

Folly 141

Chapter 141: The Man Who Can't Be Caught

Xia Guagua held half a peeled melon in her hand, first bending over to look inside the room.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng wearing a tank top, working on some wood at home, the focused expression on his face filled Xia Guagua with sweet warmth.

Looking across Er Gui Village, no man works as diligently as her Yuan Feng brother, no man is as strong-built as her Yuan Feng brother.

Xia Guagua didn't have other desires, just staying with Yuan Feng brother for this life would be enough.

"Yuan Feng brother!" Xia Guagua said sweetly to Lu Yuanfeng. "I brought you a melon."

Lu Yuanfeng saw Xia Guagua, first frowned, then smiled, put down the plane in his hand, wiped his dirty hands on his pants, and walked towards Xia Guagua.

At this moment, Xia Guagua felt her heart was about to leap out.

She just knew that usually, when Yuan Feng brother told her to leave, he was just fooling her, he had her in his heart, he wanted her to be his wife.

"Yuan Feng brother, I just knew..." Xia Guagua said excitedly as Lu Yuanfeng gradually approached her.

Lu Yuanfeng walked past Xia Guagua to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuangshuang, why are you here? Is it hot? I picked some lotus pods yesterday, planned to deliver them to you later."

Lu Yuanfeng said with a grin.

"More lotus pods? Did you pick them from the lake?"

Summer lotus pods are especially tasty, if you can pick some, peel them, they could make lotus seed soup or lotus seed porridge.

Lu Yuanfeng just knew Shuangshuang would like them.

"These are picked from Lotus Pond River in Niu Village next door, pity they are hard to pick from there."

Lotus Pond River is not a big river, but because it connects to a main river in the South, it doesn't dry up all year round.

Thanks to Lotus Pond River, the people of Niu Village have one more survival means compared to the nearby villages.

The source of Lotus Pond River is a high mountain, a large area of lotus flowers grows there, come summer, you can see lotus flowers and pods swaying in the river.

People of Niu Village only watched the lush green lotus pods, without a way to pick them because the place was covered in water grass, whether a boat or person, arriving there, would get entangled, unable to move.

Listening to Lu Yuanfeng's introduction, Mu Shuangshuang immediately had an idea, if no one picks those lotus pods, if she could pick them and bring them to town, they should sell for a good price.

But how to avoid those water grass and pick the lotus pods?

The way Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng exchanged looks completely infuriated Xia Guagua, she walked up to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Who let you come to our house, you go away!"

"..."

"Xia Guagua, what are you up to again?"

Lu Yuanfeng thought he had already made himself clear enough.

"Yuan Feng brother, I came to bring you a melon, see, it was just cut."

Xia Guagua put the melon in her hand in front of Lu Yuanfeng, but he simply turned his head away disdainfully.

Xia Guagua saw all of this and suddenly felt uncomfortable.

"Lu Yuanfeng, let's go inside, I have words to say to you."

Mu Shuangshuang took the lead heading towards the house where Lu Yuanfeng was working.

Lu Yuanfeng quickly followed, but he didn't expect Xia Guagua to follow as well.

If anyone in the village had the thickest skin, it would surely be Xia Guagua, Lu Yuanfeng had expressed countless times he didn't like her, yet she just selectively ignored.

Entering the house, Xia Guagua first looked for Yuanbao, seeing Yuanbao playing alone in the room, she hurriedly approached with the melon.

"Yuanbao, sister brought you a melon, do you want to eat? It's very sweet."

Yuanbao heard about the melon, quickly raised his little head, but seeing Xia Guagua, he hesitated, so he could only look at the melon eagerly, not daring to speak.

Xia Guagua knowing Yuanbao wants to eat, but with Lu Yuanfeng present, she thought, after all, Lu Yuanfeng and Yuanbao are brothers, winning Yuanbao's favor, Lu Yuanfeng would finally take a good look at her.

Lu Yuanfeng wanted to explode again, but was held by Mu Shuangshuang's hand.

Mu Shuangshuang walked to Yuanbao, grabbed the lotus seeds from the bowl beside Yuanbao, and said to Yuanbao.

"Does Yuanbao know if sister grabbed an odd or even number? If you guess right, sister will make you something tasty later."

"Even, Sister Shuangshuang open it quickly, I want to see, I want to see."

Yuanbao's attention was instantly attracted, leaving Xia Guagua holding the melon awkwardly.

She lowered her head momentarily, not knowing what to do.

Finally, Xia Guagua gave Mu Shuangshuang a malicious look and left Lu Yuanfeng's room.

"Shuangshuang, you're amazing, no matter how I try to chase her away, she won't leave."

Lu Yuanfeng felt a bit embarrassed, he wondered whether being like this made Shuangshuang think he was useless.

"Because Xia Guagua fundamentally doesn't want to leave, chasing her away is useless."

Moreover, by Shuangshuang's guess, this Xia Guagua is currently just refusing to leave, but later might do more disgusting things.

Mu Shuangshuang guessed right, arriving home, Xia Guagua furiously threw away the melon in her hand, treating the broom at her feet like trash, throwing it here and there.

Gu Jiulian, who happened to be holding her son and came out to play, saw the melon on the ground and the scattered broom branches, angered, she cursed loudly.

"You damn worthless thing, have you gone mad? Are melons bought for free?"

"Not your concern!" Xia Guagua replied rudely, resulting in Gu Jiulian giving her a hard slap.

With a "slap", a fresh red five-finger mark appeared on Xia Guagua's face.

"You hit me..." Xia Guagua looked at Gu Jiulian in disbelief.

"Why can't I hit you? I gave birth to you, raised you, can't I hit you? You useless thing, don't say you're my daughter, acting up here for a man."

Her daughter liking that little brat, how could Gu Jiulian not know, but her daughter is too weak, chased out time and again.

"What can I do, he doesn't like me, Yuan Feng brother doesn't like me..." Xia Guagua suddenly felt sad, why after doing so much, he still wouldn't spare her a glance, even just one.

"Saying you're stupid still doesn't work, who said you need to like someone to marry? Look at me and your dad, is there any affection?"

There are countless ways to get married, if not, you strip naked, stand in front of him, see if he might be moved."

In Gu Jiulian's heart, there is no man she can't capture, as long as you're willing to spend the cost, then this man will eventually be yours someday.

Gu Jiulian's methods might be vile, but in Xia Guagua's view, they were the most useful.

Right, can't wait anymore, if in the end, Yuan Feng brother ends up with that bitch, she would have nothing.

Thinking like this, Xia Guagua already had a plan in her heart.

"Oh, mother, I heard Yuanbao and that brat from the Zhang family say, Yuan Feng brother's wild boar sold for quite a lot of money, you and Uncle Lu..."

Letting her mom take the money is better than letting Mu Shuangshuang, that wild girl, have it!

Chapter 142: Gu Jiulian Visits

Mu Shuangshuang played some games with Yuanbao and made him laugh, then she began explaining her intentions to Lu Yuanfeng alone.

"So Shuangshuang is dividing the family now?" Lu Yuanfeng asked in surprise.

"Yes, but there are still many things to prepare. Besides, my father has to recuperate in bed for half a year."

Mu Shuangshuang had no intention of hiding anything from Lu Yuanfeng because he mentioned that the Lotus Pond River had many lotus seeds, and she wanted to discuss with him about getting some lotus seeds to make Eight Treasure Porridge.

In this era, porridge was primarily made with white rice, and Mu Shuangshuang believed that making Eight Treasure Porridge might attract some people.

Besides, in the hot weather, drinking porridge could be a good choice.

After she finished speaking, Lu Yuanfeng went into his room and came out with a money jar in his hand.

"There is about six taels of silver here. I can lend you some, and we can gather ten taels of silver to treat Uncle Dashan."

Lu Yuanfeng was sincere, taking out all his savings and still wanting to gather the remaining money for Mu Shuangshuang.

"Are you crazy, giving me all your silver? What about Yuanbao's schooling?"

"I have hands and feet; I can earn again. Besides, it's summer now, and the prey we catch are small animals.

When winter comes, the big game in the mountains will come out, and by then, casually hitting a big one will be enough for Yuanbao's gift."

Lu Yuanfeng laughed foolishly.

But in Mu Shuangshuang's eyes, that silly laugh had a different meaning.

This silly guy, why does he always think about others?

At the same time, Mu Shuangshuang made up her mind to be better to Lu Yuanfeng in the future, so he could save more silver.

