifty wen, not a small amount, but definitely not much either.

"How about this, did you bring any brushes or xuan paper? If so, give me a brush and two sheets of xuan paper, and I'll give you eighty wen."

Eighty wen, equivalent to more than a month's wages for her mother, this scholar wasn't too much at a loss.

"Alright!"

The side room of the Old Mu Family.

Mrs. Jin changed her clothes, but she still hadn't recovered from the blow of falling into the latrine.

She used ten buckets of water to wash off the stinking stuff on her body.

Right now, in her mind, she kept seeing those filthy faces of the Old Mu Family, and the disgusting look in Mu Danian's eyes...

"Mom, I threw away those clothes of yours, they were too stinky..." Mu Dandan said as she walked in from outside, speaking to Mrs. Jin who was sitting on the kang.

"Mom, this grandma is really too much, obviously it's Fifth Uncle's fault, why talk about you? I don't like grandma one bit." Mu Dandan muttered with a pout and complained.

Mrs. Jin, at this point, didn't care about these matters; she felt she couldn't take it anymore. She didn't want to stay at the Old Mu Family one more day. She needed to leave soon, and the only way was for her husband to pass the exams.

"Dandan, quickly go get your dad and tell him I have something important to discuss with him."

"Okay!"

Those disgusting people, it's best if they never appear in front of her again. Mu Dade left the study room with a somewhat unnatural expression on his face.

In fact, his mother had also come by earlier, said a lot of things, all complaints, even accusing Mrs. Jin of deliberately seducing the men in the family, and warned that if not managed, the family would be in chaos.

"My mother just came by," Mu Dade said expressionlessly. "She asked you to be more restrained, not to make trouble every day."

Mrs. Jin's expression instantly became shocked, "You believe your mother's words? Dandan's father, do you find me repulsive? I..."

Large teardrops rolled out of Mrs. Jin's eyes, and Mrs. Jin was good-looking; she also looked beautiful while crying, which softened Mu Dade's heart.

"Yinyin, don't cry, I don't mean that. I know you've suffered in this household. Once dad gathers the fifty taels of silver, we'll live a good life!"

Most men like women who are pitiful and beautiful. When Mu Dade passed the scholar's examination, among the women who approached him for marriage, he only found Mrs. Jin attractive.

Moreover, Mrs. Jin's family was decent, which allowed this relationship to last for so many years.

"Da De, I feel so bitter inside. For years, I've treated mom as my own, but how does she treat me? She speaks ill of me behind my back, saying I eat without producing... Boohoo..."

"And then our dad, claiming it's for your benefit, but why is he unwilling to marry Shuangshuang off? If he did, we'd have money, and you could hire a teacher in the county."

Mrs. Jin resented Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu; eventually, these people would become obstacles to her good life, it'd be better to make her husband think ill of them now.

Mu Dade also knew about these things, but his father was stubborn; once something is decided, who can change it?

"Yinyin, I understand everything you say. The wealth and grandeur are so close, I don't want to give it up, but I have no other option." Mu Dade shook his head

helplessly.

"There is a way, you can ask mom. She's easily swayed, ask her if she wants to be the mother of an official, wants to be waited on, wants the villagers to

respect her."

Old Mrs. Mu was greedy and liked face; as long as you offered her enough benefits, she would definitely agree, and she never liked Shuangshuang. "Even if mom ultimately disagrees, I have a contract, Da De, take a look"

Mrs. Jin took out the contract she had hidden for a long time and handed it to

Mu Dade.

Mu Dade took a look and immediately understood Mrs. Jin's intention.

"Isn't this going too far?"

Mu Dade was actually worried that Mrs. Jin's plotting against the third branch might eventually be exposed by Old Third, making him lose face.

"Don't worry, Old Third is honest; he can't outtalk the two of us. Just go and plead with dad and mom; if they don't agree, use this."

When Mu Dade went to find Old Mrs. Mu, she happened to be heading out to dump slop water. A bucket of slop water poured outside nearly splashed onto

Mu Dade.

Mu Dade disdainfully lifted his foot, looked up, and saw the carelessly dressed

Old Mrs. Mu.

The weather was unbearably hot, so Old Mrs. Mu just wore a sweat-soaked shirt, the wet clothes clung to her body, emitting a unique odor.

"Oh, Da De, you're here. Hurry into mom's room and sit; mom will get you

something to eat. Your Uncle Yang came over this morning and brought two melons; he said they're really sweet."

"Mom, I won't go in. I just want to ask, have you prepared the travel expenses for me? The Autumn Examination is getting closer, and by then, even if you gather the silver, I won't have time to hire a teacher."

Old Mrs. Mu, upon hearing this, became anxious.

These days, Mr. Mu couldn't eat or sleep, constantly worrying about the fifty

taels of silver for his eldest son.

The Old Mu Family didn't have many wealthy relatives; rather a bunch worse

off than them.

Virtually no relatives they could borrow from.

"Oh, Da De, your dad is nearly going crazy; dad and mom really can't come up with such silver."

Mu Dade's face looked increasingly gloomy. "Then I won't take the exam, tell dad, I don't want to be laughed at again. For years, many have mocked me behind my back, saying our Old Mu Family can't raise a single talent.

Son's heart is suffering, yearning for recognition all these years, just wanting to stand out, to let dad and mom live a good life."

What Mu Dade said sounded pitiful, compelling Old Mrs. Mu to feel as though her heart was being stabbed, causing her tremendous pain.

She dropped the slop bucket and hugged Mu Dade, lamenting her poor heart,

finally she said,

"I, this old lady, will go and borrow from the eldest sister tomorrow; she surely has fifty taels."

"Mom, why go bother Xianxian, Xiangxiang is freeloading at her house, now take money from her, how will others see our Old Mu Family?"

"This..." Old Mrs. Mu realized this as well; she didn't favor her eldest daughter

Mu Xianxian the most, but she was still her daughter.

She's involved in business, and they were hoping for her future support for

Dade, definitely not worth offending her.

"Then what do you suggest?"

"Marry off Shuangshuang, marrying her will bring money, mom, don't you want

to see me pass the exams and become an official in the Capital?"

To wear gold and silver, be waited on, of course, Old Mrs. Mu wanted that.

"Alright, I'll discuss this with the old man, go have a melon and rest."

Chapter 123: Acting Unreasonably

"Mom, I won't be going, keep the melons for yourself, stay inside and rest since it's hot, let the others like the second, third, and fourth ones do the work."

"My son is so filial, I'll listen to you. It's comfortable like this, your father and I haven't misjudged you. You're the only one in the family with a conscience."

Old Mrs. Mu felt delighted in her heart. Her eldest son was truly good, always giving her food first, unlike the other sons, who were like pigs, eager to eat a whole pot of food by themselves.

Mu Dade hurried back, while Old Mrs. Mu carried the slop bucket back to the kitchen.

After noon, once Mr. Mu had finished lunch and was about to rest, Old Mrs. Mu pulled him aside.

"Old man, what are you planning to do about the fifty taels of silver needed for Da De's Autumn Examination?"

It would have been better if not mentioned, but once brought up, Mr. Mu began sighing, repeatedly slapping his thigh, overwhelmed with worry.

"What else can be done? But this fifty taels of silver isn't just easy to come by."

"Old man, perhaps we should just follow Da De's advice and marry off Shuang. Da De is only going for the Autumn Examination now, and will have to go to the Capital to take exams later.

