

Folly 151

Chapter 151 Barbarian

Mu Shuangshuang rolled up her sleeves and handed the tightly tied burlap sack to Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng stood beside her, completely clueless about what Mu Shuangshuang was up to.

But gradually, he began to discern the reason from those two indistinct sounds.

Mu Danian was in the cotton field, accompanied by Chen Hong from Tie Dao Village, whose husband had died.

The two of them were engaged in an indescribable act.

Mu Danian was making rooster-like crowing sounds, "Cock-a-doodle-doo," full of exuberance.

"How is it, young lady? Am I better than other men? Am I strong, am I fearless?"

Chen Hong shook her upper body in response. "You damn thing, why do you always pick creepy places like this? In the dark, you never know if there are snakes around."

"Slap!" Mu Danian patted Chen Hong proudly.

"What are you saying? Snakes are quiet creatures, but with the racket we're making, they've long been scared away."

"Alright then, hurry up!" Chen Hong urged.

The more they talked, the more disgusting it became, and Lu Yuanfeng's face suddenly turned red, but it was out of anger, not embarrassment.

Having spent five years in the army, Lu Yuanfeng had seen this kind of situation before, sometimes when his buddies went to brothels.

Sometimes it was two people who couldn't hold back their mutual attraction, so they chose somewhere wild and uninhibited.

But they knew to avoid people.

He wasn't opposed to Mu Danian doing such things, but how could he do it in front of Shuangshuang, who was still so young...

The burlap sacks in Lu Yuanfeng's hands suddenly slipped, and he grabbed Mu Shuangshuang, covering her ears with both hands.

"Don't listen, this isn't anything good. Be good, Shuangshuang, don't be afraid, I'll take you away..."

Muffled sounds reached her ears suddenly covered, and Mu Shuangshuang was startled, struggling to free herself, but then she suddenly felt herself being lifted.

Mu Shuangshuang's eyes widened as Mu Daniao's voice grew more distant...

Dammit, she wanted revenge!

What a bastard, it was just a live-action version of a little movie; she was a modern person and could handle this!

Almost forcibly taken away, Mu Shuangshuang cried out internally, but Lu Yuanfeng ignored it.

When the sounds finally faded, Lu Yuanfeng released Mu Shuangshuang's ears.

"Shuangshuang, I'll take you back! You didn't hear anything just now, don't think about it."

The seventeen-year-old boy had a face full of determination, carrying an uncommon assertiveness.

"No way, I must teach my fifth uncle a lesson, it's a rare opportunity."

Mu Shuangshuang shook her head, seizing the chance; there was no way to let the caught duck fly away.

"I don't agree, you can't go there." That kind of place would only contaminate Shuangshuang's eyes.

"You don't need to worry about this, don't stop me." Mu Shuangshuang said nicely.

"You..." Lu Yuanfeng was so angry he couldn't speak, finally responding after a while. "Other things I can't interfere with, but this I must."

Without another word, Lu Yuanfeng hoisted her onto his shoulder and walked straight off the field ridge.

"Lu Yuanfeng, Lu Yuanfeng, let me down!"

Mu Shuangshuang kicked and punched continually, but without much force.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't even grunt, letting her hit and kick as she pleased.

Eventually, concerned about her getting hurt, he just held her hand with one hand and her foot with the other.

She was furious, locked like an octopus and unable to move her limbs, yet all her strength failed to free her.

How could this silly kid be so earnest? Even seeing it wouldn't give him sore eyes.

"Lu Yuanfeng, let's negotiate seriously, listen to me..."

Despite Mu Shuangshuang's shouts, Lu Yuanfeng stubbornly carried her off into the distance.

Under an old banyan tree, a route necessary to take to Old Mu Family, he finally put her down.

Freed, Mu Shuangshuang was still ready to head to the cotton field, but Lu Yuanfeng unknowingly pulled out a stick, wrist-thick and half-arm-length.

"Take this. After your fifth uncle comes, I'll cover him with a burlap sack; you can teach him however you want, but you can't go there."

Shuangshuang wanted to teach someone; he was willing to help and assist in the beating. The only thing he couldn't tolerate was Shuangshuang seeing something she shouldn't, burning her eyes.

"Hmph, you're lying, the burlap sacks you brought were used to catch frogs, and the frog sacks are still on the field ridge."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't foolish; putting a burlap sack over someone presumed having burlap sacks.

Just as she finished speaking, Lu Yuanfeng stepped back a couple of paces and, utilizing his momentum, jumped several meters high onto the banyan tree.

From the branches, he took out a burlap sack, then jumped straight back down.

One must admit, Lu Yuanfeng's jumping ability and explosive power were the best Mu Shuangshuang had ever seen.

In these times, there was no shortage of good seedlings nor flexible bones, but she reckoned, two or three big men wouldn't match Lu Yuanfeng's prowess.

Why did she feel like this kid wasn't so simple?

Logically, a talent like him wouldn't be easily let go of by the army; how did he come back?

"Here, I've kept this sack here for a while!"

Seeing the burlap sack, Mu Shuangshuang calmed down; even if the plan had deviated, a good result would suffice.

Originally, she planned to dump a sack of frogs on Mu Dania, and in the darkness, those two would definitely think they were snakes, scared to death.

She could then fish around, hitting anyone who came up, ensuring Mu Dania would be beaten to rolling.

Now, indeed, plans couldn't keep up with changes.

Mu Shuangshuang squatted behind a tree not far away, while Lu Yuanfeng was behind the banyan tree; both quietly awaited Mu Dania's appearance.

Half an hour later, Mu Dania, having resolved a crucial life matter, slowly walked out of the field ridge humming a tune only he understood.

This path, a village trail he'd taken countless times without fear.

Conversely, satisfied tonight, he found everything pleasing to look at.

"Damn, that minx is truly something; after marriage, she still makes me feel so good!

Damn, I suddenly feel the need to poop."

Upon reaching the banyan tree, just as he was about to undo his pants, Lu Yuanfeng covered him with a burlap sack.

"Ah~ Who is it, who dares touch your Mr. Mu."

Mu Danian shouted loudly, as Mu Shuangshuang dashed out with a stick, hitting Mu Danian with a solid whack that made him howl.

Then a second, third hit, da-da-da without pause, Mu Shuangshuang swung with increasing delight.

Eventually, she simply tossed the stick and used her fists to punch directly.

"Oh my dear, it hurts like hell, murder, murder..."

Mu Danian shrieked, but at this hour, who would be outside except for doing bad things?

Even normal folks, hearing these ghostly cries, would likely flee.

"Bang bang bang!"

"Da da da!"

Chapter 152 The Useless Zhuangzi

"Ouch, it hurts so much, help..."

Mu Danian's voice was hoarse from screaming, but the person hitting him through the burlap sack not only didn't stop but became even more ruthless.

The pain was so intense that Mu Danian actually wet his pants. A strong smell of urine wafted out, making Mu Shuangshuang withdraw her fist in disgust.

She tugged at Lu Yuanfeng's sleeve, and the two quickly and tacitly fled.

Leaving Mu Danian alone, incessantly wailing.

Mu Danian was found early the next morning lying under the big banyan tree in the village, covered in bruises, his face swollen like a pig's head, and most notably, reeking of urine.

The villagers all said Mu Danian was possessed, and even when old Mr. Mu went out to herd cattle in the morning, people avoided him as if he were a plague.

It was breakfast time, and Mu Danian sat at the main table, sniffing, with his mouth askew.

"Look at you, crying over something so trivial, aren't you ashamed?"

The whole village knows about your little incident now, where am I supposed to put my old face?" said old Mr. Mu displeased.

"Dad, you don't know, I was ambushed; such a thick stick was hitting me, my bones are about to break."

Mu Danian said while crying.

Over on the side where Mu Shuangshuang was having breakfast, she felt so pleased that even the hard bread picked by Old Mrs. Mu turned into delicious mountain delicacies.

Serves you right for your foul mouth!

"I say, fifth brother, you're a grown man and got hit with a stick, how can you even tell everyone? If it were me, I wouldn't show my face."

Mu Zhenzhen was the only one in the Old Mu Family who dared to laugh, clutching her stomach, for an entire morning.

Since she saw Mu Danian, she started laughing, her shoulders shaking with laughter.

"Zhenzhen, how can you say that? Do you even have a conscience? I'm your brother."

