

## Folly 131

Chapter 131: Settled with 30 Coins

"Big sister, do you even know what you're saying?" Mr. Mu looked at Mu Xianxian in astonishment.

Ever since the eldest daughter of the Mu Family, Mu Xianxian, got married, she rarely returned home. Over the years, Mr. Mu's impression of Mu Xianxian was limited to a few pairs of cloth shoes during festivals.

But Mr. Mu never expected that the daughter he raised with such effort would end up not caring about her eldest brother.

"Dad, you and Mom are getting old, it's time to think about yourselves. My brother is like this, you should just stop.

He's already a Scholar now; he can live off the grain the court gives him each year and find a teaching job in town. He can completely support himself, so why keep taking the imperial exams?"

Mu Shuangshuang entirely agreed with Mu Xianxian's words deep down, considering that Mu Dade was already over thirty, having spent more than a decade trying to pass just one scholar exam.

If he were a promising stock, he's a stock that's hit bottom and will never rise again.

However, reason told her that she should persuade Mr. Mu to borrow those fifty taels of silver, and even if he couldn't, to at least secure a promise.

"Aunt, it's Shuangshuang. Grandpa came this time because he thinks our uncle can definitely pass the exam. He's the only Scholar in Er Gui Village, and if he really gets it, he'll surely be grateful to you in the future."

Mu Xianxian dug her ears; she wasn't interested in who this person in front of her was. Anyway, they were just poor relatives from the Old Mu Family.

Over the years, Mu Xianxian, along with her husband, had worked hard, having long given up thinking about the Old Mu Family.

If Mu Dade hadn't had even a tiny glimmer of hope of passing the scholar exam, she wouldn't have let her in-laws take care of him all these years.

Thinking about her big brother, who, come harvest time, would eat and stay at her house for free, Mu Xianxian felt upset again.

"Dad, don't say any more. Here's thirty coins; take them to buy something nice for you and Mom.

In the future, unless it's about my brother, you're welcome to come over. Otherwise, don't even mention it.

After all, the master of this house is the one with the last name Cao, and I'm just a woman with no say."

In the past, Mu Xianxian would've been cautious, worrying about how to face people if her brother suddenly passed the exam.

But now, there was no need to worry. Her mother-in-law, Mrs. Zhao, had already gone to Liu Family Village to find a Scholar named Liu, who was first in the entire town during the child student exams.

By then, marrying him into their Cao Family made her a Scholar's mother, which was better than being a Scholar's sister.

"Xianxian, you've really disappointed me. Back then, if it weren't for Dashan, you wouldn't have had a dowry for marriage.

Now you're forgetting your roots. Can you face the ancestors of the Old Mu Family?"

At this point, Mr. Mu had lost his reason; he only thought about how Mu Xianxian refused to give him money, completely forgetting that once married, Mu Xianxian was part of the Cao Family.

By the logic of ancestors, it was the ancestors of the Cao Family now.

"Alright, Dad, let's not talk about other things. Take these thirty coins. I'm tired. If you don't mind bringing something for Mom, go buy some food yourself, fill your belly."

On the stone table in the gazebo, Mu Xianxian casually placed the previously prepared thirty coins and, ignoring whatever Mr. Mu said, she didn't stop.

"Shuangshuang, your aunt has changed, changed..." Mr. Mu sighed for a long while, and his once hunched back seemed even more weighed down than before.

Mu Shuangshuang knew Mu Xianxian wouldn't be helping Mu Dade anymore.

"Grandpa, Shuangshuang has something to ask you."

"Go ahead," Mr. Mu said with a bitter and pitiful tone.

"Are you and Grandma planning to sell me to raise money for my uncle's exam?"

Mu Shuangshuang felt that since things were already at this point, it would be truly foolish to hold back her thoughts any longer.

"Nonsense! Who said Grandma and I wanted to sell you? I, an old man, would never do something that would disgrace the Old Mu Family." Mr. Mu angrily replied.

"But Second Aunt said, you and Grandma..." Mu Shuangshuang didn't finish her sentence. She wanted to see Mr. Mu's reaction.

"Your Second Aunt is just a troublemaker; she won't rest until she stirs up trouble at home," Mr. Mu said, slamming his hand heavily on the stone table in the gazebo.

The melon originally placed on the stone table shook with his hand and fell onto the ground with a clatter, the bowl shattered into pieces.

At this moment, Mr. Mu was acting like a loving father, getting angry for Mu Dade's sake.

Mu Shuangshuang really wanted to ask what her father, Mu Dashan, meant to him—a tool, or a pawn?

"Grandpa, don't blame Shuangshuang for speaking up. This matter concerns Shuangshuang's future. I may be disobedient, but I really don't want to end up in a remote place married to a stranger."

"I've said I won't, so I won't. What's wrong with you, child?" Mr. Mu glared fiercely at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Grandpa, I just don't want to be sold."

Mu Shuangshuang met Mr. Mu's gaze. She just wanted a promise. Whether or not something like this would happen in the future, it would at least maintain their ties with the Old Mu Family.

Beyond that, she wouldn't just let it go.

"Then I promise you, even if I have to haul cargo at the docks, I won't sell you, okay?"

"That's okay, that's okay, thank you, Grandpa!"

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The scorching sun blazed overhead. In the fields of the Old Mu Family, with Mr. Mu not around, only Mu Dashan was left working.

Mu Dazhong had gone to find a spot to hide again, Mu Danyan was playing with mud, and as for the fourth, Mu Dajiang, he had already started tilling the field.

The villagers seemed accustomed to this setup; only Mu Dashan and Mu Dajiang were the ones working in the Old Mu Family, two honest people.

These days, honest people always seem to have the hardest time; after all, the saying "the child who cries gets the milk" is based on reality.

"Alright, alright, it's almost noon. Let's head back, Third Brother!"

Mu Danyan threw down the last piece of mud in his hand and scrambled up from the field ridge.

"Hurry up, hurry up, I'm starving here. This work of cutting rice is really back-breaking. I can't even lift my shoulders," Mu Danyan said, waving his shoulders to emphasize.

Mu Dashan hesitated for a moment while gripping his sickle before speaking after a long pause.

"Old Fifth, you should keep cutting for a while longer. You haven't even finished a row this morning. If Dad comes back, he'll probably scold you again."

"Third Brother, what are you saying? If you don't say, I don't say, and certainly, our second brother won't say; so how would Dad know?" Mu Danyan dismissed his concern.

"Third Brother, are you trying to have a better life soon, and now you're lecturing me? What's going on? Are you going to tattle on me?"

Oh, I get it. No wonder you usually keep quiet. You felt you had no status, right?

Now that you're about to have a good life, with a higher status, you're thinking of teaching me, your younger brother.

Third Brother, how can you be like this? Shuang hasn't even married yet, and you're already thinking of bullying your own brother. Do you have a conscience?"

#### Chapter 132: The Third Branch Wants to Split the Family

Mu Danian's cutting words made Mu Dashan frown.

"Fifth Brother, what exactly are you talking about? What's the matter with me? And Shuangshuang getting married, marrying whom? Why don't I know anything?"

A torrent of questions surged in Mu Dashan's mind.

But at this moment, Mu Dazhong was unwilling to speak.

He turned his head and left alone, refusing to say anything regardless of what Mu Dashan asked.

Mu Dashan followed Mu Danian all the way home, exhausted and panting heavily.

"Fifth Brother, you just mentioned Shuangshuang getting married, what exactly do you mean?"

Mu Dashan finally stopped Mu Danian at the courtyard gate, and he spread his hands wide open, making sure Mu Danian couldn't take another step into the Old Mu Family's yard.

"Hehe, Third Brother, what are you doing? I was just joking around. The matter of Shuang getting married isn't decided by me; it's up to you and mom. I have no say. I was just fooling you to come back, speaking casually."

Mu Danian grinned at Mu Dashan, recalling last time when they discussed Shuang's marriage; nobody from his third brother's family was around, and since their father had already forbidden any talk about it, Mu Dazhong hadn't given it much thought.

He really just wanted to trick him into coming back; who would've thought his third brother would react so strongly?

What's the big deal about a girl? Whether she gets married or sold, you can have another one; perhaps a son might be born.

To carry on the family line, you still need a son.

Daughters, well, they're dispensable.

"How can you joke like this? You know if I'd stayed, I could have cut a furrow of rice... sigh..." Mu Dashan stomped angrily but had no choice but to let Mu Danian pass by him into the yard.

"You go back on your own; I'm going to the field to work a bit longer."

"Ah, Third Brother, is your head messed up? You've come all the way back, why go again? Besides, Father isn't here, what are you trying to prove?"