Even if we have fifty taels, it won't be enough in the future. We might as well marry off Shuang and get more silver from Wang San's house to cover all the examination expenses for Da De in one go."

Old Mrs. Mu had already made up her mind, thinking that since she had to marry her off eventually, she might as well ask for more.

"You old woman, what nonsense are you talking about, marrying off Shuang to Wang San? Are you trying to disgrace Da De completely?"

Mr. Mu angrily slapped the brick bed under him, and his thick black eyebrows furrowed in anger.

"What did you say, old man? Marrying off Shuang has nothing to do with Da De. Shuang is his niece, not his daughter. Can he manage everyone in the family?"

Besides, words are on others' mouths, can we control them? I don't care, I want to be an official's wife. If you won't let me be an official's wife, I'll just die in front of you."

As Old Mrs. Mu spoke, she was ready to run into the nearby wall.

"If you want to go, go die outside. Don't think about getting me to agree to this. If our reputation is ruined, what kind of official could we possibly be?"

Mr. Mu angrily finished speaking, turned over onto the brick bed, and Old Mrs. Mu, seeing this, slapped her thigh and sat on the ground, kicking the mud on the ground with both her hands and feet.

"Oh, there is no justice! I, Liu Guixiang, have been married to your Old Mu Family for so many years, bore and raised children, and fed the descendants of your Old Mu Family with my hard work, and this is how you treat me!"

"Ah... I don't want to live anymore..."

"Ah... I can't live anymore, Mu Dabiao, are you even a human?"

Old Mrs. Mu's wailing attracted people who were originally resting in the main house to gather around.

When Mu Dashan rushed to the room where Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu were, he saw Mr. Mu lying on the brick bed resting, while Old Mrs. Mu was rolling on the ground, slapping it, and in a few moves, she had insulted the ancestors of the Old Mu Family for eighteen generations.

The fourth daughter-in-law of the Mu Family, Mrs. Liu, was the only daughter-in-law who came over. She stepped forward to help Old Mrs. Mu, but was kicked away by her.

"Get lost, you stinky woman, you came to laugh at me too, did you?"

Mrs. Liu fell to the ground, feeling extremely wronged.

"Mom, I didn't mean it..."

"If that's not what you meant, then what? Get lost!"

Mrs. Liu, hearing this, went to cry by herself nearby.

Everyone knew why Old Mrs. Mu was angry, but there was nothing they could do, all the money in the family was in her hands, and they didn't have any money.

"Second Brother, I heard that Gou Dan's uncle is wealthy, why don't you borrow some, later when Big Brother becomes a scholar, you'll be the biggest contributor." Mu Danian suddenly said.

"Nonsense, Fifth Brother, don't talk nonsense. Let me tell you, Gou Dan's uncle's business isn't doing well, he hasn't visited Gou Dan for a long time.

As I see it, with you being so strong, you go to the pier to carry goods, you'll earn ten or so coins a day, in half a month you'd have half a tael of silver."

Mu Dazhong wasn't stupid; after all, the only relative from Lin's family worth anything was that particular one, and if ruined here, what would happen in the future?

"Second Brother, I think you just don't want to help Big Brother. Let me tell you, don't regret it. If Big Brother becomes an official, he definitely won't take you along." Mu Danian's threatening words made Mu Dazhong unhappy. "Fifth Brother, you act like you've eaten dung every day, spraying at everyone, why wouldn't I want to help?"

"You just don't..."

Mu Dashan sighed and said to the two engaged in a war of words, "Don't argue, let's see what Dad says. If we truly can't gather enough, we'll all go to town to carry goods; us four brothers, in a month that's two taels of silver, every bit helps."

"You go if you want, I'm not going, my back still hurts."

"Exactly, only Third Brother is so enthusiastic; your third branch has the least money in the family."

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian's words left Mu Dashan's face red from anger.

He said nothing more.

Old Mrs. Mu was still throwing a tantrum on the ground, and finally, Mr. Mu angrily got up.

"Enough! I'll go to my little sister's house tomorrow to borrow money, settle down all of you!"

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In the town, Mu Shuangshuang used eighty coins to buy ten books. She casually flipped through them; they were all about the imperial exams. That scholar seemed to have some level of learning.

Lu Yuanfeng stood nearby and, seeing the girl seriously looking at those books, curiously asked, "Shuang, do you recognize the words?"

"How could I? They recognize me, but I don't recognize them. I just want to see what those scholars read." Mu Shuangshuang smiled and explained.

As for the words in the book, she recognized them all. After all, writing had long been passed down through the bloodline, and even though she had never learned traditional characters, she had no difficulty reading them.

"Hehe, keep reading then, I'll wash the dishes."

Every dish Liu Zian washed had to be washed again, so Lu Yuanfeng took on this task willingly. By the time he finished washing the dishes, Mu Shuangshuang had already gone through a whole book.

He always had a feeling that Shuang recognized the words, otherwise, she wouldn't stare at those books for so long.

There were kids studying in the village too, but he heard from those kids that just looking at books made their heads hurt.

Still, that was just his speculation.

This time, they sold one hundred eighty-six buns, making seven hundred forty-four coins. As for soup, Lu Yuanfeng counted it—one hundred twenty bowls, earning one hundred twenty coins.

After deducting the cost of one hundred sixty coins, they made a total of seven hundred four coins from this trip.

Lu Yuanfeng knew that without Shuang, those twenty-some pounds of meat, wouldn't even sell back for the cost, let alone make a profit.

"Shuang, I counted the silver used to buy the meat yesterday—it was three taels plus five hundred fifty-four coins.

Later, come to my house, and I'll give you two taels of silver; keep today's money for yourself to pay for Xiao Han's school gifts."

#### Chapter 124: The Old Lady Who Sells Herbal Tea

Mu Shuangshuang closed the "Ritual" in her hands and looked at Lu Yuanfeng in confusion.

"Didn't we agree to split it equally? You should take your share, otherwise, I won't dare earn money with you again."

According to Lu Yuanfeng's explanation, Mu Shuangshuang mentally calculated the silver earned from the wild boar, totaling four taels of silver plus two hundred and fifty-eight wen.

Divided, it's two taels of silver and a hundred and twenty-nine wen each for her and Lu Yuanfeng.

In ancient times, this was indeed a considerable income.

"The wild vegetables are yours, the method to catch the wild boar was your idea, and even the suggestion to sell meat rolls was yours; I didn't do anything and don't deserve so much money," Lu Yuanfeng shook his head, refusing.

"Just because you say you don't deserve it doesn't make it so. If you don't deserve it, how did our wild boar get down from the mountain? How did these things come from the village to the town? And who built the treehouse for Little Black on your back?"

A string of questions rendered Lu Yuanfeng speechless.

Yet, in his heart, Lu Yuanfeng was delighted, as Shuangshuang's words made him feel like a useful person.

"Shuangshuang, let's first take Little Black to the market and ask others how to sell it; we can discuss it further when we return."

"Alright, anyway, we stick to the original splitting agreement no matter what."

After returning all the rented items, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng went to the marketplace.

It was already past midday, but the sun's heat hadn't decreased at all; Mu Shuangshuang carried a water jug, drank several mouthfuls, and turned to find Lu Yuanfeng had brought nothing but a wheelbarrow and a few buckets.

"Didn't you bring water? Are you thirsty?"

"No... not thirsty!" Lu Yuanfeng shook his head.

"Stop lying, I'll go buy you a bowl of tea to drink, and let Little Black out for some air."