"What's wrong with my brother? It's not like it was me who hit you." Mu Zhenzhen smiled slightly and then said to the man beside her, "Right, Zhuangzi, isn't my fifth brother in the wrong?"

Zhuangzi was busily eating, and hearing his wife's words, he quickly looked up from the huge bowl and said.

"Hehe, yes, fifth brother, your face is really ugly, uglier than a toad's."

"You..." Mu Danian was so angry he felt like a lump of blood was stuck in his throat, neither swallowable nor coughable.

"Mom, another bowl of rice, I'm done with this one," Zhuangzi picked up his large bowl and handed it to Old Mrs. Mu, who was serving the rice.

"You're still eating, Zhuangzi? This is your third bowl. Your second and fifth brothers only eat one bowl each."

"I'm hungry, Zhenzhen, I'm hungry," Zhuangzi said to Mu Zhenzhen.

"Mom, Zhuangzi says he's hungry, so serve him some more, will you? How much does this rice cost? Our Zhuangzi is a hard worker; he shouldn't go hungry."

"I know, I know!" Old Mrs. Mu said somewhat impatiently.

As for this son-in-law, if before yesterday Old Mrs. Mu still welcomed him, now she particularly despised him.

The Old Mu Family's male members' rations were all consumed in this one meal; if it continued like this, the Old Mu Family would be eaten into bankruptcy.

After serving another bowl, Old Mrs. Mu tried to fill it with sweet potatoes to make the portion seem bigger, but Zhuangzi wouldn't accept it.

"Mom, I don't eat sweet potatoes. They're rough and not tasty; you keep them for yourself!"

"..."

Old Mrs. Mu angrily replaced the sweet potatoes with rice, cursing Zhuangzi thousands of times in her heart.

Seeing how Old Mrs. Mu was crumbling on the second day of her aunt's visit, Mu Shuangshuang was curious to see if Old Mrs. Mu would cough up blood if her aunt stayed any longer.

"Grandpa, grandma, uncles, and aunt..., I'm full, you all take your time eating."

"We're full too," Little Zhi and Xiao Han said simultaneously.

Mu Shuangshuang put her bowl and chopsticks away, took the two little ones at home, and without waiting for old Mr. Mu and the relatives to respond, she stepped out of the main room.

The main room erupted into chaos again, but Mu Shuangshuang paid it no mind.

"Xiao Han, today your sister has important things to do. You stay at home and look after dad. Later, Zhao Dahu and Zhao Daniu brothers will come to help build the kitchen and pigsty, remember to offer them water.

Little Zhi, you help feed Little Black. We'll have lunch at Brother Yuanfeng's house as usual, and I'll come to get you when it's ready."

Before heading out, Mu Shuangshuang always gave instructions to the two little ones at home, as they were still young and needed her guidance as their older sister.

The two little ones were very understanding and always did as Mu Shuangshuang instructed.

Especially Little Zhi, who tugged at Mu Shuangshuang's leg and said, "Sister, you hurry along, Little Zhi will take good care of Little Black."

When she left, Mu Shuangshuang took a chopping knife and a back basket with her.

She had promised Mu Dashan that she would let him work even while lying in bed, so this morning's task was to find some palmetto branches before going to find Lu Yuanfeng to pick lotus pods.

Palmettos usually grow in the mountains. Mu Shuangshuang found them with little effort, cutting enough to fill a bamboo basket with her machete.

Bringing the palmettos back, Mu Shuangshuang spread them out to dry on the open space in front of her house.

Making straw fans isn't difficult; you usually learn it after being shown once. She had already told Mu Dashan how to do it the night before, and now it just depended on whether the dried-out palmettos would work for Mu Dashan's practice.

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At Lu Yuanfeng's yard.

There were plenty of summer clothes, and during the day, Lu Yuanfeng was busy helping Mu Shuangshuang with chores, and at night he was busy making a wardrobe for her, so he could only squeeze in time to do laundry.

He just soaked the clothes when Xia Guagua sneaked over again.

Today, Xia Guagua was wearing a light green skirt, obviously new, and she had makeup on; her face was powdered, and red paper colored her lips, making her look much more lively.

"Brother Yuanfeng, why are you doing the washing? Let me do it. It's not suitable for a man like you."

Xia Guagua rushed to take over Lu Yuanfeng's task but was brushed off with a wave of his hand.

"Brother Yuanfeng, look at me, how do I look? I'm wearing new clothes today. My mom bought them for me."

Xia Guagua lifted her chin proudly.

She was confident in her looks, believing that no one in Er Gui Village could outshine her beauty, and Brother Yuanfeng would like her for sure.

Lu Yuanfeng single-handedly finished the laundry and laid the clothes out by the creek, never once acknowledging Xia Guagua, who lingered in his view from time to time.

"I have to go out now, don't follow me; it won't look good if others see."

Lu Yuanfeng said to Xia Guagua after hanging up the clothes.

"Why can't I follow you? Are you going to meet that stinky girl? Do you like her? Do you want her to be your wife? I tell you, I don't agree!"

Chapter 153: Falling into Water

Xia Guagua glared menacingly at Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng had heard Xia Guagua's shameless talk countless times and had lost interest in arguing with her.

After tidying up everything at home and preparing the tools that Shuangshuang needed, Lu Yuanfeng gave a few instructions to Yuanbao and locked him inside the house.

This was to prevent Xia Guagua from sneaking into his room when he wasn't around.

Completely ignored, Xia Guagua clenched her fists tightly, her makeup-covered face twisted, her long nails dug into her flesh without feeling any pain.

Yuan Feng brother is hers, and no one can take him away, no one...

Xia Guagua took a deep breath, picked up a wooden stick from the ground, and followed in the direction of Lu Yuanfeng...

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng agreed to meet at the village entrance; the lotus harvesting area was in Niu Village, relatively close to Er Gui Village, only a half-hour walk away.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng instinctively straightened his chest, as if echoing Mu Shuangshuang's words that men should stand tall.

Neither mentioned last night's events, and Mu Shuangshuang simply regarded it as ancient conservatism, feeling nothing was amiss.

When they arrived at Lotus Pond River, it was quiet at the head of the river, not a single person, but along the riverbanks, broken lotus stems surrounded by villagers with bamboo poles made an unexpected circle.

On the river's surface, in places out of reach, a large cluster of lotus pods grew particularly temptingly, and Mu Shuangshuang's eyes were fixed intently.

The lotus pods and red flowers before her, interconnected in shades of green and pink, made a beautiful picture unseen in modern times by Mu Shuangshuang.

"So beautiful!" Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but exclaim.

Lu Yuanfeng was also influenced by Mu Shuangshuang. Ordinarily, he wouldn't notice such scenery, but now he found it exceedingly beautiful.

"Do you want a lotus leaf? I'll pick one for you?" Lu Yuanfeng's cheeks reddened slightly, his gaze quietly lowering as he spoke.

"Haha, for me?" Mu Shuangshuang found it amusing, considering if at her age, she needed a red flower as an accessory?

"Yes, for you." Lu Yuanfeng nodded firmly.

"Forget it, it's useless for me. Instead of that, let's quickly get to work. Maybe we'll have a big harvest by tomorrow."

Mu Shuangshuang gazed intently at the riverbed, already feeling impatient.

Lu Yuanfeng felt a bit disappointed but still prepared to follow Mu Shuangshuang's focus on the task at hand.

He laid down the tools he had brought one by one. Before this, Mu Shuangshuang still used a wooden stick to test the water, and the underwater weeds had grown wildly. When a bamboo pole was lowered and pulled up, a long section of weeds came with it.

It seemed that the lotus pods in Lotus Pond River were indeed hard to harvest.

"Luckily, we prepared tools," Mu Shuangshuang said with a cheerful smile.

Long bamboo poles, thin iron wire, fishing nets, and a sickle were bound to the bamboo poles to make a long sickle.

The fishing net was threaded with iron wire to form a ring, which was then tied to another bamboo pole to create a simple net cover.

Lu Yuanfeng's eyes lit up, instantly understanding Mu Shuangshuang's intention.

"Shuangshuang, you want us to cut the lotus pods with one and use this net to catch them?"

"Smart, Lu Yuanfeng, you're not dumb at all."

