

Folly 211

Chapter 211: A Good Marriage

"Shuang, what do you think about this matter?"

Talking about dealing with Old Cao's house, Zhuangzi's mother felt a bit troubled in her heart.

Especially when she knew that, even though Old Cao's family had tricked away her grandson, Xiao Mizi, they indeed didn't mistreat him, providing him with good food and drinks.

Old Cao's family, with so many people and only a few acres of land, really couldn't sustain them.

Right now they only have two grandsons, what if they add more family members in the future, how will they sustain them?

"Grandma, you should decide on this matter, Shuangshuang is not from Dahuo Village and it's not appropriate to say much. But no matter what decision you make, Shuangshuang will support you."

Mu Shuangshuang had no intention of getting involved in this matter; she only came to find Xiao Mizi and bring Gou Dan back. Now that she had achieved her goal, she could step back.

Zhuangzi's mother sighed, "For now, let's put this matter aside. I'll first go back and see our Xiao Mizi before making a decision!"

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On the way back to Zhuangzi's family with Zhuangzi's mother, Mu Shuangshuang mentioned the dead fish she found in the ditch when she entered the village. She originally thought the fish were sick, but it wasn't the case.

Zhuangzi's mother's expression looked troubled as she sincerely told Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuang, you've helped grandma so much, I won't beat around the bush with you.

Every year around this time in Dahuo Village, there's a large number of fish that swim upstream to spawn from the far-off downstream of the Golden River, creating a fish tide.

The villagers seize this opportunity to catch fish like crazy. But you know, it's such a hot season now, and if the fish are slightly mishandled, they start to rot and smell bad.

Plus, there are too many of them to finish, so throwing some away is normal."

Saying this, Zhuangzi's mother made a gesture of covering her mouth, indicating she didn't even want to eat fish anymore; the smell was strong and unpleasant, and the sight of the discarded rotting fish was revolting!

"Then why not take those fish to town and sell them?" Mu Shuangshuang asked curiously.

No matter what, that would count as income!

"It's because of dual harvests making everyone busy; we just don't have time to go to town. Anyway, in a couple of days, the fish tide will subside."

Zhuangzi's mother casually mentioned something, which sparked an idea in Mu Shuangshuang's mind.

"Grandma, can I go to the river to catch fish? Our family has no farmland now, so we don't have to worry about farm work, I want to..."

Before Mu Shuangshuang could finish her thought, Zhuangzi's mother was already nodding happily. "That would be great, because if you don't catch them, others will only throw them away too, letting them rot and smell, which is a waste as well.

Let's go back first. I'll find tools for you later, and then we'll go to the river to catch fish."

"Okay, thank you, grandma!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded enthusiastically.

Back at Zhuangzi's house, Zhuangzi's big brother had already hurried back upon hearing the news, and their home was lively with the family weeping as they embraced Xiao Mizi.

The pain of separation is something ordinary people can't understand.

Seeing her little grandson, Zhuangzi's mother slapped her thighs and cried out heart-wrenchingly. "Xiao Mizi, my dear grandson, you finally came back..."

"Grandma, I'm back..." The little guy responded in a childish voice, and the two cried their hearts out together.

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang was deeply moved. She even recalled solving a missing person case in her previous life, and the family reunion was just like this, crying until they almost couldn't breathe.

Since her emotional pressure seemed so low, Lu Yuanfeng took her by the shoulder and said, "Don't worry, Xiao Mizi is back now, they're happy!"

"Yes, having something lost and then found again is probably the happiest thing in the world." Mu Shuangshuang commented emotionally.

Loss isn't terrifying; it's the inability to ever recover what's lost that's truly frightening!

After a round of greetings and emotional outpouring, Zhuangzi's mother pulled the family aside and explained everything to Zhuangzi's father and the kids, including the Cao Family stealing the child and Shuangshuang's help in finding him.

Zhuangzi's father immediately decided to help Shuangshuang catch fish, putting other matters aside for now.

The deeper reason is their desire to forgive the people of Old Cao's house.

After all, aside from this incident, Old Cao's people haven't done anything bad over the years.

Of course, necessary punishment is still required, as hiding someone else's child is a serious matter that cannot be overlooked by heaven.

Mu Shuangshuang never expected Zhuangzi's entire family would help her catch fish, and with everyone involved.

At the main riverbank of Dahuo Village, the Golden River, the fish tide described by Zhuangzi's mother had already subsided a lot, unlike the previous density of fish everywhere.

But you could still see fish struggling to swim upstream. Each member of Old Cao's family was catching one fat fish after another with buckets and sieves, placing them into their "Five Finger Mountain."

Suddenly, satisfied bursts of laughter echoed from the riverbank.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng stood in the water, watching the clear lake water ripple over the surface and the occasional fish swim to their feet, feeling absolutely delighted.

"This is my first time catching fish like this, it's like swatting mosquitoes—feels like I can just reach out and grab them."

Mu Shuangshuang said, her originally fair face now flushed red from excitement and the heat, and Lu Yuanfeng laughed foolishly beside her.

"I've seen this before, but only with small fish, never this big," Lu Yuanfeng also commented with a sigh, though catching fish was secondary to the joy he felt.

"Shuang, what are you and Fengzi whispering about over there? Are there fish over there? Come over here, there are more fish here." Zhuangzi's mother raised her sieve and called out to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, who were off away from the group.

Zhuangzi's father quickly nudged her arm. "Old woman, let the young people have their chat and catch some fish, it's romantic. Why bother them? Be careful not to ruin their good match, even Grandpa City God won't spare you."

Zhuangzi's father's words were clearly in jest, but his implications made Mu Shuangshuang blush fiercely, her face turning red from her neck to her earlobes.

Lu Yuanfeng, too, had his face turn bright red, like a monkey's butt, unsure of how to explain himself. He opened and closed his mouth futilely, which was incredibly cute.

"Fengzi, let's go over there and catch more fish."

Mu Shuangshuang pulled Lu Yuanfeng's sleeve and walked toward the part where Zhuangzi's mother said the fish were thicker.

Indeed, there were significantly more fish here than where she and Fengzi had been.

Knowing that the two young ones were already shy, the others refrained from teasing.

Instead, they tacitly managed to push them together, and Mu Shuangshuang occasionally brushed against Lu Yuanfeng's strong frame and iron-like arms, once again causing her face to heat up...

Chapter 212: The Triumphant Gou Dan

After catching the fish, Zhuangzi's mother helped Mu Shuangshuang weigh them. They amounted to around fifty pounds. At the current market price of eight wen per pound, they were worth about four hundred wen.

Though not much, it's better than nothing. But how to transport them back became a bit of a problem.

They couldn't use a bucket, right? Not to mention transporting them back, even on the way, the fish might die of dehydration.

If the fish die and you still take them back to sell, isn't that like pulling down your pants to fart, completely unnecessary?

"Zhuangzi's mother, how about I go and ask Butcher Liu's family in the village for the unused pig-killing basin? They're not slaughtering pigs anymore, so there's no use keeping that basin."

Mu Shuangshuang certainly knew what a pig-killing basin was, bigger than a bath bucket, the perfect thing for holding fish.

"Then what are you standing here for? Go quickly and ask for it." Zhuangzi's mother glared at Zhuangzi's father, then turned around and spoke to Xiao Mizi's father.

"Old Man, quickly bring out the old cart from our warehouse that's no longer in use, to carry the pig-killing basin for Shuang and Fengzi. This way, the fish can definitely be transported back."

"Alright, I'm on it."

Shuangshuang and Fengzi saved Xiao Mizi, and Zhuangzi's family naturally felt grateful to her and Fengzi. Plus, Zhuangzi's mother liked Mu Shuangshuang very much, so when it came to helping her, Xiao Mizi's father immediately agreed.

"Nai, you don't have to do this. We'll find a way ourselves. You keep the cart for your own use."

Mu Shuangshuang seeing Zhuangzi's mother trying to come up with so many solutions for her felt a bit apologetic. Besides, Dahuo Village wasn't close to Er Gui Village, so she couldn't possibly come deliver things the next day.

"Shuang, don't worry. The basin and cart are for you and Fengzi. You heard me earlier, those things are no longer useful for our family or anyone else's. Keeping them would just be a waste.