Mu Danian looked disdainful; he hated this about his third brother the most, always working more than him and Second Brother, and getting up earlier too, causing him and Second Brother to be scolded by their father every time.

Every time they got scolded, Third Brother would come over and act the nice guy, pleading for them.

If he really didn't want them to be scolded, he shouldn't work so much.

The truth might be, Third Brother is doing it on purpose; the so-called honest person is actually the most calculating.

Finding no faults with him and Second Brother, he works excessively, letting their father be the bad guy.

Having figured it out, Mu Danian didn't even want to look at Mu Dashan.

He walked straight towards the main house.

Mu Dashan stood there as if struck by lightning, stunned, and after a long while, when he came back to his senses, he could only feel deep darkness in his eyes, nearly fainting on the spot.

The bitterness, anger, and heartache, all emotions surged forth, finally turning into a sigh.

Mu Dashan returned to the field and finished cutting that furrow of rice, then went back to the Old Mu Family with Mu Dajiang.

By the time they returned, the family had already finished lunchtime, and Old Mrs. Mu was waiting for Mu Dashan in the main house. As soon as she saw him, she spoke.

"Old Third, come to my room; Mother has something to discuss with you."

Upon hearing Old Mrs. Mu's words, Mrs. Jin, Mrs. Lin, and Mu Dazhong's bodies all shook. Mrs. Jin was a bit excited, knowing Old Mrs. Mu was about to lay cards on the table with Old Third, she nearly ripped the silk handkerchief she held tightly.

"Ah!" Mu Dashan nodded and followed Old Mrs. Mu into her room.

Old Mrs. Mu entered the room and sat on the kang, while Mu Dashan could only stand beside her.

"Mother, what do you want to talk about with me?"

"Old Third, how has Mother treated you all these years?"

Old Mrs. Mu didn't start by talking about finding a match for Shuangshuang but instead tried to remind Mu Dashan of her kindness.

"Mother has treated me very well."

"That's good." Old Mrs. Mu nodded, "You might remember, when you turned twenty and became an adult, Mother bought you a jacket, right? How was it, warm enough?"

Mu Dashan recalled that sole jacket at home which could resist the cold, with many pieces of its cotton falling off, and he nodded.

"Warm, the jacket is still in my room. Mother's kindness towards me, I'll remember. I will make sure to be filial to you and Father in the future!"

"That's good, seems like Mother didn't raise you in vain. Does your eldest brother treat you well?"

Unaware, Mu Dashan continued to nod. "Yes, Eldest Brother said if he achieves great success, he won't forget us."

"That's right, your eldest brother has a conscience. If he achieves great success, he surely won't forget you.

But now your eldest brother is facing difficulty. If not solved, he definitely won't live well, much less care for you."

The more Mu Dashan listened, the more bewildered he became. His mother, like his fifth brother, spoke in an unclear manner.

"Mother, are you still worrying about Eldest Brother's travel expenses? How about I start tomorrow going to the town wharf to carry goods, earn a bit if I can, and come back at night to cut rice?"

"No need, your earnings aren't enough to send Da De to the county. Actually, there's a better way to help your eldest brother. Tell me, would you help?"

Old Mrs. Mu looked to probe Mu Dashan, originally wanting to ask directly, but Da De said it must be implicit.

She felt stifled, awfully uncomfortable.

Mu Dashan hesitated as he looked at Old Mrs. Mu.

The person before him is his biological mother; although she's forty-eight, there aren't many wrinkles on her face, even her hair shows no trace of graying.

Yet the peculiar look in his mother's eyes made him uneasy inside, feeling something might happen.

"Mother, let me think it over." Mu Dashan suggested, hoping to discuss it when his daughter returned.

"Think, think what! You just said you'd be filial to this old lady, and now I ask you to help your eldest brother a little, you're unwilling. Are you my son, do you have a conscience?"

"Mother, what are you talking about? If I'm not your son, whose son am I? Tell me the matter, if I can do it, I'll agree, right?" Hearing Old Mrs. Mu's words, Mu Dashan anxiously blushed.

"Alright, this task you surely can accomplish. Shuang isn't young anymore, I've arranged a match for her.

Later in the afternoon, Matchmaker Sun will come home; you sign the marriage certificate, and once Shuang turns fifteen, she'll be married."

In the Da Ning Dynasty, there's a law stating that daughters, upon reaching fifteen, that is, after coming of age, can marry.

Everyone must comply with this law, otherwise, they will face certain punishment.

Hence, Old Mrs. Mu said Shuangshuang would be married once she turned fifteen.

Mu Dashan widened his eyes in surprise, not daring to believe as he looked at Old Mrs. Mu.

His facial expression at this moment looked like a palette, changing rapidly.

"Mother, I disagree, I don't consent to marry off Shuangshuang." Mu Dashan shook his head.

"If you say Eldest Brother lacks money for exams, I can work, toil, do anything, but marrying off Shuangshuang, that's something I won't do.

If marrying off Shuangshuang is the only way to gather the amount for Eldest Brother, I..."

"What will you do? Speak!" Old Mrs. Mu asked angrily, placing her hand on her waist.

"Then our third branch will move out and live separately, from now on no matter what happens to Eldest Brother, we won't need his help."

Chapter 133: Utter Disappointment

"What did you say? You worthless scoundrel, daring to say such things for a stinking girl?"

Old Mrs. Mu angrily pointed at Mu Dashan's nose, her eyes full of fury and contempt.

"Mom, I... I'm speaking the truth. If we have to marry Shuangshuang off, then our branch will move out and live independently."

Mu Dashan repeated himself, and as soon as he finished speaking, Old Mrs. Mu's palm hit him.

With a loud "slap," the eavesdropping people outside jumped in fright.

Mu Dashan's face burned with pain!

"Take it back, Mu Dashan, take back what you said to your old mother!"

Mu Dashan stiffened his neck and refused to bow, so Old Mrs. Mu slapped him again, this time jumping up to hit him, causing Mu Dashan's mouth to bleed.

"Third son, has your brain been caught in a door? That stinking girl is a jinx, not only owing a mountain of debt but also constantly stirring up trouble.

I'm marrying her off to settle the debt, which reduces the burden on your branch. You should be grateful to your old mother."

Afraid Mu Dashan would disagree, Old Mrs. Mu quickly added, "I'm telling you, you don't have a say in this. Matchmaker Sun is coming, you'll sign the marriage deed whether you want to or not."

With Old Mrs. Mu's words, Mu Dashan's last bit of hope dissipated. He hung his head and looked at her.

"Mom, all these years, I've worked hard without complaint, just wanting Si Niang and the kids to live well.

But I'm useless; I haven't made their lives better. Still, in no way will I sell Shuangshuang, not even if I die."

Mu Dashan was resolute. He now understood why his second sister-in-law had gone to talk to Shuangshuang and why Fifth said Shuangshuang had to get married.

Everyone knew but kept it from him.

"Well then, you want to die, do you? I'll make it happen, you wretched man."

Old Mrs. Mu looked around, saw a broom in the crack of the door, and without thinking, started to strike Mu Dashan's back.

"Tell me, will you sign or not?" Every time Old Mrs. Mu swung the broom, she'd stop to ask.

After dozens of hits, Mu Dashan's back was covered in welts. If his shirt were lifted, you'd see the purple-red bruises.

Mu Dashan gritted his teeth, telling himself to withstand the pain and not bow his head. If he did, Shuangshuang would be ruined.

The broom struck his back several times, but he still wouldn't speak.

"Mom, don't bother teaching third son a lesson. He actually wanted to marry Shuangshuang off a long time ago but is just embarrassed to admit it."

Mrs. Jin had watched the scene unfold; seeing Mu Dashan thoroughly punished, she felt it was time for her to step in.

"What nonsense are you saying? He clearly disagrees, where's the agreement?" Old Mrs. Mu looked confused, as if Mrs. Jin couldn't understand human speech.

"Mom, look at this." Mrs. Jin gleefully took out a piece of paper from her sleeve.

At this moment, the other members of the Old Mu Family also entered.

To watch the commotion, they had to be present.

"What is this? I can't read." Old Mrs. Mu urged, "Hurry and read it out."

"This is the promissory note Third Son made, borrowing a hundred taels from Wang San's house, saying he'd marry off Shuangshuang if he couldn't repay.

Of course, I helped him make this note, and the money hasn't been borrowed yet.

His intention was for me to marry off Shuangshuang, fifty taels for me and Da De to take exams, and the other fifty taels for him."

Mrs. Jin's lies flipped the truth, making Mu Dashan's face pale instantly.