Unable to get into the river, unable to use boats and rafts, they could only find a way from the riverbank. Mu Shuangshuang had simulated this plan in her mind several times, and as long as they coordinated well, it shouldn't be slower than picking with one hand.

This approach was novel to Lu Yuanfeng. He held up the bamboo pole with the net cover and said excitedly, "Let's start!"

"Okay!"

On the riverbank of Lotus Pond River, a man and a woman each wielded a long bamboo pole, and as the woman moved her hand, three or four large, beautiful lotus pods quickly landed in the net.

Both were doing this for the first time, but they cooperated exceptionally well, and Mu Shuangshuang even found waving the sickle particularly amusing.

In a short while, they harvested a netful of lotus pods. Lu Yuanfeng dragged the net back and dumped the pods into the burlap sack they had brought.

Thus, the two laughed and picked lotus pods, and by the end of the morning, had filled a burlap sack with them.

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"I told you, these lotus pods are truly wonderful, both tender and sweet," Mu Shuangshuang said, sitting by the river with a large lotus pod in hand, occasionally popping a tender white Lianzi into her mouth.

Lu Yuanfeng sat not far away, with the burlap sack of Lianzi at his feet.

"Eat more, they're tender and surely sweet," Lu Yuanfeng said, taking out another large and tender lotus pod from the sack and handing it to Mu Shuangshuang, who already had a few by her side.

"Enough, enough, I haven't finished what's in my hand," Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand and then pointed to the lotus pods beside her. Lu Yuanfeng nodded with understanding and started shelling the lotus pods.

"By the way, Lu Yuanfeng, I heard you joined the military camp at twelve. Can you tell me about the military life? No need for something in-depth, just the basics will do," Mu Shuangshuang asked curiously, knowing that, as she worked in security, many things were classified, so it was okay if Lu Yuanfeng couldn't say much.

Lu Yuanfeng thought for a moment before speaking.

"Actually, there's nothing special about it. I joined the military camp because my family was too poor. By going, I could at least lighten my mother's burden."

Lu Yuanfeng's family once owned fields and land, but due to Lu Xiao's gambling addiction, he became more reckless after marrying Lu Yuanfeng's mother.

This once-decent family fell into exceedingly difficult times.

Mu Shuangshuang put down the lotus pod in her hand, propped her head, and listened to Lu Yuanfeng speak.

"When I first went to the camp, everything felt unfamiliar. People didn't know each other, and talking felt awkward.

But after just three days, we got to know each other, trained together, endured hardships together, and it was especially joyful.

Shuangshuang, you know? I trained at the foot of a mountain in the Northwest for two years, and I became familiar with every grass and tree there.

Sometimes, I even felt like staying there for a lifetime wouldn't be bad. Later, when we went to the battlefield and fought against Chen Country, going into battle with my brothers.

I finally understood what it meant for a man to aspire to make his mark everywhere. I even felt it wouldn't matter if I died on the battlefield, as long as I could do something for Da Ning, protect the people and their homes."

Mu Shuangshuang felt thrillingly inspired by Lu Yuanfeng's account, and she greatly admired his experiences.

Every time she met him, she couldn't help but recall her college days, training every day, tired but happy.

"Lu Yuanfeng, if you were given another chance, would you enter the military camp again?" Mu Shuangshuang suddenly grew curious.

"I..." Lu Yuanfeng was about to answer when Xia Guagua suddenly rushed out from behind Mu Shuangshuang, swinging the wooden stick she held.

"Shuangshuang, watch out!"

Lu Yuanfeng exerted force with his hand, trying to pull Mu Shuangshuang away, but heard a loud "thud." Before he could react, a splash rose from the water.

Chapter 154: Shuangshuang Is About to Do Something Bad Again

Lu Yuanfeng's hand hung in mid-air, looking completely dazed.

He still seemed to have not recovered from the earlier incident.

Just as Xia Guagua rushed over, he had just reminded Shuangshuang.

She promptly sidestepped, and as Xia Guagua approached, she was directly kicked down by Shuangshuang.

"Ooh ooh ooh... help~" Xia Guagua splashed around in the water, feeling as though her waist was about to break.

Her feet felt like they were tangled in something, growing heavier and heavier.

"Help, Brother Yuanfeng, save me~ ooh... help..."

Xia Guagua's body gradually sank, but that wasn't the worst. The worst part was Mu Shuangshuang picked up the fallen stick and pressed it against Xia Guagua's head.

"Glug, glug!" Xia Guagua was directly pushed down, the feeling of suffocation instantly attacked her.

At this moment, Xia Guagua was already frightened out of her wits underwater; she kept waving her hands, slapping the water's surface. Whenever she floated up, the stick would press her down again.

After swallowing a few more mouthfuls of water, Xia Guagua finally began to wail loudly.

"The water grass of the Lotus Pond River is known for capturing souls. Today, Xia Guagua, you'll accompany the lotuses here, making excellent fertilizer for the river,"

Mu Shuangshuang sneered at Xia Guagua.

This woman has a truly vicious heart. If she isn't properly taught a lesson today, it'll be her lying in the river tomorrow.

Xia Guagua cried heartbreakingly, the river water kept pouring in, causing her to cough incessantly.

"Please... don't kill me..."

"Brother Yuanfeng, save me!"

Lu Yuanfeng stood still, showing no intention of helping. This time, Xia Guagua was truly out of line. If not for Shuangshuang's quick reflex, it would be Shuangshuang in the river.

Xia Guagua needs to learn her lesson.

"Mu Shuangshuang... glug glug..."

Xia Guagua looked extremely pathetic now. Her newly made dress was stained dark green by the water grass, and her deliberately painted makeup was smeared all over her face.

"Do you know your mistake?"

Mu Shuangshuang squinted her eyes, exerting force with her hand, pressing Xia Guagua down again.

"I was wrong... I was wrong..."

The water grass around her legs tightened and grew heavier, and Xia Guagua gradually stopped struggling.

"Don't show up in front of me and Lu Yuanfeng again, or I'll toss you into the river to feed the lotus flowers."

Just as Xia Guagua gave up resisting even with her hands, Mu Shuangshuang picked up a rope from the ground and quickly looped it around Xia Guagua.

"Lu Yuanfeng, lend a hand, pull her up."

Xia Guagua finally breathed a sigh of relief, as Lu Yuanfeng helped pull her up. Her lower half was already covered by water grass, and pulling her up took quite a bit of effort.

Once up, Xia Guagua barely held on, gasping for air, eyes filled with terror towards Mu Shuangshuang. As Mu Shuangshuang moved closer, she whimpered loudly.

Stretching lazily, patting her shoulder, Mu Shuangshuang was in a great mood.

"Lu Yuanfeng, we should return soon? It's about time to make lunch."

"Hmm, let's go!"

"But I heard, people often get pulled into this Lotus Pond River. Let's stick closer to each other, just in case."

These words were meant for Xia Guagua. In her current state, encountering any man would be problematic.

Though it's just a scare, she didn't want a life lost, nor did she want Xia Guagua to be sullied by someone. At least after she intervened, she wouldn't allow such a thing to happen.

Hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words, Xia Guagua couldn't spare a breath, she climbed up, tearing off the water grass, following Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng step by step.

Half an hour later, they finally arrived at Lu Yuanfeng's home. Exhausted, Xia Guagua collapsed directly in the courtyard.

Unlocking the door, releasing Yuanbao, Lu Yuanfeng completed all actions seamlessly, neither of them concerning themselves with Xia Guagua outside the courtyard. Once home, what happened to Xia Guagua mattered no more to them.

After lunch, Mu Shuangshuang, carrying ten lotus pods, returned home with Little Zhi and Xiao Han. Originally, they were walking through the side gate but happened to encounter Mu Zhenzhen who came by the outhouse.

Mu Zhenzhen naturally had sharp eyes that saw the lotus pods in Mu Shuangshuang's hand.

Without a word, she walked over and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, give the lotus pods to Second Aunt. I'm hungry."

"If you're hungry, go home and eat." Mu Shuangshuang found it ridiculous. Feeling hungry, one can simply ask for things?

What did she take her for?

"I say, you little brat, what kind of talk is that? I'm your Second Aunt, good food and drinks should be prioritized for me. I'm telling you, if you don't hand them over, I'll report you to Grandma."

"I say, Second Aunt, at your age, are you really shameless enough to snatch food from a child?"

Mu Shuangshuang sneered, looking disdainfully at Mu Zhenzhen.