Eventually, she would send Yuanbao and Xiao Han to school together.

"Take the money back; the silver I have on hand is enough for the medicine for a while. But I do really need your help, just not with silver."

Lu Yuanfeng insisted, not retracting the hand holding the jar.

He actually regretted it a bit; when he came back from the camp, the court gave him twenty taels, and at that time, he just wanted to cut ties with his father, plus his grandmother had raised Yuanbao for five years, so he didn't keep any selfish intentions.

Otherwise, taking it out for Shuangshuang now would have been no problem.

"Lu Yuanfeng, listen to me, I didn't tell you last time, the cold noodles you delivered were three hundred wen each trip.

The contract I have with the restaurant is for two months, which is about six taels of silver, plus what I have on hand, which totals ten taels of silver."

Mu Dashan's medicine money wasn't the issue; the priority was to start prospering, and the Old Mu Family didn't give the third branch anything, so all pots, bowls, and pans had to be bought himself.

Lu Yuanfeng listened to Shuangshuang without interrupting a single word.

"I just want to know now whether you can build houses because we now need a kitchen and a stove. If you can do all this, I'll hire you for the work, and I'll pay you whatever others are paid per day."

Mu Shuangshuang could only think of Lu Yuanfeng at the moment, and even if Lu Yuanfeng didn't accept, she would find someone else.

"I can; the house at home was built by me. I'll work on yours every afternoon."

In the mornings, Lu Yuanfeng planned to complete the wardrobe that Mu Shuangshuang wanted, as a congratulations for her gaining freedom.

"Also, I want to pick all the lotus pods from Lotus Pond River, make Eight Treasure Porridge, and sell it in town."

"Eight Treasure Porridge?" Lu Yuanfeng wondered just as a rustling sound came from outside.

Gu Jiulian shouted towards Old Lady Lu, "Mother, you don't know, Fengzi is smitten with a bratty girl, and the bratty girl wants to trick him out of money. I'll take you over there to see."

Nearby, Old Lady Lu remained silent, but Shuangshuang heard her breathing and could guess that she was a bit angry.

Lu Yuanfeng squinted his eyes, placed his money jar on the table beside him, ready to go out, when his door was kicked open.

"Oh, oh, oh! I said, Mother, this seductive vixen is here, and the door is actually closed, doing who knows what!"

Gu Jiulian pointed at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Aunt Gu, you can randomly eat things, but you can't say whatever you want; be careful the gods hear and snatch your tongue."

"Don't use that to frighten me; I, Gu Jiulian, am not soft. Tell me, what are you doing here with Fengzi?"

Gu Jiulian's bossy demeanor made Mu Shuangshuang uncomfortable, and she directly said.

"This doesn't seem to have anything to do with you, Aunt Gu, does it? But what are you so confidently running here to do?"

"Mother, listen, she really thinks this is her own home, like she's the lady here."

After hearing Gu Jiulian's words, Old Lady Lu's face became a little unpleasant; with her present, who dared declare themselves the lady of the house?

"Granny, this is Shuangshuang, the eldest daughter of Mu the Third from the Old Mu Family; she came today to ask me to help build a stove. She helped me when I got into trouble in town."

Old Lady Lu heard Yuanbao talk about this matter before; she had a good impression of Sister Shuangshuang through Yuanbao's words.

Old Lady Lu couldn't help but look Mu Shuangshuang up and down.

The little girl was dry, skinny for sure, but she didn't look like a seductive vixen. Instead, her eyes were clear, more like a sincere child.

Old Lady Lu's glance told Gu Jiulian that the complaints she made were completely forgotten by the old lady.

"Mother, look at that, it's Fengzi's money jar. This brat is surely putting on a pitiful act to get money from Fengzi. I heard the third branch just divided from the Old Mu Family, and they didn't get anything."

Gu Jiulian was sharp-eyed, noticing Lu Yuanfeng's jar and saying.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at Gu Jiulian; at this point, she understood her motive, likely having seen the money from Lu Yuanfeng's sale of wild boars last time.

"It seems Aunt Gu must be seriously ill; upon seeing the money jar, you assume I'm borrowing money. Next time, if you see a knife, are you going to falsely claim I used it to kill someone?"

Things should be proven; making baseless accusations only shows your impure intentions."

"Hey, I say, you girl, why are you talking nonsense? Wouldn't you believe it if I hit you?"

"Try it then; Gu Jiulian, if you dare to touch Shuangshuang today, you better cough up the twenty taels of silver I gave you before. Otherwise, don't blame me if my knife shows no mercy."

Lu Yuanfeng waved his knife, the blade slicing past Gu Jiulian's ear, shaving off a lock of her hair.

Gu Jiulian crouched down in fright, trembling incessantly.

"Mother, save me, save me... You know the silver I saved for Fengzi's bride price; it's better to give it to me, his stepmother, than to others, at least it would come back."

While speaking, Gu Jiulian kept moving closer to Old Lady Lu, only to be pushed away by Lu Yuanfeng.

"What are you doing? Looking to make my granny fall? I said long ago, my house isn't a place you can come.

Also, my money, I'll give it to whoever I want; it's none of your business!"

Lu Yuanfeng found this woman, who took over his mother's place, especially annoying.

Chapter 143: The Predicament of the Old Mu Family

"Mom, listen to this. Fengzi is so captivated by that woman he's just handing over money."

Gu Jiulian shouted at the top of her lungs, not expecting that this time she would be thrown out by Lu Yuanfeng.

She didn't manage to get any money and was kicked out, so she cursed for a while. Realizing no one inside paid her any mind, she left in a huff.

Inside, Old Lady Lu looked at her grandson blankly, suddenly remembering how much he disliked Gu Jiulian.

"Fengzi, it's my fault, I just got too excited, I..."

"Grandma, don't worry about it. You go back first, I'll come by to see you when I have some time."

Lu Yuanfeng's face showed no emotion as he sent Old Lady Lu away.

Once Old Lady Lu left, Lu Yuanfeng's expression crumbled.

"Shuangshuang, do you think I shouldn't treat Gu Jiulian like that?"

His expression was a bit troubled, continuously watching Mu Shuangshuang as he spoke.

To outsiders, Gu Jiulian seemed like his stepmother, someone he should respect.

But no one knew what she had really done, and he simply couldn't put on a happy face in front of her fake smile.

"Not at all, that Aunt Gu looks like nothing good. The greed in her eyes is obvious.

I just saw her eyeing your money jar for ages. Be careful she doesn't get the chance to take advantage again. Who you like or dislike is up to you, don't concern yourself with what others think."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke sincerely, and by now she had a good understanding of Lu Yuanfeng's character.

He really is a great person, especially towards her. As for Gu Jiulian, if it weren't for Old Lady Lu, she wouldn't hesitate to tear off that woman's façade.

Having split from the family, her concerns were long gone.

"Mm!" Lu Yuanfeng nodded heavily. "Shuangshuang, when do you want to go to Lotus Pond River to pick lotus seeds?"

"Tomorrow, and then the day after we can take them to town to sell fresh lotus seeds and rent a stall while we're at it."

To do business, you need a stall; borrowing from others all the time is not a good plan.

"Alright, tomorrow I'll bring some burlap bags, come find me at my place."

After saying this, Lu Yuanfeng handed the picked lotus seeds to Mu Shuangshuang and brought out a big iron pot.

"What are you doing?" Mu Shuangshuang was puzzled by Lu Yuanfeng's action.

"I have two iron pots at my stove, usually only use one. My family doesn't raise pigs, so we don't need to cook pig feed. I'll give you this pot, so you don't have to buy one."

Afraid Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't accept it, Lu Yuanfeng ran off with the pot on his back. By the time Mu Shuangshuang snapped out of it, he had already rushed out of the courtyard.

"..."

Mu Shuangshuang could only feel helpless, left with nothing else but helplessness.

But mentioning pig farming reminded her of the large empty space behind her room, perfect for a pigpen. As for the piglet, the two little wild boars on the mountain last time seemed decent enough.

Maybe she should go up there again and bring one down, saving some money.

For now, the focus is on picking lotus seeds first!

Lu Yuanfeng, sweating profusely, finally brought the big iron pot to Mu Shuangshuang's house.

Without even stopping for a drink of water, Lu Yuanfeng began inspecting the surroundings of Shuangshuang's house.

Currently, the third branch only had two rooms; one for Mu the Third and Yu Si Niang, the other was for Shuangshuang and Little Zhi.