"How about over there?" Mu Shuangshuang pointed to a nearby shed where an old woman with grey hair stood with two large wooden buckets in front of her, probably filled with brewed herbal tea or something similar.

"Never mind, Shuangshuang, I'll drink when I get back; honestly, I'm not thirsty."

A bowl of herbal tea costs one wen, the same as two buns.

"Why don't you drink from mine?" Mu Shuangshuang extended the jug to Lu Yuanfeng, startling him into shaking his head quickly.

"You're not going to say that men and women shouldn't exchange things even now, are you?"

From a modern perspective, the original host was only thirteen, hadn't even had her period, and in modern times would be considered a middle schooler. Letting a boy drink some water shouldn't be a big deal, right?

Besides, during her previous training, she didn't have water, and it was the boys in her class who shared their water with her, which didn't result in "pregnancy."

"No... I..." Once again, Lu Yuanfeng blushed from Mu Shuangshuang's words, and after some thought, he said solemnly.

"Let's go buy a bowl of tea; keep your water for yourself because there's still a long way back and you'll need it."

With a journey of over twenty li back, walking would be hot and tiring, and water would be necessary.

Shuangshuang was a girl after all, and Lu Yuanfeng really didn't have the courage to drink her water.

At the tea shed, Lu Yuanfeng ordered two bowls of herbal tea, one for himself and one for Shuangshuang.

Taking advantage of the moment, Lu Yuanfeng brought Little Black out.

Little Black was the name Mu Shuangshuang casually gave to the Black Mink, simple and easy to remember.

Once out of the treehouse, Little Black clucked with its pointed head bobbing happily.

"Oh, that's a mink, isn't it?" The tea vendor, an old woman, handed the two bowls of warm herbal tea to them and asked.

"Yes, we just caught it," Mu Shuangshuang replied.

"That's a valuable thing; black minks aren't common; they're worth quite a bit,"

"We're indeed planning to sell it at the market. But, Grandma, how do you know about this?"

Mu Shuangshuang was curious. When Lu Yuanfeng brought out the Black Mink in the morning, even Aunt Wang thought it was just a strange-colored weasel.

"Ah, my son is in the fur business, so I naturally know a bit."

When the old woman spoke, Mu Shuangshuang began to take a closer look at her.

The person before her wore a brown-green outfit, the neckline tightly fastened, and the sleeves fully covering her wrists.

Unlike the villagers who immediately rolled up their collars and sleeves in hot weather.

The person before her had grey hair, but it was meticulously groomed, with not a single stray hair.

She certainly didn't look like she was from a poor household setting up a stall here. Could she be a wealthy person here to experience life?

Just as the thought crossed her mind, a man in a fine outfit came running over from not far away, probably around twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old. His forehead was full of sweat, and his steps were unsteady.

Upon seeing the old woman, his expression immediately showed some color.

"Mother, I knew you'd be here. Why do you keep coming to this broken shed every day? Do you really think you can make money with a few bowls of herbal tea?"

The man shook his sleeve, his expression a bit displeased.

"Yi, don't say that. Back in the day, your father and I started out by selling herbal tea; now that he's gone, can't I have the right to come and reminisce?"

Saying this, tears began to well up in the old woman's eyes, and she looked so pitiful.

"Oh, why are you doing this? No one said anything, stop crying. I'm not stopping you, stay as long as you like."

The old woman continued to cry, and Mu Shuangshuang couldn't bear it; she handed over a cotton handkerchief she always carried to the old woman.

"The dead cannot be brought back to life, Grandma. You should focus on happy things and live freely.

If the old gentleman knows you're feeling so upset for him, he wouldn't be comfortable either."

The man glanced at Mu Shuangshuang, initially intending to reject the handkerchief she was offering, but his mother unexpectedly took it.

"Young girl, I'm thinking of my old man. He never lived a good life; just when our son and daughter were successful, he left..."

Parting life and death is the most bitter; Mu Shuangshuang couldn't imagine the pain of losing a companion who was with you for most of your life.

She tightly held the old woman's hand, chanting, "It's all in the past, it's all in the past. When the old gentleman departed, he had no regrets. Moreover, if you believe in souls, I imagine he's by your side, accompanying you."

"Really?" The old woman's eyes widened, seeking confirmation from Shuangshuang's words.

"Yes, don't you feel it? When you smile, the breath you feel is sweet, proving he's right beside you. Try it; you'll see."

Listening to Shuangshuang, the old woman sniffed.

"There's nothing." She replied.

"Nothing is right because you're not in a good mood now."

Lu Yuanfeng held Little Black, watching Shuangshuang explain to the person before her; he took a breath, feeling the air he inhaled was sweet.

Mother, Shuangshuang wasn't lying... You're... beside me, aren't you?

Chapter 125: Selling Black Mink

After a long while, the old woman's emotions finally returned to normal, and she wore a smile on her face again, looking at Mu Shuangshuang with great satisfaction.

"Thank you, young girl!"

"It's not necessary; in such hot weather, you'd better go back early. If you fall ill from exhaustion, it will only sadden those who care about you."

Upon hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, the old woman's expression softened as she replied, "I really like you, and if you have the chance, you should come to our house. I'll tell you about the past my husband and I shared."

"Mother, what are you saying? Is it worth inviting a village girl over like this? If people find out, wouldn't our Old Xue Family become a laughingstock?"

"How insolent, the Xue family's house was built for me by your eldest brother. Whoever I say can visit, can visit. Besides, are you looking down on village girls?"

Your mother was a village girl, even now in old age still a village girl. If you dare talk nonsense again, don't blame me if I go to your eldest brother and have him drive you out."

The old woman's few admonishments left the middle-aged man subdued. He hung his head, standing aside, not daring to even breathe heavily, like a student being scolded by a parent.

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang felt that the old woman before her wasn't simply an ordinary merchant's mother.

The Xue family seemed not quite ordinary.

Perhaps she ought to inquire more about the happenings in town.

"Yi'er, this young lady has a Black Mink to sell. See how much silver you can offer," Granny Xue suddenly said, after letting the middle-aged man stew for a while.

Granny Xue wasn't joking when she said she liked Mu Shuangshuang, for Shuangshuang indeed gave her a warm feeling. Her husband had been gone for half a year, leaving her in deep sorrow and unable to eat or sleep, always wanting someone to talk to.

Yet her children at home never listened to her, always presumptuously offering her money or hiring a bunch of maids for her, none of which she wanted.

"Mother, but the business..." Xue Yi hadn't finished speaking when he was startled by his mother's gaze and quickly said, "Let me take a look at the Black Mink."

Lu Yuanfeng didn't quite like this sudden Xue Yi, who spoke unpleasantly and seemed to disdain both him and Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang walked over to Lu Yuanfeng and picked up Little Black. Perhaps sensing it was about to be sold, Little Black suddenly let out a "hiss-hiss" of distress, showing it was afraid.

"This little thing's fur is quite good, smooth and soft, and its eyes are clear. How about I offer eight taels of silver for this mink?"

Eight taels of silver, enough for these two to live well for one to two years, Xue Yi thought.

In his heart, he admired himself for thinking he was doing a good deed, and believed this time his mother wouldn't scold him.

Xue Yi reached out, grabbed Little Black by the neck, lifting it directly, not caring about strangling it.

Little Black's paws struggled incessantly, it looked pitifully at Mu Shuangshuang, seemingly pleading not to be sold.

"Hiss-hiss..."