Mu Zhenzhen's face turned, reaching out to grab them, only to be pushed away by Mu Shuangshuang.

"You'll regret it, you little brat, just wait for me, just you wait..."

Mu Zhenzhen stomped her foot, angrily heading towards the Old Mu Family direction.

Mu Zhenzhen kicked open the door of the main room, grumbling, "Mom, that obnoxious brat bullied me, didn't give me the lotus pods, I... I can't live like this."

Old Mrs. Mu, who often indulged Mu Zhenzhen, would risk anything if anyone touched her. Hearing this, she seethed, "We don't cry, Mom will go teach that brat a lesson now, see if I don't beat her up today."

"Yes, let's beat her up." Mu Zhenzhen waved her little fist, agreeing.

...

Just as Old Mrs. Mu was shouting outside, Mu Shuangshuang was with Mu Dashan peeling lotuses. The fragrant, sweet lotus seeds in her hands quickly turned into plump, peeled lotus seeds.

Mu Dashan laughed heartily while eating the lotus seeds peeled by Mu Shuangshuang, unable to stop grinning.

"Obnoxious brat, come out."

"Obnoxious brat, come out!"

Old Mrs. Mu's coarse voice rang out, already unpleasant, and now raised in volume, it sounded exceptionally harsh.

Mu Dashan looked displeased.

By rights, the third branch has split off, even though they still eat with her mother, she shouldn't be talking about Shuangshuang like that.

"Shuangshuang, don't come out, I'll reason with your grandma."

"Dad, you rest, I'll go check." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head quickly.

"Sister, Little Zhi will go with you."

"Me too, I'll go out too." Xiao Han followed suit, both knowing Old Mrs. Mu was not easy to deal with, afraid their sister would suffer alone.

"You two take care of Dad, I'll handle the rest."

Punches and kicks have no aim, an injury to one of them would be unfortunate.

"Then Sister, be careful. If Grandma hits you, just run." Little Zhi said worriedly.

Her words fell on Mu Dashan's ears, and it made Mu Dashan extremely uncomfortable.

"Xiao Han, Little Zhi, help me up, we can't let your sister suffer alone."

Chapter 155: Stole a Dudou

"You brat, tell me, your grandma, why didn't you give Zhenzhen the lotus pods? Why is your heart so black?" said Old Mrs. Mu.

"Grandma, that's not right. I'm just a kid, finally got something to eat, why should I give it to Second Aunt? She can get whatever she wants with her own hands and feet."

"Pfft, your Second Aunt wants to eat, so you must give it to her. No need for argument, hurry up and hand over the lotus pods, or I'll skin you alive."

Old Mrs. Mu is very domineering, asking for the lotus pods Mu Shuangshuang brought back as soon as she spoke.

"Sorry, I already ate them all, they're gone." Mu Shuangshuang shrugged, and replied to Old Mrs. Mu.

"Mom, she's lying, she took a lot of lotus pods earlier, the brat is just stingy!" Mu Zhenzhen said beside her.

"You dare lie, seems I need to teach you a lesson to know my grandma's might today."

Mu Zhenzhen shrugged her shoulders because of Old Mrs. Mu's words, watching as if it's a good show, and laughed sinisterly on the side.

Old Mrs. Mu glanced around but didn't see anything, then raised her hand and aimed a slap towards Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang easily dodged it and gradually moved towards Mu Zhenzhen.

"Wow, you dare dodge, I'll beat you to death."

Old Mrs. Mu's expression became more ferocious, she jumped up, aiming another slap at Mu Shuangshuang's face, concentrating on hitting, unaware that Mu Shuangshuang had reached in front of Mu Zhenzhen.

Just as Old Mrs. Mu's slap was about to land on Shuangshuang's face, she dodged quickly, leaving Mu Zhenzhen to take the slap brutally.

A loud "slap" was heard, the sound so loud it stunned Mu Dashan who had just stepped out of the room.

Mu Zhenzhen froze for a moment, then let out a pig-slaughtering scream.

"Oh my, it hurts... Mom, why did you hit me? My face..."

Old Mrs. Mu panicked, ran over to hug Mu Zhenzhen, showering her with concern.

"Oh dear, don't cry, you're the apple of mom's eye. If you cry, mom's heart will break, it's mom's fault, mom didn't see clearly..."

"Sob sob..."

Mu Zhenzhen cried with snot and tears flowing, continuously shouting about the pain, Old Mrs. Mu hurriedly dragged her back to her room, asking for ointment and calling for the doctor.

Mu Shuangshuang shrugged, turned to head back to Mu Dashan's room, but saw Mu Dashan standing at the door, furrowing his brows involuntarily.

"Dad, what are you doing out here, why not go inside."

Ten taels of silver for the medicine, such disregard cannot be afforded.

Mu Dashan's eyes glistened with tears, he said.

"Shuangshuang, dad's sorry, it's dad's fault, dad should have divided the family earlier..."

Mu Dashan heard all of Old Mrs. Mu's words, causing him heart-wrenching pain inside.

His daughter, humiliated like this, even considered being hit.

"Dad, I'm fine, you should go rest."

Mu Shuangshuang had no demands of Mu Dashan, as long as he stood by her in key moments, after all, he was the most filial son of the Old Mu Family in the past.

However, it seems Mu Dashan's behavior now is increasingly departing from being a good son, is this an unexpected joy?

After Mu Dashan rested, Mu Shuangshuang started to soak mung beans; tomorrow she'd be busy delivering cold noodles to the town, her work was cut out today.

When there's time in the afternoon, she'd have to go to the mountain to pick some mountain berries.

...

After completing her day's work, it was already late at night, Mu Shuangshuang dragged her exhausted body, washed up, and let Little Black in the treehouse roam around for a while.

Once free, Little Black excitedly circled the whole house non-stop, its head shaking, looked like a weasel to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang took off her clothes, ready to sleep, a copper coin fell from her pocket, and Little Black rushed to pick it up, handing it to Mu Shuangshuang in a flattering manner.

Mu Shuangshuang's eyes rolled, suddenly thought of something.

She trained Little Black as a police dog, repeatedly teaching it to fetch money, maybe it's time to see the results.

"Little Black, can you do something for me..." Mu Shuangshuang babbled on, hugged Little Black out the door, heading towards the Old Mu Family.

After a while, Mu Shuangshuang returned alone.

In another moment, Little Black returned as well, scratching Mu Shuangshuang's door, when she opened it, it leapt towards her carrying something.

Bright red, Mu Shuangshuang frowned.

"What did you bring back, a piece of tattered cloth?"

Little Black seemed to understand Mu Shuangshuang's words, biting that heap of bright red stuff, approached Mu Shuangshuang's foot, seemingly trying to prove that it didn't bring something bad.

Mu Shuangshuang got interested, she squatted down and picked up the heap of cloth.

"Whoa, pretty heavy."

When she unfolded the cloth, her mouth twitched.

The so-called cloth was actually a bellyband, the chest position sewn with two pockets, weighted heavily.

She tore open the pockets, inside were two heaps of copper coins, estimated to add up to at least ten-plus coins.

It seemed, this thing was worn by someone every day.

She just put Little Black outside Old Mrs. Mu's room, meaning Old Mrs. Mu wore two lumps of copper coins every day?

Pfft! With this thought, Mu Shuangshuang's stomach hurt from laughter, she took out all the copper coins from the bellyband and handed the bellyband back to Little Black.

"Aside from nearby home, you can place this wherever you want."

A blissful night, Mu Shuangshuang was awakened early morning by Mu Zhenzhen's scream.

Early in the morning, Mu Zhenzhen was woken by the urge to pee, originally wanting to kick Zhuangzi, letting him hand over the chamber pot so she could relieve herself in bed, but upon opening her eyes, saw Zhuangzi wearing a red bellyband on his head, clearly a woman's bellyband.

"Zhuangzi, you heartless thing, I worked like an ox for your Old Chen Family, cleaned up after your parents, and you secretly find a woman behind my back."

"Oh, I won't live, I won't live..."

"Mom, Dad, Second Brother, Third Brother, Fourth Brother, Fifth Brother, there's an ungrateful wretch here." Mu Zhenzhen shouted loudly.

Waking the entire Old Mu Family.