Despite this, Little Zhi often wasn't actually in Mu Shuangshuang's room.

By the time Mu Shuangshuang came in, Lu Yuanfeng already had an idea, and he shared it with her.

"Let's set up the kitchen on the empty land, and next to it a pigpen to raise chickens or pigs. Once the pigs and chickens grow up, things will get better."

Lu Yuanfeng drew a map for Mu Shuangshuang, inwardly longing for that kind of life.

"You're right, let's do as you say. But for two straw houses, shouldn't we hire someone?"

Building one house was manageable, but two...she didn't want to tire out Lu Yuanfeng.

"Okay, I'll call someone for you. Last time, Zhao Dahu and Zhao Daniu were helpful; they work odd jobs for villagers to make a living."

The people Lu Yuanfeng recommended were trustworthy to Mu Shuangshuang. She had learned that a man helping with work in town earned about eighteen coins per day, and maybe twenty-five coins at the dock for heavy lifting.

Zhao brothers usually just scraped by with meals and would charge seven or eight coins a day plus three meals, yet even then, not many would hire them.

Mu Shuangshuang decided not to skimp on wages, eighteen coins means eighteen coins, according to town rates.

Building two straw houses with three people would take roughly seven to eight days, costing around a hundred coins and including lunch, with materials sourced herself, going up the mountain to chop wood. She intended to set a good example this time.

After discussing it, Mu Shuangshuang settled the plan with Lu Yuanfeng.

Meanwhile, Lu Yuanfeng chatted with Mu Dashan for a while. Since he killed a wild boar last time, Lu Yuanfeng's reputation in the village improved, and Mu Dashan admired him.

Unfortunately, in his current state, he didn't have the strength to build a house for his family. If he did, he wouldn't let his wife and daughter run around doing everything.

"Uncle Dashan, don't worry, your illness is treatable. With proper medication and rest, it'll get better."

Mu Dashan was, indeed, anxious. His daughter was managing the whole household. If his wife hadn't insisted on him staying put, he would've started working already. He truly believed he was fit for it.

"But if I keep staying put, what if Shuangshuang gets sick from overworking?"

"She won't. Shuangshuang knows how to take care of herself, and besides..." Shuangshuang taking care of herself also meant he was there for her.

Lu Yuanfeng dared not speak the latter part, fearing Shuangshuang might distance herself because of it.

"Sigh..."

On the Old Mu Family's field ridges, even though only one acre of land remained, it took two whole days to harvest it, yet still unfinished.

Mu Dazhong threw his sickle to the ground, helplessly saying to Mr. Mu, "Dad, bring back Mu the Third. Let's reunite, this workload is overwhelming us."

"Exactly, Dad, when is this going to end? If Third Brother were here, it would've been done in no time."

Mu Danian gulped some water before chiming in.

Previously unaware of how much work Mu Dashan handled until his absence made the Old Mu Family realize the vital role he played.

Mr. Mu paused with the sickle in his hand, refusing to respond to his sons. He glanced at the far-off field where Mu Dajiang struggled with a plow.

Taking another look around, everyone else, men and women alike, worked diligently, unlike his sons who acted like old men!

Alas, what a curse, what a curse!

Chapter 144: Mu Dashan's Resistance

Mr. Mu hadn't marveled for long when he felt a sharp pain on his hand; the sickle sliced from his left pinky all the way to his wrist.

Blood gushed continuously, and before long, it dyed Mr. Mu's entire arm red.

"Ah, Dad, you're bleeding..." Mu Dazhong noticed the situation and couldn't help but shout loudly.

Mu Danian, standing nearby, lifted his head and saw Old Mrs. Mu's bleeding left hand. His eyes darted, and he quickly spoke.

"Second Brother, what are you dawdling for? Get Dad back home. The weather is so hot; if we don't treat the hand properly, it'll stink."

Mu Dazhong hurriedly helped Mr. Mu to prepare to go back. Who would've thought Mr. Mu would swipe his hand away.

"No, there's just these seven or eight plots. I must finish them quickly; your elder brother is still waiting for the money."

"Dad, you must be muddle-headed. This hand is precious! If you don't treat it well, who's going to transplant the rice in a few days?"

"Listen to me. Go back and rest for a day. Heal the wound first, then talk about it. Fifth Brother and I will finish these chores later, don't worry."

In fact, Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian were thinking one thing: Bring him back, and then they could go to the third branch, get the third brother out to do the work. Dad is like this; how can he stay idle?

The two adult men were shrewd, their mental calculations snapped sharply, and they forcibly "escorted" the old man back home. As soon as they returned, Mu Danian voluntarily headed to the run-down house of the third branch.

At this time, Lu Yuanfeng was leading Zhao Daniu and Zhao Dahu, the two brothers, around Mu Shuangshuang's house, on the vacant plot.

"Hey, Fengzi, what are you doing? Why are you clawing at our place?"

Lu Yuanfeng raised his head, saw it was Mu Danian, and replied, "We're building Uncle Dashan's kitchen and pigpen. Uncle Danyan, what do you want?"

Lu Yuanfeng didn't have a very good impression of this Mu Family's Fifth Uncle. He was well-known in the village for his greed and lechery.

If any household's men weren't home or if any woman was a young widow, as long as he encountered them, he would always pinch their buttocks or say some lewd words. Most young wives would take a detour upon seeing Mu Dania.

"What's the matter? Can't I come here? I wonder why you keep appearing at my third brother's house? Could it be you're eyeing our stinky girl?"

Tsk tsk tsk, I say you're a hero in the village; why go for someone bad, a shriveled stinky girl like her? She can't even bear sons."

Mu Dania spoke indiscreetly, and as he spoke, he let out a series of lascivious laughter.

Lu Yuanfeng paused with the wooden plank in his hand, just about to swing it at Mu Dania when Mu Shuangshuang emerged, a basin of dirty water directly poured over Mu Dania's head.

"Poo~" A mouthful of water sprayed directly from Mu Dania's mouth.

"...You stinky girl, you dare pour water on me, pui pui pui, what is this stuff, why is it so smelly..." Mu Dania cursed loudly.

"Oh dear, Fifth Uncle, sorry, sorry... I just washed my dad, gave him a foot bath.

But the water is too heavy, I can't carry it, so I wanted to pour it at the door, who knew...

Fifth Uncle, why didn't you give a sign before showing up at our doorstep?"

Mu Shuangshuang showed a surprised expression, explaining while apologetically looking at Mu Dania.

"Pui, foot bath water, you... you stinky girl, you did this deliberately."

The Zhao Daniu and Zhao Dahu working nearby couldn't hold back, they burst into laughter seeing Mu Danian's awkward situation.

Mu Danian's face became increasingly angry. Lu Yuanfeng tossed aside the stick in his hand, stepped forward, blocking Mu Danian's intimidating gaze.

"Shuangshuang, didn't you say you'd make tea for us? We're thirsty, go inside and get us some tea, please."

Clearly, Lu Yuanfeng wanted to send Mu Shuangshuang away, and Mu Shuangshuang wisely walked off; after all, Mu Danian wouldn't come trouble her.

"Stinky girl, who told you to leave? Stand still..." Mu Danian shouted hoarsely, but Mu Shuangshuang inside didn't come out at all.

"Stinky boy, don't block me. Let me tell you, I'm not easy to deal with, I..."

Mu Danian looked at himself, then glanced at Lu Yuanfeng's muscular build, his solid physique, and couldn't help but retreat a few steps. Then he fiercely spat at Lu Yuanfeng's feet.

"Pui, I'm just bitten by a mad dog."

Sidestepping Lu Yuanfeng, Mu Danian went straight to Mu Dashan's house and kicked open Dashan's door.

"Third Brother, our dad's hand is hurt. Hurry up, there are so many chores at home, they can't be finished."

Mu Dashan wasn't asleep because his wife had set the rule that even if he lay in bed, he couldn't work. He must recuperate properly.

No one dared to inform Mu Dashan about the ten silver coins incident. Otherwise, Mu Dashan surely wouldn't treat it.

"Fifth, I've... I've already split from the family." Mu Dashan mumbled, explaining.

"So what if you split? A single stroke can't write two Mu words. We're all born of Dad. Now Dad is like this, don't you want to fulfill filial duty?" Mu Danian suspiciously looked at Mu Dashan.

"Third Brother, do you think you've done more chores than anyone before, and now you're feigning illness to shirk work?"

