

Folly 271

Chapter 271: Uncle Is Coming

Mu Shuangshuang returned to her own kitchen with an extremely heavy heart. As soon as she entered, Yu Si Niang warmly greeted her.

"How's your fourth aunt? Is the matter resolved?"

Mu Shuangshuang nodded, "I've already given the meat to her and told her to also take care of her own needs. I think she will remember what I said."

"Good, now I'm relieved."

The smile finally returned to Yu Si Niang's face. The issues with the Old Mu Family's fourth branch were a constant worry for her. Every time they were bullied, it reminded her of her own past, making her sympathy inevitably come forth.

"Let's eat."

The five members of the family ate their fragrant and sweet dinner under the dim light of an oil lamp, laughing and enjoying themselves immensely. This was an experience they never had at the Old Mu Family, where everyone could eat easily and speak freely about anything they wanted.

"Mom, I noticed that there's not much rice left in the jar. I want to ask around the village to see who has rice to sell."

With a family of five, even if they didn't eat white rice and supplemented with sweet potatoes and wild vegetables, consumption was still significant. Mu Shuangshuang liked to plan ahead and store some grain at home.

Of course, buying rice in the village was cheaper, with prices at six or seven coins compared to eight coins at the town.

"Try Uncle Wang's house; they have a lot of land. But Shuangshuang, don't buy too much. Your uncle said he would come in a couple of days; he should bring us some corn and sweet potatoes. We can use more mixed grains and less rice then, to make it last longer."

Not having your own land or grain is challenging. Once you've finished one meal, you have to worry about the next.

Speaking of Shuangshuang's uncle, Mu Dashan couldn't hold back his curiosity, "Has our Sixth Brother married yet?"

Mu Dashan hadn't visited Yu Si Niang's family for years because of the workload at home, but he knew Yu Si Niang had visited recently and would know about her family's matters.

Not mentioning it was better; once it was brought up, Yu Si Niang felt saddened. Her brother, Yu Liulang, was already twenty-five and still unmarried.

The family had arranged several matches, but none had caught his eye.

"Mom, why are you so worried? You seem troubled; you can tell us anything." Mu Shuangshuang sensed something was off with Yu Si Niang and asked with concern.

"Alas, it's your uncle. He's so old now but refuses to marry or let your grandmother find a matchmaker for him to see which family has suitable girls. Finally, he found one he liked, and they didn't care about his situation, but he just wouldn't agree."

Yu Si Niang was really upset. Watching her brother grow up, it was troubling for her as an older sister to see him unmarried at such an age, even after getting married herself.

"What's the reason? Sixth Uncle must have a reason for not getting married!"

Mu Shuangshuang knew that in ancient times, unlike modern times, love matches were rare, while marriage by parental arrangement was common. If her Sixth Uncle was rejecting all matches, it seemed unusual.

"There's a reason. When he was younger, he had a fiancée, and the betrothal gifts were already given, but she ran off with a wealthy merchant from the county. Your Sixth Uncle was heartbroken and feels that wives are unreliable and will eventually leave.

So, ten years have passed, and he still can't let go of it. Whenever we bring it up, he says he's not qualified to marry in this lifetime."

Mu Shuangshuang finally understood that her uncle had been deeply hurt, becoming fearful as the saying goes, "Once bitten by a snake, one is ten years afraid of a rope."

But it's been ten years already; even the most bitter grievances should be forgotten by now.

"Mom, don't worry. Won't our uncle be coming soon? We'll all find ways to persuade him then. He'll surely relent."

Mu Dashan nodded in agreement, "Shuangshuang is right. If we put our hearts into it, I'm sure we can convince him."

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After waiting a day, Shuangshuang's uncle arrived from Yu Family Village. At that moment, Mu Shuangshuang was in the yard washing the family's clothes.

Because it wasn't his first visit, Yu Liulang arrived quietly, without alerting anyone. By the time Mu Shuangshuang noticed, there was already a strange man in the yard.

He looked at Mu Shuangshuang with eyes full of affection and a particularly warm smile on his face.

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly realized who was in front of her and quickly put down the clothes, calling out sweetly, "Uncle, you're here."

The smile on Yu Liulang's face was now completely undeniable. He came forward and looked Mu Shuangshuang up and down, constantly expressing his astonishment.

"Shuangshuang, are you really okay now?"

"I'm okay now, Uncle. Shuangshuang is all better."

"That's good to hear, your mom must be thrilled."