Old Mrs. Mu opened her sleepy eyes, hearing her daughter's cries, hurriedly climbed up to search for her bellyband for a while but couldn't find it.

Thought at her age, even if she didn't wear it for a day, nobody would notice, so Old Mrs. Mu didn't bother brushing her hair and got up.

"What's the matter, what's the matter? Zhenzhen, what's wrong?"

Old Mrs. Mu pushed aside the other sons who were watching, speaking to Mu Zhenzhen inside the house.

Mu Zhenzhen was now living in Mu Danian's room, while Mu Danian was living in a cluttered storage room.

The storage room was dirty, Mu Danian frequently complained, but Old Mrs. Mu only cared for her second daughter, disregarding Mu Danian.

Chapter 156: Cold Noodles Became a Hit

"Mom, you... you came just in time, Zhuangzi... Zhuangzi betrayed me, he had another woman's bellyband over his head, he's heartless."

Mu Zhenzhen shouted while pointing at her man.

Zhuangzi, who was kicked to the ground, lay there feeling wronged and wanting to cry. He hadn't done anything yet, so why had he been beaten up?

Zhuangzi defended himself with a face full of grievance. "I didn't do it, I woke up, and this thing was on my head. I don't even know whose it is."

Zhuangzi raised his hand high, holding the bellyband that had covered his head all night.

"Hey, isn't that Mom's bellyband? I just washed it for her a few days ago."

Mrs. Lin said in surprise, she remembered clearly, she had laughed at Old Mrs. Mu for wearing a newlywed's bellyband, bright red, really eye-catching.

Old Mrs. Mu also recognized her bellyband, but that wasn't the point; the point was there were dozens of coins inside.

"Zhuangzi, how dare you steal from me? Tell me, where's the money from the bellyband?"

Zhuangzi's chubby face showed hesitation, then he said unhappily, "Mom, what are you talking about? You have money in your bellyband? You must be dreaming. Who would hide money in a bellyband? And this bellyband wasn't stolen by me, who knows if you stuffed it in my bed at night."

"You..."

Such shameless words from Zhuangzi made Old Mrs. Mu furious, her teeth itching.

She rushed forward, snatched back her bellyband, shook it hard, and no money fell out; her eyes widened.

"Hmph, Zhenzhen, give Zhuangzi a good beating today, make him cough up that money."

Mu Zhenzhen was still overwhelmed by the previous shock, not quite clear-headed yet. When she slightly regained her senses, she suddenly said to Old Mrs. Mu, "Mom, how can you do this? Zhuangzi is my man. If you... if you... you can go find my dad."

The underlying meaning in her words was left unspoken, but everyone present knew it.

"Zhenzhen, are you talking like a human being? I'm your mom! Are you... you're driving me mad!" Old Mrs. Mu stomped her foot in anger.

"Just because you're my mom doesn't mean you can touch Zhuangzi, Zhuangzi is mine!" Mu Zhenzhen puffed out her chest and shouted sharply.

Mu Shuangshuang covered her mouth, snickered; even the smallest of matters at Old Mu Family could escalate into chaos.

She was sure this incident today would make the entire Old Mu Family have a good laugh.

Mu Shuangshuang pulled Yu Si Niang's sleeve, and the two winked at each other before taking the chance to leave the Old Mu Family.

...

Lu Yuanfeng went straight to Zhao Yun's house this time to pick up the packed lotus pods in burlap bags. The rest was what Mu Shuangshuang had in hand, along with the frogs caught last time.

Yu Si Niang, who accompanied him, was used to her daughter going to the town with Lu Yuanfeng. She discussed this with Mu Dashan last night.

Lu Yuanfeng, the kid who couldn't be found even with a long pole, was actually very fitting as a good son-in-law for their capable Shuangshuang.

If neither of them objected, they would set the marriage arrangement, and once Shuangshuang turned fifteen, she'd be married off. They could then look after the grandchildren while still young.

"Mom, have you planned to keep working at Wealth Master Zhang's house?"

On the road, Mu Shuangshuang talked with Yu Si Niang about future matters.

Working short-term at Wealth Master Zhang's house, with a lunch meal included, earned six coins a day.

Yu Si Niang was rather satisfied, it wasn't worse than farming, and she'd quickly accumulated nearly two taels of silver this year.

"Shuangshuang, do you have something you want to say to Mom? Go ahead, Mom trusts you."

"Mom, I've thought it through; if you work for a year, you'll earn two taels of silver.

During that time, you'd have to work regardless of rain or wind. Otherwise, the wage would decrease."

"It's actually quite tiring. Now, Lu Yuanfeng and I want to set up a small stall in the town to sell snacks.

I believe within a month, we might earn your annual wage.

It's easier and more profitable than working at Wealth Master Zhang's, though it might require attending the stall."

The town is far from here, and moving back and forth is quite inconvenient.

Especially every time going to market, Mu Shuangshuang had to pay rent for everything, which added to the inconvenience.

Yu Si Niang knew how much silver her daughter had on hand, she'd acknowledged her daughter's earning ability.

But she wasn't the daughter; she didn't know anything.

"Shuangshuang, you don't know anything, and I wonder if I'll hold you back."

Yu Si Niang differed from Mu Dashan; if it were Mu Dashan, he'd worry whether the town's money could be earned so easily or if it would waste time...

Yu Si Niang was bold and adventurous in her youth, or else she wouldn't have married into Old Mu Family without asking for a dime.

"That's simple, Mom, you don't have to worry, I can teach you, and what I make is particularly easy, you surely can learn it quickly."

Cold noodles, cold skin wraps, meat sandwiches, and eight-treasure porridge. Cold noodles commitment for Jiu Si Xuan not to set up a stall for three months, so it couldn't be counted.

"Okay, first teach Mom, if Mom can make them just like you, she won't go to Wealth Master Zhang's house anymore."

The burden of this family couldn't just rest on a daughter's shoulders.

"That's great mom, you really understand things so well." Mu Shuangshuang stopped walking and threw herself into Yu Si Niang's arms.

Yu Si Niang was in great spirits, she gently stroked Mu Shuangshuang's hair and giggled.

"You clingy girl, aren't you afraid Fengzi will laugh?"

"Aunt Si, I won't, I won't laugh at Shuangshuang." Lu Yuanfeng shook his head; in fact, he quite liked Shuangshuang like this, radiating happiness all over.

"See how understanding Fengzi is."

"Yeah, yeah, everything mom says is right, let's hurry on, the sun is up."

Once again in town, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng delivered the cold noodles to Jiu Si Xuan. Just stepping inside, Fat Chef greeted them.

"Oh my dear, you finally came, if you hadn't shown up, I'd really be raising the roof here."

Fat Chef exaggerated immensely; Mu Shuangshuang furrowed her brows and thought, it couldn't be her cold noodles causing trouble, right?

Every time she delivered cold noodles, Mu Shuangshuang made sure Jiu Si Xuan inspected them with care; once they were outside, she wasn't responsible for their safety.

Fat Chef had no issue with that.

Was it that they tasted bad and were being rejected?

Her mind spiraled into countless thoughts, seeing her lost in thought, Fat Chef couldn't hold back and spoke.

"You little girl, your cold noodles have brought business to my tavern but also trouble.

Those people come every day just asking for cold noodles, willing to pay any silver. They say if more isn't prepared soon, they'll smash this tavern."

"Think of a way, can you deliver more frequently, with larger portions each time?"

Chapter 157: I'll Give You More Money

Fat Chef looked anxious, Mu Shuangshuang noticed and had another layer of plan in her heart.

She naturally wanted to make money, but if she had to come every day, she couldn't handle it. After all, making cold noodles once nearly took her an hour.

The next day, she would have to rush over more than ten miles of mountain road, she couldn't handle it for now.

Plus, this thing, cold noodles, if eaten too often, would surely become tiresome. Once it became tiresome, the card she held would be useless.

"Fat uncle, actually for you now, guests' demand not being met isn't necessarily a bad thing."

"Think about it, everyone wanting it certainly proves this thing is precious. If you easily brought it out, wouldn't everyone think it's just a common thing, easy to get."

"Over time, they wouldn't love to eat it anymore, the business of cold noodles would break down. To maintain longevity, first, let them have less contact, and secondly, change the flavors constantly."

Fat Chef listened and realized it made sense.

No matter how good a chef is, if the dish is made too often, others will find it tiresome. Cold noodles are just a single item.

