

Folly 201

Chapter 201: Envy Shuangshuang _2

Lu Yuanfeng was not silent this time. He directly said, "I'm a man. When going shopping, it's only natural that I spend money. If I took a girl's money, people would laugh at me."

The two of them each had their point, and neither was willing to back down.

Ah Ru, on the side, found it both amusing and touching.

She had been in business for so long and had never seen a situation where they weren't a couple, weren't siblings, yet paid for each other's things.

Moreover, both Shuangshuang and Fengzi had a rare sincerity in their eyes.

Especially Fengzi; the way he looked at Shuangshuang was clearly full of fondness, while Shuangshuang's gaze at Fengzi was more pure, at least without as much affection.

Well, she would consider it a good deed; hopefully, it could lead to a marriage.

"Shuangshuang, take your silver back. There's no sense in a girl spending money on a boy, and Fengzi is willing to spend money on you; you should be happy."

"Exactly, Sister Shuangshuang, let my second brother pay. He's more than happy to spend on you."

Yuanbao seized the chance to chime in; he was thinking for his second brother, so distracted even when talking to Little Zhi. Later, he would definitely make his second brother buy something delicious.

Mu Shuangshuang blushed slightly, worried that Ah Ru and Yuanbao might say something even more outrageous, so she temporarily accepted Fengzi's goodwill.

Sigh, does this mean she owes someone a favor again?

Right now, Mu Shuangshuang hadn't settled down yet. If it were modern times, she would let Lu Yuanfeng pay without a second thought.

After all, a few clothes wouldn't cost much. However, in ancient times, these fabrics were like gold, frighteningly expensive.

Fortunately, there were plenty of gains this time. Mu Shuangshuang left the fabric at Ah Ru's store and took the three little ones to stroll around town.

Perhaps because the double cropping season in some places was coming to an end, the streets suddenly had more peddlers wandering around. They each carried their wares, calling out to you with clear, melodious voices as they passed by.

Little Zhi, holding Mu Shuangshuang's hand, called to her looking at a sugar-coated hawthorn vendor. "Sister, sugar hawthorn. I want to eat sugar hawthorn."

"Little Zhi..." Beside them, young and mature Xiao Han stopped Mu Shuangshuang.

They had just spent so much money on clothes, who knows when they could earn it back; they shouldn't spend anymore.

"Xiao Han, it's okay. It's rare for your sister to take you all out shopping; anything you want to eat, your sister will buy for you."

"But sister, Brother Yuanfeng has already spent so much silver." Xiao Han lowered his head, looking at his toes.

He didn't want to spend Lu Yuanfeng's silver.

"You're right, Brother Yuanfeng has spent quite a bit, so the snack money should be on sister. Fengzi, you have no objections, right?" Mu Shuangshuang smiled faintly, her eyes full of mischief.

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly felt a sense of relief. Spending the girl's money was fine, at least Shuangshuang was happy.

"Then, on food, Shuangshuang pays."

"That's more like it. Let's go get something delicious!"

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Third Branch of the Old Mu Family!

When Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang saw Shuangshuang off, they fed some tender meat to Little Black from the bucket. Little Black took a couple of bites and then stopped, raising its head to look helplessly at the beam of the roof. It seemed a bit melancholic.

It was an abandoned black mink. Its owner went out shopping without taking it, leaving it home alone, bored and only able to catch mice for fun.

But the last mouse in the Old Mu Family was played to death by it early this morning, and there would no longer be any mice to accompany it through dull times.

In the eyes of Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan, Little Black had always been like a weasel. Initially, they were quite against Shuangshuang raising it, after all, it was the first time they had ever seen a black-furred weasel.

Fortunately, Little Black brought much joy to the family, like now, its frustrated look genuinely amused Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan.

After laughing, Mu Dashan couldn't help but sigh.

"Si Niang, you see, if we can tame a chicken-stealing weasel, why can't we manage to settle people?"

It was no wonder Mu Dashan sighed; this morning, the whole family had agreed last night to go to Dahuo Village to discuss with Zhuangzi's mother about temporarily bringing Xiao Mizi back, but everyone delayed and no one was willing to go.

No work was done, no matter settled, leaving anyone feeling uncomfortable.

"Shuangshuang's father, let's not worry about it. If even his second brother's family won't go, how can others help him go?"

"It's not that I want to meddle, I just feel that Shuangshuang is right. Such a simple matter, yet no one is willing to step up, alas..."

Chapter 202: Envy Shuangshuang _3

Actually, it's not that the second branch of the Old Mu Family is unwilling to step forward, it's just that they feel the issue started with Mu Zhenzhen, and their own son shouldn't take the fall. Their son shouldn't suffer, nor should their branch. Even if someone has to go to Dahuo Village, it should be Mu Zhenzhen who belongs to Dahuo Village.

But Mu Zhenzhen is afraid of being punished and refuses to go back no matter what.

Right now, Mu Zhenzhen is crying uncontrollably, and Old Mrs. Mu is holding her and wailing non-stop.

Several people in the room sigh over and over, and finally, Mu Danian speaks up. "Dad, Mom, why don't we let Shuang handle it? She spoke so nicely yesterday."

Mu Danian is still upset over last night's incident; his face, which is more handsome than a young actor, was almost ruined by that smelly girl. Just thinking about it still makes him feel sore all over.

Today we must let that smelly girl go to Dahuo Village, deliver herself, and get beaten to death by Zhuangzi's mother.

"Right, Mom, let that smelly girl go, she... let her exchange for Gou Dan, Mom, I really don't want to go back." Mu Zhenzhen seized the last straw and cried out loudly.

"But the third branch has already split off, how would Shuang help us?" Mr. Mu shook his head to show his disapproval.

"It's already come to this, why worry about so much? Let's save the person first, if we don't, who knows what will happen to Gou Dan. Dad, Mom, Gou Dan is your biological grandson, Old Mu Family's flesh and blood."

Mu Dazhong pondered for a long time before speaking out.

"Dad, I'm begging you..."

The sons and daughters-in-law jointly pressured, and Mr. Mu decided to take desperate measures to seek out Mu Shuangshuang.

But upon arriving, they found out that Shuangshuang had gone to the town in the morning.

"Shopping, with such a big issue at home, and that smelly girl still has the mind to shop? Definitely a heartless brat." As soon as Old Mrs. Mu heard about Mu Shuangshuang, she began cursing.

The others followed suit, cursing her as well, but despite the cursing, they still had to wait for Mu Shuangshuang to return.

Mu Shuangshuang, because she was with the children, returned later than ever, arriving home when the sun was about to set, leaving only a little remaining sunlight.

She carried a bolt of cloth in her hand, humming a tune, while Little Zhi and Xiao Han each held a paper bag of food, cheerfully following behind her.

Mu Shuangshuang was contemplating how her stove had been ready for two days now, and it should be usable tomorrow. It was time she thought about how to give her family some nutritional supplements.

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang entered the courtyard through the side door, Mrs. Lin's sharp voice rang out.

"Dad, Mom, the smelly girl is back, she actually... she actually..."

The bolt of cloth was so obvious in Mu Shuangshuang's hand, and there was clearly something good to eat in the oil paper bags Little Zhi and Xiao Han held. The jealousy and craving completely overwhelmed Mrs. Lin, causing her to choke on her own spit several times before finishing her sentence.

The members of the Old Mu Family were already waiting for Shuangshuang to return, and as Mrs. Lin spoke up, they rushed over like rabbits, eager to see what kind of treasures the so-called smelly girl had bought while shopping.

When they saw the bolt of cloth in Mu Shuangshuang's hand, every last one of them was taken aback.