I originally wanted to keep you and Fengzi here for dinner, but you wouldn't stay. Since that's the case, I must help you protect the fish properly!"

Zhuangzi's mother had a point, Mu Shuangshuang wanted to argue but didn't know how.

Meanwhile, Zhuangzi's mother took advantage while Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng went to the house to find Gou Dan, and instructed her daughter-in-law to pull some greens, cucumbers, and bitter gourds from the garden, tie them with straw for them to take back.

Zhuangzi's mother had been to Er Gui Village more than once; that place was really not suitable for growing good things.

Moreover, the third branch had now split from the family, so they definitely needed these things.

"Mom, why don't we also give some seeds to Shuangshuang? After the double harvest is over, it'll soon be autumn, another peak time for planting vegetables. If we give them seeds, they can start farming and planting themselves."

After binding the vegetables taken from the ground, Second Daughter-in-law Zhao suddenly suggested.

Zhuangzi's mother thought it was a good idea too, teaching people to fish is better than giving them fish; the vegetables they were giving, at most, could last two or three days.

"Alright, you go to the warehouse and get some seeds, later I'll talk to Shuang about how to plant them, once it's about time to set off, we'll package them up; it's getting late, if we don't start moving, we'll be traveling in the dark."

Everything was prepared well. When Mu Shuangshuang looked at the vegetables tied up and packed into sacks, she didn't even know what to say.

Zhuangzi's mother was truly good-hearted. Although she might be a bit hot-tempered, her actions showed she wasn't stingy at all. It's a pity Mu Zhenzhen didn't know how to cherish.

With such a good mother-in-law, yet she was eating idly every day.

"Nai, thank you, I... I really don't know what to say." Mu Shuangshuang was a bit incoherent.

Lu Yuanfeng was also moved, but being a man, he wouldn't easily show his emotions.

"Don't say anything. Just make sure you and Fengzi get home safely, and persuade that lazy bum to come back for me. This time, I must make sure my son divorces that lazy thing."

The lazy bum in Zhuangzi's mother's words was Mu Zhenzhen, and truth be told, after making so many mistakes, she deserved to be punished.

As for whether Mu Zhenzhen would willingly accept being divorced, that was none of Mu Shuangshuang's business.

"Then Nai, we're off first. You go attend to the farm work, don't let it really turn wild." Mu Shuangshuang grinned.

"Alright, off you go!" Zhuangzi's mother waved her hand to Mu Shuangshuang, then suddenly remembered something and called out to Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, come to the side for a bit, Nai has something to tell you."

Lu Yuanfeng followed Zhuangzi's mother to a corner of the yard for a while. When he came back, his face was red as a monkey's behind; he didn't even dare look at Shuangshuang, he just held onto the cart and headed in the direction of Er Gui Village's entrance.

Mu Shuangshuang, although curious, didn't ask any questions. She, along with Gou Dan, walked beside Lu Yuanfeng. She wanted to lend a hand initially but was refused by Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng's reason was simple, if the road was long and he couldn't move later, then Shuangshuang could help; otherwise, both being exhausted, the fish would only be left halfway.

After walking for just about the time it takes to burn an incense stick, Gou Dan suddenly sat down on the ground.

"Stinky girl, I can't walk anymore, carry me."

"Stinky girl, I'm hungry, find me something to eat, I want meat!"

Gou Dan naturally called Mu Shuangshuang stinky girl. Mu Shuangshuang saved him, yet he showed no gratitude and instead became smug.

"Try calling me stinky girl one more time? Have you forgotten the pain from when I beat you last time?"

Mu Shuangshuang had beaten Gou Dan more than once, but each time, he would initially be afraid, and as time passed, he would forget about the pain completely, proving the saying that after the scar heals you forget the pain.

"Stinky girl, stinky girl; so what? You want to hit me? Let me tell you, if you dare hit me, I'll tell Nai!"

Gou Dan made a face at Mu Shuangshuang, then spat on her shoes.

No surprise, Mu Shuangshuang grabbed Gou Dan and gave him a good beating, directly pulling down his pants.

His fair white buttocks exposed to the sun, the sound of slaps resonated rhythmically.

"Ow, ow..." Gou Dan wailed miserably, worse than during pig slaughter.

Afterward, Gou Dan rolled around on the ground, Zhuangzi's mother had just washed his clothes, now completely covered in dirt.

With such tantrums, it seemed impossible to continue the journey right away.

Thus, Mu Shuangshuang decided they would rest right here; she remembered the two pastries she made when she went out, now was a good time to put them to use.

"Fengzi, are you hungry? I brought some pastries with us."

Without saying, even at the mention, Lu Yuanfeng just realized that in his rush to leave, he hadn't had breakfast.

Two pastries, just enough for each to have one.

As for Gou Dan, let him cry on his own!

Chapter 213: The Overthinking Old Mu Family

Gou Dan finally cried himself out, watching Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng eating pancakes deliciously, drooling.

He sniffed as the snot dripped to the corner of his mouth, greedily staring at the pancake in Lu Yuanfeng's hand.

He dared not look at Mu Shuangshuang, because she had just beaten him, and he hadn't forgotten the fiery pain on his backside.

"Do you want to eat?" Lu Yuanfeng casually asked, and Gou Dan nodded like a chicken pecking at rice.

Shuangshuang's pancakes were delicious, with the taste of dried chili, spicy and flavorful.

Plus, with the hot weather, eating them cold felt very comfortable, Lu Yuanfeng was really reluctant to give them to Gou Dan, he hesitated a bit, and finally tore half of his pancake and gave it to Gou Dan.

"Eat, and don't cry anymore. You must walk back this stretch by yourself."

Gou Dan snatched the torn pancake from Lu Yuanfeng and stuffed it whole into his mouth, like a starving wolf released from its cage, after biting twice, he spat forcefully, ejecting all the pancake from his mouth.

"Pah, no meat at all, is this for humans? Cold and hard, not even pigs would eat it!"

While speaking, he smashed the half pancake onto the ground with force.

The half pancake flew far away, stirring up a cloud of dust.

At this, Lu Yuanfeng got angry too.

The pancake made by Shuangshuang, he had only eaten a few bites himself, and cherished it so much, was just abandoned like that.

"Apologize to Shuangshuang!" Lu Yuanfeng's straight eyebrows furrowed into a knot, his expression turned visibly cold.

Those familiar with him would know that he was already angry now.

But Gou Dan didn't know, he thought Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't touch him, so he puffed out his little chest.

"I won't, it's pig food anyway, I'm not eating it, I'm not apologizing!"

"You..." Lu Yuanfeng's face turned red with anger, while Mu Shuangshuang, having finished the last bite of pancake, didn't even bother to wipe the oil from her hands, grabbed Gou Dan for another good beating.

Being unruly, huh? A good beating will fix that!

Lu Yuanfeng stood there in astonishment, if the first time Shuangshuang took action he could understand, the second time was beyond understanding.

"He's too noisy, won't behave without a beating. Let's finish and hit the road early, tonight I want to make a good meal and invite some people who have been taking care of us for a feast. If it's too late, we'll have to postpone to tomorrow."

With so many ingredients on hand, and the harvest drawing close to completion, Mu Shuangshuang naturally wanted to reward those who have helped her.

"Okay!"

This time, neither took a rest, finally returning to Er Gui Village before sunset.

Little Zhi, Xiao Han, and Yuanbao had been waiting at the village entrance, and upon seeing Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, the three little guys couldn't be more excited.

Little Zhi was more direct, she pounced the moment she saw them, and Mu Shuangshuang joyfully twirled her around, causing Little Zhi to giggle uncontrollably.

"Sister, I knew you'd come back, Little Zhi was so anxious, Brother Yuanbao even said you and Brother Yuan Feng wouldn't come back tonight."

Speaking of Yuanbao, he was now consciously turning Little Zhi, telling her that she would become part of his family in the future.

Especially today, he said something like his brother and Sister Shuangshuang wouldn't come back because they went to do big things.

Scaring the naïve Little Zhi, while Xiao Han was more mature, only believing what he saw with his own eyes.

"Brother, brother, I didn't do anything bad today, even had two bowls at lunch." Yuanbao hugged Lu Yuanfeng, acting coquettishly seeking praise, while Xiao Han stood nearby, watching the scene wide-eyed.