Mu Shuangshuang's previous condition was known to the Old Yu Family; she was always silent, timid, and would be scared to death if anyone approached her. Even her sister, trying to give Shuangshuang a bath, could make Shuangshuang cry incessantly.

But now, everything seemed normal, and Yu Liulang was extremely happy. His trip hadn't been in vain. When he brought this news back in a couple of days, his parents would be overjoyed.

While Yu Liulang was observing Mu Shuangshuang, she was also sizing up him.

Yu Liulang was tall and sturdy, with dark skin and the typical appearance of a man from a farming household. He wore an old blue-gray outfit and held a bunch of greens, likely brought from home.

"Uncle, come sit inside. Shuangshuang will finish washing the clothes and then prepare lunch."

Speaking of lunch, Mu Shuangshuang hadn't yet decided what to cook for noon; she might have to buy a pound of meat.

"Lunch isn't urgent; you go on with your work. I'll unload the things from the cart."

Yu Liulang had brought quite a few things, including sweet potatoes mentioned by his sister, the special corn from Yu Family Village, and homemade vermicelli, along with some greens.

Previously, these items delivered by the Old Yu Family ended up in Old Mrs. Mu's hands, and the third branch didn't get even half a cob of corn. After that, the Old Yu Family stopped coming.

They only hoped their daughter could eat well once a year when she returned home.

Mu Shuangshuang now noticed a rundown cart by the small side gate of the yard, with several burlap bags, seemingly filled with quite a lot.

"Let me help you!" Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward, wanting to lend a hand, but was stopped by Yu Liulang.

"Girls shouldn't do hard work; boys should be raised rough."

Yu Liulang's words amused Mu Shuangshuang, as apparently her uncle knew about raising girls to be well-cared for?

Chapter 272: Very Resilient

When Yu Liulang stuffed all the things into the kitchen for Mu Shuangshuang, Mu Shuangshuang finally had an idea of what to cook for lunch.

Homemade sweet potato noodles are best used for stewing with pork.

Moreover, Mu Shuangshuang remembered what Yu Si Niang had said: a pot of noodles with a few pieces of fatty pork is delicious.

She called Little Zhi to watch the house, and Mu Shuangshuang went to Wang Erma's house to weigh the meat, but unexpectedly, she ran into Wang Gousheng at Wang Erma's house.

Since last time when Wang Gousheng was pantsed and tied to the tree by Mu Shuangshuang, he lost face in the whole Er Gui Village, especially now that Lu Yuanbao had a group of half-grown children with him, who often found trouble with him. Wang Gousheng hated Mu Shuangshuang, the instigator, even more.

"Dad, it's this stinking woman who tied me to the tree last time. You must not sell her pork."

Wang Erma's least favorite person is Lu Yuanfeng, because Lu Yuanfeng is the village's best hunter. He always sells the game he catches at a low price to the villagers, causing Wang Erma to lose a lot of things.

Mu Shuangshuang is very close to Lu Yuanfeng, which Wang Erma also dislikes, especially after his son was tied up and exposed to everyone, making him more and more furious.

"You little brat, what do you know? Get out of the way, don't interfere with my business."

Wang Erma scolded his son nonchalantly, while putting on a smile, and gently asked, "Shuang girl, what do you want? I have freshly slaughtered pork here, very fresh. Buy more, and I will give you a discount."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't plan to buy too much. If she didn't know exactly when her uncle would come, she could actually take Little Black up the mountain to try her luck and see if there were any rabbits.

The rabbit Lu Yuanfeng gave last time, Yu Si Niang couldn't bear to eat, so she took it to town and exchanged it for silver and bought some necessary things for the family.

"Uncle Wang, just give me a pound of five-flavor pork, that's all. How much is it?"

Knowing the price of the meat, Mu Shuangshuang still asked symbolically.

"Fifteen wen per pound, I will cut the best piece for you." Wang Erma said, as he began to glide the slaughtering knife over the half piece of pork.

Mu Shuangshuang noticed that Wang Erma cut a large piece of meat, looking like twenty pounds or more, but she didn't pay much attention, thinking he might divide the meat and then cut the five-flavor pork for her separately.

Unexpectedly, Wang Erma directly placed the piece over twenty pounds on the scale, and after weighing, he said to Mu Shuangshuang: "Shuang girl, it's a total of twenty-five pounds, you owe me four hundred wen, the meat is sixteen wen per pound."

Mu Shuangshuang frowned and instantly realized she was being ripped off by a swindler forcing a sale.

"Uncle Wang, what did you say? What twenty-five pounds? I just want one pound of meat, fifteen wen should be enough."