Even the cheapest cloth could cost half a tael of silver, very expensive.

Thus, peasant families followed the saying: wear new clothes for three years, old clothes for three years, and patch them up for another three years.

If not, homemade fabric (self-woven cotton cloth, not processed to make soft) was used for clothes, but that was nothing compared to cloth bought from the town.

"Shuang, where did you get the money to buy cloth?" Mr. Mu was the first to speak, looking at Mu Shuangshuang with skepticism, confusion, and mistrust.

Mu Shuangshuang, who does special work, is adept at observing people's expressions.

"I neither stole, nor robbed, nor cheated—earned it myself." Mu Shuangshuang met Mr. Mu's gaze head-on and then turned to Little Zhi and Xiao Han, saying, "Little Zhi, Xiao Han, hurry into the room to look after Dad; he's definitely missing you after being out all day."

"Stop right there, you little brats, what's in your hands? Show it to your grandpa and grandma." Mu Dazhong shouted when he saw Little Zhi and Xiao Han were about to leave.

"Uncle, please speak respectfully. These things are all bought by me, using my silver; no one has the right to touch them. Little Zhi, Xiao Han, go inside."

Mu Shuangshuang was truly furious, over just a bit of food they even resorted to calling the children names.

How could there be such shameless people in the world?

Mu Danian was about to reach out, but Yu Si Niang heard the commotion and rushed out from the room, blocking Mu Danian with her open hands. "Fifth Brother, what are you doing? Are you really going to hit two children?"

"Mom, take Xiao Han and Little Zhi inside. They've been playing all day and must be tired."

Mu Shuangshuang deliberately emphasized the word "playing," as expected, causing the faces of the members of Old Mu Family to darken one by one.

Chapter 203: Using Land in Exchange

Mr. Mu stood there, thinking over and over, waiting and waiting, and finally spoke with a faltering voice.

"Shuang, can you resolve the matter with your second aunt?"

Mu Shuangshuang was originally pondering why the Old Mu Family members were blocking her path one after another. Turns out, it was still about these trivial matters.

She thought they had already gone out to find someone, but surprisingly, after a day had passed, nothing had been accomplished.

"Grandpa, didn't I mention a solution yesterday? Help find the child lost from Second Uncle's family, and it will be resolved."

"Bah, you make it sound easy, girl. The person is already lost; if it were that easy to find them, why would we need the government's people?"

Old Mrs. Mu spat a mouthful of phlegm, which landed perfectly at Mu Shuangshuang's feet. She quickly jumped aside, avoiding the attack on her shoes.

Damn, the old hag, this is her only pair of embroidered shoes, and she wants to ruin them, how malicious.

Mu Shuangshuang said with a rather unpleasant expression, "I've already shared the method. Whether you can do it or not, that's your problem, not mine. I need to go back and make new clothes."

After saying that, Mu Shuangshuang was about to run back to her room.

"Dad, I told you, this nasty girl knows the method but won't tell us. She has a black heart!" Mu Danian, as usual, strived to slander Mu Shuangshuang by pouring mud all over her.

Mr. Mu gave Mu Danian a fierce glare.

"Stop talking for a while, let me speak with Shuang." Mr. Mu took a few steps forward, and the unresolved hesitation on his face faded away.

"Shuang, just consider it a good deed to help your second aunt. If that child can't be found, your second aunt really won't survive."

Mu Shuangshuang was unfazed. Do they expect her to help just because they ask?

They underestimate her too much?

However, she was curious whether the Old Mu Family would side with Mu Zhenzhen or Gou Dan.

"Grandpa, if that child can't be found, what is your plan?"

Mu Shuangshuang asked what the few present were most concerned about, as Gou Dan was with Zhuangzi's mother, while Mu Zhenzhen was with the Old Mu Family.

Hearing this, Mu Zhenzhen began to cry bitterly again, "Dad, Mom, Zhenzhen doesn't want to die, please please..."

As soon as Mu Zhenzhen began crying, Old Mrs. Mu started to feel sorry for her again. Her empathy was moving to anyone who saw her.

Unfortunately, her love was incredibly narrow-minded.

Mrs. Lin, seeing this, began pleading with Mr. Mu. Both of them were grabbing hold of someone to further their own purposes.

"Grandpa, actually, this is really no big deal. Send someone from the family to find the child, apologize once found, and it's all over."

Mu Shuangshuang genuinely didn't understand. With all this time spent crying, why not go to Dahuo Village to check?

Is it possible that when something happens, they just wait for others to save them?

"You make it sound simple. Your second aunt and second aunt-in-law are crying like this, why won't you help? Stupid girl, do you even have a conscience?"

Mu Dazhong retorted, confronting Mu Shuangshuang.

"Second Uncle, don't throw the responsibility on me, I didn't make Xiao Mizi lost. Plus, I already told you the method, or do you think a young girl like me can replace all the manpower in the family?"

One sentence left the Old Mu Family members feeling embarrassed. Yet the hope was right here, and if they didn't grasp it, no one knew what to do.

Mr. Mu sighed, looking at Mu Shuangshuang's expression, which was already full of resignation. "Shuang, tell me what you want, and I'll help your second aunt and Gou Dan."

At this point, Mr. Mu had no other options; otherwise, he wouldn't be begging a little girl.

Relying on family was not possible; every additional day Gou Dan stayed, the greater the danger.

"Shuang, tomorrow, once Gou Dan is rescued, I'll have him bow deeply to thank you."

"Don't bother, I don't need Gou Dan to bow to me. Otherwise, Second Uncle and Second Aunt will say I've lost my conscience and bullied Gou Dan again."

Here's the thing, Grandpa, since you insist on my help to find the child, you know my dad is sick now, and my mom has to work for the family. The third branch's income depends on me. If I go to find the child, the family will have no income."

Mr. Mu listened and understood Mu Shuangshuang's implied demand for money, and he actually felt relieved. "Alright, if you find Gou Dan, I'll have your grandma give you six copper coins."

Six copper coins were Yu Si Niang's daily wages. Mr. Mu thought giving them to Shuang should keep her satisfied.

"Grandpa, it's not money that I want." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head with a smile.

Does she, Mu Shuangshuang, appear to be the type to be solved with six copper coins?

"Then what do you want?" Mr. Mu was momentarily stunned, hesitating before speaking.

"I want that one-acre good land in the north of the village! Give me the land, and I'll save the person and find Xiao Mizi in the process."

The smile on Mr. Mu's face instantly disappeared as he angrily looked at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuang, you're opening your mouth like a lion, how can you be so merciless!"

The good acreage in the north of the village is considered one of the better lands. Not only is it vast, but it's black soil, very fertile, with no need for fertilizer after planting rice seedlings.

Every year, Mr. Mu uses that land to flaunt before others. Many have coveted it, but he's always been reluctant to sell. Now that Shuang mentions wanting that land, it's natural for him to be furious.

But Mu Shuangshuang didn't care, instead laughing boldly.

"Grandpa, since you say I'm heartless, then I won't go. After all, in your eyes, your second aunt and Gou Dan's lives aren't worth that acre of good land."

Mu Shuangshuang was about to leave again, and Mu Zhenzhen considered this her last chance, falling to the ground, crying her heart out.

"Mom, Dad, Zhenzhen can't go on living, can't live anymore. Instead of being drowned, I'd rather die here. At least I'll die as a member of the Old Mu Family."

"Ah... can't go on living anymore..."

"..."

"Third brother, come out and see the good daughter you've raised, like a blood-sucking leech. Aren't you going to do something? Hiding like a cowardly turtle inside the house!" Old Mrs. Mu stomped her foot and shouted towards Mu Dashan's house.