He wanted to join in but couldn't let down the pretense.

"Xiao Han, come here, let sister give you a hug, have you gained weight?"

Mu Shuangshuang playfully smiled at Xiao Han, immediately making him blush. Yet he still stretched out his arms to hug Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang was sticky all over, her sweat even dampening her hair; if it wasn't for these circumstances, she wouldn't really want the kids to hug her.

Gou Dan stood there, seeing Mu Shuangshuang not looking his way, turned on his heel and began to run.

As he ran, he shouted, "Mom, that stinky girl hit me, the stinky girl hit me..."

Being able to complain right in front of them, only Gou Dan could do that.

"Shuangshuang, he ran, what should we do, should we go catch him?"

Lu Yuanfeng was afraid Gou Dan would go back and talk nonsense, so he couldn't help reminding Mu Shuangshuang.

"Forget it, don't bother with him, I've already brought him back, the rest is not my responsibility."

Gou Dan heading back meant she could get that acre of good land now.

Thinking about this, a smile reappeared on Mu Shuangshuang's face.

"Let's go, let's hurry into the village and head home!"

Mu Shuangshuang had just entered the yard, and the people of Old Mu Family were already lined up, each staring at her as if she were a rare artifact, when they saw Lu Yuanfeng dragging a cart with a large wooden bucket on it, each sharp-eyed one wanted to discern what was on it.

Mu Danian, who was tall, stood on his tiptoes and saw the fish in the big wooden basin.

"Oh my, so many fish, how long will it take to eat all these?"

As he spoke, Mu Danian started drooling.

Mrs. Lin was more direct, shouting towards Old Mrs. Mu in the house, "Mom, Shuang caught a lot of fish back, we're having fish tonight."

Inside, Old Mrs. Mu was supervising Mrs. Liu cooking, and upon hearing there were fish, she tiptoed over energetically.

She scolded, "Lin, what's the fuss about? What's up? Is there anything worth you shouting about?"

Mrs. Lin excitedly ran up, pointing at Mu Shuangshuang's water basin, and cried, "Fish, a big basin of fish, dozens of pounds!"

Old Mrs. Mu finally came over, being short, she couldn't see inside the basin with it still on the cart, having to rely on Lin's word.

She said, "What are you all standing there for, hurry and help get the fish down for me!"

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian quickly stepped forward, untied the rope, and lifted the fish from the cart, only then did everyone see the basin full of carp and catfish swimming joyously.

"Wow, so many fish! Our family's Gou Dan's got a lucky streak. They say 'survive a great disaster, there's good fortune afterward', I think that applies to our Gou Dan, just escaped from danger, now he's got fish to eat every day."

Mrs. Lin said, reaching out her hand, "Mom, let me take a couple to give to my mother's side, they surely haven't had such fresh live fish."

Just as she was about to touch the fish, Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand, directly slapping Lin's hand back.

"Aunt, what are you doing?"

"Grabbing fish, Shuang, you're not going to be stingy and not give us fish, are you?"

"Aunt, you guessed right, I am stingy. I'm taking these fish to town to sell, if you want to eat, bring money!"

Chapter 214: I Won't Let You Go

Mrs. Lin's face suddenly fell.

"You... you girl, why are you so mean? If you didn't want us to eat, why did you let Gou Dan's father and your Fifth Uncle move things just now?"

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes and said impatiently. "Second Aunt, you got it wrong; it wasn't me who asked Second Uncle and Fifth Uncle to move things, it was Grandma. Go talk to her."

This time, not only did Mrs. Lin's face fall, but Old Mrs. Mu's face also fell after being mentioned.

They glared fiercely at Mu Shuangshuang, but unfortunately, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't affected at all.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't make it clear earlier, but these fish, along with the water, weighed about a hundred pounds. At that time, it was carried to the cart by several men from Zhuangzi's family and Lu Yuanfeng together.

Now, Lu Yuanfeng and she had traveled for so long and were definitely tired. Rather than tire themselves out, it was better to let someone else do it.

Anyway, the people from the Old Mu Family were so eager to help, that Mu Shuangshuang simply accepted this "favor"!

Mu Danian, seeing the situation, quickly joined in, playing the emotional card.

He intentionally exaggeratedly laughed at Mu Shuangshuang, and because he laughed too hard, his face, which had recently been hit hard by Old Mrs. Mu with a wooden stick, hurt intensely.

He quickly restrained his smile, making a grimace that looked no different from a monkey.

"Shuang, over the years, your Fifth Uncle has taken care of you a lot. Sending two fish for your Fifth Uncle to eat shouldn't be a problem, right?"

"I don't recall how Fifth Uncle took care of me; what I do remember is that we suddenly lost a few pounds of mung beans and half a jar of lard. Does Fifth Uncle know anything about that?"

Mu Shuangshuang's questioning made Mu Danian's face turn blue and white. He turned red in the neck, shouting, "How should I know? I didn't steal it. Are you accusing me?"

"I didn't say you stole it, so why is Fifth Uncle so worked up?" Mu Shuangshuang shrugged helplessly. "If you've done nothing wrong, you shouldn't fear ghosts knocking at your door. Be careful not to be suspected of anything unspeakable."

After all, people are doing it, and the heavens are watching. Mu Danian, sooner or later, will face retribution.

"You... Mother, listen to what this damn girl is saying? She doesn't respect us at all, not even willing to give us a single fish. We shouldn't have let Yu Si Niang give birth to such a bringer of bad luck in the first place!"

"Fifth, what nonsense are you spouting? You're getting addicted to bullying my daughter, huh!"

Mu Dashan, who had no idea when he got up, was holding a stick he found somewhere, waving it, ready to teach Mu Danian a lesson. Lu Yuanfeng, sharp-eyed, quickly stepped forward to support Mu Dashan, preventing him from falling.

"Uncle Dashan, what are you doing coming out, you're not well yet."

Mu Dashan was sick until Mu Danian was beaten, and Zhang Huai Shu was invited. Zhang Huai Shu told Mr. Mu about the situation, saying he must rest quietly; otherwise, there would be big problems, and then everyone believed it.

Before that, they always thought Mu Dashan wasn't working just to be lazy.

"It's nothing! I just want to know who keeps bullying my daughter. I'm just sick, not dead yet. If anyone dares to bully my daughter again, I, Mu Dashan, will fight to the death and won't let them off."

Mu Dashan's words were loud and powerful, making it clear he was not joking.

As he spoke, he glared fiercely at Mu Danian, as if he wanted to skin Mu Danian alive.

Mu Danian was so frightened by Mu Dashan's fierce demeanor that he took a step back, retreating to Old Mrs. Mu's side.

Mu Shuangshuang, afraid that Mu Dashan might get too agitated and trigger his illness, stepped forward to soothe Mu Dashan.

"Dad, it's nothing. Fifth Uncle was just joking with me and didn't really mean to bully me. I'll go make dinner now. From today on, our third branch won't eat in the main house anymore. What do you think?"

Actually, by this time, the third branch really didn't need to eat at the Old Mu Family's house anymore. The stove was already built, and Mu Shuangshuang had even bought the rice.

The daughter didn't want to eat in the main house for some time now, and Mu Dashan was not going to stop it. Anyway, with the third branch not eating there, their parents should be happier because they wouldn't have to see the third branch, whom they disliked.

For the first time in his heart, Mu Dashan used the word dislike. While cruel, that was the reality.

The expression on Mu Dashan's face softened a bit, and he spoke gently to his daughter Shuang.

"Then you rest a bit, and I'll see if there's any firewood around to gather. Once we get the firewood, our family will cook dinner together."

"No, Dad, Fengzi and I will take care of the firewood. You hurry inside; you're still sick. What if there's a big problem?" Mu Shuangshuang gave Lu Yuanfeng a look, and Lu Yuanfeng understood immediately, going to help support Mu Dashan into the house.

The other members of the Old Mu Family were completely ignored. They stood there, as if shocked by Mu Dashan's "heinous" remarks, and it took them a while to come to their senses.

Old Mrs. Mu stared at Mu Dashan for a long time, feeling like her son had changed. He never dared speak about punishing anyone before.

But even if he changed, this household still ultimately listened to her old woman. Whatever she said should be done.