The harder something is to get, the more cherished it is. Those easy-to-get items, in others' hands, they would just throw away.

"Little girl, tell me what to do, if your method works, I'll give you extra money."

The previous price for cold noodles set by Fat Chef was twenty coins per bowl, but now it's sold for thirty-five, and it sells immediately. It's not excessive to pay Mu Shuangshuang extra money.

Upon hearing this, Mu Shuangshuang became spirited.

"You need to act contrary to expectations and continue supplying cold noodles in limited quantities. Moreover, let others know that making cold noodles in Jiu Si Xuan isn't an easy task.

This way, the value of cold noodles will increase, and eating at Jiu Si Xuan will become a very prestigious thing to do."

The psychology of comparison, everyone has it, especially the wealthy folks in town who own large fields but have nothing to do, they may care more about their face.

"What you said makes sense, eating is just for fun and for face."

The dishes at Jiu Si Xuan aren't cheap. A cold noodle costs dozens of coins, which is a few days' wages for poor people. But for those who are wealthy, it becomes something trivial, like a bamboo strip used for wiping in a latrine, dispensable.

"Speaking of which, I've been scared silly by them, but we at Jiu Si Xuan often have regular customers wanting this thing, and we can't turn them down.

So, later when you send cold noodles every three days, send more. It used to be thirty portions, now send me sixty."

The remaining thirty portions, he would reserve them for more prestigious regulars.

"Alright, no problem." Mu Shuangshuang nodded in agreement.

Thirty more portions meant she could earn a few hundred coins in one round.

"Then, let's count cold noodles with juice together, and I'll give you five extra coins per portion. Our contract needs to extend, originally three months, now extend for another three months, how's that?"

Cold noodles paired with juice, such a fresh and popular thing, couldn't just stop being made quickly, even if the weather indeed cools down, the popularity of cold noodles wouldn't decrease.

"Sure, then shall we draft a new contract?" Mu Shuangshuang raised an eyebrow. She was someone who clearly distinguished between love and hate, public and private, didn't leave trouble for herself, responsible for herself, and for others.

"Alright, I'll start calculating the extra money from today."

Fat Chef was generous. In this way, Mu Shuangshuang earned over a hundred more coins from this trip, with thirty portions totaling four hundred fifty coins, it was indeed a profitable business method.

After signing the new contract and stamping it, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng hurried to Zhwei Xuan to sell frogs and when they truly had free time to sell lotus seeds in town, half an hour had already passed.

On the road to the market, Lu Yuanfeng kept smiling shyly at Mu Shuangshuang. He had experienced Shuangshuang's money-making skills before, yet each time there was something new to learn.

For instance, this time when they went to Zhwei Xuan to sell frogs, originally the chef there set six coins per pound, but Shuangshuang managed to negotiate eight coins.

Earning just two more coins per pound, plus making the head chef so happy his mouth couldn't close.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't know that Mu Shuangshuang had refined herself to the point of seeing people as people and ghosts as ghosts. Most importantly, she knew what those people truly wanted and liked to hear.

"Silly boy, why are you grinning at me like that?" Mu Shuangshuang used her previous nickname again. She really wanted to pat Lu Yuanfeng's head if he weren't so tall and strong now.

This boy was a typical loyal dog. Whatever she said was right, whenever there was danger, he habitually protected her from it.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't know what this meant, compared to those complex emotions, she preferred partnering with Lu Yuanfeng now to make money. He had a certain level of dependency on her.

"Nothing." Lu Yuanfeng shook his head like a rattle, without showing any sign of guilt.

"Alright, let's go sell lotus seeds then. With so many lotus seeds, we should be able to make quite a bit of money."

Mu Shuangshuang cheerfully gave Lu Yuanfeng's wheelbarrow a hand, but Lu Yuanfeng didn't stop her. As for the actual strength, he bore it all alone.

Xue Family!

Old Mrs. Xue had been searching for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng for days but found no trace. Now, she stopped searching and thought of checking her herbal tea stall.

Instead, her son Xue Yi stopped her.

"Mom, where are you going? It's so hot, the tea stall is very hot, you might get heatstroke."

"You don't need to worry about me, go tend to your business. I'm good now, your dad is by my side protecting me."

The words from Mu Shuangshuang, saying that her old man must be beside her, successfully fooled Old Mrs. Xue.

Old Mrs. Xue now allowed herself to be happy every day, as a kind of explanation to her old man.

"Good? You say that, but you didn't eat dinner last night, didn't have breakfast today. If my dad knew, he'd be sad." Xue Yi was clever. He understood the things Mu Shuangshuang used.

"You're talking nonsense, the old man wouldn't blame me. If there's someone to blame, blame you. You're the one who sent Gui Sao away, now I can't get used to the cook's food. I want something special."

The "special" mentioned by Old Mrs. Xue made Xue Yi's eyes light up. "Mom, are you talking about Jiu Si Xuan's cold noodles? I've pre-ordered it for you. It'll surely be delivered by noon. How about you drink some porridge now?"

"No, I don't want it. I don't like the cook's food at home, the flavor is off. Also, I want to eat lotus seeds, fresh ones, right now."

Chapter 158: Meeting Steward Xue Again

Before Mr. Xue made his fortune, he lived near the Lotus Pond River. It was midsummer when Old Mrs. Xue married into the family, and with no other food at home, he prepared a lot of lotus seeds for her to eat.

She still remembers the taste to this day.

"If you want to eat lotus seeds, that's easy. We have a lotus pond in the backyard, I'll have someone pick them for you."

The Xue Family's residence naturally differed from the residence of Mu Family's oldest daughter, Mu Xianxian's in-laws. The Xue Family's front and back yards combined might cover over a hundred acres, with a winding corridor alone taking up several acres.

Having a lotus pond was no big deal for a big family like the Xue Family.

"I don't want to eat those; I want the ones picked from the river. The lotus pods your father picked from the Lotus Pond River back then were so fragrant. Mom can still remember that taste, sweet and with larger grains than usual lotus seeds."

"..."

Xue Yi had gotten used to his mother's numerous demands. The only thing he regretted was not escaping to the Capital with his elder brother back then. At least then, it wouldn't be his headache right now.

"Housekeeper Xue, do as my mother said. Go to the town market and see if anyone is selling lotus seeds. They should be from the river. If you find any, buy more and bring them back; my mother wants some."

Housekeeper Xue was a chubby middle-aged man who had been working in the Xue Family for many years. Having reached the position of chief housekeeper required some skill. As long as it was Xue Yi's command, he would accomplish it in the shortest time possible.

...

In the market, Mu Shuangshuang laid a burlap bag on the ground and placed some lotus pods on it. In no time, many people gathered around her stall.

Lotus pods were always rare in town during midsummer, and since she was selling them cheaply, two copper coins each, most passersby would stop and buy one or two.

In no time, more than ten lotus pods were sold.

Selling lotus pods was the easiest business Mu Shuangshuang had encountered so far, with people gathering around almost without her having to advertise.

However, lotus pods weren't like other products. People generally bought only one or two, so selling them in large quantities wasn't easy.

After some thought, Mu Shuangshuang decided to call out.

"Lotus pods, fresh lotus pods, just picked from the Lotus Pond River, large and sweet grains, can be used to make soup or porridge, everyone come and have a look, if they're not delicious, you don't need to pay!"

The phrase "if they're not delicious, you don't need to pay" attracted a few more people forward.

"Wow, these lotus pods are really fresh, how much are they?"

"Two copper coins each. Sister-in-law, why not take a few more? The kids would surely love them."

"Alright, then I'll take three!"

"..."

In the market, Mu Shuangshuang patiently answered every question from the people coming to buy stuff, always with a smile, even if some didn't buy lotus pods. She was still very courteous and would sometimes give them a few lotus seeds.

Lu Yuanfeng was always helping by gathering lotus pods and taking money. He stood close to Mu Shuangshuang, occasionally glancing at her.

Mu Shuangshuang was probably the most peculiar girl Lu Yuanfeng had ever met—bright-minded, sincere, unlike how the village treated Old Mu Family.

Lu Yuanfeng thought that Shuangshuang lived a life that many could not.

She was clear about love and hate, giving back vengeance and gratitude. Such a character, he would rather call carefree.

While Lu Yuanfeng was lost in thought, Mu Shuangshuang sold a few more lotus pods.