"Hiss-hiss..."

"Hiss-hiss..."

Little Black's cries grew more and more pitiable, even a layer of mist covered its clear eyes. Mu Shuangshuang couldn't bear it anymore and snatched Little Black from Xue Yi's hands. "I'm not selling it; it doesn't like you!"

"..."

Xue Yi, who had never been refused before, immediately thought they were dissatisfied with the silver offered. "Twelve taels of silver, this little beast for me."

"I said no sale, no matter how much silver you offer."

"Twenty taels!" Xue Yi gritted his teeth.

"No sale!"

"Fifty taels!" Damn it, just throw it in the water. A Black Mink is worth at most fifteen taels, even if made into fabric, that's the price. This time he spent dearly.

Xue Yi looked at Mu Shuangshuang with a smug face; he couldn't believe with this price enough to buy a house in town and hire a few servants, the girl wouldn't sell.

"Still not enough." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head firmly.

Fifty taels was surely a temptation, but since Little Black knew to plead with her, it showed it had spirit. Instead of making it into fabric, why not keep it?

Silver could always be earned, but such a spirited animal might never be seen again.

From the moment Mu Shuangshuang snatched Little Black away, the little creature burrowed into her arms, seemingly the safest place.

"You..." Xue Yi wanted to say something, but Granny Xue stopped him.

"Enough, Yi'er, the young lady doesn't want to sell it. Why force her? You now go!"

"Mother, I..." Xue Yi felt extremely aggrieved; wasn't it his mother who told him to buy the Black Mink? Why was he the one in the wrong now?

"What do you mean 'I'? Get moving, or don't come back to the Xue family." Granny Xue's words carried significant weight, and upon hearing them, Xue Yi scampered off immediately.

"Young lady, what's your name? It's rather impersonal to keep calling you 'young lady' all the time."

"Granny, my name is Shuangshuang, this is my partner, Lu Yuanfeng, you can call him Fengzi."

"Madman?" Granny Xue eyed Lu Yuanfeng up and down. "He looks pretty normal to me."

"Granny, it's not the 'mad' of madness, but the 'Feng' of harvest. He's really good-hearted," Mu Shuangshuang said with a laugh.

"Alright, I'll remember that, Shuangshuang, I must go back now, but you must come to my house, you must..."

After finishing her words, Granny Xue reluctantly departed, leaving an unattended tea stall.

The Xue family indeed didn't lack money, so leaving a tea stall here was no big deal.

Little Black returned to normal with the departure of strangers.

At this moment, it lay quietly in Shuangshuang's arms like a baby, occasionally stretching out a paw to tug at Shuangshuang's hanging hair.

"Lu Yuanfeng, do you think my brain got stuck in a door? Damn it, fifty taels just vanished at one look from this little creature."

Lu Yuanfeng didn't see it that way. "Since it's with us now, we should just take care of it. Silver we can continue to earn."

"That's true, fifty taels of silver might take a few years to earn back, but Little Black, well..."

"I've decided, I'll take it hunting next time. It crawled into the rabbit hole last time, proving this little thing could help me catch rabbits."

"I figured it; fifty taels of silver means it has to catch eight hundred and thirty-three rabbits for me, or else... humph humph!"

Little Black shivered for no reason in her arms! (Darn it, why does it feel like there's killing intent?)

By this time, Lu Yuanfeng found it both amusing and exasperating. "Shuangshuang, you're truly the most unusual girl I've ever seen."

"Of course, I'm one of a kind!"

Shuangshuang raised her chin with a smug look.

"Hold Little Black for a while; I'll help write something to leave at the tea stall!"

Mu Shuangshuang took out a book and a brush from the wheelbarrow, then went to a nearby inn to borrow some ink.

After flipping through the book, she finally wrote out a few large characters on the paper and pasted it onto the wooden post of the tea stall!

Chapter 126: Love Rival Xia Guagua

On the way back, Lu Yuanfeng carried everything single-handedly, including the now highly valued and smug Little Black.

Halfway down the road, both Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were sweating heavily from the heat, so they suggested taking a break.

Lu Yuanfeng leaned against a big tree, watching the girl in front of him fanning herself with her hand, looking quite hot.

He got up and wandered around the woods, eventually finding a few larger leaves, and fanned Shuangshuang with them to relieve the heat.

The breeze from the leaves blew on Mu Shuangshuang's face, instantly dispersing quite a bit of the summer heat.

"Lu Yuanfeng, who would have thought you were good at taking care of girls... Very nice, very nice!"

Actually, Lu Yuanfeng's behavior would be considered some kind of hint to most girls.

But in Shuangshuang's eyes, it was completely normal because others had taken care of her like that before.

There's no helping it; with more boys than girls at police school, she's treated like a panda baby, with food served to her and clothes handed over, barely having to do anything herself.

"Alright, I'm not hot anymore, you fan yourself now!" Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand and said.

"It's fine." Lu Yuanfeng shook his head, feeling delighted to fan Shuangshuang.

"By the way, why didn't you ask me what I wrote at the tea stall in town just now?"

Lu Yuanfeng seemed curious about everything, but he hadn't asked about that matter earlier.

"Oh, I forgot." Lu Yuanfeng scratched his head in embarrassment, perhaps because he was only concerned with checking whether Shuangshuang was hot during the journey, he had forgotten what he intended to ask.

"Silly, what should I say to you?" Mu Shuangshuang said with a helpless look, "I just wrote a few words at the stall: Honest Tea Stall, Self-service Tea, One Coin per Bowl!"

It's quite similar to modern honest sales; anyway, the owner wasn't there, but the price of each item was listed, and if you liked something, you took it yourself and paid voluntarily without any supervision.

Anyway, Granny Xue wasn't short of money, she was doing it just for fun.

Mu Shuangshuang's unintended act had an unexpected result.

She didn't know that once she left, people passing by actually went inside to drink tea.

Out of curiosity, they observed for a long time and discovered that the owner truly did not show up, and each of them paid Silver voluntarily and washed the bowls they used before leaving.

As a result, it naturally attracted a lot of attention, and the two barrels of cold tea at the tea stall quickly sold out, with a lot of Copper Coins thrown into the small wooden barrel beside them.

In the evening, when the Xue Family sent someone to collect the wooden barrel, they discovered this and informed the old lady.

Granny Xue then felt she had truly encountered a blessing.

Upon further inquiry, no one knew the two young kids, as if they had appeared out of thin air.

Granny Xue just thought her old man had shown her mercy, so she had someone put a few barrels of cold tea at the tea stall every day.

—

"Didn't Shuangshuang say she couldn't read?" Lu Yuanfeng grew even more puzzled.

"Ahem... Lu Yuanfeng, I need to share a secret with you next, can you please keep it confidential for me?"

Shuangshuang's expression was full of seriousness; though she was someone with a changed soul, it only took some investigation to realize she had many changes.

But being a farm girl, as long as she didn't threaten any big man, she wouldn't have such a sudden problem.

The current issue is that people around her would eventually notice her differences, and continuous explanations weren't a solution.

"Shuangshuang, just tell me, I won't tell anyone else, if you're worried, you can..." Lu Yuanfeng seemed eager to listen; having a secret meant he could understand Shuangshuang better.

"Actually, ever since I bumped my head because of my second aunt before, some memories have appeared in my mind. These memories don't belong to me but appear whenever I do something.

Like last time with the wild boar hunt, or like what we made today with the meat bun, and even writing the words."