"Old Third, your daughter Shuang is too stingy with food. I, an old woman, would like to eat a fish. She's unwilling. If you don't manage this unfilial thing, she'll bring shame to our Old Mu Family sooner or later."

"Grandma, speaking of filial piety, I almost forgot."

Old Mrs. Mu, hearing there was still fish to eat, couldn't help but secretly rejoice because her role as a steward was still somewhat effective.

But when Mu Shuangshuang spoke the next words, Old Mrs. Mu nearly choked with anger.

"Once I sell the fish tomorrow, if there are any leftovers, I will definitely send you a few. I just hope by that time, you won't mind if they're dead fish."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke slowly, unsurprisingly watching Old Mrs. Mu's change of expression.

"You little brat, you... Second, Fifth, why are you dawdling around? Quickly, grab the fish for me, the old lady! I refuse to believe that the old lady wants fish today and can't have it."

At Old Mrs. Mu's command, Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian moved to catch the fish.

Mu Shuangshuang released Mu Dashan's hand and shouted toward the main house where the old man hadn't shown up yet. "Grandpa, Grandma is trying to snatch my fish, come and see!"

They say every pot has its lid; to deal with the Old Mu Family, you need the face-loving Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu, rarely back early today for a rest, hadn't rested enough when he heard Mu Shuangshuang loudly calling.

He was startled.

Granny snatching things from a granddaughter, if this got out, their reputations as grandparents would be damaged and the Old Mu Family's face lost.

"Stop it, you bunch of fools, haven't you had enough disgrace? Old Second, Fifth, get back to work.

Mrs. Lin, why are you everywhere? You're like a stirring stick, stirring everywhere. Your son Gou Dan came back, and you didn't care as much. If you keep causing trouble, you won't have a place in our Old Mu Family."

Chapter 215: Starting to Farm Our Own Land Tomorrow

Mr. Mu called out and scolded each of the troublemakers who had caused a scene in Shuangshuang Courtyard, but since Old Mrs. Mu was an elder, she escaped the scolding.

However, Mr. Mu still gave her a fierce glare, which finally made her leave in anger.

Mr. Mu stared at Mu Shuangshuang for a long time, scrutinizing her. To him, it seemed unlikely that Shuang would return so quickly after going to find someone. How did she come back after just a day?

And she brought back so many fish?

"Shuang, how did you find that Xiao Mizi from Zhuangzi's family? Did you encounter any danger?"

Seemingly concerned but actually questioning, Mu Shuangshuang bravely met Mr. Mu's gaze, patting her chest, and answered straightforwardly.

"The people of Dahuo Village all helped us look. It took quite a while. As for the danger you mentioned, I didn't encounter any."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't explicitly mention the situation she encountered in Dahuo Village, after all, previously because of this matter, Zhuangzi's mother had caused trouble.

Moreover, she wanted to drag Mu Zhenzhen to be drowned in a pig cage. If she claimed that the child's disappearance was the doing of the villagers of Dahuo Village, it was hard to say that Old Mrs. Mu wouldn't find trouble with Zhuangzi's family for the sake of her beloved daughter.

Listening to Shuang's words, Mr. Mu knew that she didn't want to tell him the truth. Since that was the case, he didn't push further. The fact that she returned was better than anything else.

"Shuang, you've... worked hard! Go on, your third branch doesn't need to help with the family work anymore. The two acres of land assigned to you, you can decide what to plant, and future harvests will also be yours."

From Mr. Mu's words, Mu Shuangshuang realized that nothing had been planted on that piece of fertile land and that barren patch of land. She initially thought they would at least plant something there before giving it to their third branch, but it seems that was never the case.

"Grandpa, will we also get the seedlings?"

Without seedlings, it would be impossible to plant rice, although she had seen people scatter grains directly in the field, but that required first growing seedlings and disinfecting them. It was already the end of the double harvest season; they might not make it in time.

"Of course, the seedlings in the nursery field, you can pull out for yourself."

On this point, Mr. Mu didn't make things difficult for the third branch. In fact, he mainly feared being criticized by others; in a village, people didn't have other hobbies, they just enjoyed gossiping about other families, and he didn't want his family to become the topic of others' idle conversations.

"Thank you, Grandpa. When Mother comes back, I'll tell her. Grandpa, there's one more thing. Second Aunt asked me to tell you that Second Aunt is still the Zhao family's daughter-in-law, and it's time she returned."

"I understand!"

Mr. Mu replied in a low voice. In fact, he had long decided to let Zhenzhen return. The family's double harvest was almost finished. If she stayed any longer at the Old Mu Family, Zhuangzi would indeed divorce her. But little did the old man know, Zhuangzi's mother was determined this time to make Mu Zhenzhen return so she could be divorced!

Once Mr. Mu left, Shuangshuang's house finally calmed down completely. Lu Yuanfeng came out of Mu Dashan's room, carrying a stack of straw fans, all made by Mu Dashan over the last few days, representing a substantial income.

"Shuangshuang, where should I put this?" Lu Yuanfeng asked curiously.

"Just put it in my room; find a corner to pile it up. I'll organize it later."

Mu Shuangshuang casually mentioned to Lu Yuanfeng as she planned to gather some firewood herself.

Lu Yuanfeng blushed instantly, thinking that entering a girl's room might be inappropriate...

He stood still in the corridor. Seeing that he hadn't gone in, Mu Shuangshuang turned around, hurriedly urging him.

"Fengzi, what are you standing there for? Hurry up, once we finish this, we'll prepare dinner."

At this time, Little Zhi, Xiao Han, and Yuanbao were all out catching cicadas outside. Summer dusks were when cicadas rested low, making them easy to catch.

Village children, when they had nothing to do, would catch cicadas, fish, or if they had firecrackers, blow up cow dung for fun. While it might sound boring, participating in these activities made them feel like these were indispensable childhood joys.

Lu Yuanfeng took a deep breath and finally stepped into Mu Shuangshuang's room.

Mu Shuangshuang's room, previously a storage room, now had everything neatly arranged, without any trace of a cluttered storage space.

What attracted Lu Yuanfeng the most was the bedspread on the bed, neatly folded like a block of tofu, without a single wrinkle.

This was Lu Yuanfeng's first time entering a girl's room, and he couldn't help but be a bit nervous, so after looking around the entire room, he finally found a corner and placed the straw fans down.

Suddenly, he caught the scent of lotus flowers. Looking around, he found lotus petals scattered in the corner.

Pale and lovely, they appeared quite appealing.

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly felt it was inappropriate. Shuangshuang had asked him to place the items and hadn't said he could look around, so he quickly retreated with his heart still pounding.

In the blink of an eye, Mu Shuangshuang returned with a bundle of firewood. It was already late, making it inconvenient to gather firewood. She simply borrowed a bundle from Aunt Zhao Yun, agreeing to return it the next day.

The day after, she would have to make another trip to town. Delivering cold noodles every three days, barring extreme weather, was something she absolutely couldn't delay.

Thinking about the amount of work left at home made Mu Shuangshuang feel she needed to put in extra effort.

"By the way, Fengzi, Uncle Yu mentioned that Aunt Xiao Yun has already made dinner, so they won't be joining us tonight. For dinner, we'll just make a few simple dishes and make do, okay?"

"Yeah, I can eat anything. If you're short on time, I can go home and cook for myself." Lu Yuanfeng still dared not meet Mu Shuangshuang's eyes because his mind kept replaying scenes of her room.

"What nonsense are you talking about? We agreed on this while we were on the road. Since you're not willing to take these vegetables, you have to eat at my house. Once we've finished these vegetables, then you can go home for meals."

Zhuangzi's mother had prepared a sack of vegetables that Lu Yuanfeng refused to take, so Mu Shuangshuang chose this silly method. Luckily, it wasn't his first time eating there, so nothing felt particularly awkward.

"Okay... alright then."

...

In the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang was busy selecting vegetables by herself. She planned to make a cold cucumber salad and stir-fried bitter melon for dinner. Unfortunately, there were no eggs; otherwise, she could make bitter melon scrambled eggs. Additionally, she would use what was at hand to make braised fish.

There wasn't enough time to buy meat, which gave her a headache. Dinner would be rather simple.

Fortunately, half a jar of lard was spared from theft last time because she had hidden it in her room, or else there wouldn't even be cooking oil today.