The words of his Fifth Brother were always like this, specially picking faults, specifically attacking people. Mu Dashan could generally smile and let it go, but not this time, as it concerned his home and his health; he wouldn't compromise.

"Fifth Brother, what are you saying? I'm ill. Doctor Zhang said I need to rest for half a year. For this half a year, I won't be working."

Mu Danian's expression showed shock and disbelief, but more was disgust.

"Third Brother, it seems you've been spoiled by Yu Si Niang, that woman. You used to be so good, doing all the chores. Second Brother and I didn't have to work so hard..."

"Enough. If you've come to see me, you're welcome. If you're here to criticize me, leave. You're not welcome." Mu Dashan shouted hoarsely.

"I'll leave then. Don't you regret it later, we'll see!"

Angry, Mu Danian left. When he reached Mr. Mu, he exaggerated the words of Mu Dashan.

Mr. Mu's hand hadn't stopped bleeding, his lips pale, his words quivering a bit. "Third really said he'd never get up?"

"Yes, Dad. You don't know; Third Brother's so smug, lying in bed like a lord.

I mentioned you hurt your hand and our family asked him to do a day's work and finish cutting the rice on those eight plots to save money for Brother for his exams. We even offered him wages.

He just said that the third branch has split, he won't do the work, and Brother's tuition is none of his business."

"Oh, this beast. Saying such words, he's rebelling. I'll go and drag that beast out of bed right now."

Old Mrs. Mu stomped heavily and shrieked.

"Mom, don't go. The stinky girl is really fierce now. I just spoke a few words with Third Brother, and she poured urine all over me. I'm still stinking..."

Chapter 145: Just Wait and See!

"This girl is quite wicked, today I'll definitely teach her a good lesson."

Old Mrs. Mu cursed out a long series and rolled up her sleeves from her wrists, clearly ready for a big fight.

Mu Danian was secretly overjoyed, he always said he would make his third brother regret it.

Hmph, with her mother giving her a lesson, let's see if his third brother dares to play tricks and not work in the future.

Mu Danian had done a lot of lazy tricks like that, so he was quite adept at it.

"Mom, I'll go with you, we'll beat them to death." Mu Danian chimed in.

"What go, come back, aren't you embarrassed enough already!" Mr. Mu heavily scolded the few people inside the house.

"Second, Fifth, it's just eight acres, work hard and finish it in a day, don't let others look down on you.

Once the rice is harvested, go manage the water in the field, and tomorrow morning, go to Dahuo Village to invite your second sister Zhenzhen and Zhuangzi back.

Just say that my hand is injured and I need help to transplant seedlings."

Actually, according to Mr. Mu's words, the family only had those eight acres left, and the work wasn't much.

Once these fields are cut and transported to the village's threshing ground, their family can start using stone rollers to crush the rice and mill it.

Once the rice is milled, they can pack it in burlap bags and take it to town to sell for money.

Sigh, if Da De passes the exam, the family will be better off, Mr. Mu comforted himself inwardly.

Old Mrs. Mu's face immediately changed when she heard Mr. Mu asking Mu Zhenzhen to work.

"Xiangxiang's dad, what are you doing? Are you trying to exhaust our Zhenzhen? She's never been in the fields, how can she do this work?

Aren't there a few wives for transplanting seedlings? Mrs. Lin, Mrs. Liu, and Yu Si Niang, Yu Si Niang can do more work, otherwise, why feed them?" Old Mrs. Mu spoke logically.

"Then who does the rice milling? You or me?"

This task was previously done by Mu Dajiang, but now he has to plow and cultivate the fields, so this work must be given to someone else.

"Let the Fifth do it, after all, he doesn't like working in the fields, but he always likes being at the threshing ground."

On the side, Mu Danian's face darkened, being sent to the threshing ground, what kind of nonsense is this.

"Mom, rice milling is what the Fourth is best at, it used to be him and Mrs. Liu handling it, if you want me to take over his work, he'll hit me again."

"Then you go plow, cultivate, and the Fourth and Mrs. Liu go to the threshing ground."

The Old Mu Family has many people and tasks, but no matter what, everyone can complete the family's double harvest within a month.

It's just this time, the Old Mu Family faced too many issues, in previous years around this time, they had already been threshing for several days.

"I'm not going to work the fields, this task is my third brother's responsibility, I'm not doing it."

Mu Danian returned to the original point, refusing to do tasks where he gets nothing out of it.

He's not stupid, plowing and cultivating are visible tasks with few people, unlike transplanting seedlings where he can play in the fields all day with nobody noticing he hasn't worked.

"This not that not, what exactly do you want to do? I'm telling you, from today onward, if you and Dazhong dare to slack off, you'll all be kicked out, don't say you're from the Old Mu Family."

"I'm not leaving, Big Brother is from the Old Mu Family, if I leave, I can't enjoy fortunes."

"You..." Mr. Mu's vision darkened, almost fainting.

Mu Dazhong seeing this situation realized it's about time for him to step in, so he said.

"Mom, Dad's in this condition, isn't it fine to invite Second Sister back? Besides, we watched her grow up, she definitely won't be made to suffer.

But Zhuangzi is different, after all, he doesn't carry the Mu surname, doing some work for our Old Mu Family doesn't tire out our people, right?

And Sister-in-law, she does the least work at home, although she's the scholar's wife, this isn't the time to act like a lady of leisure.

If the rice isn't harvested, Big Brother won't have tuition money, she'll still end up farming in the countryside for life."

Mu Dazhong said his piece rather eloquently, Mrs. Lin beside him was just shy of rushing over to hug her husband.

At this moment, having one more person means they can do less work.

"Mom, Gou Dan's dad is right, we're all doing this for Big Brother's tuition, good days are coming soon, let's work harder."

Mrs. Lin finally got a chance to speak, she hoped Mu Zhenzhen would come back, not just because the work could be shared.

It's also because if Mu Zhenzhen comes back, Old Mrs. Mu would definitely buy meat, she hasn't had meat for days, her cravings nearly swallowing her tongue.

Thinking of meat, Mrs. Lin felt energized.

"Alright, alright, Zhuangzi will do some work then, but definitely don't let our Zhenzhen work, otherwise this old lady won't be done with you."

Old Mrs. Mu's words made both Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian feel quite nauseous.

They're all her children, her love given either to Big Brother or to Second Sister and Little Sister, darn it, surely it's about the right stance when reincarnating?

Meanwhile, Mu Xiaohan told his big sister Mu Shuangshuang everything he had just heard from Gou Dan.

Gou Dan was the only child at home who liked crawling everywhere in the dirt, sometimes hiding under tables, sometimes under beds.

So he often overheard some special news, but he's not very scheming, he hears it and soon tells others, then forgets it all himself.

"Sis, what do you think we should do? I see Grandpa and Grandma are planning to bother us again."

Seven-year-old Xiao Han had already become sensible, being plotted against made him angry, though he still couldn't think of a counter-plan.

"Let them be, as long as we eat until after the double harvest is over."

Work is controlled by oneself, to work or not to work, isn't it up to oneself, she's planning to tell her mom not to work too hard then it'll be fine.

"I'm really curious about this Second Aunt."

Mu Shuangshuang had already seen her eldest aunt, and worried this Second Aunt might be another traitor.

"Sis, don't you want to teach them a lesson? They're really going too far."

Mu Xiaohan was a bit unwilling, he knew his sister had a lot of plans, it was his sister who caused their eldest sister-in-law to fall into the latrine last time.

"What kind of lesson do you want, I'll consider it."

"Throw Fifth Uncle into the latrine, stink him to death!"

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head helplessly, "Xiao Han, you must remember, such tricks usually only work once and lose their effect on reuse.

But for Fifth Uncle, I do have a way to deal with him, just wait, in a couple of days, I'll make you have a good laugh."

Receiving this assurance, Mu Xiaohan nodded heavily. "Anyways, we can't be bullied, anyone causing a ruckus again, I'll beat them to death!"

Chapter 146: Preparing Lunch

Mu Xiaohan raised his fist high, like a little adult. His thin face was full of determination and resolve.

Poor children grow up early, Mu Shuangshuang had long been accustomed to Mu Xiaohan's unusual maturity, she didn't even think Mu Xiaohan was joking.

"Alright, but first you need to fatten up a bit. Brother Yuan Feng picked some lotus seeds, go to my room and take one to eat, after you finish, close the door properly."