Inside, Mu Dashan couldn't sit any longer. He had wanted to get up but was held back by Yu Si Niang.

"Shuang's father, don't go. Shuang already hinted to me that none of us should go out. She'll handle it."

Yu Si Niang remembered the look her daughter gave her, one that signaled she shouldn't come out for anything.

"I'm worried our daughter will be taken advantage of. You know what kind of person Mom is."

Old Mrs. Mu is definitely the type to get physical, and there's a chance she'd hit Shuang if she lost her temper.

Upon hearing the possibility of her daughter being mistreated, Yu Si Niang couldn't stay seated. She thought, if anything happened, the family should bear it together, and Shuang was just a child.

"Let's go, we're going out to support Shuang. My Mu Dashan's daughter, no one should bully her."

At this moment, Mu Dashan stood up straight and tall, feeling that he should have stood up long ago.

"Dad, Mom, I want to go too." Mu Xiaohan's face was firm; he wouldn't let anyone bully his sister.

"Yes, Brother Xiao Han is right, let's go protect Sister. Whoever dares to touch her, Little Zhi will hit them."

Chapter 204: Someone Protects

Inside the house, when the whole family came out, Mu Shuangshuang felt a surge of warmth in her heart.

Although she was strong, she was ultimately just alone.

She wasn't afraid of the Old Mu Family being large and powerful, but when you know there are people supporting you, it always gives you more strength than being alone.

Mu Dashan came out, and Old Mrs. Mu got even more worked up, rushing over to start berating Mu Dashan.

"Third son, you control that unruly girl of yours. Do you know what outrageous things she said? With Zhenzhen and Gou Dan like this, she's still thinking about robbing our family. If you don't beat her to death today, I'll skin you alive, I swear!"

Mu Dashan had already heard what Old Mrs. Mu and the family were saying while he was inside, and he felt uneasy in his heart. So many people in this family, targeting one child, do they really not see how excessive it is?

"Mom, I'm not going to reprimand Shuangshuang. I don't think she's wrong. Something this big happened in the family; everyone should work together to solve it. Why should she be the only one busy with it? If she's going to do it, she should get whatever she wants!"

Old Mrs. Mu was so furious she almost rolled on the ground.

"You beast, what are you saying? How did I not realize before that you're a leech too? Are you happy just because the Old Mu Family is in trouble now, and we have no choice but to beg that unruly girl? Well, I refuse to beg her!"

"Fine by me, I don't want to be involved in this kind of thing anyway." Mu Shuangshuang chuckled.
"Dad, Mom, let's go inside and eat some buns. Those warm buns sure are delicious."

Hearing about the warm buns, Mu Daniao couldn't help but swallow his saliva and cursed in his heart: How did that unruly girl get so lucky, able to afford even buns? It's so bizarre—why don't I, Mu Daniao, get such opportunities to strike it rich?

Mr. Mu's eyes turned red with anger; he glared at Shuangshuang, feeling a deep frustration in his heart.

Mu Dazhong stood silently; even though the fields were important, kids were more important.

While they were at an impasse, Matchmaker Sun arrived from outside.

She looked exactly the same as last time, still wearing a thick layer of white "wall dust" on her face, which would flake off as she moved.

She had a tuft of hair in her hand, walked up to Mr. Mu, and said, "This is from your in-laws in Dahuo Village. They said once you see it, you'll know what it is. If you don't hand over Zhenzhen, they'll send over a finger tomorrow."

Matchmaker Sun was a well-known figure in the neighboring villages. Zhuangzi's mother was right to find her, except last time, she got beaten up so badly by Mu Shuangshuang that she still had lingering fears. So after delivering the message and handing the hair to Mr. Mu, Matchmaker Sun ran off.

She still remembered how much it hurt when that unruly girl whipped her with a stick last time.

Seeing Gou Dan's hair, Mrs. Lin rushed up, clutching the hair in her hand, stroking it like a treasure while crying and lamenting. "Gou Dan, my poor son, Mom is useless. Mom can't save you, I don't know if they've beaten you, boohoo..."

After all, they were her own flesh and blood, and at that moment, Mu Shuangshuang realized that Mrs. Lin did care about her son Gou Dan.

However, the more she saw this, the more she felt that she couldn't let this go.

When they split up the property, the third branch got one mu of paddy field and half a mu of dry land, and the rest was for their own to handle. They didn't even provide emergency grain.

If she hadn't already earned some silver, the third branch that split off would have been doomed to wait for death.

Since others didn't consider their lives as worth anything, why should she stupidly help out?

With things at this point, Mr. Mu had no choice but to follow what Shuangshuang said, but looking at the third branch, he found it increasingly confusing, especially the third son, who would never have opposed his mother before.

Shuang was like she'd completely changed his most honest son.

Mr. Mu didn't know how to feel, only feeling as if his heart was filled with a blend of emotions.

"Go get the land deed and give it to Shuang!"

This was naturally said to Old Mrs. Mu, who kept all the good things in the family.

"Old man, what kind of potion did this unruly girl poison you with? Do you know what you're saying? This is our field; why should it go to the third branch? I refuse."

Refusing outright, Old Mrs. Mu plopped onto the ground, her hands stained with mud, constantly pounding the ground.

"Such bitter fate, others raise kids to support them in old age, but I've raised useless wretches bullied by outsiders. I can't live, I can't live anymore; they're taking my life, my heart and soul..."

Dust rose layer upon layer on the ground, choking a few people into wanting to retreat.

Mr. Mu felt as if his face had been fiercely slapped. In the past, he was the one who called the shots in the family, but now this woman defied him, making him laughable in front of so many people.

"Everyone mind their own business. If you don't agree, then let Zhenzhen exchange herself for Gou Dan." Mr. Mu irritably glared at everyone present. "I've decided on this; the land deed goes to Shuang. No one is to talk about this afterward."

Mu Danian opened his mouth, just about to speak, but was silenced by the look in Mr. Mu's eyes.

Old Mrs. Mu climbed up from the ground. Compared to a mu of land, she still preferred her daughter.

"Fine, fine, when this family's fortune is all gone, you'll know to regret it."

Old Mrs. Mu went to her room alone and when she came back out, she had a land deed in her hand and threw it fiercely in front of Mu Shuangshuang. "Take it and banish us for good!"

Mu Shuangshuang grinned. "Grandpa, just handing over the deed doesn't make it mine. We need a contract, and we need a middleman."

Since coming to the ancient times, Mu Shuangshuang had seriously studied the laws of the Da Ning Dynasty.

Those TV dramas about taking possession of land and house just by grabbing the deed are complete nonsense.

Every transfer of land deed and property deed required the imprint or signature of the previous owner and needed a middleman as a witness and host. For larger estates, you might also need to register and stamp it at the government office.

Did the people of the Old Mu Family really think she was a fool? Just give her a deed, and she'd go off and take care of business?

Mr. Mu almost spat out a mouthful of blood in anger; he hadn't thought through all the steps Shuangshuang mentioned, he was just anxious to save people, so he brought out the deed.

Mr. Mu took a huge loss, yet this girl stood tall with a proud expression on her face.

"Second son, go to the village and get Fu Wu, tell him Old Mu wants to ask for his help."

"Okay!" Mu Dazhong took off running. He just wanted to solve the problem quickly and find his son Gou Dan as soon as possible.

Chapter 205: Want to Buy Land

Late in the evening, they invited Uncle Fu over. Uncle Fu didn't feel bothered at all; instead, he readily acted as a witness, allowing Mr. Mu to press his handprint on the land contract, while he took the contract away as a notary.