The large iron pot that Lu Yuanfeng gave her fit perfectly with her stove, which might be due to the fact that the stove was crafted by him.

While she was busy, Aunt Zhao Yun walked in from outside.

Chapter 216: Disturbed Heart

"Hey, Shuang, are you cooking today?"

Zhao Yun, having arrived just in time for cooking, was delighted.

Earlier, she went to the vegetable garden to pick some produce but didn't catch Shuang coming over. Instead, it was her husband Zhang Yutou who spoke with Shuangshuang and informed her that their meal was already ready.

Zhao Yun knew Shuangshuang took a bundle of firewood from their home and left without asking for anything.

From this, she deduced that the Third Branch of the Old Mu Family was preparing to start cooking independently. She remembered that during the family's division, Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu were ruthless, giving nothing to the third branch. Everything relied on Shuangshuang's small shoulders.

So, Zhao Yun picked a basket of eggs from her home, brought a small jar of chili sauce, and half a jar of rapeseed oil.

For her family, these things aren't rare or valuable, but for the third branch, which lacks everything, they could be quite useful.

"Aunt Xiao Yun, what brings you here?" Mu Shuangshuang looked surprised but quickly put down the vegetables she was holding to greet Zhao Yun. "Aunt Xiao Yun, let me get you a chair. Please have a rest first."

"No need, Shuang, don't busy yourself. I came today just to bring you some things. Treat it as if it's from family and accept it without any complaints."

Zhao Yun placed the wooden bucket she brought on the ground and began taking out the items she prepared.

Upon seeing those items, Mu Shuangshuang's mouth immediately formed an "O" shape. Her family indeed had a good relationship with Zhao Yun's family, but she never expected Zhao Yun to bring them so many things.

The basket of eggs appeared to contain about fifteen eggs, which, based on the price she used to sell them at the market, were worth several dozen coins.

Additionally, there was a small jar of vibrant red chili peppers and half a jar of rapeseed oil, exuding a fragrant aroma.

This gift was too generous!

"Aunt Xiao Yun, I can't accept these things," Mu Shuangshuang quickly shook her head. "They're too valuable. You should keep the eggs for Da Long or sell them in town; they could fetch a good price."

"You silly girl, you're still being stubborn. How could Da Long eat all those eggs?"

Besides, we have over a dozen chickens at home that lay more than ten eggs every day. And now, eggs are not worth much in town, just one coin each. Selling them, I'd rather give them to your family."

Zhao Yun explained everything clearly, and after leaving the items on Shuangshuang's kitchen counter, she prepared to leave.

Mu Shuangshuang hurriedly stopped her. "Aunt Xiao Yun, Shuang caught a lot of fish today. Please take some with you, otherwise, take these items back."

Zhao Yun shook her head helplessly. In truth, the reason she brought these items to Si Niang's family was partly because of the close family relationship, and partly because Shuang was quite considerate, often bringing something for their family whenever she returned from town.

Sometimes, after earning silver, she'd even give a bit to her. So in the end, it was hard to say who owed whom.

While Mu Shuangshuang was in the yard catching fish, Lu Yuanfeng happened to be filling a large wooden basin with water. Fifty pounds of fish wasn't much or little. If they didn't continuously change the water for oxygen, they'd quickly die.

"Fengzi, let me catch a few fish for Aunt Xiao Yun, and you can put it on my tab later."

When they partnered in business, they agreed that aside from Mu Dashan's fan-making work, if either of them were involved in a money-making activity, they'd split profits equally. If Mu Shuangshuang took the fish, their total revenue would surely decrease. Therefore, it was necessary to inform each other.

But as soon as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Lu Yuanfeng's expression immediately turned sour.

"Shuang, are you treating me like an outsider? Didn't we agree to run the business together, earn money together, and send your brother to school together?"

There was an inexplicable hint of bitterness in Lu Yuanfeng's words.

He thought that by now, even if they weren't truly family, Shuang wouldn't fuss over such things with him, but apparently, she did.

The low pressure from Lu Yuanfeng made Mu Shuangshuang realize she'd misspoke. She quickly waved her hand. "No, no, I didn't mean that, and I'm not treating you like an outsider. It's just..."

"It's just that I feel if I give away what belongs to both of us and then take your share without a care, it would make me feel selfish."

Mu Shuangshuang always prided herself on being eloquent and sharp-tongued. When complimenting others, she could flatter them to the point they willingly emptied their pockets. When criticizing them, she could infuriate them to the point of internal turmoil.

But this time, facing this young man, she found it difficult to explain herself properly.

She just didn't want Lu Yuanfeng to misunderstand her and think she was a selfish person.

Mu Shuangshuang was at a loss, scratching her ears and cheeks, unsure how to convince Lu Yuanfeng. But she didn't realize that when she said she didn't treat him like an outsider, all of Lu Yuanfeng's negative feelings disappeared.

"Shuang, I'm fine now, don't worry anymore."

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly cracked a smile.

It was the first time he'd seen Shuang panicking, and despite knowing her for so long, she'd been calm even when chased by wild boars, reminding him to focus on escaping. But now, she was anxious over his feelings, like an ant on a hot pan.

Actually, seeing Shuang react this way was already enough for him.

"You scared me to death," Mu Shuangshuang retorted, feeling like she'd been played, thanks to Lu Yuanfeng's laughter.

She reached out intending to hit Lu Yuanfeng, but the words that came out somehow carried a hint of feminine shyness.

Lu Yuanfeng looked on as Shuang's hand hit his chest without dodging, letting her continue.

A light tap, thump, thump, twice, yet it felt as though it resonated with his heartbeat.

Lu Yuanfeng looked down at this fair-skinned girl with eyes brighter than the stars, and an indescribable warmth slowly crept from his chest to his head.

Perhaps that's what it meant when they say a 'rush of heat to the head,' for when Lu Yuanfeng realized it, his hand had already wrapped around Shuang's shoulder.

The last bits of sunlight disappeared over the horizon, and the sky quickly darkened.

In the kitchen, Zhao Yun waited and waited but still didn't see Shuang come in, so she shouted aloud.

"Shuang, are you still there?"

Everything seemed to awaken from a dream; the two separated quickly, with Mu Shuangshuang struggling to catch the fish, but Lu Yuanfeng was quicker.

"Let me do it. You go entertain Aunt Zhao Yun." Lu Yuanfeng's face was flushed, still uneven in breathing as he spoke.

Mu Shuangshuang was in a similar state, considering that Lu Yuanfeng had genuinely wrapped his arm around her shoulder.

"Shuang, about what just happened..." Lu Yuanfeng hesitated for a moment before speaking.

"Nothing happened just now. You hurry and catch the fish, make sure to get the biggest ones, three of them."

With that, Mu Shuangshuang quickly ran back to the kitchen.

Chapter 217: Preparing Dinner

Back in the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang's face was so hot it could probably cook an egg. She didn't say much to Zhao Yun and quickly got busy with dinner.

If she delayed any longer, they wouldn't get to eat dinner.

She quickly washed the vegetables she had picked and put them in a big bowl.

Next was the fish, which had been scaled. To add flavor, she intentionally cut a few lines on its back.

The house didn't have a strainer yet, nor any tools for draining water, so almost everything was replaced with other items.

Since there were eggs, Mu Shuangshuang decided to follow her plan: make a cucumber salad, bitter melon with scrambled eggs, stir-fry some peppers, and finally, braise three big fishes.

Four dishes, but the portions were several times the usual amount. Mu Shuangshuang dried the bitter melon slices and then began cracking the eggs. There were five people in the family, plus Fengzi and Yuanbao, making it seven. Mu Shuangshuang took three eggs, cracked them into a bowl, and stirred them with chopsticks.

The sound of "da da da" echoed in the kitchen. Outside, Lu Yuanfeng put the fish he'd caught into Zhao Yun's wooden bucket, reminding her to change the water several times at night so the fish wouldn't die.

After sending Zhao Yun off, the kids came back. The three little ones seemed very happy, each holding a chirping cicada, their faces radiant with innocent smiles only children have.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng, they all gathered around.

Yuanbao started bragging again, "Second brother, I'm amazing. You know, Little Zhi's cicada was caught by me, it's really big."

Catching cicadas wasn't actually difficult for Yuanbao, but boasting daily and seeking praise was something he had to do.