The half-true words made Lu Yuanfeng's face instantly turn serious, but then he thought it might be a gift from heaven.

If Shuangshuang hadn't known these things, she would always have been bullied by the Old Mu Family.

"Shuangshuang, I think it's a gift from the Bodhisattva to you; you are so kind, so good, you deserve this blessing."

Lu Yuanfeng spoke seriously, if Mu Shuangshuang hadn't been lying, she would have surely believed his words.

"Yes, you're right, I get it, and from now on, I'll be grateful!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded vigorously.

Alas, another lie told, feeling like her time in this ancient era is turning her into a charlatan.

When will she be able to use her strength to slap the strange Old Mu Family in the face?

Returning to the village, it was still early, and thinking about having to deliver cold noodles to town tomorrow, Mu Shuangshuang went with Lu Yuanfeng to his house.

From now on, she didn't need to sneak around to make cold noodles, since she had a contract in hand.

Upon arriving at Lu Yuanfeng's house, she noticed that the front and back of the house seemed to have undergone significant changes compared to yesterday.

The grass in front of the house was gone, and the baskets and sieves randomly thrown in the yard were nowhere to be seen, while a row of clothes were hung on long bamboo poles outside, all of them men's clothes.

Even underpants were placed in the most conspicuous spot on the pole, and Mu Shuangshuang inadvertently glanced at them, just in time to see a patch on them.

The meticulous stitching wasn't something a man could do.

"Lu Yuanfeng, who would've thought you'd be such a good lad, washing clothes so cleanly, even having someone patch your underpants!" Mu Shuangshuang spoke with a hint of sarcasm.

The rascal, even his underpants were patched, why doesn't she get such treatment?

Lu Yuanfeng's face turned red, not out of embarrassment, but anger.

When he left, the clothes weren't washed.

"Shuangshuang, it's not like that, let me explain..." Just as Lu Yuanfeng wanted to explain, a girl in a yellow dress stepped out of the house where he lived.

The girl immediately came up to Lu Yuanfeng upon seeing him.

"Brother Yuan Feng, I've helped you wash your clothes, and also tidied up your room. I wanted to bathe Yuanbao, but he wouldn't let me, so I didn't."

Xia Guagua looked up with a face full of anticipation at Lu Yuanfeng.

Ever since Lu Yuanfeng had left early in the morning, she had come to help, washing clothes, tidying the room, and even patching Lu Yuanfeng's clothes.

"Who asked you to do this, this isn't your home, go back." Lu Yuanfeng unceremoniously pointed to a house dozens of meters away.

"Brother Yuan Feng, why can't I come here? We're family!" Xia Guagua looked at Lu Yuanfeng, her eyes gradually filling with tears.

"Do you even know, my hands got bruised from the wooden club when I washed your clothes, and nearly fell when I tidied your room.

You shouldn't have scolded me even if you didn't praise me... boo hoo hoo..." Xia Guagua wept, looking pitiful indeed.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at her fingers, those slender hands were indeed covered in blood marks as Xia Guagua said!

Chapter 127: Use Little Black as a Dog

Mu Shuangshuang playfully watched the two people talking.

She wasn't planning to get involved in this matter anyway; Lu Yuanfeng's attitude had already made everything clear.

"Brother Yuanfeng, look at my hand. It really hurts..."

Xia Guagua said a bunch of things, trying to earn Lu Yuanfeng's sympathy, but who knew Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't care at all.

"Xia Guagua, if you like working, you can go work at your own home. You don't need to come to my place every day. My house doesn't welcome you."

"No, why can she come and not me?" Xia Guagua protested with red eyes, pointing at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Do you like her? I'll tell you this, I won't agree to you two being together."

This woman, so skinny, ugly, and dark; why can she come to Brother Yuanfeng's house and not me?

Brother Yuanfeng is mine, no one can take him away!

"Xia Guagua, I've told you long ago, my affairs don't need your interference!"

Lu Yuanfeng's face was full of anger. He had tried being nice and harsh, telling her not to come, so why wouldn't she listen?

Mu Shuangshuang, watching the drama from the side and unjustly brought into the situation, was displeased.

What's this about Xia Guagua disagreeing with her being with Lu Yuanfeng? They weren't anything to each other, and even if there was something, it wouldn't be this person's place to speak up.

"I say, young lady, if you want to ignite then ignite, chase a man then chase a man, why drag me into it?"

Did I eat your family's rice or steal your man? Speak nonsense again, and don't blame me for tearing your mouth apart."

Mu Shuangshuang directly scolded her in front of everyone without restraint, leaving Xia Guagua momentarily dumbfounded.

"Brother Yuanfeng, is this the girl you brought back? She insulted me..."

If there were an award for the most shameless at this moment, Mu Shuangshuang would definitely give it to Xia Guagua, who was utterly shameless.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't see any sign that Lu Yuanfeng was interested in this woman; instead, this woman seemed to have already assumed the role of the lady of the house.

Could it be that there were crazy people even in ancient times?

"Even if Shuangshuang insulted you, it was your fault. Don't come here unless necessary. After a few days, I'll build a courtyard wall outside the house. If you dare come again, I'll go to the village chief."

Lu Yuanfeng thought that perhaps the lack of a courtyard wall at his house was the reason Xia Guagua kept coming when he wasn't around, doing things he didn't want her to do at all.

Xia Guagua stared blankly at Lu Yuanfeng. She couldn't accept these words were spoken by her Brother Yuanfeng. She used to wash clothes for Brother Yuanfeng.

But back then, he only said not to come; it wasn't like this humiliation now.

She understood, it must be because of this woman, this woman forced him.

"Brother Yuanfeng, you will regret being with this woman!"

Xia Guagua flung her sleeves in anger and left Lu Yuanfeng's yard.

Lu Yuanfeng had already furrowed his brow into a knot. He glanced at the direction Xia Guagua left, deciding to visit that woman's place later and ask her to control Xia Guagua.

"Sister Shuangshuang, Second Brother..." Yuanbao suddenly rushed out of the house, wearing only shorts and barechested. As he came out, he deliberately covered the two points on his chest.

"Why aren't you wearing a shirt?" Lu Yuanfeng pulled Little Yuanbao into his embrace.

"Sister Guagua told me to take it off, saying it was too dirty and needs washing."

"Just because she told you to take it off, you did? What did I tell you before?" Lu Yuanfeng was displeased.

"When she came, I was about to close the door, but she said she was thirsty, and Second Aunt wouldn't give her any water, so I opened..."

Yuanbao spoke, lowering his head, knowing he had made a mistake.

"Lu Yuanfeng, let it go. Yuanbao is so young, he doesn't know anything, and children are soft-hearted. They won't really drive someone away." Mu Shuangshuang tugged at Lu Yuanfeng's sleeve.

Now she figured it out; this Xia Guagua was brought over by Lu Yuanfeng's stepmother.

And then developed feelings for Lu Yuanfeng, coming over to harass. In the end, she distorted her thinking, believing Lu Yuanfeng was her property.

"Shuangshuang, go inside and sit. Today's matter was my fault towards you. I guarantee it won't happen again." Lu Yuanfeng earnestly said to Shuangshuang.

He was most afraid of Shuangshuang being upset and ignoring him.

"It's okay, I won't mind. I'll go get something first."

For making cold noodles, green beans needed to be soaked in time. Fortunately, it was still early, and soaking until night, the time would be just right.

Lu Yuanfeng first carried Yuanbao inside and dressed him, then took out all the green beans Shuangshuang had bought last time from his room.