Basically, once things reached this stage, it was settled. All Mu Shuangshuang needed to do was find Xiao Mizi.

As soon as Uncle Fu stepped out of the Old Mu Family's gate, Mu Shuangshuang followed right behind him.

This Uncle Fu is the person in this generation who specializes in handling land transaction procedures, known in modern terms as an economic agent.

He earns his commission from land transfers. Since there was no monetary exchange between Mu Shuangshuang and the old man, Uncle Fu didn't charge the Old Mu Family this time, only having a cup of coarse tea.

"Uncle Fu, please wait a moment, Shuangshuang has something to ask you!" Mu Shuangshuang rushed up from behind Uncle Fu and stopped beside him.

"What's up, Shuang girl?"

"It's nothing, just wanted to ask Uncle Fu, if we're buying land, we should look for you, right?"

"Of course!" Uncle Fu nodded slightly, suddenly looking at Mu Shuangshuang with curiosity.

Generally, those who ask him about land have intentions to buy land. This girl is from the third branch of the Old Mu Family, could she really be planning to buy land?

"Shuang girl, are you thinking of buying land?"

"Yes, now that the third branch has split off, more than an acre of land isn't enough for us to survive, so I want to buy some dry land, but I don't have enough money yet, and wanted to learn more."

Sole reliance on land reclamation is not a solution. Mu Shuangshuang knows well that reclaiming wasteland is easy, but transforming it into fertile land requires time and effort.

If it's sandy land, growing peanuts or sweet potatoes might yield a harvest, but if it's yellow clay land, it can only be covered with fertile soil.

Just like their vegetable garden, it took so much manure to cover the soil properly.

In short, there are certain risks in land reclamation.

"Got it, I'll remember this. Next time, if there's good land available, I'll have someone check with you. If you've saved enough money, then you can buy the land, how about that?"

Uncle Fu smiled kindly, not finding the idea of the little girl in front of him buying land strange at all.

Since he entered this business, becoming a land broker, he had seen all sorts of people. Some were dressed in rags, yet when it came to buying land, they could produce enough money to frighten people.

"Thank you, Uncle Fu. Next time you visit Shuangshuang's house, I'll definitely prepare a great meal for you!"

"Alright, you should hurry back now. A little girl shouldn't be out after dark!"

After seeing Uncle Fu off, Mu Shuangshuang took a side path back to her home, not caring how the rest of the Old Mu Family, still waiting to hear her rescue plan, would think.

In the main hall, Mr. Mu waited and waited, not seeing Mu Shuangshuang. He sent someone to the third branch, only to learn Mu Shuangshuang had already gone to bed.

The cheeky girl even tricked her own family, rascal!

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The next morning, after having breakfast, Mu Shuangshuang leisurely carried the dried palm leaves to her pigsty, using sulfur to smoke the fan blades. Since it needed to be smoked all day, she didn't need to pay much attention, just checking in at noon.

Several people from the Old Mu Family sharpened their heads, observing what method she would use to find people.

After all, it cost them an acre of fertile land to have Mu Shuangshuang's help. If they didn't pay attention, that'd truly be foolish.

But as soon as they paid attention, Mu Shuangshuang worried that no one would work the fields. She relied on completing the work to receive her share of the third branch's land.

So Mu Shuangshuang found Mr. Mu, gently suggesting he take the family out to work. She didn't need any help over there. Mr. Mu thusly led the whole family out to work.

Unhurried, Mu Shuangshuang took some flour from her room, planning to make some dry provisions to take on the road. Finding people takes time and effort, and if she doesn't find anyone in one day, she can't exactly starve all day.

Although her kitchen was usable, it lacked firewood. Mu Shuangshuang decided to take the flour to the Old Mu Family's kitchen to prepare it.

Very simple pancakes, made in a straightforward and rough manner.

Mu Shuangshuang added water to the flour, mixed in some dry chili, and after kneading the dough, fashioned it into round pancakes. In a large iron pot, she added some rapeseed oil, and once the oil was hot, she tossed the pancake in.

A "sizzling" sound immediately came from the pot. Mu Shuangshuang waited until the pancake was almost cooked, then flipped it to cook through.

Two pancakes would be enough for her for the day.

Old Mrs. Mu discovered her kitchen had been used only after Mu Shuangshuang had left. The stove was still warm, and she cursed loudly with her legs apart for an entire morning before calming down.

Of course, Mu Shuangshuang had long left home, with two pancakes on her back and a jug of water. In just a moment, she reached the village entrance.

At this point, Mu Shuangshuang felt somewhat sentimental. Although finding people and solving cases were her areas of expertise...

But in vast Dahuo Village, where she knew neither the land nor the people and had no instruments, she really wasn't sure if what she knew could be applied.

But since she had boasted, if for nothing else, just for that acre of fertile land, she had to give it a try.

"Facing it or not, thinking about it is just wasting time, better to head to Dahuo Village first."

Just as she prepared to head to Dahuo Village, a figure suddenly appeared on the country path—a tall frame, upright posture, with a long bow on the back. Next to the bow was a quiver, arrows of the same length scattered within.

He was heading straight towards Mu Shuangshuang.

When he got closer, the sweat-drenched face of Lu Yuanfeng became clear in front of Mu Shuangshuang.

Before Mu Shuangshuang could speak, he started talking. "I heard you were going to Dahuo Village, I'll go with you. I brought a bow, I can protect you. I left Yuanbao with my grandma."

Afraid that Mu Shuangshuang might refuse, Lu Yuanfeng had already taken care of Yuanbao.

In the morning, Lu Yuanfeng went to fetch water by the northern creek and happened to overhear a few young wives chatting about Shuangshuang going to Dahuo Village to help find the missing child from Mu Zhenzhen's husband's family.

Lu Yuanfeng feared she'd encounter danger alone and without a second thought, left Yuanbao with his grandma and quickly headed out. Luckily, he caught up.

Mu Shuangshuang was still processing her surprise when Lu Yuanfeng had already stepped ahead of her. His ears were red; whether from the heat or from the embarrassment of what he just said, it wasn't clear!

What a silly lad!

Mu Shuangshuang helplessly chuckled to herself, but despite her words, she was pleased that Lu Yuanfeng came.

With Lu Yuanfeng accompanying her, Mu Shuangshuang quickened her pace, finally reaching Dahuo Village before noon.

Chapter 206: Dahuo Village

Dahuo Village is situated in a river valley, a so-called alluvial river valley, and is considered quite a famous village in this area. Especially compared to Er Gui Village, Dahuo Village is like paradise.

The greatest characteristic of the fields in Er Gui Village is their infertility. Many fields look decent but the actual harvest might be worse than barren land. At least barren land doesn't require paying rent or taxes.

In Er Gui Village, the grains planted each year are harvested, yet not enough to pay the rent and taxes.

But Dahuo Village is different; the land is fertile, the fish are fat, and the water is clear. People here mostly rely on farming and fishing to maintain their livelihoods.

Mu Zhenzhen marrying Zhuangzi truly epitomizes the saying, "Wang Ba sees green beans, and their eyes meet."

However, Mu Zhenzhen didn't care for Zhuangzi as a person; she was attracted to his family's land.

Zhuangzi's family owns more than twenty acres of land and is considered a big farming household within Dahuo Village. However, Zhuangzi's mother is a prolific giver, having birthed three sons, all of whom will inherit the land in the future. This is why Mu Zhenzhen didn't allow Zhuangzi to work later on.

After all, the land will be divided among others eventually, so why not do less work now than wait for their efforts to benefit Zhuangzi's older brothers.