Lu Yuanfeng was patient enough to listen to him and occasionally asked a few questions.

Mu Xiaohan wasn't as courteous, he called out once upon seeing Lu Yuanfeng and pretty much stayed silent afterwards.

Lu Yuanfeng just thought he was shy and didn't mind too much.

"Hey, Little Zhi, let's go play with Little Black. I haven't seen it in so long," Yuanbao suddenly suggested, remembering that the clever Little Black, which was even smarter than a mouse.

"Sure, but Little Black hasn't had dinner yet. There's no meat at home."

Little Zhi's face fell; Little Black ate a tiny amount of meat each meal, about the size of a little finger.

Sometimes Sister Shuangshuang would buy a bit, sometimes Little Black would catch some weird small animals like mice.

But it's so hot out, they need replacing every day or so, otherwise they start smelling.

"Little Zhi, you forgot we have fish at home. Little Black could eat fish too," Lu Yuanfeng laughed and pointed to the fish in the bucket.

Little Zhi's eyes immediately lit up, and he jumped with joy, "Yeah, Little Black has fish to eat now! Little Black won't go hungry!"

Their pet was a treasure to Little Zhi; he didn't want it starving.

Mrs. Lin had been hiding in the shadows for a long time, watching those fish. Originally planning to snatch a few when the brat wasn't looking, who knew that annoying Feng had been standing in the yard, making it hard for her to act.

Such delicious things, and she couldn't taste them. It's exasperating.

"Second daughter-in-law, how long are you going to take with your business? Everyone's waiting for you to start dinner, if you're not eating, don't bother coming."

When dinner was nearly ready, Mrs. Lin came out claiming she had a stomach ache. But now dinner was on the table, and she was nowhere to be seen. Old Mrs. Mu thought she must be at the third son's place and came over to drag her in.

Mrs. Lin was smart and knew Old Mrs. Mu came over wanting fish, so she said.

"Mom, I don't think the brat respects you at all. I just saw her give fish to the second daughter-in-law of the Zhang Family, Mrs. Zhao, and that ferret beast of hers. Feng also said to give a fish for it to eat, and you..."

Old Mrs. Mu's anger rose quickly, giving fish to Mrs. Zhao was one thing; she knew Mrs. Zhao had a good relationship with that hag Yu Si Niang. But a pitch-black ferret having something to eat too, what's that about?

"Mom, I think we should call Gou Dan's dad and his fifth uncle to come over and grab them by force. We can't be outdone by a brat, can we?"

Old Mrs. Mu thought for a while and quickly shook her head. "No, we can't do that. If your dad finds out, we'll get a good scolding."

"Then how about tonight..." Mrs. Lin left the rest unsaid, but Old Mrs. Mu understood.

While stealing fish isn't honorable, can dishonor compare to a brat showing disrespect even to her real grandmother?

"I'm not taking part in this, you handle it yourself." After speaking, Old Mrs. Mu quickly went back to her room.

Mrs. Lin took several glances at the big wooden bucket, nearly drooling.

Mu Shuangshuang was preparing dinner and didn't know what was happening outside in the yard. At this point, she was already adding fire to the stove and putting water into the iron jug next to the pan.

Lu Yuanfeng had built a stove with two hearths for their household, allowing placement of two pots side by side, one for boiling dishes later and one for stir-frying.

Between the two pots, there were two iron jugs embedded. As soon as the stove started burning, the jugs would heat up.

With dinner prepared, water in the jugs would be hot enough for bathing, though Mu Shuangshuang's household hadn't used theirs yet. The water needed warming for at least three days, only after three days could it be used for bathing.

With the water ready, the stir-fry pan was also hot.

Just in time, the rapeseed oil brought over by Aunt Xiao Yun was put to use. She poured oil from the jug into a bowl, then scooped a bit of it into the pan. When the unique rapeseed scent dispersed, Mu Shuangshuang poured the beaten eggs into the pan all at once.

The sizzling sound started, and the eggs began to set. Mu Shuangshuang quickly flipped the eggs with a spatula; once they turned golden yellow, she scooped them all up.

Bitter melon with scrambled eggs consisted of two steps: first scrambling the eggs, second stir-frying the bitter melon. After adding more oil to the pan, Mu Shuangshuang placed chopped garlic into the pan to sauté until fragrant, then poured in the bitter melon.

Bitter melon is harder to cook than eggs; generally, Mu Shuangshuang would wait until the bitter melon was almost cooked before adding the scrambled eggs back in. Once both were cooked, she'd add salt.

Instantly, the vivid green paired with golden accents of the bitter melon with scrambled eggs was ready. Though it wasn't a fancy dish, just the colors made Mu Shuangshuang feel a surge of appetite.

Finally, braising the fish, which Mu Shuangshuang left for last, so that when Yu Si Niang returned, the fish would still be hot, eliminating any fishy taste.

Just as she was thinking that, Yu Si Niang's voice came from outside, and Mu Shuangshuang heard several children sweetly calling her mom, with Yuanbao dramatically calling her Aunt Si.

Upon hearing the voices, Mu Shuangshuang hastened her dinner preparations even more.

Chapter 218: I Six, You Four

Just like before, after waiting for the oil to heat in the pan, Mu Shuangshuang placed the chopped ginger and garlic in the pan to sauté them, then put the marinated fish into the oil.

At this moment, the most important thing is not to rush to flip the fish over; you must wait until the fish develops a golden-brown crust.

After Mu Shuangshuang flipped the fish a few times and caught a whiff of its aroma, she scooped a ladle of clear water, mixed it with chili sauce and scallions, poured it over the fish, and covered the pan with the lid.

The rest is just waiting for the fish to cook.

Yu Si Niang freshened herself up, washed her hands, and entered the kitchen. "Shuangshuang, do you need my help?"

Mu Shuangshuang was busy adding firewood, and just said, "No, Mom, I'm still cooking the fish. I have to cook rice later; it'll take a little while longer."

"Alright then, Mom will go make a few more straw fans."

Having worked all day, Yu Si Niang was indeed hungry, but hearing her husband say that the third branch wouldn't have to go to the main house for meals in the future, she felt relieved.

In fact, even there, she couldn't eat much. The food was distributed by Old Mrs. Mu, and whenever there were good dishes, they were usually given to others first, and the third branch couldn't get anything good, especially since Shuangshuang's second aunt arrived.

Whenever there was anything tasty, it was eaten by the second aunt alone; others could only watch and drool. Instead of that, she preferred to come out on her own.

Now, she could earn five coins by making a straw fan. If she could make more, it wouldn't be worse than farming, and she could definitely support the whole family.

On the other side, in the Mu Family's main house, with the absence of the third branch, Old Mrs. Mu was secretly pleased and served everyone a little more rice during the meal.

Five people in the third branch — one bowl of sweet potato rice per person. That's five bowls; over a day, that's fifteen bowls. Now that they aren't eating together, she could save quite a bit of money.

"Mom, why is there no meat today? I can't eat without meat." Mu Zhenzhen looked at the table full of vegetarian dishes and suddenly lost her appetite.

Old Mrs. Mu's expression became awkward. Ever since the second daughter arrived, she had to buy some meat every day or fry a few eggs, and it added up to quite a sum; right now the eldest's traveling expenses were still unresolved.

Recently, just the expenses for meals had seriously exceeded the usual, and if she didn't tighten up, they would have to eat the Northwest wind.

"Zhenzhen, let's endure for now. After the harvesting period is over, Mom will buy you something good."

"I don't want it, you said last time that you'd kill a chicken for me; look, it's been so long, I never got to eat chicken, and outsiders got it instead."

Mu Zhenzhen stubbornly refused to back down, and beside her, Gou Dan started acting up, slamming his chopsticks on the table. "Dad, Mom, I want meat. At Second Aunt's, there was meat to eat; there's nothing here."

Upon hearing this, Mu Zhenzhen's face lit up with a smile. "Gou Dan is right. At Zhuangzi's, I could eat meat every day."

Old Mrs. Mu's face clouded immediately; she stood up and fiercely struck Gou Dan's hand, pouring most of his bowl into Mu Yingying's bowl beside him.

"If you don't eat it, someone else will. Are you rebelling, daring to threaten me, old woman?"

Seeing his family's food land in someone else's bowl, Gou Dan, who was already hungry, started crying "Wah."