He handed the bucket to Mu Shuangshuang, "Here!"

"Why are you giving me a bucket?"

"Didn't you say you wanted to soak green beans?"

"I can take them back to soak now. My grandma no longer controls me." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head.

With the contract with the chubby uncle, she had to go to the town every three days, delivering thirty portions of cold noodles each time, requiring three pounds of green beans, just like last time. But this time, she wanted to soak a bit more and let her family and Aunt Xiao Yun's family taste them.

"Shuangshuang, you should soak them here. I... I also have Silver to give you, wait a moment."

Yesterday, the money from selling the wild boar was carefully hidden by Lu Yuanfeng, and Mu Shuangshuang waited in place.

After a while, Lu Yuanfeng brought out a cloth bag, and the bag jingled, probably with copper coins inside.

It was indeed troublesome experiencing this way, a few taels of Silver translating to thousands.

Judging from the situation, counting the copper coins would take time, so Mu Shuangshuang obediently soaked green beans at Lu Yuanfeng's place.

This time, she soaked three and a half pounds of green beans, enough to make thirty or so portions of cold noodles.

After preparing the cold noodles, Lu Yuanfeng had already started counting the copper coins. Based on previous calculations, Lu Yuanfeng only needed to give her one tael of Silver plus four hundred twenty-five copper coins.

Yuanbao cleverly walked out and closed the door for Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Money should not be exposed, or it would lead to trouble.

This was recently taught by Lu Yuanfeng to him, and Lu Yuanfeng himself was educated by Mu Shuangshuang.

While Lu Yuanfeng was counting copper coins, Mu Shuangshuang released Little Black from the tree house.

The quirky creature was ecstatic, running wildly in joy once free.

Mu Shuangshuang took out a copper coin from her pocket and placed it near Little Black's nose, saying, "Little Black, from now on, whenever you see this thing, sneak it back home, understand?"

Little Black disdainfully turned away, pretending to be uninterested.

With a "smack," Mu Shuangshuang swatted Little Black's rear, speaking fiercely.

"You owe me fifty taels of Silver. From now on, you have to earn money for me. Earn money, or else I'll give you to Xue Yi to be turned into a mink coat."

Little Black hissed, picking up the copper coin off the ground, lightly sniffing it at its nose.

#### Chapter 128: Clever Shuangshuang

Little Black sniffed a few times and was about to throw away the copper coin in its hand, but Mu Shuangshuang's gaze was too sinister.

Suddenly—

After hissing twice, it ran over to Lu Yuanfeng, picked up one of the copper coins Lu Yuanfeng had counted to the side, and dashed over to Mu Shuangshuang.

Its eyes, like those of a cunning fox, gazed at Mu Shuangshuang ingratiatingly.

"Smack!" Its butt got smacked again, and Mu Shuangshuang said righteously,

"You can't take things from your own home. If you dare touch the family's things next time, I'll sell you."

"Hiss hiss—" Little Black hung its head pitifully and crouched at the side, whining continuously, looking quite forlorn.

"Trying to gain sympathy? No way. Just stay over there!"

"Shuangshuang, take it easy. Little Black has been living in the mountains for so long, meat is definitely more tempting than copper coins for it." Lu Yuanfeng looked up, grinning at Mu Shuangshuang.

The lively and adorable girl in front of him made his previously irritable heart calm down.

"You're right. I should come up with some punishment and reward measures, but I won't train it now. I'll try it at home tonight. By the way, Lu Yuanfeng, do you have any fresh meat here?"

I asked Lu Yuanfeng to soak some in the well last night; I'm not sure if he did.

"Only cooked meat left; we don't have a well at home..."

In fact, the village only has three wells in total.

They're located at the village entrance, the eastern part of the village, and the southern part of the village.

Although the third well is near Lu Yuanfeng's house, it's the one most prone to drying up in the village.

So most of the summer, Lu Yuanfeng prefers going to the stream on the northern side of the village for water.

The water there is sweet, and he doesn't have to compete with villagers for it.

"I'll go to Wang Erma's later to get some."

Wang Erma is a butcher; there's definitely meat in his house, no doubt about it.

"That's fine too. Later, take some coins from my share to buy just enough meat for Little Black for tonight and tomorrow morning. I'll buy some from town for it at noon."

Little Black doesn't eat much, just two finger-length pieces of meat at a time.

"No need, I'll take care of it; Little Black doesn't eat much!"

Having finally counted the silver, Lu Yuanfeng handed the cloth bag to Shuangshuang, then took a jar from the kitchen, stuffed all the copper coins inside, and carried it back to his room.

On the way through the yard, he saw the conspicuous underpants hanging on a long bamboo pole by Xia Guagua, angrily ran over, and threw the newly patched underpants into a nearby manure pile.

On the way back, Lu Yuanfeng helped her carry the soaked mung beans and only left after dropping Shuangshuang off at Aunt Xiao Yun's house.

It was still early when Mu Shuangshuang put away her things, held Little Black, carried a small string of meat tied with a straw rope, and returned to the Old Mu Family.

At the entrance, Mrs. Lin seemed to have been waiting for Mu Shuangshuang for a long time. As soon as she saw Mu Shuangshuang, she twisted her sagging hips proudly and said,

"Oh, look who it is, the rich lady is back?"

Tsk tsk tsk, who would have thought, Shuang, you have the potential to be a rich lady!"

Mrs. Lin spoke while covering her mouth and giggling.

Shuang felt a pang of fear, thinking Mrs. Lin knew about her business dealings outside. Although she had a contract, she currently had over two taels of silver, and who knows if Mrs. Lin might get greedy.

But Mrs. Lin's next words made Shuang think she was overthinking it.

"You brat, don't think marrying a rich man will put you in the clear; you might end up with nothing."

Mrs. Lin got scolded by Old Mrs. Mu in the afternoon, over Mu Dade's exam expenses.

What the old crone was up to, Mrs. Lin knew clearly.

Expecting Gou Dan's uncle to pay for Mu Dade? Dream on!

But since the old lady annoyed her, she'd come to bother Mu Shuangshuang instead; after all, bullies pick on the weak.

Bully the weak!

Mrs. Lin looked at Mu Shuangshuang sarcastically, her words hinting at Shuangshuang's marriage prospects.

"Second Aunt, what's with the chicken and the egg? Did you steal grandma's eggs and get caught? Or are you planning on stealing grandmother's chickens?"

But you know, the chickens and eggs belong to Uncle, so neither you nor little cousin Gou Dan has the right to them."

Mu Shuangshuang squinted her eyes, smilingly countered Mrs. Lin.

"You brat, you go ahead and be smug; just don't come crying to me later. And stop bringing junk into the house; it's not a trash heap for that crap."

Mrs. Lin wiggled her hips back to her room.

She just wanted to assert her presence, and since Shuangshuang didn't suffer a loss, her mood wasn't great upon leaving.

Mu Shuangshuang brought Little Black back to her room, fed it a small piece of meat, and took out the copper coins from Little Black's treehouse.

With food and freedom, Little Black dashed around Mu Shuangshuang's room, and in no time, its little footprints were all over the room, including on Mu Shuangshuang's bed.

However, its fate was unfortunate as it got another smack from Shuangshuang.

After circling around the room, Mu Shuangshuang found a mouse hole in the corner next to the bed.

She rolled her eyes and shooed Little Black inside.

Soon after, Little Black crawled out with a half-grown rat in its mouth, looking excited.