All the valuable things of the third branch are now in her room, including Little Black, she must be extra careful.

In just a few days, Mu Shuangshuang had pretty well trained Little Black, she tried letting it outside, but it didn't run away, it seems it won't leave from now on.

"Sister, can we not take Brother Yuan Feng's stuff?" Mu Xiaohan pouted, "Xiao Han can help Sister with work, anything it may be, can't we not rely on others?"

Ever since Lu Yuanfeng began appearing more often and being kinder to his sister, Xiao Han was always uneasy, always feeling that Lu Yuanfeng would take away everything that rightfully belonged to him.

"Rely on others?" Mu Shuangshuang heard Mu Xiaohan's words and felt like laughing, she reached out, gently smoothing Mu Xiaohan's hair off his forehead.

"Sister has never relied on anyone, and besides, Lu Yuanfeng isn't really an outsider, he's Sister's partner, a working partner.

He and sister have the same goal, we both need to earn a lot of money so that we won't be bullied by genuine outsiders."

Before Mu Dade enters the August Autumn Examination, she must earn enough silver to set up a small stall in town after all, no one knows whether Mu Dade will succeed in the exam.

If he gets lucky and passes, the people from the Old Mu Family will certainly come to mock the third branch, the only way to make them shut up is by showing them the third branch would thrive even apart from the Old Mu Family.

"But sister, I..." Mu Xiaohan looked at Mu Shuangshuang with longing yet hesitance in his eyes.

"Xiao Han, be good, sister will talk to you tonight, but for now, I have to go pick some wild vegetables and mushrooms, we need to prepare lunch for Brother Yuan Feng and Brothers Da Niu and Da Hu who are building the house, otherwise they'll go hungry."

Lunch is being prepared at Lu Yuanfeng's house, Mu Shuangshuang's kitchen isn't ready yet, and there's no stove built or firewood stocked, it's in no condition for cooking.

Thinking of all this, Mu Shuangshuang realized there was still a pile of things she had to do.

She took two bamboo baskets and headed up the mountain alone.

Since it wasn't her first time at Niuwei Mountain, Mu Shuangshuang headed skillfully to the spot where she'd previously picked wild vegetables and mushrooms.

In the forest, since sunlight can't reach here, it feels cooler than outside the forest.

Mu Shuangshuang meticulously searched the ground, soon finding a decayed cedar tree.

The cedar tree was covered in mushrooms, Mu Shuangshuang picked them all, filling up nearly half of a basket.

Now that the third branch wasn't under the control of the Old Mu Family, Mu Shuangshuang picked wild vegetables and mushrooms freely, only choosing the tender ones.

She hardly touched the old wild vegetables, after going around a few times, both baskets were brimming full.

Coming back to her senses, Mu Shuangshuang realized she had gone far, unknowingly deep into the forest, the surroundings were quiet, without even a bird's chirp.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a bit scared, animals have the keenest instincts, if even birds don't want to go somewhere, it indicates that place isn't safe.

Intuition told her she should leave soon.

Forget it, next time I'll bring a bow and arrow to see what's around here.

Mu Shuangshuang picked up stones from the mountain, marking several trees conspicuously, so she wouldn't lose her way next time.

As Mu Shuangshuang walked away, a black shadow emerged from a half-person high bush nearby, swayed a couple of times, then disappeared.

The path down the mountain was much easier for Mu Shuangshuang, she retraced her steps, reaching the stream she often visited.

She paused for a while, picking some water plants she usually used for bathing. The sap from these water plants can be rubbed together to create foam, useful for daily life.

After separating from the Old Mu Family, her marriage was under her control, hence the dark grime on her face could be removed.

Mu Shuangshuang squatted by the stream, after a burst of splashing water, the grime on her face was completely gone.

With a clean face, she finally looked presentable.

Seeing her slightly fair complexion in the water, Mu Shuangshuang was quite pleased, except for being thin and not strong enough, this body had no remnants of illnesses anymore.

Once she eats well and exercises properly later, she should gain some weight.

After washing her face, Mu Shuangshuang didn't rush back, usually paying attention to the mountains and hardly observing the foot of it, this time she took a closer look. She realized, surprisingly, something was growing about forty to fifty meters from the stream - a patch of fish mint.

Though fish mint smelled unpleasant, it was effective against summer heat and could be used for cooking. Mu Shuangshuang pinched some leaves, bundled the fish mint with grass, and carried it back to Lu Yuanfeng's house.

Yuanbao was playing with stones at home alone, he jumped up excitedly when he saw Mu Shuangshuang.

"Sister Shuangshuang, I've been waiting for you for a long time, second brother said you're going to make a good meal today, so I'm here to help."

While speaking, Yuanbao licked his lips, besides grilled meat, his second brother's cooking skills were so bad that the tastiness could make people vomit.

Sister Shuangshuang was different, last time that winter melon stew with bones, Yuanbao ate three bowls of rice, nearly bursting his belly before stopping.

"Alright, help Sister bring out the scale, I need to weigh how much rice is used from your home."

For now, she could only keep track this way, noting how much she used from Lu Yuanfeng's house, then she could buy rice and reimburse him when she went to town delivering cold noodles in a couple of days.

Yuanbao tilted his head, contemplating Mu Shuangshuang's words, then suddenly understood after a while.

"Sister Shuangshuang, you needn't be polite, second brother said I can't take your money, otherwise he'll spank me."

Lu Yuanfeng had left Lu Yuanbao at home, partly for Mu Shuangshuang's convenience, and partly so Yuanbao could tell her that the household items could be used freely without worrying about money.

"Haha, you little fatty, your words are amusing, if you all are this generous in giving me everything, don't come blaming sister if you go hungry later."

Mu Shuangshuang smiled, seemingly not discussing money anymore, yet although she spoke like this, the things she used, whether firewood, rice, oil, salt or water were all noted in her mind.

No one's silver is blown in by the wind, even if she had a good relationship with Lu Yuanfeng, she couldn't take advantage of him.

Mu Shuangshuang arranged the items and started preparing lunch.

Soon, the sound of chopping vegetables could be heard from Lu Yuanfeng's kitchen...

Chapter 147: The Child Follows the Mother

Fresh wood ear mushrooms contain a certain amount of toxins, so they must be dried before use. Mu Shuangshuang used a bamboo basket to spread all the mushrooms she collected in Lu Yuanfeng's yard. Once they were dried, they could be washed and used for cooking.

Yuanbao is a year younger than Xiao Han and isn't as precise in managing the fire's intensity. Since it was hot, Mu Shuangshuang simply didn't let him help out.

For lunch, Mu Shuangshuang planned to make five dishes: stir-fried pork with green peppers, a cold wild vegetable salad, a wild vegetable soup, and pan-fried winter melon slices.

The last time she was here, she left some flour at Lu Yuanfeng's house, so she thought she could make some biang biang noodles.

Although this dish is usually eaten on its own, using it as a side dish should be fine too.

The green peppers, winter melon, and meat were all prepared by Lu Yuanfeng. Mu Shuangshuang knew there wasn't a garden at his house and wondered where these vegetables came from, so she felt a bit reluctant to use them.

She thought she should buy vegetables from Aunt Xiao Yun's place tomorrow, as her garden was big and had plenty of vegetables.

Right now, the double harvest was not yet complete, and the land belonging to the third branch hadn't reverted back to them. Mu Shuangshuang wanted to plant some bok choy but found it inconvenient.

Perhaps, she shouldn't wait for the piece of land from the Old Mu Family. In ancient times, developing wastelands was allowed, so she should cultivate a vegetable garden on her own to avoid having to pick from others' gardens in the future.

Stir-fried pork with green peppers and cold wild vegetable salad are fairly common home-style dishes, and Mu Shuangshuang found making them was not difficult.

As for the biang biang noodles, she wanted to eat them herself and also wanted to give it a try to see if the outcome was good.

If it turned out well, she thought of teaching Yu Si Niang, maybe it would be useful for setting up a stall in the future.

Biang biang noodles were, according to Mu Shuangshuang, a relatively simple way to make noodle dishes. From the moment she started kneading the dough, Yuanbao's eyes were wide open.

"Sister Shuangshuang, what are you going to make? Dumplings?"

In Yuanbao's mind, using flour meant making dumplings, and dumplings were a great thing—he hadn't eaten them many times.

"No, sister is making biang biang noodles, which won't taste any worse than dumplings. Yuanbao can just wait and see."