"Big sister-in-law, what are you talking about? I never signed such a thing. Mom, don't listen to her nonsense; I didn't sign it." Mu Dashan anxiously explained.

But in others' eyes, this only appeared guilty.

"Oh, never saw it coming, Third Son. You seem honest usually, but when it matters, you always plan for yourself.

Fifty taels, wanting to split the family. Tsk tsk tsk, you really disgust me. Thinking of living well on your own, leaving us all behind."

Mu Dazhong, as the Mu Family's second son, was the first to criticize Mu Dashan.

"Second brother, I've been saying it forever, Third Brother isn't stupid; he's smart. Fifty taels could get him a big house in the city."

Mu Danian added, enjoying the escalated drama.

At this moment, Mu Dashan only wanted to cry, with his own mother pushing him and his cherished brothers siding against him.

"Why don't you believe me? I didn't give Sister-in-law this signature..." Mu Dashan shouted, his face veins bulging with rage.

"Third Son, I know I shouldn't have broken my word and told Mom, but you shouldn't deny it. You're the one who initially asked me to marry Shuangshuang to Wang San."

The awkward lie was full of holes, but because it came from Mrs. Jin.

She was the wife of Mu Dade, the most promising member of Old Mu Family.

So her words carried more weight than Mu Dashan's hundred words.

Mu Dashan's eyes welled with bitterness, "Big sister-in-law, you should speak with conscience. Why wrong me? I didn't write it."

"Enough, you'll know if you signed it by checking for the handprint."

Old Mrs. Mu took the contract from Mrs. Jin's hands, unfolding it before Mu Dashan.

Mu Dashan glanced at the handprint, and something flashed in his mind.

That's his handprint, but Sister-in-law had given it to him.

Right, the handprint on that paper was misplaced; was yesterday's one fake?

"Sister-in-law, you..."

Mu Dashan cried. It's embarrassing for a grown man to cry, but he couldn't care, feeling utterly exhausted, his chest about to burst.

Why does a family have so many twists and turns?

"Mom, no matter what you say, this time, I want to split from the family.

As for Shuangshuang, I won't marry her off. If you insist, you'll have to take my life."

Mu Dashan's body trembled violently as he walked out of Old Mrs. Mu's room.

Exiting the house, Mrs. Jin followed him out, lowering her voice. "Third Son, can't you see? I've done this on purpose since you gave me the handprint; I've been waiting for this day."

"But it doesn't matter if you know; I'll go to Wang San's house soon, get him to make a handprint. This matter will become official; Shuangshuang will marry, whether she wants to or not."

Mrs. Jin intentionally spoke these words just to provoke Mu Dashan.

Who asked him not to agree initially, causing her to take so many detours?

Whoever stops her from living well, she would personally remove them.

"Give me..." A glimpse of hope appeared in Mu Dashan's eyes.

Before Wang San's house, if he could snatch it, it'd be fine.

"Give you what?" Mrs. Jin asked deliberately.

"Give me the contract, give it to me..." Mu Dashan reached out his hand to grab, but Mrs. Jin deftly stepped back a few paces.

"Mom, Second Brother, come quickly, Third Son is going to hit me."

Although Mu Dazhong was named, it was Mu Danian who promptly stepped in and swung Mu Dashan's arm away.

"Third Brother, enough, you should own up to it. Hitting Sister-in-law, what does that mean?"

Being a scoundrel yet wanting to be acknowledged for good, you should give it up!"

Being berated by his own brother, Mu Dashan first felt a sting in his chest, then his head, and his entire body seemed to lose control.

His consciousness gradually blurred, and he trembled a few times.

Suddenly, he spat out a mouthful of blood, collapsing there.

"Mom, Third Brother spat blood, I didn't do anything, he himself..."

#### Chapter 134: Prelude to the Storm

Mr. Mu, ever since he left Shuangshuang's aunt's house, has been like a wilted cabbage, looking listless, dragging his feet as he walks.

Shuangshuang knows he's disappointed.

It's not surprising he's disappointed; such a large sum of silver could support the entire Old Mu Family for several years. How could it be easily produced?

If it were Mu Dade's first time taking the exam, it would be understandable, but how many times has he taken it?

Mu Dade became a scholar at fifteen, and now at thirty-one, he's spent sixteen years striving for one title of scholar.

Sixteen years, enough for the poor wife to become a respected woman, yet Mu Dade selfishly insists on taking the exam, asking for fifty silver pieces.

Perhaps his virtues are too poor, even Heaven refuses to let him pass.

Thinking about the Old Mu Family through these years, everyone tightening their belts, and the result is this, Mu Shuangshuang feels it's not worth it.

"Grandpa, would you like to eat something to fill your stomach? I know there's a place selling buns ahead, two for a penny."

Mu Shuangshuang was referring, of course, to the bun shop she'd visited several times; after such a long walk, it's normal to feel hungry.

"Let's go back." Mr. Mu shook his head.

Mr. Mu held onto those thirty copper coins, planning to save them for Mu Dade's examination expenses, and felt reluctant to spend even on a bun.

Poor Shuangshuang couldn't leave him to buy something to eat, but luckily, they encountered Lu Yuanfeng on the way.

The town is not very big, yet some people always seem to run into each other.

"Mr. Mu, Shuangshuang, are you heading back?" Lu Yuanfeng, pushing a wheelbarrow, approached them proactively.

"Yes, Lu Yuanfeng, would you like to join us?" Mu Shuangshuang spoke while signaling to Lu Yuanfeng and touching her stomach.

Lu Yuanfeng immediately realized that Shuangshuang was hungry.

"Mr. Mu, Shuangshuang, could you wait for me a moment?"

Lu Yuanfeng's attitude was sincere, so even if Mr. Mu was unwilling, he could only nod.

Lu Yuanfeng went ahead and bought ten buns, spending five copper coins.

Normally, he might have hesitated, but these days he and Shuangshuang had earned quite a bit of silver. With Shuangshuang saying she was hungry, he naturally didn't hesitate to buy them.

The buns wrapped in oiled paper were still steaming when bought, and the previously indifferent Mr. Mu suddenly felt hungry.

But Lu Yuanfeng was, after all, a child. Mr. Mu found it awkward to eat while asked to do so, but fortunately, Lu Yuanfeng was considerate.

"Mr. Mu, I bought a lot of buns, please have some."

Out of ten buns, Lu Yuanfeng gave Mr. Mu three, kept three for himself, and four for Mu Shuangshuang.

Mr. Mu observed quietly but felt resentful; it wasn't that he necessarily wanted to eat the bun, but he was the eldest among the three.

As Shuangshuang's grandfather, he felt it was right to eat more than Shuangshuang.

This isn't about being selfish, it's just how it should be.

"Shuangshuang, won't you be overstuffed eating so many? Yuanfeng's buns should be eaten more by him."

Unjustly criticized, Mu Shuangshuang rolls her eyes internally, just because she ate one more.

"Grandpa, since Lu Yuanfeng gave them to me, it means he doesn't want to eat that much. I've walked a long way, I'm truly hungry."

Besides, I don't intend to finish all of them. Little Zhi and Xiao Han have never had buns, I want to save some for them."

Being directly refused, Mr. Mu's expression flickered between shades of green and white.

Because of this incident, he remained quiet the entire way while Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng occasionally exchanged glances.

The two pushing the wheelbarrow found amusement in it.

By the time they reached the village, it wasn't late—not long after the lunch hour.

Fortunately, Lu Yuanfeng bought several buns allowing her to stave off hunger, or she would have surely starved.

Mu Shuangshuang ate two meat buns, keeping the remaining two tucked away for Little Zhi and Xiao Han.

Just as she reached the village entrance, she saw Little Zhi with disheveled hair, crying her eyes out.

Mu Shuangshuang rushed over, heart aching as she embraced Little Zhi. "What's wrong, who bullied you?"

Little Zhi was crying so hard she was almost breathless, hiccuping.

If not for Mu Shuangshuang's embrace making her feel familiar, she wouldn't have realized her sister, whom she'd waited so long for, had returned.

"Oh... Sister, why did you come back so late, Daddy... coughed blood, Grandma bullied Daddy..."

"Wuwuwu..."

Mu Shuangshuang's face turned pale, as the meat buns she had in her pocket fell to the ground, rolling a few times before landing in the muddy earth.

Mu Shuangshuang's body trembled slightly as she asked, "Little Zhi, don't cry, tell Sister what happened."

Mr. Mu also panicked; Old Three coughed blood and he was gone for just a morning. How did another incident occur at home?

"Little Zhi, tell Grandpa what exactly happened."