The rat squeaked continuously, but Little Black, like it had found a playmate, casually tossed it around the room, trampling and kneading it flat.

In no time, the little rat was dead as a doornail.

Since then, there were no more mice in Mu Shuangshuang's room.

And Mu Shuangshuang confidently stashed all her money into the mouse hole.

— —

In the evening, when Mu Dashan returned from work, the first thing he did wasn't to go to the kitchen but to return to his room and give Mu Shuangshuang the "Eight Characters of Birth" he got from Mrs. Jin.

"Shuangshuang, I got this from your Aunt's place, you keep it!"

Mu Shuangshuang took the contract, looked at the words on it, and it was indeed the Eight Characters of Birth, but the ink on the paper didn't seem like it was written days ago.

It looked freshly written today.

Mu Shuangshuang had a strong intuition that Mrs. Jin was up to no good.

"What's wrong? Is something off?" When Mu Dashan went to get it at noon, Mrs. Jin handed it over without a word, saying she'd find Mrs. Lin later to match the Eight Characters.

So Mu Dashan couldn't tell what might be wrong.

"Nothing, Dad. Second Aunt blocked me today and said strange things; she said I'd soon marry a rich man.

She even called me a rich lady. Do you think Grandpa and Grandma want to marry me off to get the exam silver for Uncle?"

Being familiar with special work, Mu Shuangshuang's reasoning skills were unparalleled; even a slight hint would lead her to analyze thoroughly.

This was currently the most plausible conclusion she had come up with.

The Old Mu Family is planning to sell her off to scrape together money for that unworthy Mu Dade.

Chapter 129 Aunt Xiao Yun Is Really Nice (Part 1)

"Shuangshuang, don't overthink it. Your grandpa said he's going to the town tomorrow to borrow the money for your uncle's exam from your aunt."

Mu Dashan couldn't believe that his parents would do such heinous things for money, no matter how biased his mother was, there was a line she wouldn't cross.

"Shuangshuang, don't worry, no matter what happens, I'll protect you and our whole family."

Mu Dashan was already starting to plan for himself gradually.

This morning, when the old man wanted him to finish all the remaining work alone, Mu Dashan said he wasn't feeling well and came back with his second brother and fifth brother.

This was the first time he refused, but he felt a sense of relief.

"Hmm!"

All these were just Mu Shuangshuang's suspicions, she actually knew that Mu Dashan wouldn't believe it.

At least, without evidence right now.

Even a tiger wouldn't eat its cubs, deep down, Mu Dashan believed Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu still had good conscience and kindness.

"How about, dad, I go to the town with grandpa tomorrow? The road to town is far, and I can help take care of grandpa, which could put everyone at ease."

Since it was about raising money for Mu Dade, she must accompany and see it through, ensuring the sum of silver is collected successfully.

Meanwhile, she could try to get some words out of the old man on the road, see if her suspicions were correct, and if they were, ask Mu Dashan to bring up the family division again.

As for delivering the cold noodles to town, Lu Yuanfeng could handle that.

He's quick and efficient and would certainly deliver the cold noodles intact.

"Alright then, I'll talk to your grandpa and see what he says."

At the dinner table, when Mr. Mu heard what Mu Dashan said, he agreed without a second thought.

Right now, the fields needed hands, and it wasn't practical for others to accompany him to town.

If it wasn't for Dade's situation, he wouldn't have taken a whole day to go to town.

"Dad, what does Shuang know? Why would you agree to let her go? Big Sis might not like her." Mu Dazhong opposed for the first time.

He was planning to take the opportunity to be lazy for a day; in this scorching sun, staying outside harvesting rice daily had taken a toll on his skin.

And also, Big Sis's house in town surely had plenty of good food and drinks.

"Second Brother is right, what does Shuang know? When she meets Big Sis, she'll just be scared and might anger Big Sis.

Or seeing how nice Big Sis's house is, she might get mischievous and take something; that'll bring shame to our Old Mu Family."

Mu Danian thought the same as Mu Dazhong; he also wanted to loaf around in town.

"If you all go, who will do the work in the fields? Who will handle the farm work?"

Mr. Mu picked up his dry tobacco pipe that he had hidden for a long time and knocked it heavily on the dining table.

He usually stopped smoking it as soon as summer arrived because firstly, it was hot; secondly, it was inconvenient to do farm work while holding a pipe all day.

But ever since Dade urgently needed money to hire a teacher in the county, he brought out the pipe again, smoking a few puffs when he was agitated.

With each puff, as the smoke was exhaled, it seemed his worries were also reduced.

"Second Uncle, Fifth Uncle, now is a critical time, what you should be doing is harvesting our rice quickly, so we can store the grain safely.

This way, there's one more layer of security for First Uncle's exam fees.

And after all, Big Sis is my real aunt, why wouldn't she like Shuangshuang, Second Uncle please don't say such things in the future. If overheard, people will blame Big Sis for being ungracious.

As for Fifth Uncle, Shuangshuang is your legitimate niece. They say uncles are close with their nieces, sharing similar temperaments, claiming Shuangshuang would steal is akin to scolding yourself indirectly, how will that be resolved?"

Mu Shuangshuang retorted to Mu Dazhong and Mu Dalian's words slowly and deliberately, maintaining a smile throughout.

However, her composure was bound to anger Mu Dazhong and Mu Dalian.

"In adult conversations, you little brat have no place, now scam to the side."

"Second Uncle, once again you are mistaken, back then grandpa set the rules, as long as it's reasonable, both adults and children are allowed to speak, grandpa, isn't that right?"

Upon hearing Shuangshuang's words, Mr. Mu was slightly touched for a moment.

This young girl, her every word was justified, whereas his own two sons were clearly unreasonable.

Unfortunately, this child was a good child, but sadly born as a daughter; after all, a daughter is like water thrown from a basin that can't be gathered again.

If she were a son, after Dade passed his exams, she could be groomed nicely.

Mr. Mu felt somewhat regretful in his heart, but on the surface, he gave a just verdict. "Shuang is right, stop arguing, and she will accompany me tomorrow."

"Mom..." Mu Danian still wanted to say something, but Old Mrs. Mu was unusually silent, as if her throat had been muted.

At this moment, Old Mrs. Mu was contemplating in her mind, she had planned that once the old man left tomorrow, she would talk to Dashan about marrying off Shuang.

While the old man was away, they would secretly obtain the marriage certificate with a few people.

By then, anyone wanting to regret would have to ensure Shuang would never marry, otherwise, no one would dare propose to her.

Others didn't know what Old Mrs. Mu was planning, but Mrs. Jin knew very well, so she kept her silence too.

After dinner, Mu Shuangshuang went to Aunt Xiao Yun's house to grind mung beans, Little Zhi and Xiao Han went along.

The three of them laughed and chatted as they arrived at Zhao Yun's house.

On the way, Mrs. Jin watched Mu Shuangshuang run eagerly toward Zhao Yun's house, though puzzled, she didn't follow.

In her heart, soon this niece would disappear.

Yu Si Niang came over after cleaning the kitchen. When she arrived, her forehead and body were covered in sweat. It was only after Shuangshuang handed her a handkerchief that she wiped the sweat from her forehead.

At this moment, Shuangshuang had already begun grinding the beans; originally Yu Si Niang wanted Mu Dashan to come over, but they were held back by the old man busy making straw ropes from rice ears, unable to leave at the moment, so she gave up on that.