Observing at the entrance of Dahuo Village, Mu Shuangshuang roughly understood the external layout. From the village entrance, Dahuo Village stretches very far as it is all flat ground without any peaks.

Because of the lost child, the outside of Dahuo Village already put up fences, with a man guarding the village entrance, keenly watching the people coming and going. As soon as Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng appeared, they naturally became the man's target.

He approached briskly, yelled at Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, "What are you here for?"

Lu Yuanfeng positioned Mu Shuangshuang behind him protectively. He courteously addressed the approaching man, "We are from Er Gui Village. Zhuangzi is my friend's second uncle, they're relatives. We're here to help find Zhuangzi's family's missing child."

Lu Yuanfeng's upright appearance and his honest gaze, along with the bow and arrow on his back, made the man naturally assume he was a helper sought by Zhuangzi's family.

"Zhuangzi's house is on the north side of the village. You walk straight to the very end on the north side; the adobe courtyard with several rooms is their home."

Lu Yuanfeng thanked the man and entered the village with Mu Shuangshuang.

Throughout the whole process, Lu Yuanfeng was the one negotiating with the man while Mu Shuangshuang watched from the side.

At the moment, she suddenly felt that Lu Yuanfeng wasn't actually a silent or reticent person. At least in such situations, she didn't have to speak but just nodded alongside him.

Since Lu Yuanfeng was being so earnest, she too should get serious.

"Fengzi, later when we go to my second uncle's place, his mother's emotions will definitely be unstable. It's highly possible she'll vent on us, so be sure to focus on your own safety. Be mindful of the bow and arrow on your back; don't let it be snatched away. Self-protection is most important.

If reasoning matters, I'll handle it. If push comes to shove, we'll make a run for it."

Relying on past life experiences, Mu Shuangshuang has seen many such occasions. The most dangerous one she witnessed was when a colleague's gun was nearly snatched away; luckily, it wasn't loaded, otherwise, if an incident had occurred, they would have had a big responsibility.

Lu Yuanfeng's hand suddenly touched Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve.

"Shuangshuang, stay behind me later. If anything happens, you leave first, I'll hold them off."

Lu Yuanfeng's expression was incredibly earnest. Mu Shuangshuang was not worried he was lying, but she feared him being too sincere, lest he really faced all peril on his own.

"Fengzi, thank you. It's really good to have you here!"

Mu Shuangshuang's sentence wasn't just a joke; it was the truth.

As long as Lu Yuanfeng was around, she never suffered a disadvantage. Although he blushed easily and mostly didn't refute her words, Mu Shuangshuang had to admit that with him around, those factors that scared her miraculously vanished.

Because of Shuangshuang's comment, Lu Yuanfeng's face instantly reddened like a monkey's behind.

Subconsciously, he pursed his lips and gazed at Shuangshuang with more determination in his eyes.

With him here, nobody could bully Shuangshuang!

This warm scene was destroyed by a foul stench, growing stronger as they progressed into the village. Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng almost had to walk while holding their noses.

"What's this smell, so stinky?" Mu Shuangshuang furrowed her brows and glanced around, seeking the source of the stench.

Inside, Lu Yuanfeng happily followed behind her. With Shuangshuang there, no matter how bad the smell was, he could endure it.

Mu Shuangshuang discovered a few rotten fish in Dahuo Village's gutter—likely deceased not too long ago. But with the summer heat, simply tossing them on the ground can easily lead to maggots and stench.

"Who did this, so thoughtless? In this hot weather, discarding dead fish and shrimps carelessly—isn't it foul enough to kill?"

"Perhaps they were washed ashore. Let's go up ahead and see, maybe it won't smell." Lu Yuanfeng comforted her.

Only then did the two decide to continue forward, but the stench didn't lessen at all.

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In Zhuangzi's family courtyard, Zhuangzi's mother stood with hands on hips, cursing loudly.

"I spit, couldn't find Xiao Mizi, but dragged back such a lazy glutton, which is simply a replica of that slut Mu Zhenzhen. If you didn't know better, you'd think Mu Zhenzhen bore him."

The lazy glutton Zhuangzi's mother spoke about was, of course, Gou Dan.

That day when Gou Dan played in the courtyard, the Old Mu Family members wouldn't open the door, and Zhuangzi's mother tricked Gou Dan away with a raw egg, initially thinking the Old Mu family would help find her grandson, Xiao Mizi, out of kinship.

Who would've guessed—it's been a full day, and not only aren't they helping to search, they've abandoned even this child.

Especially with Gou Dan eating a lot—each meal consuming a bowl of rice; though the Zhao family has grains, they can't sustain such a little rascal's feasting and drinking.

"Mother, I think you shouldn't have brought this kid back."

Zhuangzi's mother's second daughter-in-law, Mrs. Zhou, spoke to her kindly.

Zhuangzi's mother isn't a bad person. On the contrary, she's quite warm-hearted. When Mu Zhenzhen married Zhuangzi, fearing Mu Zhenzhen's family had no grain to eat, Zhuangzi's mother voluntarily delivered some grains to the Old Mu Family.

Unexpectedly, the wife her son married turned out to be a fancy yet useless hen. Mu Zhenzhen does no work herself, yet persuades Zhuangzi to follow suit.

That could have been tolerated, but over five years of marriage, she wouldn't even leave Zhuangzi a seed, constantly using this to threaten Zhuangzi's mother, saying if forced to work, she'd never give birth and let Zhuangzi die childless.

This woman repeatedly challenged Zhuangzi's mother's authority. For Zhuangzi's sake, Zhuangzi's mother endured, but due to Mu Zhenzhen's laziness, she now lost her own grandson!

Chapter 207: Both Fierce and Reasonable

"How was I supposed to know the Old Mu Family would be this shameless? This brat, you can't hit or scold him, and when you try to touch him, he screams louder than anyone else. What can I do?"

Zhuangzi's mother was a bit deflated. Xiao Mizi had been taken away by kidnapppers several days ago, and the villagers had searched frantically but found nothing. If this continued, her Xiao Mizi...

Thinking of her obedient eldest grandson, Zhuangzi's mother grabbed a broom from the ground and said, "Since the Old Mu Family doesn't want that lazy thief, I'll take him. I'm going to beat him to death right now!"

Mrs. Zhou hurriedly stopped her furious mother-in-law.

"Mother, our sister-in-law is already crying her eyes out every day. If something else happens, what will we do?"

"I don't care. The Old Mu Family has to hand that wretch over to me. I will drown her in the pig cage!"

"Zhuangzi, get out here! Bring that lazy wife of yours back, or you're in big trouble..."

Zhuangzi's mother shouted angrily toward the house while jumping up and down.

She was like a person driven to madness.

Since Xiao Mizi went missing, Zhuangzi's family had been like this. Every day, Zhuangzi's mother cursed at the top of her lungs, cursing everyone from Mu Zhenzhen to the ancestors of the Old Mu Family.

When Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng arrived at Zhuangzi's house, Zhuangzi's mother was still cursing. Mu Shuangshuang remembered that voice; it was the old lady who carried a hoe and led people to ruin the Old Mu Family.

Unfortunately, those cunning folks were unwilling to come out one by one.

Zhuangzi's mother didn't gain any substantial benefits.

"Grandma, I'm the eldest daughter of the Third Branch of the Old Mu Family, Mu Shuangshuang. Can you please open the door? We are here to help."

Mu Shuangshuang knocked on Zhuangzi's courtyard door. Upon hearing that someone from the Old Mu Family had come, Zhuangzi's mother suddenly became revitalized.