As she spoke, Mu Shuangshuang began kneading the dough, using a large mixing bowl to hold half a bowl of flour. She added a bit of water and kept stirring with a spoon.

She then added some old dough, covered the mixing bowl with a clean cloth, and let it rest for the time it took to burn two sticks of incense, allowing the dough to rise.

Yuanbao was already sitting on a stool, watching Mu Shuangshuang, who found it a bit amusing and had to speed up her pace to start the fire and cook.

The fire crackled and burned, and once a pot of water boiled, she started adding wild vegetables to it. Cold wild vegetables needed to be blanched in boiling water to remove their inherent bitterness.

Once the wild vegetables in the hot pot changed color, she took them out and put them in cold water. After they cooled, Mu Shuangshuang lifted out the wild vegetables, chopped them up, and set them aside for later mixing.

With the remaining dishes done and the dough almost ready, Mu Shuangshuang divided the risen dough into small rolls, roughly the size of two thumbs thick and half a finger long.

After brushing oil on these small dough rolls, Mu Shuangshuang cautiously arranged them on a plate, covered them with a cloth, and continued to let them rest.

The subsequent steps were relatively simple, and Mu Shuangshuang planned to wait until Lu Yuanfeng and the others returned to finish them. Biang biang noodles should naturally be eaten hot.

Looking at the time, it seemed as if once she cooked the rice and waited a bit, they should be coming back for their midday break.

The three men were all working, so Mu Shuangshuang cooked a bit more rice, and before long, it was ready. She walked out of the yard and headed towards her house.

The Old Mu Family's house was bustling because Mu Zhenzhen, the second aunt who hadn't visited for a long time, had come over.

She was wearing festive floral clothes, which she only wore on holidays, and was lounging around in the Old Mu Family's courtyard with a handful of sunflower seeds brought from home, cracking them noisily.

Mrs. Lin was chit-chatting with Mu Zhenzhen and occasionally complained about the third branch. Mrs. Lin was known for her sharp tongue, and in no time, she had insulted everyone from the third branch.

"I spit; the third branch must have been kicked in the face by a donkey to dare live separately. I said to my mother from the start that Yu Si Niang was no good. See, I was right."

Mu Zhenzhen echoed Mrs. Lin's insults a few times, her mouth still busy cracking the seeds.

After talking for so long, Mrs. Lin's mouth was dry, and she was eyeing the sunflower seeds in Mu Zhenzhen's hands.

All the edible things in Old Mu Family ended up in the main house's pocket, so now that the second aunt was here, she would make sure to eat something good and fill her belly.

"Gou Dan, your second aunt, have you noticed any changes in our family since you came with your uncle?"

Mu Zhenzhen shook her head. "Changes? What changes? I don't see any."

"Haha, really?" Mrs. Lin laughed dryly, her eyes fixed on the sunflower seeds in Mu Zhenzhen's hands.

Gou Dan, who had returned from playing outside, seemed to have a dog's nose. As soon as he entered the backyard, he headed straight for Mu Zhenzhen and clung to her leg.

"Second aunt, Gou Dan wants some seeds, Gou Dan wants some seeds."

Mrs. Lin felt like giving her son a thumbs up—inspired by her son, rightly knowing what she wanted to eat and how to act spoiled.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Lin overestimated Mu Zhenzhen's patience. With Gou Dan covered in dark, sticky sweat, his unwashed matted hair, and his perpetual runny nose covered in grime, Mu Zhenzhen got annoyed.

"Shoo, children like you are dirty, no eating," Mu Zhenzhen said disdainfully, kicking Gou Dan away.

Mrs. Lin's face immediately soured; this second aunt was really something, hitting even little ones.

Once kicked off, Gou Dan's first reaction was to let out a loud wail.

"Mama, want seeds, want seeds, Gou Dan wants seeds..."

Gou Dan sat on the ground, frantically raking his legs, and in no time the spot where he sat was swept clean of dust.

Seeing the scene, Mrs. Lin awkwardly said to Mu Zhenzhen, "Aunt, Gou Dan is still a child, you could at least give him some."

The rising dust got into Mu Zhenzhen's nose, and she glared at Gou Dan unhappily.

"Why give him anything? Just because he's a child means he can beg people for food?"

Later on, if he takes a liking to something, will he just stick his hand out and ask? If you ask me, kids are like their mothers, whatever the mother teaches, that's what the child becomes."

Mrs. Lin felt as if she'd been slapped in the face, her face turning dark, and she suddenly had no words to flatter Mu Zhenzhen.

Poor Gou Dan, rolling and wailing, still couldn't make Mu Zhenzhen spare even a single seed from her teeth for him.

"Gou Dan, go back inside. Mother will buy you seeds later." Mrs. Lin yelled at Gou Dan, but he only glanced at her and continued rolling on the ground.

It was only when Old Mrs. Mu heard the commotion and came out to give Gou Dan a smack on the rear that he quieted down.

Chapter 148: Spending Money Worth It

"Mom, why did you come out? Didn't I tell you to rest?" Mu Zhenzhen stood up as soon as she saw Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu felt warm in her heart; daughters are more reliable than daughters-in-law or anyone else.

"Good girl, I just wanted to see if you came back. What do you want to eat? I'll have your fourth sister-in-law make it for you at noon."

"Mom, I want to eat meat, and also fish, and chicken."

Mu Zhenzhen immediately asked for big fish and meat. Old Mrs. Mu looked a bit unhappy, but then she thought since it's for her daughter, it wasn't painful at all.

At most, just a chicken laying two fewer eggs.

"Zhenzhen, I'll ask your fourth sister-in-law to buy meat for you. Fish will probably have to wait until tomorrow when we go to town.

We only have a few chickens, and we rely on them for eggs. Why don't you just make do with eating meat for now?"

When Mu Zhenzhen heard there was no chicken or fish, she wouldn't have it, threw away the melon seeds in her hand, and shouted, "I don't care, I want chicken, or Zhuangzi and I will go back."

"Don't, you just got here, you can't leave like that." Old Mrs. Mu was anxious. She hadn't seen enough of her daughter yet, how could she let her leave?

"I don't care, it's just one chicken, Mom. Big brother needs to study too. If you kill a chicken to make soup, he can eat some as well," Mu Zhenzhen swayed and acted spoiled.

"Alright, since my dear daughter wants to eat, I'll make it for you. I'll make soup and also serve a bowl to your big brother."

Mrs. Lin looked on, stunned. The few chickens at home were Old Mrs. Mu's treasures, and now a word from the second aunt had Old Mrs. Mu agreeing to kill one. It was as if the sun had risen in the west.

"Mrs. Liu, get out here quickly," Old Mrs. Mu said a few words to Mu Zhenzhen and then began shouting at Mrs. Liu, who was cooking in the kitchen.

Before long, Mrs. Liu hurried out, looking flustered and even a bit scared.

"Mom, what's going on? I'm cooking."

"Just because you're cooking doesn't mean you can't be called? Let me tell you, you're the wife of the Old Mu Family, and you should work for the family with all your might.

Don't think about imitating the shameless third branch. If you get any ideas, I'll destroy you."

Old Mrs. Mu scolded Mrs. Liu, who turned pale and her chin nearly dropped to her chest before she finally stopped.

"Go to the chicken coop and chop that chicken that doesn't lay eggs for me. Make some chicken soup for Zhenzhen.

Don't pick the wrong one. I'm sharp-eyed. If there's one less laying hen tomorrow, I'll skin you alive."

Mrs. Liu meekly nodded and went to the chicken coop to catch the chicken.

"Mom, you're really my dear mother, so good to me." Mu Zhenzhen hugged Old Mrs. Mu tightly, making her smile so wide she couldn't close her mouth.

"Second Aunt, how long are you planning to stay this time?" Mrs. Lin asked.

"I say, Second Sister-in-law, are you not welcoming me? Why do you keep asking these kinds of questions?"

Zhuangzi and I aren't here just for the food; Dad invited us over to work. Why are you making a fuss?"

Taking advantage of Old Mrs. Mu's presence, Mu Zhenzhen quickly put Mrs. Lin in her place.

As it happened, even if Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian hadn't picked them up today, they would have still come over.

The Zhuangzi family had twenty to thirty mu of land, unlike the large Old Mu Family. Mu Zhenzhen didn't want to help out at home, so she pulled Zhuangzi away. Anyway, her mom wouldn't let her work at home.

Old Mrs. Mu glanced at Mrs. Lin, "If you can't speak, then shut up. Nobody mistakes you for a mute."