But after mentioning Mu Dashan coughing blood, Little Zhi couldn't speak another word, as if her throat was locked, opening mouth several times without a sound.

Mu Shuangshuang handed Little Zhi to Lu Yuanfeng and said to him, "Help me to take Little Zhi to your house, have Yuanbao take good care of her, I will come to pick her up in the afternoon, meanwhile, go to Zhang Huai Shu's place and ask him to come over."

After saying this, Mu Shuangshuang quickly rushed towards her home.

Mr. Mu followed behind, almost running.

When they reached the Old Mu Family, both were soaked through, Mu Shuangshuang looking like she had been fished out of the water.

At the Old Mu Family, everything was peaceful; Old Mrs. Mu was entertaining Matchmaker Sun with coarse tea from Mu Dade and the melon she'd secretly hidden a few days ago.

In such a grand manner, Matchmaker Sun, after listening to Old Mrs. Mu, promptly took out the wedding book.

"Old Sister-in-law, all you need is for Dashan to sign this, and I'll take care of the rest with the Wang Family myself."

Matchmaker Sun, holding a piece of silk cloth, spoke as she laughed, occasionally swaying it with a charming demeanor.

Mu Shuangshuang's first act was to head home, finding Mu Dashan lying on the bed, ashen-faced, hopeless; if that matchmaker came in, forced by his mother, even if he died, he wouldn't sign.

"Dad, tell me everything that happened this morning in full detail."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't bothered to inquire about Mu Dashan's condition since Zhang Huai Shu would soon arrive to attend to it.

She needed to deal with the Old Mu Family's lot of rubbish first.

Unlike Shuangshuang, Mr. Mu's first task was to go indoors and ask Old Mrs. Mu what happened, after all, Little Zhi claimed Old Mrs. Mu bullied Old Three.

"Shuangshuang, it's Dad's fault. I was tricked by your aunt, she... she deceived me into signing a document that was actually meant to sell you..."

Indeed, that rogue Mrs. Jin really had such thoughts.

"Now your grandma found Matchmaker Sun to have me sign the wedding book, I..."

Upon speaking, Mu Dashan began to become agitated, his chest hurting once more; he breathed heavily, eyes bloodshot, looking terrifying.

"Dad, take a rest, I'll deal with Aunt."

"Xiao Han, take good care of Dad, don't let him get up. Until I come back, don't let anyone in."

Mu Shuangshuang squinted as she returned to her room, took out a contract she'd prepared in advance, and headed towards Mrs. Jin's room...

Chapter 135: Mrs. Jin Deserves It!

Mrs. Jin was in a good mood, her whole demeanor practically glowing.

By now, Matchmaker Sun should have gone to the main house, maybe even dragged to the third branch by the old lady.

Once Mu Dashan signed the marriage contract, the hard days for their big branch would be over.

When the silver was in hand, she would go to the county to find that teacher and get the exam questions first.

"Hmph, with Mu Dashan's blockhead, trying to fight me, no way."

Mrs. Jin muttered pleasantly to herself.

Mrs. Jin had been sitting for nearly half an hour; she was tired and had just risen to go to the backyard to rest when a dark shadow flashed in.

Mu Shuangshuang charged into Mrs. Jin's house, saw Mrs. Jin sitting on the chair, and without a word, rushed up and slapped her.

"Bitch, what exactly have you done."

"Smack," went a slap that made Mrs. Jin see stars; she trembled and fell to the ground.

Her face burning with pain, before she could clutch her face and scream, another slap landed.

With a "wow," Mrs. Jin cried out.

"Ah, what are you doing...are you mad..."

Last time, Mu Shuangshuang had only taught her a lesson without touching her, but this time, she wasn't polite.

Her palms mercilessly slapped Mrs. Jin's face.

In the whole main room, there was only the sound of slapping and Mrs. Jin's wailing.

"Mu Shuangshuang, ow, it hurts...let go..."

Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Mrs. Jin's hair with one hand, dragging her back and forth with the other, so furious she nearly lost her mind.

Mu Dashan was honest, but honest people shouldn't be bullied like this.

"Mrs. Jin, are you even human, my father vomited blood, look at what you've done."

Mu Shuangshuang kept a cold face, mercilessly scratching Mrs. Jin's face.

Wasn't she concerned about her face?

Today she was going to scratch this bitch's face.

"Da De, Mom, Dad, save me, this bitch is going to kill me, help..." Mrs. Jin cried out at the top of her voice.

'Bitch' was what other people in the Mu Family called her, Mrs. Jin had never used it because she thought she was different from them.

Being a scholar's wife, her life would be better than those mud-legged people, but this time, Mrs. Jin couldn't care less about her image.

Her face was scratched, and even her hair was yanked away in chunks during the fight.

"Bitch, do you still dare to bully, third branch, tell me!"

Mu Shuangshuang grabbed a handful of hair but still didn't vent her anger, ignoring Mrs. Jin's howls; she just wouldn't let go.

"Today, I, your aunt, will let you know what it feels like to live worse than death!"

Beaten like this, Mrs. Jin just wouldn't bow her head.

"Don't get cocky, I have a contract, I have a contract..."

Mrs. Jin shouted loudly, "Bitch, even if you beat me to death, you still have to marry that old and ugly cripple Wang San, haha...cough, cough...let go, let me go!"

Before Mrs. Jin could finish laughing, Mu Shuangshuang had already started tearing her clothes.

The contract, such a thing, must be on Mrs. Jin.

After tearing the first piece of clothing, Mu Shuangshuang saw the contract inside Mrs. Jin's bosom, reaching out and grabbing the contract, she tore it into pieces with a few strong pulls.

"Contract? Not anymore! Hahaha!" Mu Shuangshuang clutched her belly and laughed heartily.

Mrs. Jin was completely dumbfounded, beaten and unable to hold onto the contract.

"Wuwuwu..." Mrs. Jin began to sob softly, the commotion waking Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying from their nap.

They stared blankly at Mu Shuangshuang.

By this time, Mrs. Jin, already beaten with disheveled clothes, had a face full of red marks, swollen all over.

But neither dared to step forward since Mu Shuangshuang's gaze was terrifying.

"Bring me the Seal Mud Box if you don't want to die."

Mu Shuangshuang shouted, Mu Yingying, who'd been beaten by her before, immediately took a few steps back in fright, because she was holding the seal box, intending to use it as lip balm.

Mu Shuangshuang flung Mrs. Jin aside like a rag, then went up to Mu Dandan and kicked her, sending her flying, her head thudding heavily on the ground.

Then, she snatched the Seal Mud Box from Mu Yingying's hand.

Mrs. Jin was still moaning on the spot; Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward, bent slightly, grabbed Mrs. Jin's finger, pressed it into the seal box, and then stamped the prepared contract with it.

A bright red thumbprint appeared on the contract.

Mrs. Jin stared at Mu Shuangshuang in horror. "What's that in your hand, what's that..."

"Aunt, in this world, you're not the only one who knows how to use contracts; I just used this one too.

Today I received a thousand taels from xx, willing to use my eldest daughter Mu Dandan's marriage as collateral, if not repaid on time, the daughter belongs to xx, the principal continues to be paid, written by Jinyin'er."

"No, you can't write, no way..." Mrs. Jin shook her head desperately.

"I can't write, but others can; in this world, you're not the only bitch who can write!"

Mu Shuangshuang's words left Mrs. Jin completely shocked.

"Oh, I forgot to remind you, Aunt, this xx means no name has been filled in yet, you just told me the person's name is Wang San, don't worry, I'll fill in the name for you."

Fear, suspicion, bewilderment, resentment, all emotions emerged simultaneously, Mrs. Jin looked at Mu Shuangshuang with terror as if she had swallowed a fly.

She reached out, trying to grab the contract paper, but was kicked away by Mu Shuangshuang.

With this kick, Mu Shuangshuang used some force, making Mrs. Jin flop to the ground, unable to get up for some time.

"Get ready for sister's engagement, then I'll lend you a hand."

Mu Shuangshuang carefully folded the contract, coldly smiled, and walked out of Mrs. Jin's house.

On the other side, Mr. Mu felt like he'd been slapped hard when he heard Old Mrs. Mu's embellished words, feeling an aching pain on his face.

He had just promised Shuangshuang that he wouldn't sell her. Now his wife's actions were no different from selling Shuangshuang, what's the difference?

"You old woman, all you do is spoil things!" Mr. Mu stomped his foot in anger and shouted at Old Mrs. Mu.

"How did I spoil things, it's old three himself who signed that, can you blame me?"

"I'm telling you, our eldest now just needs the silver, with the silver he can take the exam, don't block my good days."