After grinding the green beans, following last time's method, Mu Shuangshuang began cooking the cold noodles.

"Xiao Han, today's task of managing the fire is once again entrusted to you, our family's fire-handling master."

Mu Xiaohan was already used to it, but his most exciting thing right now was the few books Mu Shuangshuang brought.

Those were treasures, and although he was illiterate, just the scent of the paper from the books made him feel like he should be the one holding them.

People are like this; there are things you have always pursued, but there are also things that suddenly appear, prompting you to decide to pursue them.

"Si Niang, are you guys still working on it?" Zhao Yun craned her neck, walking into the kitchen from outside.

"Yes, Xiao Yun, have you finished eating?" Yu Si Niang went up to meet Zhao Yun as soon as she saw her.

"Yes!"

The two chatted for a while before getting to the main topic.

"By the way, are you making any money from this? I feel bad taking Shuangshuang's silver."

Zhao Yun wasn't a fool, over time, Shuangshuang had given her quite a bit of silver, far exceeding the value of what her family provided. She was truly worried that Shuangshuang would end up with little money while giving all she had to her.

How would Shuangshuang manage then?

## Chapter 130: Mr. Mu's Concern

The next day, just as dawn barely broke, Lu Yuanfeng pushed his family's wooden cart to Zhao Yun's house.

He loaded the cold noodles and raspberry juice made by Mu Shuangshuang into two wooden barrels.

Cheerfully, he headed towards the town.

Old Mu Family—

Mr. Mu took out a navy blue shirt that he usually wore only during the New Year or festivals and put it on his slightly hunched frame.

The smile on his face was unrestrained, with gaping mouth corners revealing big yellow teeth.

He smoothed out his clothes, and said to Old Mrs. Mu beside him.

"Xiangxiang's mother, take a look at me, does this look good? Would I embarrass the big sister?"

Mu Xianxian married someone from the town, her in-laws owned a shoe store, certainly more respectable than these mud legs.

Mr. Mu didn't want to lose face when visiting, so he had been tidying himself up all morning.

He even shaved the beard he hadn't touched for a long time, making it clean.

"Looks good, looks good, Xiangxiang's father, you look good in anything."

Old Mrs. Mu was in a good mood as well, her current demeanor was as flawless as it ever could be, not noisy, and didn't cause trouble.

Even Mr. Mu couldn't find a single fault.

"Xiangxiang's mother, what's going on? Why are you so quiet today?" Mr. Mu couldn't help but curiously ask.

Understanding his wife deeply, Mr. Mu knew that normally, at this hour, she would be in the courtyard arms akimbo scolding daughters-in-law one by one. How could she be standing quietly here now?

"Oh, what could be up with me? Old man, didn't you say you're afraid of being late and missing the lunch at big sister's house? You better head out now."

Old Mrs. Mu wished Mr. Mu to head to town early, so she could visit the third son.

"True, it's been delayed for so long, I'll be on my way then." Mr. Mu gave a final tug at his shirt.

"Wait a moment, I'll go to the third room and call Shuang, let her take care of you on the way."

Old Mrs. Mu's tone was gentle, a rare occurrence since early morning breakfast, usually the smallest bun was for Shuang.

This time, she deliberately picked a larger bun, and advised Shuang to wander around town if she liked, not to rush back.

"Alright then!" Mr. Mu, unaware of any ulterior motives.

Soon, Shuang emerged from her room.

Unlike Mr. Mu, she showed no change from usual, wearing a faded cotton shirt, clean and spotless.

There were patches on the fabric washed to white, the clothes were large, making Shuang look like a child who sneaked on adult clothes.

Mr. Mu furrowed his brows.

"Shuang, why didn't you change into better clothes? This..."

Mu Shuangshuang understood Mr. Mu's implication, yet the old man was quite amusing, as all family money was controlled by Old Mrs. Mu.

For someone like her, would they ever get money to buy some fabric to make clothes for her?

"Grandpa, there's no other clothing at home, this is Shuang's best outfit. Do you think... my aunt would really despise me as Uncle Five said?" Mu Shuangshuang curved her lips into a light smile.

"No... she wouldn't." Mr. Mu waved his hand.

Mr. Mu decided that soon he'd have Shuang wait outside, ensuring big sister's in-laws wouldn't see her like this.

Mu Shuangshuang simply laughed, the more Mr. Mu tried to distance himself from her, the more she stayed close.

The grandfather-granddaughter duo each carried a jug of water, walking in the morning sun, trekking over twenty miles of mountain roads.

By the time they arrived in town, Mu Shuangshuang felt almost cooked by the heat.

Mr. Mu dawdling aside, they happened to arrive when the sun was at its harshest, causing her additional hardship.

Mu Xianxian's in-laws were in a place called Three Willow Lane at the east market, the name seemed unsavory, but many wealthy people in town lived nearby.

Therefore, marrying Mu Xianxian there once made Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu proud.

Stopping before a house with vermilion wooden doors, Mr. Mu hunched his neck, adjusted his clothes, confirmed his appearance wasn't too shabby, and knocked on the big lock on the door.

After a few knocks, a servant came to open the door.

"Who are you looking for?" The servant scanned Mr. Mu up and down, neither the clothing nor presence seemed affluent, rather impoverished.

"I'm looking for Mu Xianxian and Mu Xiangxiang, I am their father."

Mu Xiangxiang had been at Old Cao's house for several months, yet no message sent home.

Mr. Mu felt solemn at the thought, fortunately, today he'd have a chance to see them.

"Then wait here, I'll find the lady of the house." The servant thoroughly unconcerned, told Mr. Mu.

"Shuang, how do you think your aunt is doing now?" Mr. Mu curiously asked.

"Surely living well, Aunt is kind-hearted, won't care about Shuang's shabby clothes. The heavens have eyes, they'll treat her well."

Mu Shuangshuang meaningfully remarked about Mu Xianxian, recalling when Mu Dashan worked at the dock to scrape together her dowry.

Yet she turned her back on the family, taking nothing when Mu Dashan married.

Such people, it's perplexing for heaven to favor.

Sadly, Mr. Mu didn't catch the sarcasm, blissfully accepting her remarks, even the notion of leaving Shuang outside dissipated.

Soon, the reporting servant returned, ushering Mr. Mu inside.

Mu Xianxian's family home wasn't particularly large, with a front and back yard about the size of a basketball court.

The servant led Mr. Mu straight to Old Cao's back yard.

Mu Xianxian sat in a pavilion, a basin of sliced melon before her, upon seeing Mr. Mu, she waved.

"Father, I heard from the household that you've arrived, I didn't want to believe it until seeing you to be sure."

Mu Xianxian remained seated, waiting for Mr. Mu to come over.

Mr. Mu didn't mind, upon approaching, seeing Mu Xianxian adorned with bead hairpins, believed more than ever his eldest daughter could aid his son.

"Father, these melons were freshly bought from the market by the servants, try some, they cost quite a bit per pound."

Mr. Mu waved his hand. "No need, big sister, I've come today needing your help for your eldest brother, he's soon exam-bound, urgently needing money."

Mu Xianxian glanced at Mr. Mu, "How much?"

"Fifty taels!" Mr. Mu peeked at his eldest daughter's reaction, seeing slight surprise, hurriedly added.

"This time, Da De said hiring a tutor requires this amount."

"Father, not to be harsh, but how many times has my brother taken the exam? You still prepare for it this year, what if he fails again? Do you know how much could be done with fifty taels?"