"..."

Mrs. Lin clutched her chest, silent for a long time.

Mu Shuangshuang came home and found that the plot of land meant for building a kitchen and pigsty was now full of a lot more timber, and the foundation there was almost fully dug.

In one morning, the work done by three men far exceeded her expectations, making Mu Shuangshuang feel that the silver she spent was worth it.

When they saw Mu Shuangshuang, the three men had no intention of stopping their work.

Zhao Daniu, Zhao Dahu, and Lu Yuanfeng were brothers, and with the generous pay from Mu Shuangshuang, they hadn't taken a break all morning except to drink water.

Lu Yuanfeng, in particular, was bustling around so quickly by himself that he was practically working like two men.

"Lu Yuanfeng, you guys should take a break. The food is ready, and you can head back to eat."

"Shuangshuang, just wait a little longer. We'll dig a bit more," Lu Yuanfeng said to Mu Shuangshuang, wiping sweat from his forehead.

"No need, it's really hot. I'll call Xiao Han and Little Zhi, and then you can follow us soon."

It's not time for the kids to work yet, so Mu Xiaohan and Mu Xiaozhi couldn't have lunch at home.

As for Mu Dashan, Mu Shuangshuang went into his room to tell him that she would bring him a bowl of meat soup upon her return.

When eating, Mu Dashan had to eat at the Old Mu Family house, or else all their work would be in vain.

Xiao Han and Little Zhi each took one of Mu Shuangshuang's hands, and with Little Black on their backs, they happily left the Old Mu Family's yard through the side gate.

Since the family split, the third branch wasn't allowed to use the main entrance. Mu Shuangshuang and Mu Dashan discussed it and converted the dog hole to a side gate for two to three people to pass through.

With this change, it became much easier for the third branch to enter and exit. They didn't have to pass through numerous houses to reach the front courtyard, nor face Old Mrs. Mu blocking the door asking for this and that.

With Lu Yuanfeng and the Zhao brothers behind, Mu Shuangshuang returned home before they did.

The rice in the iron pot had been sitting long enough for a crust to form. Usually, these rice crusts went to the family's uncles, leaving no chance for Mu Shuangshuang and Xiao Han, Little Zhi.

"Sister, Little Zhi wants to eat the rice crust," Little Zhi tugged on Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve and said.

"Okay, Sister will serve you. One piece for each of you, but you surely can't finish this whole pot, so let's make rice porridge with the rest of the crust, alright?"

"Okay, okay."

Porridge made from rice crusts cooked in a big iron pot is the most fragrant, and the water for it is also special.

Before the rice is done, you have to scoop out a ladle of the cooking water, the rice broth, and use it to make rice crust porridge. This method makes the porridge fragrant and delicious.

After serving the rice and sweet potatoes from the top, Mu Shuangshuang poured the rice broth on the stove into the big iron pot, letting the residual heat from the hearth slowly simmer the porridge.

Meanwhile, Lu Yuanfeng and the Zhao brothers only returned to Lu Yuanfeng's house after finishing their assigned tasks.

Yuanbao, upon seeing his second brother from afar, rushed in, shouting, "Sister Shuangshuang, my second brother is back. Get ready to make oil-splashed noodles!"

Mu Shuangshuang cheerfully scooped the porridge from the pot into a large wooden tub and then began adding more firewood to the hearth and washing the pot.

Just as Lu Yuanfeng walked back in, Mu Shuangshuang had just finished cooking a pot of noodles.

The wide noodles, served in sea bowls, came in three portions. After adding ginger, scallions, garlic, and fried minced meat on top, Mu Shuangshuang poured hot simmered oil over the noodles.

With a sizzle, cheerful sounds came from the bowl of oil-splashed noodles.

The aroma filled the whole kitchen; the oil-splashed noodles were finally ready!

Chapter 149: Endless Praise

When Lu Yuanfeng and the Zhao Brothers entered, they happened to catch the aroma of the oil-splashed noodles, each one sniffing nonstop.

Zhao Daniu, being rather outgoing, quickly scampered over to Mu Shuangshuang and pointed at the dishes already laid on the table.

"Shuangshuang, did you make this?"

"Yep, how does it smell? Feeling hungry now, aren't you? Hurry up and wash your hands, we're about to eat." Mu Shuangshuang replied with a smile.

"Yes, yes, Brother Yuan Feng, working for Shuangshuang is really a profit for us."

Not to mention getting lunch included, they also earn wages for working in town.

Because of this, Zhao Daniu and Zhao Dahu worked exceptionally hard.

Little Zhi and Xiao Han had already washed their hands. With limited chairs at Lu Yuanfeng's, Mu Shuangshuang served them each a bowl of porridge and had them sit with Yuanbao on the threshold to eat.

The thresholds in ancient times were quite high, almost the height of a modern little stool, which could comfortably seat two or three children.

Lu Yuanfeng watched Mu Shuangshuang bustle around in the kitchen of his home, as if Shuangshuang was the mistress of the house, with him working outside, and Shuangshuang making meals at home, the whole family together...

Thinking of this, Lu Yuanfeng's face turned red; he didn't dare even glance at Mu Shuangshuang, feeling as if he had done something wrong.

Mu Shuangshuang, seeing Lu Yuanfeng standing like a statue, not taking food or sitting down, waved her hand in front of him, puzzled.

"What's the matter? Are you too tired or uncomfortable? Want me to give you a massage? Why don't you rest at home this afternoon instead of going out to work?"

"I'm fine, Shuangshuang. You don't tire yourself out either, in this hot weather, I can make lunch from now on." Lu Yuanfeng replied.

"Oh come on, Yuanbao told me your cooking is terrible. I'm afraid the Zhao Brothers won't be able to eat it."

The playful remark made the Zhao Brothers laugh heartily.

"Hey, is this noodles?" Zhao Daniu exclaimed in surprise, pointing at the oil-splashed noodles on the table with curiosity.

"It's got scallions, minced meat, and a layer of oil on top. I think that's the smell that made my mouth water earlier."

Zhao Daniu's words drew everyone's attention to the oil-splashed noodles on the table.

"Yeah, smells so good. Let's try it."

The men were carefree enough to grab some noodles and shove them into their mouths, each widening their eyes.

Zhao Daniu's reaction was the most exaggerated, sticking out his tongue with huffing sounds from his mouth.

"Tsk, tsk, it's really delicious, Shuangshuang, your cooking skills are amazing."

Zhao Daniu gave Mu Shuangshuang a thumbs-up, his eyes full of praise.

"Indeed, even the chefs at the town restaurant might not cook as well as you do." Zhao Dahu chimed in.

"Brother, the way you say it sounds like you've eaten there."

"I haven't eaten there, but how can I not know Shuangshuang cooks well?"

"So you're just bragging..."

"Hahaha..."

Zhao Dahu and Zhao Daniu started arguing unrestrainedly, while the three children sitting on the threshold giggled uncontrollably.

Lunch was filled with laughter and chatter, and after the meal, if Mu Shuangshuang hadn't stopped them, the three men would have headed off to work at her house again.

"You guys need to stop doing so much, you barely rest. I picked some fishwort this morning, it's cooked, everyone take a bowl and some for the afternoon."

After washing the pots, scrubbing the bowls, and brewing tea, Mu Shuangshuang carried Little Han and Little Zhi under the blazing sun back to her home.

Upon arriving home, Mu Shuangshuang learned that her second aunt, Mu Zhenzhen, had come, and the Old Mu Family's lunch hadn't been prepared yet.

Old Mrs. Mu was in the courtyard yelling at Mrs. Liu, scolding her for not being able to catch a chicken, living was a waste of grain.

With a coarse voice and lowly curses, Mu Shuangshuang chuckled coldly; ever since the third branch was separated, Old Mrs. Mu would often verbally abuse, or point her finger at the nose of her fourth aunt, Mrs. Liu, scolding harshly.

The members of the fourth branch were, after all, ancient people, without the thoughts of rebellion like her; her fourth aunt was probably wiping tears in the kitchen now.

Just thinking about this scene made Mu Shuangshuang uncomfortable, but she couldn't make decisions for her fourth uncle and fourth aunt.

To live a good life, one must first learn to resist!

Entering the house, unsurprisingly, Mu Dashan was already sitting up, having rested for just one day, he looked much better and was no longer as fallow as before.

"Dad, get up first and have some lunch. No telling when there'll be food from grandma's side."