While crying, his short legs under the table kept flailing randomly, accidentally touching the wound on his butt, hurting so much he grimaced in pain, wailing like a funeral dirge, and his cries gradually reached the third branch...

At this time, the third branch's dinner was just ready; the food was set, and the family along with Fengzi brothers gathered in one corner of the kitchen, joyful unlike the Old Mu Family's stark contrast.

The braised fish and bitter melon scrambled eggs on the table were a hot commodity; once served, everyone dug into those two dishes. In no time, they had cleared the table.

Yuanbao had eaten four bowls of rice, his belly almost ready to burst; he burped contentedly and gave Mu Shuangshuang a thumbs-up.

"Sister Shuangshuang, your food is so delicious. I've never had anything so tasty in my life; it would be great if you were my real sister."

After saying that, Yuanbao immediately realized he misspoke and sneaked a glance at his second brother, whose brows were already furrowed. Little Yuanbao quickly corrected himself. "I mean, it would be great if Sister Shuangshuang could cook for me every day."

Haha, being a sister-in-law could also mean cooking every day.

"Sure, you can come every day, and I'll cook for you every day," Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile, "but next time, don't eat excessively; it's not good for your health. Even the tastiest food needs moderation."

Yuanbao nodded eagerly. Of course, he was willing; he had to help his second brother look after Sister Shuangshuang.

After dinner, as for that tub of fish, Mu Shuangshuang felt a bit troubled. Leaving it in the yard was definitely unsafe, but if not in the yard, where could it be placed?

Other places might be too enclosed; what if the fish died?

"Shuangshuang, what's wrong?"

After dinner, Lu Yuanfeng and Yuanbao hadn't rushed to leave; Mu Shuangshuang let them rest for an incense stick's time before heading home, since it was already late.

"I'm thinking about these fish; if I leave them in the yard, there's a chance they'll get stolen."

Lu Yuanfeng also felt it was indeed a problem. He thought for a long time and finally whispered a few words into Mu Shuangshuang's ear, the two instantly reaching a mutual understanding.

At midnight, with the moon hung high, the place bathed in cold moonlight.

Except for the frogs and crickets on a summer night, most people and things had fallen asleep. Mrs. Lin crawled out of bed, holding a wooden bucket filled with half a bucket of water, prepared for the delicious little fat fish she was planning to steal.

On the other side, Mu Danian also got up from bed with the same intention — to steal the big tub of fish.

The two met by the latrine, first startled by each other, then seeing what the other held, readily opted to collaborate.

"Fifth, do you think that brat will still have the fish in the yard?" Mrs. Lin asked in a low voice.

"It's such a big tub; where else would it be but the yard? Second Sis-in-law, you're overthinking; wait till you see my skills. I guarantee to catch plenty of fat fish."

Mu Danian walked ahead, Mrs. Lin behind, and they quietly approached Shuangshuang's yard. In the yard, a wooden tub sat right in the middle with a bench under it, and as they got closer, Mrs. Lin remarked.

"Hey, this brat even managed to raise fish without making sounds."

Mu Danian also found it odd; there really wasn't a single sound, not even from fish moving around, almost as if there were no fish in the tub.

But if the fish weren't in the tub, where could they be? Surely not in the brat's room!

"Second Sis-in-law, I'll step on the bench to catch the fish, you stand by to take them, and when we divvy up, you get forty percent and I get sixty percent. How's that?"

Mu Danian thought he'd be the one catching the fish, so he should get sixty percent, whereas Mrs. Lin just stood by, so forty was generous.

"Why should I? The fish are here, why should I get less?"

"Then catch them yourself; I'm not helping you."

"Fine, I'll do it myself!" Mrs. Lin said, stepping onto the edge of the bench, hand reaching into the tub.

Mu Danian did the same; neither wanted to fall behind, both aiming to scoop out all the fish.

"Damn, what's going on? Why can't I feel the water..."

Chapter 219: Encountering the Eldest Aunt

Mu Danian and Mrs. Lin waved their hands, digging in the wooden barrel for a long time but couldn't find any water, so they had to lean further into the wood.

"That damn girl, why on earth did she put the wooden barrel so high? Just wait till I..."

Mrs. Lin muttered to herself halfway through, but as she reached out, she slipped and plunged headfirst into the barrel.

Mu Danian did the same, eager to catch the fish; he extended his upper body into the barrel, but still couldn't touch the bottom, so he reached out his hand to see what was under the barrel, and then...

There were two muffled thuds, as Mu Danian and Mrs. Lin crashed through the barrel and fell to the ground, followed by the barrel tumbling down and pinning them.

But there wasn't a drop of water splashed on Mrs. Lin and Mu Danian, as the barrel was hollow and bottomless.

Both of them reacted by letting out a howl, extremely piercing in the quiet night.

Mu Shuangshuang heard the noise and slowly opened her eyes, recognizing the sound came from her own courtyard. She sneered, and then fell back into a deep sleep.

...

...

Early next morning, before dawn, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng used the cart from yesterday to transport the fish to town, planning to sell them at a good price.

Perhaps they got up too early, as they arrived in town just as the day was dawning.

Summer mornings are the most pleasant time of day, and many people come out at this hour to buy groceries. Mu Shuangshuang targeted this timing, forgoing breakfast to get busy.

"Lu Yuanfeng, later I'll do the yelling, you just weigh the fish and collect the money, and also keep an eye on the money bag."

When doing business, the last thing you want is to encounter a pickpocket.

And Mu Shuangshuang, who specializes in catching thieves, always likes to warn those around her due to her occupational quirks.

Lu Yuanfeng considered her to be prudent and didn't ask for details.

But he took off the money bag from his back. "Shuangshuang, you handle the money. I'm afraid while weighing the fish, I'll get distracted and quote the wrong price, which will be troublesome."

"Alright, but don't rush. I'll shout!" Mu Shuangshuang placed the money bag at her chest, still reminding Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng chuckled, showing his serious expression when doing business.

"Hey, passing uncles, aunties, pretty sisters, come have a look, big and fresh fish straight from the river, selling cheap..."

Like many times before, Mu Shuangshuang loudly promoted her fish, and early in the morning, many still sleepy people followed her voice to her stall.

Just as Mu Shuangshuang thought, such a large basin of fish, with water to keep them fresh and plump, buying one wouldn't hurt.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't haggle; the fish were eight wen per jin, cheaper than others in town by a wen, naturally in demand.

"Little girl, weigh me a fish..."

"I want one too, I want one too..."

An hour passed, they sold quite a lot of fish, but their stomachs were growling.

"Fengzi, I'm a bit hungry. You keep watch, I'll buy some breakfast. What do you want to eat?"

In their haste, they hadn't eaten breakfast, and now after walking so long and shouting for so long, Mu Shuangshuang was really hungry. If she didn't replenish her energy soon, she might starve.

Lu Yuanfeng was in a similar situation, but being a man, he wouldn't mention his hunger.

"I'll eat whatever Shuangshuang eats."

"Alright, I'll go see what's good to eat."

Once Mu Shuangshuang left, Lu Yuanfeng made a few sales; everyone was easygoing, spending a dozen wen or so to buy a few jin of fish without a second thought.

Until a lady in a light pink gauze skirt, her hair adorned with bead hairpins, stopped in front of his stall.

The woman looked to be in her late twenties, her face evenly powdered, but there was a particularly strong fragrance emanating from her.

She seemed out of place with the marketplace.

This was none other than the eldest sister of the Old Mu Family who had married out, Mu Xianxian.

"Hey silly boy, how much is this fish per jin?" Mu Xianxian asked Lu Yuanfeng, eyeing the remaining fish in the barrel.

"Eight wen!"

Upon hearing the price, Mu Xianxian's face immediately darkened.

This was her first time at the marketplace since marrying, the reason being none other than her family's steward who always inflated prices.

A jin of fish, twenty wen, a jin of meat, thirty wen, he really thought Mu Xianxian was that stupid, and today she came to verify.

"Then come with me to my house and tell our steward how much this fish is per jin."

Lu Yuanfeng was puzzled but roughly understood the lady's intention.

"Madam, sorry, I need to keep doing business. If you don't buy my fish, please don't hold me up."