Housekeeper Xue managed to find Mu Shuangshuang's stall by seeing people around eating lotus pods and asking around.

As soon as he saw Mu Shuangshuang, he said, "Little girl, are these lotus pods from the river?"

The chubby figure in front of her, with a round belly, instantly reminded Mu Shuangshuang who he was.

"Uncle, you're the one who bought my vegetables and monkey head mushrooms before...."

Being the provider of her first pot of gold, Mu Shuangshuang had a distinctly vivid impression of the person in front of her.

The chubby uncle stared at Mu Shuangshuang, seemingly uncertain about her identity.

He remembered the person he had done business with was dark and thin, but the person standing before him was fair and slim, and her eyes seemed more beautiful than before.

But the voice was the same, so Housekeeper Xue had no further doubts.

"It's you, little girl. Now I'm relieved. How much are these lotus pods?"

Housekeeper Xue pointed at the lotus pods laid outside by Mu Shuangshuang.

"Two copper coins each. If you buy a lot, I'll throw in a few more for you."

On his way here, Housekeeper Xue had already asked about the price. He wanted to know if the little girl in front of him would raise the price because of his attire, but she wasn't interested in earning more from him. Instead, she offered them at a discount.

Such honesty in a girl was indeed rare.

"I'll take all the lotus pods you have left. Count how many are left."

"There's no need to count; there are exactly 156 left inside."

Having initially brought 206 lotus pods, Mu Shuangshuang had sold 50, leaving exactly that many in the burlap bag.

"How about this, give me 300 copper coins, and the remaining six lotus pods will be a bonus for you, as a gift for buying my goods."

Mu Shuangshuang was generous and straightforward in business. Housekeeper Xue, without hesitation, pulled out a hundred-tael silver note from his purse.

"I came out in a rush and didn't bring copper coins. Can you make change?"

Seeing the neatly printed silver note in the person's hand, Mu Shuangshuang shook her head. A hundred taels weren't a small amount; even selling herself, she might not have that much silver.

"What should we do?" Housekeeper Xue was a bit anxious. Finding change for a hundred taels was indeed a bit challenging.

But he knew he needed to handle this matter before returning. Otherwise, the second young master was bound to throw a fit.

"How about this, you take the goods back, and you can pay me next time you see me. How does that sound?"

Mu Shuangshuang was quite lenient towards the person in front of her. Normally, she never sold on credit. It was always a handover of money and goods, or she'd move on.

If things were sold on credit for just a few coins, she might have starved long ago.

"No, how about this, you deliver the goods to our residence, and I'll add 20 copper coins as a delivery fee each for both of you. Does that sound good?"

"Lu Yuanfeng, what do you think?" Mu Shuangshuang asked Lu Yuanfeng.

"I have no objections." With 40 copper coins per trip, it was quicker money than moving goods at the dock.

"Alright, let's do that. As soon as the new phrase was out, Housekeeper Xue became interested. He said, "Little girl, where are you from? You speak so interestingly."

"I'm from Er Gui Village. These words are things I've thought of when free. I find them quite interesting too."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't feel embarrassed about adopting modern phrases as her own. After all, she's the only one who knows the future, and whatever she says, no one would jump out to refute her.

Chapter 159: Xue Family

"Who is this boy? Your husband?"

Housekeeper Xue had been noticing Lu Yuanfeng for a while. Not only was the boy sturdy looking, but his face was also very amiable. Most importantly, standing beside this girl, they matched well together.

"Ah?" Mu Shuangshuang was stunned for a moment, then quickly denied it. "Not at all, I'm only thirteen, not at the age to talk about marriage yet. Where would a husband come from? You're really joking."

Not saying it was one thing, but mentioning it made Mu Shuangshuang think that women in ancient times married too early, had children too early.

At fifteen, one is still a child, the body hasn't fully developed yet, giving birth can easily drain vitality.

"Haha, that's true." Housekeeper Xue laughed lightly.

Lu Yuanfeng was actually in a good mood because he indeed wished to marry Shuangshuang, as long as she was willing.

"You little girl, as thin as a monkey, should eat more and put on some weight."

All the way Mu Shuangshuang and Housekeeper Xue chatted sporadically, and eventually stopped in front of the Xue family's mansion.

"Uncle, are you part of the Xue family?" Mu Shuangshuang slightly tilted her body, pointing at the magnificent plaque of the Xue family in front.

"I am the housekeeper of the Xue family, what's up? Scared? You two just follow me inside, I'll fetch the money for you."

With Housekeeper Xue leading, the gatekeepers allowed them through without a word. However, before Mu Shuangshuang could take a good look at the Xue family's courtyard, Old Mrs. Xue came out with a servant and surprisingly pointed at Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"It's you two, I've been looking for you for a long time."

Unlike Housekeeper Xue, Old Mrs. Xue immediately recognized Mu Shuangshuang because the last time Mu Shuangshuang was in town, she deliberately washed her face before coming out.

Moreover, Shuangshuang was still wearing the clothes from last time; Old Mrs. Xue would find it hard not to recognize her.

"Grandma, long time no see." Mu Shuangshuang smiled and nodded.

"You know our matriarch?" Housekeeper Xue asked in surprise.

Mu Shuangshuang took a moment to recount the story of how she came to know Old Mrs. Xue. To her surprise, Housekeeper Xue seemed amazed after hearing it and looked at her and Lu Yuanfeng with admiration.

"So it was you two that the old matriarch has been looking for."

The person who wrote the note at the old matriarch's tea stall turned out to be the little girl in front of them. Housekeeper Xue was astonished and sighed, realizing how small the world was.

"In that case, why don't you chat with our old matriarch for a while; I'll go fetch the money for the lotus pods."

Old Mrs. Xue walked casually to Mu Shuangshuang's side, held her small hand and said:

"I've lived to this old age and have seen countless people, but never have I seen a girl as clever as you. Have you promised to someone yet?"

When people encounter something they like, they always want to bring it home; Old Mrs. Xue was no exception.

Mu Shuangshuang appeared to be just around ten years old, and would be a good match for her eldest grandson Xue Cheng. If that were the case, she'd have company in the future.

"I haven't." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head.

"Promised!" Lu Yuanfeng quickly replied.

The two spoke almost simultaneously, and Old Mrs. Xue was initially stunned, then suddenly realized that the young man in front seemed to be interested in Shuang.

But no matter the interest, it wouldn't do; Shuang was who she wanted as her granddaughter-in-law.

Soon she'd write a letter to her grandson far in the Capital, to see his thoughts, ideally to set the marriage directly.

Beside her, Lu Yuanfeng sensed a strong feeling of crisis, and that prompted his abrupt words; usually when elders ask about marriage, there's often an introduction in mind.

Shuang was still young and it was normal not to understand, but Old Mrs. Xue certainly knew.

"Our Xue family is a prominent household in this town, which is why the residence is so grand. Personally, I prefer to live in a smaller courtyard for its warmth.

Shuang, you can treat this place as your own home. If you wish to see or eat anything, just tell me and I'll instruct the servants to do it."

The benefits offered by Old Mrs. Xue were too great, Mu Shuangshuang didn't feel relaxed, instead, she became tense.

To have met someone only twice, who suddenly treats you as family with such privileges.

If there were no ulterior motives, it must be that you left too deep an impression on her; she's genuinely fond of you.

Though it seemed Old Mrs. Xue had elements of both.

"Hehe, Grandma, you don't have to be so courteous, I actually didn't know Uncle Xue was the Xue family's housekeeper.

Lu Yuanfeng and I just came to deliver lotus pods to Housekeeper Xue, we weren't thinking of anything else."

Speaking of lotus pods, Old Mrs. Xue really craved them, "Shuang, could you keep me company, as this old lady has neither had dinner nor breakfast? Have breakfast with me?

And tell me how you managed to pick lotus pods from the Lotus Pond River. I remember the lotus pods there are not easy to pick."

"Lu Yuanfeng and I just tied a sickle to a bamboo pole and used a net to catch the lotus pods cut off by the sickle," Mu Shuangshuang explained.

She was pondering how to find an excuse to leave when Xue Yi's frustrated voice came over.

"You worthless bunch, you claim to be chefs from the Capital, yet my mother won't eat what you made. I'm telling you, if you continue like this, you should all go away."