Old Mrs. Mu raised her neck and said to Mr. Mu.

"Crazy, you're really crazy."

"I'm crazy, if old three really has guts, then don't sign it; anyway, I've called over Matchmaker Sun, she's on my side now, once old three signs the marriage paper it'll be done, or else just come up with one hundred taels yourself."

"You..." Mr. Mu simply couldn't believe these words came from his own wife.

He wanted to ask if old three was her son, but the words stuck in his throat remembering his eldest daughter's words today, he swallowed them back.

Everyone thought the Old Mu Family would fail, he just wanted to prove them wrong.

The Old Mu Family would rise to fame for sure.

But without money...

While Mr. Mu was hesitating, Mu Shuangshuang walked in.

The hostility on her body still hadn't faded; her gaze at Old Mrs. Mu was still a bit bloodthirsty.

"You little bitch, what kind of look is that, what are you staring at." Old Mrs. Mu said directly.

"Old sister-in-law, Suang girl came just in time, let her see, the match I, Matchmaker Sun, found."

Matchmaker Sun hadn't spoken before, but when she saw Mu Shuangshuang, she got excited.

"Matchmaker Sun, my father won't sign the marriage contract, the Old Mu Family have some family matters to resolve, please go back!"

Chapter 136: Strength Slaps in the Face

"Hey, how can you talk like that, girl? Matchmaker Sun was invited by my old wife, it's not up to you to tell her to leave."

Old Mrs. Mu interjected authoritatively at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Exactly, old sister-in-law, I came only because I heard Shuang has been behaving well lately. Otherwise, with her stinky and dirty looks, who in the village would be interested?"

Matchmaker Sun lifted her chin, placed her hands on her hips, and thrust her chest in Mu Shuangshuang's direction.

She thought: Who does this smelly girl think she is? No looks, no family background, yet dares to look down on the match I propose.

"Matchmaker Sun, my grandma asked you to propose a match, not to pick and choose, if you want someone good-looking, marry them yourself."

Wang San surely fancy your type. Anyway, my marriage is up to my parents, not for an outsider like you to comment on."

Mu Shuangshuang bluntly refused; no way would she marry.

"I spit! Saying you're fat, you start panting. You don't even deserve Wang San, not even that lame dog from the Wang San family.

Look at your feeble appearance, not sure if you could bear children, you're just a hen that won't lay eggs, nobody wants."

Matchmaker Sun cursed out loud; as a matchmaker, she relied on her connections with the neighboring villages and knowing whose kids have good or bad reputations.

Thus, she liked treating girls from bad backgrounds and timid personalities like livestock when arranging marriages.

Mu Shuangshuang has always been seen as easy to bully over the years, hence Matchmaker Sun dared to provoke her.

Unfortunately, Mu Shuangshuang isn't the timid type; whoever dares to insult her, she'll tear their mouth apart.

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward and slapped Matchmaker Sun across the face, shattering her eardrum.

Matchmaker Sun let out a wail and then cried out, "Oh dear, murder, the smelly girl is committing murder..."

Matchmaker Sun yelled at the top of her lungs while flailing her hands wildly in Mu Shuangshuang's direction, but Shuangshuang grasped both of her hands.

Taking advantage of the moment, Shuangshuang yanked Matchmaker Sun's hair back hard, exposing her face slathered with heavy powder and lip oil.

So much powder fell off with Mu Shuangshuang's actions.

Utterly disgusting.

Mu Shuangshuang raised her hand and slapped Matchmaker Sun's food-eating mouth repeatedly.

"Teach your filthy mouth a lesson, of course, you've insulted many young girls, today I won't tear apart your mouth."

Dozens of slaps later, Matchmaker Sun's mouth swelled like a pig's snout, with the red lip oil smeared all over her face, turning into a palette.

Matchmaker Sun emitted horrid screams as if her scalp had been torn off, her mouth no longer hers, her entire body stinging painfully.

Matchmaker Sun attempted to resist, but she was no match for Mu Shuangshuang, who, despite her slender figure, had become stronger from eating well and exercising regularly, easily overpowering the blustering Matchmaker Sun.

The long-stunned Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu finally regained their senses.

Mr. Mu stepped forward to try pulling Mu Shuangshuang's hand away, but after several attempts, he couldn't.

"You smelly girl, let go! You dare to touch Matchmaker Sun; who would dare to propose a match for you in the future?"

Old Mrs. Mu joined Mr. Mu in pulling, but neither could loosen Mu Shuangshuang's grip; she simply kicked Matchmaker Sun to the ground and sat on her, continuing the beating.

"Stop! I command you to stop!" Mr. Mu spoke sternly.

"Mrs. Lin, call for Old Third, let her see her wonderful daughter."

Mrs. Lin, who was peeking from the doorway to watch the spectacle, had just stepped one foot inside when Mr. Mu caught her, reluctantly drew back her foot, and just before she retreated, Mu Shuangshuang shouted loudly.

"Who's going? You all think my dad's life is too long, right?"

Mr. Mu's order was to have Old Third discipline Shuangshuang, completely oblivious to the fact that Little Zhi had previously mentioned Old Third coughing up blood.

Having been reprimanded by Shuangshuang, he suddenly remembered, but to revoke his words would undermine his authority as the head of the family.

"Mrs. Lin, hurry and go!"

Another scolding, Mrs. Lin turned to leave, but then she saw Mu Dashan, supported by Xiao Han, coming in.

Mu Dashan appeared pallid, his whole being like a frail old tree vine.

It seemed he exerted much effort getting out of bed, now with his body drenched as if fished out of the water.

He headed directly towards Mu Shuangshuang, every step taken seemed to endure immense pain.

Seeing the scene inside the hall room, his cold sweat broke out all over; Mu Shuangshuang sat atop Matchmaker Sun's belly, mercilessly beating her.

Behind her, Old Mrs. Mu held a wrist-thick stick, ready to hit Shuangshuang hard.

"Mother, don't, don't! We the third branch want to split away, don't hit Shuang!"

"Sister, watch out!" Xiao Han also shouted.

The stick swung over with a swift breeze, Mu Shuangshuang felt something flash by her back head; she dodged aside, and the stick landed right on Matchmaker Sun's chest.

"Ah..." Matchmaker Sun cried out, then clutched her chest, shaking her body non-stop like dancing on the ground, energetically.

With considerable force behind that swing, Old Mrs. Mu's blow on anyone could leave them bedridden for three days, let alone the unguarded Matchmaker Sun.

Old Mrs. Mu was stunned; the stick dropped to the ground with a clatter.

"It wasn't me, it wasn't me who hit her..." She clearly aimed for the smelly girl, how did it hit Matchmaker Sun?

By now, Matchmaker Sun started convulsing on the ground.

Mu Shuangshuang shouted at the top of her lungs. "Grandma's killing, killing someone..."

Old Mrs. Mu trembled violently, terrified all over, as if the person died...

"What are you standing around for, Old Second, take her to the doctor, if anything happens to her, the Old Mu Family is done for."

Mu Dazhong roused by Mr. Mu, squatted down and picked up Matchmaker Sun, then dashed out of the hall room.

Mr. Mu walked up to Mu Shuangshuang, speaking sternly.

"Kneel!"

Who would've thought, Mu Shuangshuang didn't budge at all; she looked at Mr. Mu and chuckled.

"Grandpa promised Shuangshuang in town that Shuangshuang won't be sold. Does Grandpa's promise still hold?"

"How does it not, but it was Old Third who signed the agreement, it should be observed."

With one sentence, Mr. Mu shirked all responsibility onto Mu Dashan.

Watching this, Mu Dashan shuddered, nearly collapsing, Mu Family's Fourth Mu Dajiang stepped forward and supported Mu Dashan.

"Thank you, Fourth Uncle!" Mu Shuangshuang witnessed this scene and expressed her gratitude outright.

"Grandpa clearly knows my dad wouldn't do such a thing; it was all orchestrated by Aunt. Shuangshuang doesn't want to say any more, just wants us the third branch to split away according to my dad's wish."

Chapter 137: Leaving the House with Nothing

"I don't care about designs or whatever, I only know that since the third son signed the contract, it must be adhered to, otherwise, what will others think of our Old Mu Family."

The mention of splitting the family from Mu Shuangshuang instantly changed Mr. Mu's expression, making his words harsh unconsciously.

"So, Grandpa, you're saying a contract must be observed? Well, I happen to have a contract here. It's signed by my aunt, with her handprint on it.

She wanted one thousand taels from Wang San's house to fund my uncle's examination journey, with plans to repay once my uncle had the silver.