"Silly boy, you can eat indiscriminately, but don't talk indiscriminately. How can you say I'm holding up your business? I'm helping you do business! If you get our steward kicked out, I'll buy one of your fish."

Mu Xianxian, being in business herself, was quite shrewd, knowing buying one fish was enough to get this young man to follow her home to deal with that damn steward. Then she could save a lot of money into her own pocket.

"I'm sorry, I need to watch the stall, I really can't leave." Lu Yuanfeng was getting a bit impatient.

The person in front, like a leech, wouldn't let go as if the marketplace was her own.

Shuangshuang hadn't returned yet, so naturally, he couldn't just leave like that.

"Are you coming or not? If not, don't blame me for being rude." Mu Xianxian glared and looked down at Lu Yuanfeng. Seeing that he remained unmoved, she started to throw a tantrum.

"Folks, come see, this fish seller, charging me fifty wen per jin, when I refuse, says he'll beat me, who will save me."

Mu Xianxian had a pretty face and dressed well, spoke with elegance compared to the plainly dressed Lu Yuanfeng, so naturally, people tended to believe her.

Soon, two men who didn't understand the situation rushed over, shielding Mu Xianxian and even attempting to overturn Lu Yuanfeng's fish stall.

Lu Yuanfeng paused as he handled the fish, his fists unconsciously clenching.

This sort of incident wasn't new to him, last time Shuangshuang helped him, but now with her absent, he couldn't just let himself be bullied.

Mu Shuangshuang returned with four sticks of fried dough and two cups of iced tea, to find a commotion at the stall, with Lu Yuanfeng facing off against two men, and a brightly dressed woman hiding behind, clearly a textbook damsel in distress scene.

Without a second thought, she rushed in, waving her right hand impatiently. "Move aside, move aside, don't interfere with my business, what's the matter, what's the matter, do you think you can just steal fish in broad daylight?"

Chapter 220: Being Frivolous in Broad Daylight

The sudden appearance of Mu Shuangshuang startled the two men, and in that moment of confusion, Mu Shuangshuang handed the breakfast to Lu Yuanfeng, picked up the rag that had been used to clean the fish from the cutting board, and started waving it wildly at them.

The fishy-smelling cloth went straight for their faces, causing the two men to retreat repeatedly.

By accident, they stepped on the skirt of Mu Xianxian behind them, causing her to fall flat on the ground, her beautiful dress now covered in dirt and grime because of the messy ground.

Mu Xianxian immediately burst out in anger. "You two, you dirtied my dress, compensate me!"

The two men were taken aback, just moments ago they were helping this woman, and now she was turning against them?

Mu Shuangshuang sneered at the two bewildered men.

"Fengzi, I told you the smell here was too strong, even the fishy smell from our fish couldn't cover up that stench.

Turns out there were a few cowards trying to play heroes here, but got bitten back. Anyway, it's not fishy nor smelly anymore."

Mu Shuangshuang's crude words made the onlookers burst into laughter, and Mu Xianxian, upon hearing Shuangshuang's voice, hesitantly called out. "Shuang."

Only those who knew her called Mu Shuangshuang Shuang, and upon closer examination, she instantly remembered Mu Family's eldest aunt, Mu Xianxian.

Back when Mr. Mu went to borrow money, Mu Xianxian drove him away with thirty coins. Now, seeing Mu Zhenzhen at the marketplace, she immediately assumed the Mu family had fallen on hard times and was working as a vegetable seller.

"Aunt, aren't you the Eldest Young Madam at home, what are you doing out here? Buying vegetables?"

Mu Xianxian quickly retorted, "What a joke, our family has money and influence, we don't need to mingle with commoners for groceries. That's work for uncultured people. Yet here you are, an unmarried girl, spending all day with a man, aren't you ashamed?"

"Aunt, you're wrong there, I'm unmarried, and Fengzi isn't married either, what do others have to say?"

But you, already married and with kids, hanging around with these two strapping lads, people would truly misunderstand!

If word gets back to uncle, he might misunderstand and think you've done something unbecoming."

"You..." Mu Xianxian was infuriated, and Mu Shuangshuang's loud words let those around hear, making them point and gossip about her.

An elderly woman there directly pointed at Mu Xianxian and scolded, "Shameless hussy, flirting openly on the street, who knows whose wife she is, isn't she afraid of divine retribution!"

Once the first insult was out, the crowd quickly joined in scolding. Mu Xianxian flushed with embarrassment, glared at Mu Shuangshuang, and hastily left.

Returning home, Mu Xianxian vented her anger on her husband Cao Jianmin.

"Erzhu's father, I was so angry, that nasty girl, she dared to team up with outsiders to humiliate me."

Cao Jianmin quickly approached, holding Mu Xianxian's soft hand, slyly taking advantage to grope.

"Wife, you said you went out to check on Housekeeper Zhang, just check on him, no need to get so upset, it's bad for your health. When will we have Er Bao?"

Thinking of Er Bao, Cao Jianmin became enthusiastic. Over the years, Mu Xianxian had only given birth to one son and one daughter.

Now the eldest daughter Miao Miao was almost fifteen, at the age for marriage proposals, and the second son Erzhu nearly thirteen, yet Mu Xianxian's belly showed no signs of any more children.

If he didn't have more kids, who would inherit the family assets later?

Cao Jianmin placed his hand on the fullness of Mu Xianxian's chest, adding a little force, causing Mu Xianxian to cry out.

"Oh, you'd be the death of me, thinking such things in broad daylight. I haven't even said the important stuff."

"No rush, let's handle the more pressing matters first."

Soon, sounds that defy description rang out from Cao Jianmin and Mu Xianxian's room, the noises growing loud enough for Old Cao and his wife to hear them from a distance, leaving both displeased.

"Ugh, that Old Mu family, not a single decent person among them. Mu Dade always comes over to leech off us, yet after so many tries, still hasn't passed the exams."

Mu Xianxian almost drains my son dry, not going to the shop, just clinging to those dirty, old habits in broad daylight.

And that little brat treats our house like theirs, staying and never leaving, what sin did our Old Cao family commit?"

Old Mrs. Cao spat vigorously, her insults for the Old Mu family quite unseemly.

"Alright, you should say less. Young people are just hot-blooded, turn a blind eye, pretend you didn't see, and that's enough."

Old Sir Cao paused, clutching his teacup, only sipping after finishing his words.

"Hmph, you old fool, siding with an outsider. Haven't you taken a fancy to that hussy, or that one in the courtyard, with the airs of a miss, but born with the fate of a maid?"

Seeing the increasingly rude remarks from Old Mrs. Cao, Old Sir Cao stood up.

"I won't argue with you, women are hard to reason with, I'll go to the courtyard to check if the flowers I've tended have bloomed."

Old Sir Cao left after speaking, leaving Old Mrs. Cao to fume alone.

Meanwhile, Cao Jianmin, having just finished, still embraced Mu Xianxian's fair body, hands still taking full advantage of her.

He couldn't deny, deep down, he felt from a simple apprentice to now owning his own shoe shop, Mu Xianxian was indispensable. Without her, he'd probably still be an ignorant apprentice.

"Erzhu's father, you said your mother lets Housekeeper Zhang take advantage of us, can you tolerate that?"

"Let her be, my mom hasn't seen much of the world, just wants to keep the family's silver tight. If she can't manage the books, she'll resort to such means. By the way, you just mentioned that cheap niece of your family, how did she provoke you?"

At the mention of Mu Shuangshuang, Mu Xianxian got agitated. "I merely wanted a boy to help prove Housekeeper Zhang cooked the books, so I asked him to testify in front of your mom to humiliate Zhang properly.

Yet, he knew that nasty girl and scolded me fiercely, I lost all face."

Cao Jianmin, after hearing Mu Xianxian, understood the situation.

But before he could suggest a solution, Mu Xianxian spoke again.

"No way, I'll head to the store later to pick a few pairs of unsold shoes and find time to send them to my parents, this cannot be delayed. That nasty girl has the formula and is getting more arrogant, might even make things difficult for me if I return."

"Why don't you take Xiangxiang back with you? Aren't your parents fond of her? Let her ask for it."

It's a good thing Cao Jianmin suggested it, as it enlightened Mu Xianxian.

"Oh yes, Xiangxiang is loved as much as my big brother by our parents, with her, would they not help me?"