When she arrived, Mu Shuangshuang brought over the leftover pot crust porridge for Mu Dashan, along with a dish and a bowl of wild vegetable soup she had set aside.

The wild vegetable soup was made with rendered pork fat, something she and Lu Yuanfeng shared, so Mu Shuangshuang used it freely.

"Shuangshuang, thank you for your hard work for this family. And for Fengzi, busying at our home all morning, call him in later, I want to thank him properly."

"It's nothing, Dad. Lu Yuanfeng isn't an outsider, no need for formal thanks."

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, all the thanking felt cumbersome. The best way to repay Lu Yuanfeng's kindness was through practical actions.

After all, it's actions that bring changes.

"That won't do. I may be lying here and unable to work, but I can't let people think we're rude." Mu Dashan insisted.

"Dad, don't worry about these things. Shuangshuang will handle it, all you need to do now is focus on getting better."

Mu Dashan nodded, but the guilt in his heart grew heavier, feeling he wasn't really sick, lying in bed all the time wasn't right.

"Shuangshuang, talk to your mother, lying around all the time isn't a way to live. I need to get out and work."

"Dad, are you feeling too bored lying in bed?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Yes, I'm a man, can't earn a living, and now I'm stuck in bed. What kind of life is that?"

Seeing the anxious expression on Mu Dashan's face, Mu Shuangshuang could understand his thinking.

After all, no one wants to be a freeloader at home, especially in tough times.

"Let's do this, I'll go out tomorrow and let you know what you can do when I return."

Lying in bed, if it was a woman, she could at least embroider and make money, but a man...

While Mu Dashan was having lunch, Mu Shuangshuang thought about ways for Mu Dashan to contribute to the family without exhausting himself.

As she pondered, Little Zhi rushed in, speaking with a babyish voice.

"Sister, Little Black has sweated so much, it's not even willing to eat the food I feed it."

"Are you saying Little Black won't eat because it's sweating?" Mu Shuangshuang's eyes suddenly brightened. "I know what Dad can work on now."

Chapter 150: Little Black is the Master

"What?" Mu Dashan asked in surprise.

"Fans! It's so hot these days. If you could make some fans at home, I can take them to town to sell for a good price."

Fans in summer and clothes in winter are perfect for the season and sell best during those times.

"But... but I don't know how to make those folding fans, and no one in our family knows how to paint scholarly designs..."

Mu Dashan had seen the fans in town, held by the sons and daughters of wealthy families. The young men's folding fans generally had beautiful designs, while the girls' face fans were all embroidered with flowers.

"Shuangshuang knows you can't make them. We won't follow those high-end sophisticated routes; we'll stick to the common folk route — making straw fans and palm leaf fans."

In her previous life, Mu Shuangshuang was in charge of a place famous for fan production. Women staying at home wove palm leaf fans, and a single fan could sell for several bucks.

If Mu Dashan could weave palm leaf fans at home and sell them for six coins each, many people would likely buy them.

Six coins is just the price of two eggs. If he could make two or three a day, it would be equivalent to a man's daily labor.

"That sounds great! I won't have to lie in bed useless anymore. Shuangshuang, quickly teach me how to make fans."

Mu Dashan was excited. Finally, he didn't have to eat for free; how could he not be happy or excited?

"Dad, don't rush. Making palm leaf fans isn't an overnight task. I need to gather some palm leaves first, and they'll need to be dried once collected."

The various steps flashing through her mind told Mu Shuangshuang that she really needed to spend a day preparing these things.

"Then hurry and prepare. I want to start as soon as possible to lighten your burden."

At this moment, Mu Dashan's psychological burden was much lighter. Without being able to farm, he still had two hands to support the kids.

"Okay, then you eat first and rest well after. I'll see this afternoon where we can find palm leaves."

Little Zhi pulled at Mu Shuangshuang's leg, almost dragging her out.

Now, Little Black was one of the third branch family members, with a remarkably high status.

Because of Little Black, Little Zhi didn't want to sleep in the same room with Yu Si Niang and the others anymore. He'd enter Mu Shuangshuang's room now and then to check if Little Black was still there.

Upon entering her room, Mu Shuangshuang saw Xiao Han kneeling on the floor, holding a small piece of meat, feeding it to Little Black.

The little creature glanced sideways without even looking at Xiao Han, occasionally making hissing sounds.

"Little Black, come here." Mu Shuangshuang squatted and beckoned with her fingers.

Little Black glanced at Mu Shuangshuang, suddenly lying down on the floor, looking pitifully at her.

"Sister, it's so pitiful, Little Black is so pitiful, it's almost dying of heat."

Little Zhi kept turning around anxiously, like an ant on a hot pan.

Mu Shuangshuang spooned a handful of water and held it in front of Little Black. The little creature wouldn't drink; instead, it kept scratching the ground.

In no time, it stirred up a layer of dust on the floor of Mu Shuangshuang's room.

"Hiss~"

"Hiss~"

Little Black's pitiful calls made Mu Shuangshuang feel bad too. She stood up, went to Aunt Xiao Yun's house, picked a taro leaf, and gently fanned Little Black.

The gentle breeze on Little Black's back made it suddenly crawl forward, stretching out its claws at Xiao Han, lightly patting him, while its eyes fixated on the piece of meat in Xiao Han's hand.

At this moment, two pairs of jet-black eyes conveyed one message.

Lord Little Black was hungry; quickly hand over the food.

"Brother Xiao Han, Little Black is hungry, give it something to eat!" Little Zhi urged.

"Alright!"

The little animal, whose mood changed faster than flipping a page, quickly drew Xiao Han's favor.

After eating up two pieces of meat, it crawled next to Mu Shuangshuang, leaning its body against her leg, showing its chubby belly.

"Burp~" Having eaten its fill, it was time for a burp.

"..."

Mu Shuangshuang felt she was being played; this creature was so clever, could it really let itself overheat? Could it pass up the meat right before it?

The fanning gesture unconsciously stopped, and suddenly Little Black raised its claw and gave her leg a strike.

Then it found a comfy position and started sleeping again.

"Gosh, you dare to smack my leg, little thing; are you trying to turn the tables?"

Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Little Black's tail and gave its rear a good spanking.

Little Black struggled in the air, making increasingly pitiful hissing sounds until suddenly, it retched up all the meat it had just eaten.

"Heh, don't blame me; you're the one challenging my authority." Mu Shuangshuang quickly cleared her name and tossed the little creature out.

Little Black looked at the pile of vomit, its face full of disillusionment.

Playing tricks always comes at a cost...

Dusk fell, the sky filled with stars overhead, yet the moon was nowhere to be seen. The sky wasn't bright, but you could faintly see two figures, one tall and one short, slowly moving along the field bund.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng each carried a burlap sack, catching frogs on the field bund.

The frog's croaking was particularly evident on the summer night bund, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng followed the sound and occasionally captured a frog.

By the end of the night, they had a decent haul. Each had nearly a dozen to twenty frogs in their sacks.

"Shuangshuang, how about we check the cotton field ahead? There might be more frogs there."

Mu Shuangshuang naturally agreed; she was following Lu Yuanfeng anyway.

"Sure, though I didn't expect such a demand for frogs in town."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't relying on selling frogs for money. She came out of curiosity after hearing Lu Yuanfeng and Zhao family's two brothers planning to catch frogs. The brothers didn't show up, so it ended up being just her and Lu Yuanfeng.

"There are folks in town who enjoy these wild creatures. Let's hurry, watch your step."

Lu Yuanfeng led the way, partly to guide Mu Shuangshuang, partly to drive away snakes along the path.

Lu Yuanfeng, having been to battle, had a natural aura of menace. Snakes, upon meeting him, would always scurry away.

Indeed, deep down Lu Yuanfeng carried a bloodthirsty demeanor, but spending much time with Mu Shuangshuang made him unconsciously want to hide it.

People always like to present their best side to those they favor, and Lu Yuanfeng was no exception.

After walking a while, they suddenly heard a strange rustling noise from the cotton field.

It sounded a bit like the panting after a run, or the mating cries of wild cats.

Lu Yuanfeng hesitated to take Mu Shuangshuang ahead, but she had already moved past him and walked to the front.

Under the cover of night, perfect for sneaky ventures, Shuangshuang was ready for revenge.

Mu Shuangshuang's face was about to burst with laughter.

Mu Danian, oh Mu Danian, today you're in my hands. You better pray for yourself!