As for the interest, well, it would be my Sister Dandan's marriage. Grandpa, you can prepare to marry off Sister Dandan."

Mu Shuangshuang took out the contract from her sleeve, waving it in front of Mr. Mu.

At this moment, Mrs. Jin was being supported by Mu Dandan, beaten so badly that her entire body hurt.

"Father, Shuangshuang forced me to sign this...she also hit me."

The only purpose Mrs. Jin had in coming over was to complain.

Unable to beat Mu Shuangshuang, she'd appeal to Mr. and Mrs. Mu.

All in all, as long as that brat girl dies.

As Mrs. Jin spoke, her face continued to hurt badly. Upon finishing, she grimaced alone in agony.

"Grandpa, Grandma, you have to stand up for my mother, Shuangshuang hit people and wants to sell me..."

The scenario was so similar, yet Mr. Mu only remembered Shuangshuang's wrongdoing.

He reached out his hand towards Shuangshuang, saying, "Hand over the contract to your aunt."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't willing to, especially not something acquired with great effort.

"Grandpa, when my aunt treated me this way, you said my father signed the contract, which made him wrong. How come now when I ask my aunt to sign a contract, she isn't wrong anymore?"

Mu Shuangshuang was quite displeased with Mr. Mu's bias!

"Grandpa, I understand that my aunt is uncle's wife, the scholar's wife. The moment she says a thing, you're willing to break your promise and push Shuangshuang into the fire pit.

But you must know that humans act while heavens watch; evil deeds will always be repaid."

Mrs. Jin, nearby, stomped her feet, pushing aside Mu Dandan.

"Are you implying that I'm the one doing evil, Mu Shuangshuang? Who do you think hit the marks on my face? Are you daring not to admit it?"

"How do I know if you didn't do it yourself? Isn't Aunt most fond of using these underhanded tricks?"

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes, aware Mr. and Mrs. Mu hadn't witnessed it, believing Mrs. Jin expected an admission?

Dream on!

"You..." Mrs. Jin's mouth twisted in anger, her body swaying, until Mu Dandan steadied her.

Mr. Mu, seeing this, said to Mu Dashan, "Old Third, is this the kind of daughter you've raised?"

Just look at her, hitting her aunt, hitting the matchmaker, what other heinous acts can't she do?

Today you decide whether to marry off this girl or never step into our Old Mu Family's home again."

Mu Dashan's lips trembled, and he glanced at Old Mrs. Mu, whose expression was fierce, along with Mr. Mu's, everyone wishing death upon their third branch.

He truly should give up.

"Father, our third branch will split away, I won't marry off Shuangshuang."

This was the second time Mu Dashan had said it, now with the utmost determination.

He was resolute, even if it meant begging for food, he wouldn't let his daughter be sold like this.

"Beast!" Mr. Mu raised his hand towards Mu Dashan's face but didn't expect Mu Shuangshuang to grab his wrist.

"Grandpa, my father is already so grievously injured, please don't touch him anymore.

If you insist on hitting my father, I'll hand the contract over to Wang San immediately.

I assume anyone would want to gain a bride and a thousand taels of silver for free.

I just don't know how marrying Sister Dandan to such a person might affect my uncle's career."

Mu Shuangshuang sneered, fully aware that the contract in her hand was useless, yet the Old Mu Family wouldn't think so.

They would surely agree to split the family for the contract.

Mu Dandan, hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, couldn't stop her tears from falling, she pleaded.

"Grandpa, I beg you, let Uncle's family split away, Dandan doesn't want to get married to that old, ugly, and crippled person..."

Seeing her daughter cry, Mrs. Jin panicked too. "Father, just take it as my plea, if Da De becomes successful in the future, we'll certainly serve you and Mother with all our hearts, please let the third branch go, even for the sake of Da De, he can't be mocked..."

Mu Shuangshuang listened to Mrs. Jin and Mu Dandan's words and suddenly burst into laughter.

"Aunt, the saying goes you aimed for the chicken but lost the rice, it fits you perfectly. You're unwilling to marry Sister Dandan, yet fine with marrying me without any affection."

Everyone present knew deep down, Shuangshuang's words seemed to blame Mrs. Jin, but were actually accusing Mr. Mu of being unfair.

Mr. Mu stared at his granddaughter, who was smiling brightly, appearing so fragile, yet every word seemed to choke him.

"Shuangshuang, have you really thought this through? Your father has suffered so much over the years just to send your uncle away, just about to reap good days.

If you split now, your third branch will never share the joys with your uncle."

Mr. Mu still tried to persuade Mu Shuangshuang.

"Those good days can stay with Grandpa and Grandma and the rest of the family; our third branch doesn't need them.

Shuangshuang is not a tool to toss into a fire pit, and can't use my lifelong happiness to benefit those who plot against my father."

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, not longing for the so-called riches.

She wanted to pursue what she desired on her own.

"Old man, what's the point of rambling? Let them split, let them leave with nothing, at worst I pretend this creature was never born." Mrs. Mu said angrily.

To leave with nothing, made Mu Dashan's expression darker.

Her mother genuinely wanted their third branch to perish.

Mu Dashan felt extreme distress, freeing a hand to hold Xiao Han tightly. "Mother, Shuangshuang's decision is my decision. Leave it to her, whatever she wants to say is as good as done."

Actually, to Mu Shuangshuang, having the Old Mu Family's assets or not mattered little.

The silver she had now, even if only a few taels, could last a whole year if everyone saved wisely.

But the more the Old Mu Family behaved this way, the less she complied.

"Grandpa, you decide on the splitting, and after it happens, if the third branch succeeds, you're still welcome to have tea.

As for uncle's family, Shuangshuang truly can't continue being kind to those who want to sell me."

Completely severing relations through splitting isn't feasible, this era prioritizes filial piety.

If Mr. and Mrs. Mu don't commit a crime like murder, the sons are obliged to care for them till death, or else it wouldn't align with societal norms and might lead to a lawsuit.

Moreover, Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang were educated into believing that there's no fault in parents.

Hence, Mu Shuangshuang didn't outright state she'd never see them again.

Mr. Mu sighed heavily, reaching this point, splitting was inevitable.

"Fine, I agree with you, tonight when Si Niang returns, besides Da De, we'll hold a meeting to discuss this matter."

Chapter 138: How to Divide the Family Property

Mr. Mu's words seemed to solidify the family division, but the specifics still needed the family's discussion that evening.

Mu Shuangshuang held the contract and supported Mu Dashan.

"Grandpa, given my father's condition, he might not be able to work for a few days. The farm work will be a burden on you and the uncles."

"The contract, give it to me!" Mrs. Jin saw Mu Shuangshuang nearby and reached out for the contract.

"Aunt, a family division isn't just talk; after our third branch gets the division documents, then we'll give you the contract; otherwise, what do we do if you deny it?"

"What do you want the contract for? Mu Shuangshuang, I'm telling you, if you don't hand over the contract today, don't even think about walking out of this door."

Mrs. Jin, completely disregarding her image, directly cursed at Mu Shuangshuang.

Her meaning was clear: for Mu Shuangshuang to leave, she had to hand over the contract.

Mu Shuangshuang slightly swayed while supporting Mu Dashan's body, ignoring Mrs. Jin.

"Elder daughter-in-law, go home and clean up yourself properly; the elder is going to be an official, and he needs face."

Mr. Mu stopped Mrs. Jin; when he said to discuss in the evening, it was in the evening. The elder daughter-in-law was too dismissive of him.

"But, Dad, Shuangshuang she..."

"No buts, the family decisions are mine to make."

-----

After dinner, the Old Mu Family sat round in the main room, except for Mu Shuangshuang, the only child there, and the rest of the branches' children didn't have the right to sit there.

Of course, Mu Shuangshuang was there mainly because she held Mrs. Jin's contract.

Mr. Mu coughed and said, "Everyone should know about today's matters, and who's right or wrong, we won't discuss. Anyway, the third branch is going to separate."

Mu Dazhong learned of this matter from Mrs. Lin, as he went to take Matchmaker Sun to see a doctor; Mrs. Lin always spoke without hesitation, so Mu Dazhong personally asked about it.

"Dad, I naturally have no objection to the third branch separating; but if they separate, who will pay for brother's examination expenses?"

Mu Dazhong wasn't foolish; he knew when the elder came back refusing to lend money from his sister, this wouldn't end easily.

Originally thinking about selling the troublesome girl, now that the troublesome girl was leaving with a branch, the idea naturally shifted to someone else.

"We'll discuss this matter later; now I'm handling the family division."

Mr. Mu internally disliked dividing the family despite the elder daughter-in-law's outrageous deeds.