Wang Erma sneered, slammed the slaughtering knife onto the chopping board.

"You little brat think you're playing games with me? You said twenty-five pounds, I cut it for you, dare you not take it?"

Wang Erma was ugly to begin with, with a face full of pox like stars. Now showing a grim expression, coupled with his big yellow teeth resembling gold, instantly disgusted Mu Shuangshuang to retreat three steps.

Wang Erma was confident, as he believed Mu Shuangshuang was merely a little girl easy to bully.

Once she admitted and bought his meat, he would go find Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan, asking them for money. By then, his pork would be sold, he'd have the money, and would have taught the one who humiliated his son a lesson.

"You little brat, hurry up and call your parents over to take this meat, and prepare four hundred wen for me, else you won't like what I'll do."

"Uncle Wang, this accusation is quite amusing, my family neither holds banquets nor has any major events, what would we do with so much meat?"

Just as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Wang Erma raised his voice: "Mu Shuangshuang, don't think just because your family is poor, I, Wang Erma, will let you fool me for nothing. Ask around, doesn't my reputation in selling meat mean cutting as much as ordered?"

Just then, a villager buying meat saw the scene and said meanly: "Indeed, Shuang girl, since you ordered it, you should pay for it. We are all from the same village, reputation is everything."

With the help of these bystanders, Wang Erma's expression grew more and more smug.

Mu Shuangshuang was too lazy to deal with such idiots and turned to leave.

Seeing this, Wang Erma hurriedly stepped forward to stop Mu Shuangshuang, and the previously scolded Wang Gousheng also came out, the father and son's sinister smiles were identical, clearly intending to ruin Mu Shuangshuang that day.

"Get out of my way, I said I didn't say it, and I didn't. If you keep blocking me, don't blame me for being impolite."

She had hit women before, but hitting men she hadn't done in a while, unsure if she's gotten rusty.

Wang Erma was furious. He didn't expect, in this situation, Mu Shuangshuang still wouldn't admit she ordered this much pork.

"Since you won't admit your wrongdoing, I'll teach you a lesson today as Mu Dashan."

Mu Shuangshuang sneered: "If you've got the guts, come on!"

Wang Erma raised his hand, swinging it in Mu Shuangshuang's direction, simultaneously, Wang Gousheng also swung his fist forward. But before they could get close to Mu Shuangshuang, a force scattered them, making them fall to the ground.

"Bang," two loud crashes, Wang Erma and Wang Gousheng fell with a thud, as if their buttocks were run over by a cart, painfully hurt.

Mu Shuangshuang looked at Lu Yuanfeng with joy, he had fury on his face, and looked like he wished to devour Wang Erma and Wang Gousheng.

"Lu Yuanfeng, you... you dare hit me, I tell you, I, Wang Erma, won't let this go today."

"Who allowed you to touch Shuangshuang?" Lu Yuanfeng looked down at the Wang family father and son.

"This stinking girl ordered meat but wouldn't pay, made me cut twenty-five pounds extra, if she doesn't compensate me today, I'll hit both of you together," Wang Erma said stubbornly.

"Nonsense, do you think everyone is like you, full and bored, buying so much meat for nothing? I came today to tell Shuangshuang that my family slaughtered a roe deer; whatever meat she wants today, she can have."

This was probably Lu Yuanfeng's first time swearing, but it felt anything but vulgar, instead, there was a natural dominance and charisma in his words.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but give Lu Yuanfeng a thumbs up, too domineering!

"Are you crazy, what's so great about this stinking girl that you'd help her?"

With Lu Yuanfeng's words, Wang Erma knew he couldn't use Mu Shuangshuang's greediness to eat meat and lack of money as a reason. So he unwillingly looked at Lu Yuanfeng.

"This is my business, none of your concern!"

Chapter 273: Braised Pork with Vermicelli

"I can tell you why he's helping me."

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly smiled brilliantly, then walked up to Wang Erma, and punched him right in his greasy face, turning him into a panda-eyed mess.

When she turned to look at Wang Gousheng, he was so scared that he hugged his head and hid under the pork stall.

Wang Erma was wailing alone on the ground. Mu Shuangshuang used half her strength in that punch; it's no wonder it hurt.

"Let's go, we're going back!"

Lu Yuanfeng took Mu Shuangshuang's hand, and they walked out of Wang Erma's yard. As soon as they were out, Lu Yuanfeng sternly said, "From now on, don't come here to buy meat. If you want to eat meat, we can go to town to buy it, or you can tell me in advance and I'll hunt for you in the mountains."