Hatred controlled her mind. She returned to the kitchen, grabbed a kitchen knife, and muttered to herself.

"Good timing. Today I'll chop off these dogs' heads from the Old Mu Family."

"Mother, what are you doing? Killing someone will lead to a lawsuit. Put the knife down!" Mrs. Zhou's face turned pale with fright.

Now, except for Zhuangzi and our sister-in-law, everyone in the family had gone out to search for Xiao Mizi. Our sister-in-law hadn't gone out since Xiao Mizi went missing.

Zhuangzi was even less reliable. Since he returned the day before yesterday, he locked himself in his room, doing everything in there. He simply wasn't coming out.

"Even if it means dying, I want the Old Mu Family to pay for it!"

The moment the courtyard door opened, Zhuangzi's mother charged in with the kitchen knife. Lu Yuanfeng moved swiftly, easily sidestepping to her, not only snatched the knife but also subdued Zhuangzi's mother.

With her arms restrained and unable to move, Zhuangzi's mother started screaming.

"Help, murder, someone's trying to kill me... wuh wuh wuh wuh..."

The rest of her words were blocked because Mu Shuangshuang had covered her mouth.

She said, "Grandma, I'm not here to take the blame for the Old Mu Family. I'm here to help you solve the problem. Don't you want to find Xiao Mizi? Only I can help you!"

Upon hearing Xiao Mizi's name, the woman's eyes filled with tears. She looked at Mu Shuangshuang, full of doubt and a bit of hope for her words.

It's often said that a child is their mother's treasure, the flesh of their palm. Losing a child is like tearing a piece of the mother's flesh.

Another person who can deeply feel this is a child's grandmother.

As for Old Mrs. Mu, Mu Shuangshuang didn't say much. She was too biased, having long neglected the family to focus on Mu Dade and her daughters.

But Zhuangzi's mother, standing there, Mu Shuangshuang believed she was truly in pain.

Being able to scream in anger or cry in sadness, perhaps she was true to her emotions.

"Grandma, our third branch has already separated from the Old Mu Family. I've come only for the purpose I mentioned. I'll let go of you now. Can you promise not to call out? Let's solve this problem together..."

Mu Shuangshuang released her hand, and Zhuangzi's mother indeed did not scream.

From the hopeful look in her eyes, Mu Shuangshuang had already guessed she wouldn't.

Seeing the old lady calm down, Lu Yuanfeng also promptly released her hand.

Mrs. Zhou came out due to her concern for Zhuangzi's mother, but by the time she appeared, Zhuangzi's mother was no longer causing a ruckus.

"Follow me!"

These few words vividly expressed Zhuangzi's mother's sense of helplessness.

"Grandma, can you tell me what the situation was like at that time?"

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't a psychic. With no surveillance or modern facilities, she could only rely on the information from the Zhao family to find what she needed.

"That day..." Zhuangzi's mother and Mrs. Zhou rambled incoherently about the whole event. Mu Shuangshuang pieced together something like this.

Mu Zhenzhen took Zhuangzi to the Old Mu Family. The Zhao family was short-handed, so they called out the eldest and second daughters-in-law to work. Only when it was nearly noon did they go home early to cook for the whole family.

That day it was Mrs. Zhou who cooked. When she returned home, she didn't see Xiao Mizi. Initially, she thought the child was just playing around, but when everyone came back for lunch and Xiao Mizi still hadn't returned, they realized there was trouble.

Upon further inquiry, there were several cases in the village where children had gone missing like this.

Everyone desperately searched, but couldn't find the child.

"So what you're saying is, the child went missing in broad daylight, and disappeared while you all were out working?" Mu Shuangshuang extracted a useful thread of information.

"Yes, exactly!" Mrs. Zhou replied from the side.

By now, Zhuangzi's mother, having recalled the past, was crying terribly.

Mu Shuangshuang sensed something unusual. If it were really kidnappers, they wouldn't be so blatant.

Moreover, kidnappers wouldn't dare to abduct so many children at once.

Something is fishy!

"Aunt Zhou, can you take me to the families who've lost children nearby? I might have stumbled upon some clues."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke honestly. She knew her appearance would definitely make those families anxious or even hit their sore spot. But if the mystery wasn't solved, the children would have even slimmer chances of returning.

Mrs. Zhou hesitated a bit, knowing that Mu Shuangshuang was from a different village, and visiting families at a time like this was not a wise choice.

"Let's go! I'll take you. As long as it helps find my grandson, I'm willing to do anything!"

Zhuangzi's mother suddenly wiped her tears dry and looked firmly at Mu Shuangshuang. Now, she had no one else to rely on but her.

"Mother, aren't you scared..." Mrs. Zhou hinted slightly.

"What should I fear? My grandson is missing too, and my heart aches. I can tell others what happened; can't they? As long as we find the children, I believe everyone will be willing to help.

Chapter 208: Thought Of It

With Zhuangzi's mother leading the way, Mu Shuangshuang inquired about the situation when the child went missing. Although she was still cursed at, the situation improved significantly.

Lu Yuanfeng appeared as a responsible protector throughout the journey. Whenever someone attempted violence, he swiftly eliminated the danger. However, there was one particularly aggressive family that threw a kitchen knife. If not for Lu Yuanfeng's exceptional skills, he might have been injured.

Lu Yuanfeng was puzzled deep down, wondering why there was such resistance when Shuangshuang was clearly there to help.

But to avoid causing trouble for Shuangshuang, he suppressed this concern within himself.

Who knew, Mu Shuangshuang still figured it out.

Mu Shuangshuang said, "Actually, it's human nature. When a person is grieving, the best remedy is to calm them down, but our presence reminds them of their sorrow, so they lose control and may do unexpected things..."

The things Mu Shuangshuang talked about pertained to her previous life's work. She briefly explained it to Lu Yuanfeng, telling him not to view those in mourning with a normal person's mindset.

"Shuangshuang, you know so much!" Lu Yuanfeng exclaimed sincerely.

"Yes, I'm used to it!"

The phrase "I'm used to it" was loaded with emotion, but it all related to her past work. Yet in Lu Yuanfeng's eyes, it seemed like Shuangshuang had suffered too much at Old Mu Family, becoming accustomed to such feelings.

Lu Yuanfeng felt a hoarseness in his throat, as if something was constantly pressing down on it.

"Shuangshuang, don't mind what your grandparents and uncles think. Just like me, I rarely visit them."

Lu Yuanfeng actually wanted to say that he would protect Shuangshuang in the future so that no one could bully her, but he swallowed these words and instead chose a more fitting approach, using his example to ease her sadness.

Mu Shuangshuang felt warm inside. The big boy before her was like a foolish goose, his way of comforting people not very effective, yet it managed to dispel the gloom in her heart.

She smiled, her dimples appearing faintly, playful yet warm!

Lu Yuanfeng was somewhat entranced. It was the first time he realized how beautiful Shuangshuang's smile was. If it weren't for the inappropriate setting, he might have said something.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't mind Lu Yuanfeng's gaze; after all, his deep look wasn't appearing for the first time.

"Fool, it's not because of them."

This left Lu Yuanfeng more confused. If not because of them, then why?

Lu Yuanfeng voiced his thoughts, unsurprisingly sparking Mu Shuangshuang's playful mood.

"I'm such a smart, cute, and lovely young girl. Do I care about what those people think? I'm thinking about the villagers we just saw and what they said." A sly look flashed across Mu Shuangshuang's face.

Perhaps only someone as cheeky as her would say such self-praising words!

Zhuangzi's mother couldn't hold back, almost bursting into laughter, and the gloom in her heart dispersed considerably in an instant.