"Dad, if I may speak, third brother willingly chose to separate; he doesn't want to live well. Later, when elder brother has plenty, they shouldn't come freeloading."

Mu Danian thought far ahead; the third branch wanting to separate now was just dodging the elder brother's fifty taels obligation.

When elder brother prospers, they might cling again, reducing his share.

"That's only natural!" Mr. Mu nodded, "Separate, the elder's glory won't concern the third."

"Let it be separated then." Mu Dazhong agreed, "Perhaps the third might grow wealthy."

Mr. Mu took a deep breath, showing a more severe expression.

Now, avoiding issues wasn't possible anymore.

"Since no one opposes, let's separate; as for how to divide, I'll decide alone."

Mr. Mu remained the one issuing orders.

He sat centrally in the main room, with Old Mrs. Mu beside him; tonight, she was quiet, yet her eyes stayed fixated on Mu Shuangshuang.

Despite Yu Si Niang's intent to protect her, she was pierced many times by Old Mrs. Mu's sharp gaze.

"Our Old Mu Family has fifteen acres of paddy fields and six acres of dry land; as you all know, we have land deeds.

Through these lands, we've supported the entire family and saved for Da De's tuition.

Our Old Mu Family has a large household and many sons; old third, I'll give you one and a half acres of paddy land and half an acre of dry land.

With current farming busy season, you must help finish the fieldwork first.

Your mother and I are not too old, not needing support yet, but to prevent following your elder brother later, you must still fulfill filial duty.

After the guns, Si Niang pays daily six copper coins in wages, needing to give two for your mother and me.

As for you, with small land, you surely won't work the field daily; you might work in town.

A man earns twelve copper coins a day; you'll give us four daily."

According to Mr. Mu's calculation, the third branch paid Old Mu Family daily six copper coins, equating monthly to one hundred eighty coins, yearly two taels of silver.

Two taels almost matched the third branch's annual income.

"Grandpa, that's too unfair; six copper coins is my mother's daily wage, meaning she must labor hungry yearly for your and grandma's sake; it's not real separation."

If wages were gone, Yu Si Niang also had to pay food expenses—how ridiculous.

"Adults speak; children stay silent. Further words, get lost from my house!"

Old Mrs. Mu's eyes gloomily swept Mu Shuangshuang before unkindly speaking.

"Grandma, I almost got sold; why don't I have a say, or does everyone want to marry off Sister Dan Dan for a thousand taels?"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke half-smiling.

Mrs. Jin couldn't sit still, "Shuangshuang, blame your aunt's fault; aunt shouldn't have found you a good family, your Sister Dan Dan hasn't done anything, don't harm her, please?"

Mrs. Jin's mind was extremely calm; confrontation meant defeat; she must repent.

"I don't want to hurt Sister Dan Dan either; she's beautiful, a scholar's daughter, possibly later a scholar or champion scholar's daughter, sure to marry well and glorify ancestry.

But the issue is, Shuangshuang lacks life security; mother's wages are gone, leaving no food for Shuangshuang, thinking of money, wondering how much Wang San might offer seeing the contract."

Such blatant threat, how would Mrs. Jin not understand.

She clenched her fists, her face swelling like a pig, showed a pitiful look.

"Dad, why not forget it, the third branch isn't easy, taking this land, might not even survive."

Mr. Mu clearly understood; the Old Mu Family's land exceeded these acres, the rest rented, signed a ten-year lease.

Now only the third year, yet still a long stretch; thus, depending on land, the remaining Old Mu Family surely could eat.

"Then forget it; one acre of paddy land, half-acre dry land, house still as before, the adjacent hut given too.

Shared outhouse; others resolved yourself; you might not divide."

### Chapter 139: The Serf Turned Over and Sang (Part 1)

Mr. Mu's words once again circled back to the issue of not dividing the family.

He thought about giving less land to the third branch to keep them from leaving.

An acre and a half of paddy fields, if fully planted with crops, yield only about six hundred jin of grain per year, depending on the fertility of the land.

If the land is too poor, it might only produce three hundred jin, which is not enough for the third branch's family of five, post-tax, as staple food.

As for the dry land, five mu of land, at most, can grow some cotton, and by the next spring, planting rapeseed, it is still uncertain if it will be enough for the third branch to eat.

This time, Mr. Mu was certain that the third branch would not separate because of such strict conditions.

However, whether the family splits is not something he can stop with just these harsh terms.

Mu Shuangshuang thought about it, and for the land, what Mr. Mu could give was already quite a bit, asking for more, the Old Mu Family wouldn't give it.

Mu Dashan had similar thoughts as Mu Shuangshuang; although the land could not sustain a family of five, he had hands and feet. Once he's better, he'll go to town to carry cargo.

"Dad, let's split. With me and Si Niang at home, the three children won't starve."

Mu Dashan spoke somewhat weakly, as Zhang Huai Shu was out on a visit in the afternoon and wouldn't return until evening, so he hadn't been examined by a doctor yet.

Mu Shuangshuang had Lu Yuanfeng tell Zhang Huai Shu's wife that as soon as he returned, to come to the Old Mu Family to help with the diagnosis.

The situation was no longer in their favor, and Mr. Mu sighed heavily before continuing to speak.

"The family has a total of fifteen taels of silver left, which is all for your eldest brother's exam expenses. As for the expenses mentioned by the second brother..."

In theory, all these years, the eldest was supported by you brothers; you should bear the responsibility to the end.

But I know the situation of the third branch, Shuang still owes Zhang Huai Shu twenty taels, and it's unknown when that will be paid back.

To ask you for it again is impractical, so you don't need to bear it."

Upon hearing Mr. Mu's words, Mu Shuangshuang was overjoyed, knowing she wouldn't pay this silver, but if Mr. Mu insisted, it would take some effort to resolve.

"Dad, it's not right to say that; if the third brother doesn't bear it, how can we be the ones to shoulder it?"

Mu Danian was somewhat displeased, thinking it could have been a good opportunity to extort, but how could it be let go just like that?

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to deal with this Fifth Uncle. Over the years, her father had done the most work in the fields; if he didn't speak up, why should Mu Danian?

Just as Mu Shuangshuang was complaining silently, Mr. Mu spoke up.

"Fifth, this isn't your place to speak, stay aside."

"Dad, we agreed from the start that we brothers would support the eldest together. Now that the third wants to separate, trying to shirk this responsibility, we can't agree." Mu Dazhong shouted.

"That's right, Dad, the eldest needs fifty taels, and you only have fifteen.

There's still a shortage of thirty-five taels, and the eldest is about to take the exam; where will we get the money?" Mrs. Lin echoed.

"Everyone shut up, I've already said, the family splitting is my decision.

Since the third doesn't want to give Shuang in marriage, it has nothing to do with him regarding the eldest's matters."

As soon as Mr. Mu said this, the others quieted down, knowing they didn't have the authority to decide and just wanted to make things difficult for the third branch.

Realizing that the third branch didn't get anything good, they settled down.

"Alright, the decision is made; tomorrow morning, we'll invite the village chief and a few village elders to sign the documents.

Currently, with double cropping, you in the third branch will temporarily eat in the main house, but during the day, you must work in the fields. Before officially separating, you should prepare some tools yourselves."

Mr. Mu meant that, given the immediate separation, the third branch lacked rice and pots, and it would take time to prepare. Meanwhile, their family would be short a few laborers, so they'd separate after the double cropping and transplanting.

Mu Dashan nodded upon hearing this.

Mu Shuangshuang initially thought she wouldn't work for the Old Mu Family, but setting up a stove, buying pots, and building a kitchen also took time.

Moreover, as Mu Dashan couldn't work recently, they, the third branch, with five mouths to feed, wouldn't lose out.

The rest of the family had no particular opinions, considering the family meeting concluded.

Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang helped Mu Dashan back to the room. In the process, Mu Shuangshuang accidentally touched Yu Si Niang and felt her body trembling, not knowing if it was from nervousness or excitement.

Having been oppressed for so long, suddenly feeling relieved, Yu Si Niang felt as if she were dreaming.

Soon after Mu Dashan lay down, Zhang Huai Shu arrived; after carefully checking Mu Dashan's pulse, his expression was somewhat heavy, but when he spoke, it was calm.

"I've checked Dashan's injury. I'll write a few prescriptions and personally deliver them tomorrow. Dashan should rest well tonight."

Zhang Huai Shu signaled to Mu Shuangshuang with his eyes, and Mu Shuangshuang immediately understood.

"Mom, I'll see Grandpa Zhang off, take good care of Dad."