Xue Yi was famous for his loud voice, and his shouting scared the chefs, whose legs got weak, and they could only keep apologizing.

"If an apology is useful, why do we need people from the government office? Get out and remake breakfast."

The chefs rushed out while Xue Yi looked up, seeing Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"It's you? Why, did you know my mother was looking for you, so you came voluntarily to get benefits from her?" Xue Yi mocked.

"Mr. Xue thinks too much; we were just delivering lotus pods to Housekeeper Xue and happened to meet the old lady and exchanged a few words.

But Mr. Xue always likes to make baseless assumptions about others' intentions, always in a negative way."

Xue Yi had been picking on her from the start, so Mu Shuangshuang wasn't polite either.

Lu Yuanfeng timely chimed in. "Shuangshuang, let's head back; lest we're thought of as coming for benefits."

Mu Shuangshuang wanted to give Lu Yuanfeng a thumbs up; she indeed wanted to leave.

Initially, upon seeing Old Mrs. Xue's attire, she thought about doing business that might give her more opportunities.

But with Xue Yi around, she'd probably rarely benefit.

"Don't, this old lady found some companions with great difficulty, you're not allowed to go anywhere, keep me company for breakfast."

Just after speaking, Old Mrs. Xue pointed at Xue Yi's nose. "Yi'er, these two are guests invited by me. You better keep those hurtful words to yourself, or I won't be polite."

"Mother, how could you side with outsiders? I am your son, aren't I?" Xue Yi was somewhat displeased.

"You mind me; keep nagging, and I'll sweep you out the door. Now you better get out, quick."

Old Mrs. Xue rarely took the initiative to defend someone, but this time Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng received her acknowledgment.

Xue Yi grew more curious, what was special about this little girl? That made his mother, who rarely opened up, insist she stays.

Chapter 160: Using Strength to Slap in the Face

Old Mrs. Xue's breakfast was quickly prepared, with Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng accompanying her, occasionally chatting with her.

Old Mrs. Xue was in a good mood, but looking at the breakfast that wasn't to her taste, she furrowed her brows.

"What's wrong? Grandma, didn't you say you were hungry?" Mu Shuangshuang asked curiously.

"I just don't like what this chef makes; too flashy but not practical, doesn't feel like home."

The chef invited by Xue Yi from the Capital mostly cooked extravagant dishes, which Old Mrs. Xue didn't like as she had grown older.

The last time she ate two bowls of rice was when Housekeeper Xue bought Mu Shuangshuang's wild vegetables and monkey head mushrooms, which tasted familiar to her, so she was willing to eat them.

Mu Shuangshuang understood somewhat. The porridge in front of her was topped with bits of meat and some scallions, and its color was undoubtedly appealing, even she felt like drooling.

But Old Mrs. Xue didn't like it, and the reason she gave was that it was flashy but impractical.

Mu Shuangshuang thought for a moment, suddenly grasping the idea.

"Grandma, do you want a breakfast that feels like home?"

"Of course, I'm old now and don't care for fancy foods anymore, just want a comfortable and simple life."

"Grandma, how about I make you breakfast? What do you think?"

"Why certainly, Shuang is going to make breakfast for me." Old Mrs. Xue smiled broadly.

Xue Yi rolled his eyes nearby. "What's good about it, Mother? This little girl obviously hasn't seen much of the world; what she makes surely won't be impressive. Why bother listening to her nonsense!"

"Mr. Xue, what you said isn't right. Shuangshuang's cooking is delicious and not inferior to your chef's." Lu Yuanfeng frowned; he disliked Xue Yi's remark.

"Ha! Compete with our chef, do you really think you two can influence my mother's opinions just because you've given her a suggestion? I'm telling you, impossible."

"Mr. Xue, why be so sure? I do think I can make something impressive." Mu Shuangshuang sneered, "But I'm afraid Mr. Xue won't admit later that he said such humiliating things to me."

"My mother is here, can I run away? If you can make a breakfast that satisfies my mother and me today, I'll always respect you from now on."

Xue Yi made a big effort; actually, he didn't dislike the little girl in front of him, but he felt she was different from others, making him curious to test her and see what noteworthy things she might have.

Old Mrs. Xue didn't realize Xue Yi's thoughts at first, but when Xue Yi kept targeting Shuangshuang repeatedly, she understood.

Xue Yi was a businessman who typically concealed his emotions; otherwise, his fabric shop wouldn't be thriving, and he wouldn't have influence even in the Capital. As such, he must have a reason for targeting a little girl.

"Alright, let's wait and see." Mu Shuangshuang smirked.

"I assume I can borrow your kitchen and all the ingredients I need?"

"Naturally!" Xue Yi nodded.

"Lu Yuanfeng, let's go to the kitchen together. I'll make something delicious for you today."

In Xue's kitchen, a line of chefs and assistants stood behind Mu Shuangshuang, waiting for her instructions.

"Please help me prepare rice, glutinous rice, red beans, red dates, peanuts, lianzi, dried longan, and rock sugar."

Yes, Mu Shuangshuang planned to make Eight Treasures Porridge; what Old Mrs. Mu wanted was nothing more than a sense of home, simply put, it was just simple porridge and side dishes. But making porridge and side dishes wouldn't gain Xue Yi's approval; she had to make something not available here.

"By the way, please find me some cucumbers and cabbage stems."

Pairing Eight Treasures Porridge with pickles might seem odd, but pickles stimulate appetite, so gifting them to Old Mrs. Mu for her regular meals was a small favor.

The Xue Family lived up to their name; Mu Shuangshuang had barely finished speaking when, within less than a quarter of an incense stick's time, everything was prepared. A few chefs stared at Mu Shuangshuang, seemingly eager to see what she would make to satisfy someone as difficult as Old Mrs. Mu.

"You all aren't trying to secretly learn my skills, are you?" Mu Shuangshuang joked. "This is an exclusive recipe, not taught to outsiders."

A few chefs had no choice but to leave dejectedly.

To put it, they were quite pitiful, originally working as highly regarded chefs in a restaurant in the Capital, the money wasn't as much as the Xue family offered, but they had freedom and prestige, unlike now, constantly being berated by Xue Yi.

Sigh, it's really shameful.

"Shuangshuang, what can I do to help?" Lu Yuanfeng's eyes held an uncontrollable smile; Shuangshuang's words about not teaching outsiders clearly showed the chefs her status.

He was secretly very happy.

"Make a fire, such an important task should be done by someone close like you."

Mu Shuangshuang was counting on making money with these two items later, and she needed to coordinate with Lu Yuanfeng in advance so when it came time to make serious money, they wouldn't be flustered.

Mu Shuangshuang found a big wooden basin; after washing all the ingredients the Xue Family had prepared for her, she mixed them together and soaked them.

For lianzi, she didn't use dried lianzi, opting for fresh ones. However, all had the lianzi heart removed, ensuring they wouldn't taste bitter when eaten.

Lu Yuanfeng helped by boiling water for the pickles, soaking the ingredients; meanwhile, Mu Shuangshuang was discussing their future plans with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Lu Yuanfeng, why don't we deepen this partnership? I'm now selling cold noodles; you can join in, we'll split the cost of the ingredients, but the silver we earn will be shared equally."

"No way, the cost of ingredients is not much; I won't take advantage of you."

Lu Yuanfeng knew Mu Shuangshuang's cold noodles were made from mung beans, but only she knew the exact recipe. Even if mung beans were costly, they couldn't match the price of a single serving of cold noodles from Shuangshuang.

"Haha, why are you so quick to refuse, I didn't finish yet. Then in winter, we'll go hunting in the mountains together, and we'll split whatever we hunt."

In the cold winter, setting up a stall in town was certainly unrealistic, better to rely on the mountains—hunt some game, chop some firewood—and each trip could earn several hundred wen.

"Don't say the mountains are dangerous, you know my skills, I'll run faster than anyone if there's danger."

Mu Shuangshuang directly stifled the words Lu Yuanfeng wanted to say.

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly recalled the last time they were hunting wild boar in the woods, the determination Shuangshuang showed when pulling him to run for their lives.

Perhaps partnering with Shuangshuang really wasn't a bad idea.

"Alright then, we'll work together, but when in the mountains, you have to follow my lead; outside, I'll follow yours."

"Okay, okay, happy cooperation—once we've saved enough silver, we'll send the two little ones to school come springtime."