If at first, she harbored hostility toward this little girl who suddenly appeared in her home, now she completely accepted her and believed she could find her grandson, Xiao Mizi.

When Zhuangzi's mother took the little girl and boy to the houses that had lost children, she noticed that no matter how dangerous the situation, the little girl remained unfazed.

In the end, people naturally felt empathy and volunteered their situations to her.

This girl is not simple!

At least she's not like those turtle-shell hiding Mu Family members.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded seriously. "Shuangshuang is right! But what did you think of?"

In this world, probably only Lu Yuanfeng would take Mu Shuangshuang's jokes as indistinguishable from reality, and firmly believe them.

All right, this silly boy always managed to bring unexpected warmth.

"Alright, now for the serious business. We visited four villagers' homes, and in total, six families in Dahuo Village lost children, six kids. Let's first find the commonalities among these families!"

"First, the timing of the children's disappearance is quite a coincidence—they all went missing during the day when everyone was busy with farm work in the fields."

"Second, each of these families has quite a bit of farmland."

"Third, because of the children, these families haven't been tending to their fields, leaving the land idle now."

With such significant events, who would have the heart to tend to their land? Either they're out searching for people, or they're at home crying their hearts out.

Mu Shuangshuang listed the clues she gathered one by one, but this aroused Zhuangzi's mother's curiosity. "Shuang, how do you know these families have a lot of land?"

"I guessed. These families' courtyards are all large, and they each have stone rollers and grinders in their yards, meaning they don't need to take their grains to the communal threshing ground; they can mill rice at home."

"This means these people have a lot of land and don't need to share a place with others. Families with such resources must own a lot of land."

After hearing Mu Shuangshuang's analysis, Lu Yuanfeng nodded in agreement, feeling she was right.

"But that doesn't explain anything. There are quite a few people in the village with a lot of land," Zhuangzi's mother added.

"It doesn't explain anything on its own, but put together, it does. Granny, can I ask if there's any Da Ning Dynasty law, like reclaiming unused land?"

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't knowledgeable on laws but had some understanding.

Compared to modern times, Da Ning Dynasty's laws were relatively complete, with most laws protecting arable land and farmers.

After all, in ancient times, the mainstay industry was agriculture, the primary sector.

If such a law existed, preventing farmers from leaving land idle could be possible.

Mu Shuangshuang had a bold guess already at heart. This so-called child disappearance might just be a ruse arranged by some people, and the real motive could be to seize farmland.

Moreover, to take away so many children in broad daylight without being noticed, it was likely an insider's doing.

Even though she hadn't visited the last remaining household yet, the answer seemed almost certain.

"We don't have such a law, but our village has a rule that if someone's land is left fallow for a year, it must be sold at a low price for someone else to cultivate the next year," Zhuangzi's mother mentioned critically, though she wasn't aware of its significance.

Lu Yuanfeng, listening carefully, furrowed his brows and then suddenly said, "Is Shuangshuang suggesting that someone abducted the children to get their hands on the land, and it's someone from the village?"

Mu Shuangshuang nodded and said, "That's what it seems like so far, but we'll have to wait until I visit the last household to be sure."

"Granny, can you tell me about the last family we haven't visited? Who are they, and what's their situation?"

Chapter 209: Thrilling!

Zhuangzi's mother was so shocked by Lu Yuanfeng's words that she couldn't close her mouth. She didn't find anything wrong with the clues Shuangshuang mentioned because she really couldn't figure out any connection.

But when Lu Yuanfeng clearly explained Shuangshuang's meaning, she felt that Shuangshuang was right, and it was highly possible that the missing children were the work of someone in the village!

"Oh heavens, Shuang, Fengzi, give me a moment, I can't wrap my head around this!"

Zhuangzi's mother found it hard to accept this suspicion; by the time she came to her senses, some time had already passed.

It was just past noon, the hottest time of the day, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were both badly sunburned, their clothes soaked with sweat, almost able to wring out the water.

However, they were considerate and didn't rush Zhuangzi's mother because, after all, they were from the same village. While it's normal to have disagreements, accusing someone of hiding another's child is indeed hard to accept.

"Wait, I remember now. Last time the son of Old Cao told me, 'You have only three sons, give a few acres of land to our family,' and I disagreed and outright refused.

We and that old stubborn one of ours only hope for the children's well-being. Even though Zhuangzi is disappointing, marrying a jinx, over the years, she hasn't lacked anything compared to the two sisters-in-law.

Could it be the Cao Family? But that's not right either; Old Cao's grandson went missing too, and I saw how worried he was that day, nearly losing his mind."

Zhuangzi's mother thought of the Cao Family but immediately refuted it because they had also lost a child.

"Grandma, don't worry. Let's go check out the Cao Family first, and on the way, you can tell me about their situation!"

On the way, from Zhuangzi's mother's words, Mu Shuangshuang learned the last household was named Cao, with the family head being Cao Dafu. They moved to Dahuo Village a few years ago, bought land and a house, and settled down.

The Old Cao's house had many children, seven or eight. In recent years, the grain yield in Dahuo Village had been increasing, and grain prices were better than elsewhere, so the Cao Family was always asking if anyone was selling land.

But no one wanted to sell. Even those going far away preferred to rent the land out and get some rent rather than sell it.

After all, no one could guarantee they wouldn't return, and if they sold the land then, they would have nothing to rely on when returned.

Therefore, later, the village made a rule to make those unwilling to work their land behave, stating if the land was idle, it had to be sold at a low price.

"The Cao Family lost a twelve-year-old grandson, different from the ages of our children. Our Xiao Mizi is only six and knows nothing, and the Jiang Family's child is only three..."

Zhuangzi's mother rattled on a lot, but by then, the answer was pretty much apparent.

Not only did Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng think this way, but even Zhuangzi's mother felt the same.

Because there were too many coincidences!

The Cao Family and Zhuangzi's family were some distance apart, they were at the south end of the village, and they finally stopped at the gate of a large courtyard.

Inside the yard, a little girl with pigtails was playing with stones. Zhuangzi's mother knocked a few times, but the little girl didn't react. Finally, Old Cao's wife came out to open the door, allowing everyone to enter the yard.

"Zhuangzi's mother, why have you come?"

Old Cao's wife, Sun, was wearing a brown-green long gown, with her hair impeccably styled. Seeing Zhuangzi's mother suddenly visiting with two strangers, a trace of panic quickly flashed across Sun's face.

Mu Shuangshuang happened to catch this and watched Sun intently, trying to find more from her expression.

"What? Can't I come? Did you do something shameful?"

Zhuangzi's mother was well-known in the village, a typical spitfire, who never lost in an argument, but as she never took advantage of others, the villagers both respected and feared her.

As the saying goes, love and hate, that's all.

They liked her honesty but feared her sharp tongue.

Sure enough, hearing Zhuangzi's mother's words, Sun's face immediately fell. "What do you mean? Speaking in such a sarcastic tone, just say it if you have something to say."

"Where's your Old Cao? I want him to come out!" Zhuangzi's mother wasted no words, immediately demanding Sun to bring out Old Cao.

Sun wouldn't comply. Though she didn't know why Zhuangzi's mother came to their house, her man wasn't someone to be summoned at others' words.

"Not coming out, huh? Let's see what the village thinks of what your family has done."

"What are you talking about? What could I have done?" Sun angrily asked.

"Stop pretending. It's your Cao Family hiding the village's children, wanting us not to work the land, so when the fields became unused, you could buy our land cheaply."

Zhuangzi's mother's accusation was said as fact, and Sun was immediately flustered.