Zhang Huai Shu chose not to discuss Mu Dashan's condition in the courtyard with Mu Shuangshuang but waited until they were outside, ensuring no one was following, before speaking.

"Shuangshuang, I know you have a good rapport with Feng, and he specifically asked me to take good care of Dashan; otherwise, I wouldn't have come so late at night.

Don't think I'm being practical, but I really don't want to come to the Old Mu Family; your grandparent is the only person I've never wanted to treat in all these years."

"Grandpa Zhang, my dad... is it serious?"

Mu Shuangshuang felt a bit scared, a bit apprehensive, especially since Mu Dashan had just coughed up blood that day.

The entire afternoon without timely treatment could have delayed the condition.

"Shuangshuang, I won't beat around the bush; Dashan's illness isn't serious per se but is due to long-term fatigue.

Don't be fooled by his current normal appearance, just slightly pale; however, his internal organs have all suffered varying degrees of damage."

Understanding flashed in Mu Shuangshuang's eyes at Zhang Huai Shu's words!

For all these years, Mu Dashan worked tirelessly without distinction of day or night, coupled with inadequate nutrition and untreated ailments, this outcome seemed inevitable.

"Then... is it fatal?"

After all, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't a doctor, possessing only the basic modern medical knowledge, but truly lacking in medical skills.

"No, actually... Dashan coughing up blood today isn't necessarily a bad thing.

At least, for him, his condition was detected before he completely deteriorated, becoming utterly exhausted and depleted.

However, for some time to come, he may need to rest in bed and rely on a lot of good things to recuperate..."

Words left unsaid by Zhang Huai Shu.

He thought, Shuangshuang understood, knowing certain truths, even if unpleasant, were inevitable.

"Grandpa Zhang, you can tell me straight, what will it cost to fully recuperate my dad?"

"Ten taels, and that's just the cost of the medicine; there will still need to be nutritious food to supplement him. If followed my approach, he should be fully recovered in about six months."

In Zhang Huai Shu's mind, ten taels of silver, while perhaps trivial for wealthy families, but for the third branch...

"I'll figure out the money issue, just prescribe whatever medicine is necessary."

Money, ultimately, is not more valuable than a person!

Chapter 140: Life Will Surely Get Better

Zhang Huai Shu was both curious and surprised that a thirteen-year-old girl in front of him said ten taels of silver was not a problem. Just this confidence was something few adults had.

Zhang Huai Shu was not distrustful of Shuangshuang; on the contrary, he trusted her very much.

Even if Shuangshuang didn't have that much silver, beforehand Feng guaranteed that he would cover the medical expenses.

As long as Zhang Huai Shu trusted someone, anything could be discussed, especially when that person was Feng. He had no reason to refuse.

"Alright, you don't have to rush to give the silver now. I don't need it for the time being. We can talk about it after Da Shan recovers."

He was willing to wait for half a year.

"Thank you, Grandpa Zhang. I will earn the silver as soon as possible and give it to you."

Mu Shuangshuang did a simple calculation. She currently had 3,567 wen, and by selling cold noodles in town, she could earn a few taels of silver. For now, there's no need to worry about silver.

Returning home, Mu Dashan was already resting. Mu Shuangshuang called Yu Si Niang aside. Yu Si Niang must know about Mu Dashan's need for recuperation.

After hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, Yu Si Niang's tears started to flow uncontrollably.

"It's all because I'm useless and can't take good care of your father. It's pitiful how your father, a good man, has been tortured to this state. I've let you down..."

Yu Si Niang always hoped for the family to be divided, always hoped she could make life better for the family, but she never had the courage. As a result, everything fell upon a child.

She knew Shuangshuang was sensible, but she was still just a child. Now that Shuangshuang's father can only lie in bed, Yu Si Niang was even more worried.

Could she, a single person, support this many people in the family?

How could Mu Shuangshuang not understand Yu Si Niang's thoughts? Not to mention Yu Si Niang, even a man facing this might not be able to shoulder such a burden.

"Mom, don't worry about these things. Shuangshuang has the ability to care for Dad, Mom, and the siblings now.

Besides, Dad just needs recuperation; he's not paralyzed. After half a year, our family will be fine.

By spring next year, we'll rent a few acres of land and make our days prosperous."

"Yes, you're right. Your dad just needs rest. He will definitely get better..." Yu Si Niang wiped away her tears, her expression determined.

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The next day, Mr. Mu brought the village chief and several respectable uncles to gather early in the morning. The reason for the division was simple.

The third branch wanted to establish their own household and try a different way of life.

Although the reason was somewhat far-fetched, it was ultimately a family matter of the Old Mu Family. The village chief had nothing much to say and soon served as a witness.

The family was finally divided.

At that moment of receiving the document, Mu Shuangshuang knew the third branch was finally liberated, no longer needing to hide everything.

"Just when everything was fine, why divide the family? Da De is about to take the Autumn Examination. If he succeeds, good days are assured." The village chief sighed.

"Exactly, Da De is definitely going to venture into a career someday. The Old Mu Family's good days are yet to come."

"Haha, these kids have their own ideas. We can't control it, can we? We just want the kids to have a good life." Mr. Mu said.

"Indeed, children's well-being is more important than anything. You should relax your mind. Later, when Da De succeeds, he will surely support the third branch."

An old man with gray-white beard stroked his mustache as he spoke.

Mr. Mu felt awkward and could only nod in agreement.

After finally sending off Uncle Li Zheng, Mr. Mu found his face stiff from smiling.

Mu Shuangshuang had been watching Mr. Mu's awkward solo performance from the side. By now, she had already formulated a plan.

She needed to quickly pick up the pace, build the kitchen at home, and set up the stove. Once everything was done, they could formally separate from the Old Mu Family.

Mrs. Jin blocked the door. She couldn't show up when the village chief was there, but now that people had left, she came for the contract.

"Shuangshuang, give the contract to me!" Mrs. Jin said, her face swollen and her speech slightly accented.

"Aunt, you're really eager, aren't you? It's just a contract; why rush?" Shuangshuang said with a smile.

"Are you thinking about renegeing?" A flash of fierceness crossed Mrs. Jin's eyes.

"How could we? Our third branch is honest. We keep our word, unlike my aunt, introducing marriages one day and selling people the next."

Mu Shuangshuang sarcastically remarked to Mrs. Jin, reminding the fourth branch to beware of Aunt's tricks.

The third branch might be poor, but compared to Mrs. Liu of the fourth branch who gets beaten every day, it's much better.

Beside them, Mrs. Liu glanced at the document in Shuangshuang's hands and was somewhat dazed by Shuangshuang's words.

She thought: If only that document belonged to the fourth branch.

But she didn't have the courage like the third branch to propose the family division.

"Shuangshuang, don't blame your aunt. I'm doing this for the good of the Old Mu family. Only when your uncle succeeds can the Old Mu Family prosper." Mrs. Jin feigned pitifulness.

This time, selling Shuangshuang was off the table, but Da De's expenses still weren't covered, and she had to rely on the second and fourth branches.

Because no other method comes faster than marriage to earn money.

"Aunt, you might as well deceive yourself than speak such shameful words. Here, take the contract!"

Mu Shuangshuang threw the contract on the ground, and Mrs. Jin quickly squatted down to pick it up. Seeing a name written on it, her anger almost made her spit blood.

The blank space initially meant to marry Wang San was now filled with a different name: Wang Ba.

Mu Dandan was to marry Wang Ba!

"Mu Shuangshuang, I won't let this slide!"

—

Over several days, since the banquet at Wealth Master Zhang's family in town had ended, Yu Si Niang was free at home.

During the day, she was tasked by Old Mrs. Mu to do various chores—the clothes and meals for the big family, and the pigsty that hadn't housed pigs for years.

She was busy like a spinning top every day, but thinking about the upcoming family division left her with no complaints.

Mu Shuangshuang took a chance to visit Lu Yuanfeng's home. She thought if tasks like building the kitchen and stove could be done by Lu Yuanfeng, it would be best to let him do it.

She only needed to pay him according to the village standard for such work, as local resources shouldn't go to outsiders.

It's better to benefit one's own people than others.

Due to the family division, everyone in the village was aware. So when Shuangshuang walked the road, she felt others watching her.

Dividing a family wasn't a big deal, but division while parents were alive naturally became a topic of gossip.

Shuangshuang faced those probing eyes with poise, and afterward, they quieted down.

Arriving at Lu Yuanfeng's house, unexpectedly, she encountered Xia Guagua lurking suspiciously at Lu Yuanfeng's entrance.

She thought to herself: Damn, is Xia Guagua planning to be shameless to the end?