Knowing what her family did, how did Zhuangzi's mother know this?

"Don't accuse me without evidence. Our Niuniu is also missing, we're grieving too." Sun's steps were already unsteady, having done such a thing made her guilty.

"Your family is grieving? If your family were grieving, Old Cao wouldn't have gone to the fields to work first thing in the morning. Not one of the families in this village that lost children acted like yours. I think you did it on purpose!"

Zhuangzi's mother grew angrier, charging forward to pinch Sun's face, twisting the flesh on her cheeks, one hand yanking on Sun's hair ruthlessly.

Sun let out a pig-like scream. "Oh my, it hurts! Murder, Zhuangzi's mother is killing!"

Such commotion made the little girl in the yard finally look up and cry loudly.

"Don't hit my grandma, don't hit my grandma..."

The little girl cried and shouted as the beaten Sun panicked, ignoring her pain, she shouted to the little girl. "Niuniu, go find your grandpa in the fields, tell him Zhuangzi's mother is hitting your grandma!"

The little girl ran out crying, and Mu Shuangshuang signaled Lu Yuanfeng with a look, and he quickly followed the girl out.

Here, while Sun was being beaten, Mu Shuangshuang wanted to intervene, but the fight was an uncoordinated mess. They were slapping around randomly.

Double thought it best not to interfere, knowing village women fights never led to anything too serious.

In a short while, their clothes were torn, and after hitting the ground, the fight continued.

Zhuangzi's mother was muttering, "Give me my grandson, or I'll take your worthless life today!"

"You're talking nonsense, I don't..."

"Still lying, I'll beat you to death!"

What followed was a series of loud smacks...

Chapter 210: The Children Have Returned

When Old Cao and his family entered the yard with hoes and sticks, Zhuangzi's mother had already defeated Sun.

Sun sat in the corner of the yard, crying non-stop. Her clothes were torn, and her meticulously done hair had turned into a bird's nest, hanging messily over her head, her face, her hands, all covered with wounds of varying sizes.

Zhuangzi's mother, with a face full of pride, declared her victory, "Smelly woman, there's no one in Dahuo Village who can match old me. Remember this, you heartless ones, sooner or later you'll suffer retribution, together with that lazy Mu Zhenzhen."

"Zhuangzi's mother, what's going on here? Why did you beat up my wife?"

Seeing his wife beaten like this, Old Cao's first instinct was to demand answers from Zhuangzi's mother.

Zhuangzi's mother, unyielding, put her hands on her hips, "Why are you asking me? You know full well the good deeds you've been up to."

Old Cao had a sinking feeling. When his granddaughter, Niu Niu, went to the field, he felt something was amiss, and now he'd sent his eldest son, Cao Damu, to check if the hidden children were still there.

As long as the children were still there, he could adamantly deny everything.

"How would I know anything, Zhuangzi's mother? Don't think Old Cao is afraid of you. Bullying can't be done like this. Though our Cao family is from outside the village, we have fields in Dahuo Village now, so we're part of Dahuo Village."

Old Cao decided that Zhuangzi's mother was deliberately causing trouble, and his tone showed increasing contempt for her.

"Pah! People like you are not worthy. Hand over my grandson quickly, or I'll tear down your house and strip your skin!" Zhuangzi's mother jumped up and unleashed a tirade at Old Cao, saliva flying everywhere.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Our Niu Niu is missing too. Why don't you say it was your family who did it?"

The argument between the two was going nowhere, so Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward.

"Old Sir Cao, wasn't it your family who first mentioned seeing a child trafficker when the children went missing? And wasn't it your family who claimed a bearded trafficker ran out of the village entrance?"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke leisurely, but her sharp gaze was fixed on Old Cao.

Old Cao was momentarily stunned, feeling a bit panicked inside. The girl before him had such a strong presence, he felt like a clown in a show, with everything under her control.

He snorted internally at himself, wondering how a young girl could have such capabilities.

"Yes, it was our Damu who saw it. He even chased them and was nearly harmed by those traffickers." Old Cao explained.

"Then why not report it to the government?" Mu Shuangshuang continued.

"Who said we didn't? We reported it."

Old Cao was already feeling guilty, his broad sleeves starting to sweat, and his heart pounding.

"If you reported it, why didn't the authorities come? Don't tell me a missing child isn't important to the government."

"This..."

Old Cao's voice started to falter as his second son, Cao Ermu, raised his hoe, ready to strike Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang sneered, "Has your brain been clouded by greed, daring to even commit murder? Aren't you afraid of causing a disturbance with the authorities?"

Or do you want the whole of Dahuo Village to know about your deeds and be driven out, losing the land you currently have?"

Cao Ermu's hand halted instantly, struggling as he looked at his father.

The plan was his father's idea; he just wanted a better life for their family.

As the standoff continued, a ruckus suddenly erupted in the village, followed by the sound of gongs and drums.

"The children... the children are back!"

"Come quick, the children are back!"

The village was in an uproar, and Old Cao was so shocked he nearly fainted.

Fortunately, someone beside him caught him in time. It wasn't just him in shock; the other Cao family members were equally astonished.

How could the children return so soon after Damu just left?

Zhuangzi's mother was beside herself with excitement. After fighting with Sun and seeing Fengzi missing, she saw Shuang standing confidently nearby and knew this girl was up to something. Who could have guessed it would bring such a big surprise...

"My grandson is back, my grandson is back..."

Joyful tears welled up in Zhuangzi's mother's heart as she let out a long sigh, her right hand clutching her pounding heart.

In contrast, the Cao family wore pale faces, with no joy of having their children back.

Being the head of his family, Old Cao realized everything was exposed, and he could only think of seeking forgiveness.

To move to Dahuo Village, they had exhausted their savings. After years, they managed to save some silver, hoping to cultivate more land, but the villagers preferred renting land to outsiders rather than selling it to them.

"How did you know... that I did those things?"

At this point, sacrificing a car to save the queen was the best choice. If the villagers were angry, it should be directed solely at him, so Old Cao claimed everything was his doing.

"Dad, stop saying that. It wasn't just your idea."

Suddenly, a voice interrupted. From outside the yard, Cao Damu, drenched in sweat, ran back with his son Cao Niu Niu in hand.

Old Cao, already surprised by the children's return, was even more stunned when his eldest son returned.

"Damu, did you release those children?"

"It was me!" Lu Yuanfeng emerged from behind Cao Damu. He walked up to Mu Shuangshuang and said softly, "Shuangshuang, the children were hidden by the Cao family in their old residence, not in this village but not far from here either.

They said Cao Niu Niu bought them lots of delicious food with a promise that as long as they didn't return, they could eat good food every day.

Besides, for the past few days, the families were busy, and no one was playing with them. With food and play, they temporarily forgot about coming back."

Lu Yuanfeng's words made it clear to everyone present that the Cao family's deeds were fully exposed.

Old Cao suddenly started to sob, a man in his fifties crying sorrowfully.

He said, "I know, since we arrived, you haven't liked us, but we just wanted to survive. We wanted to earn more silver for the children. We have so many hands to work, yet not enough land..."

"Dad, stop it. We'll face this together. If necessary, we'll move out of Dahuo Village!"

Cao Damu, apparently having gone through something, tearfully held his aged father.

The two held each other and cried bitterly, as did the remaining Cao family members, with Sun kneeling before Mu Shuangshuang and Zhuangzi's mother, disregarding her pain.

"We beg you, don't tell the villagers that it was our Cao family. We sold our land to come to Dahuo Village.

Returning means having no land to farm. Zhuangzi's mother, you... you can beat me to death, but give the children a chance to live!"