Lu Yuanfeng himself didn't come here much. He knew Wang Erma was hostile to him, and Wang Erma's meat was always subpar. Sometimes, he would even sell rotten meat to the villagers.

The villagers would try to return it, but he would refuse, arguing that once the meat is chopped, there's no reason to take it back.

"Alright!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded emphatically, then asked curiously, "How did you know I was here?"

Talking about this, Lu Yuanfeng's expression relaxed. "I went up the mountain and caught a deer. Originally, I intended to keep it for a few days and then take it to town to sell."

"That's why I went to your house to find you, but Little Zhi said you came here to buy meat, so I hurried over. I think we should sell the deer meat to the villagers today, not go to town!"

"What?" Mu Shuangshuang was stunned. Why sell it to the villagers?

"This way, Wang Erma's meat won't sell. When I'm selling, the villagers won't buy his meat."

"Besides, meat slaughtered on the same day is best sold the same day. Today is not cool, and even if Wang Erma's meat is soaked in water, it'll go bad."

It was the first time Mu Shuangshuang found Lu Yuanfeng to be so cunning. They immediately got to work, returning to Lu Yuanfeng's house to start butchering the deer.

Luckily, the deer Lu Yuanfeng caught this time wasn't large. It was estimated to be over fifty pounds; after cleaning, there might be twenty or thirty pounds of meat.

Mu Shuangshuang borrowed a gong and drum, and under the shade of the old willow tree in the village, she beat the gong to sell meat, quickly attracting all the villagers.

Everyone had just finished the double harvest and were weak. Plus, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng's meat was willing to be sold cheaply, so they went crazy, each grabbing half a pound, and the rest was pushed by Lu Yuanfeng on a cart to the neighboring village to sell. Mu Shuangshuang took two pounds back to make lunch.

Back in the yard, she hadn't taken the meat inside when Mu Zhenzhen rushed over.

"Shuang, what do you have in your hands? Show it to your Aunt." Mu Zhenzhen feigned ignorance.

"Aunt, are you blind? Can't you see such a big piece of meat?" Mu Shuangshuang raised her eyebrows, grumbling.

She remembered last time when Mu Zhenzhen was so rude while she was eating dumplings.

"Oh, you girl, why talk to your Aunt like that? Your Aunt was just joking with you, look at you being so stingy." Mu Zhenzhen pursed her lips, her eyes darting quickly.

"Shuang, the meat you have must be about one or two pounds, share some with your Aunt, your Aunt hasn't had a bite of meat in ages." Mu Zhenzhen lied through her teeth, not turning red or flustered.

Unfortunately, just last night, Mu Shuangshuang had sent meat to the fourth house.

"Aunt wants pork?" Mu Shuangshuang's face broke into a smile, and her tone softened a bit.

Mu Zhenzhen naturally thought there was hope. She nodded vigorously, "Mm-hmm!"

"If you want to eat, it's simple, you can buy it yourself. Fengzi's meat is fourteen wen per pound, a wen cheaper than in town."

"You..." Mu Zhenzhen was furious, this darn girl knew that her stuff had all been snatched by the mobs of Dahuo Village.

"What do you mean? If you want to eat, you have to spend money. If you don't have money, you can only watch!" After saying this, Mu Shuangshuang smugly carried the meat into her kitchen.

Little Zhi saw his sister return and let out a long breath, "Sister, Little Zhi's task is complete, can I go play with Little Black now?"

"Go on, go, but don't wander too far."

Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand. Initially, she didn't allow Little Zhi to take Little Black out, considering the black mink was worth quite a bit. What if someone with intentions saw it and stole it?

But Shuang's worry was unnecessary; several people had visited the house, seeing Little Black, and just thought it was a color-changed weasel, not realizing it was a mink.

Mu Shuangshuang stopped hiding it; the more you conceal, the more people think it's a treasure, but once you reveal it, it's no longer intriguing.

Now many villagers knew that the Third Branch of the Mu Family was raising a black weasel, dumb yet quite smart.

Mu Shuangshuang started preparing lunch. She cut half a pound of deer meat to stew with cellophane noodles. Luckily, she soaked it in hot water before going out, so now the noodles were softened; she just needed to cut the meat.

The meat for stewing noodles needed to be five-flavor pork. Luckily, Lu Yuanfeng had given her some fatty deer meat, which could pass for five-flavor pork, no problem.

The meat was cut into chunks, marinated with star anise, white wine, and ginger, then Mu Shuangshuang started the fire.

She threw down some pine tree branches, tossed in a couple of sticks, and the stove started blazing. Mu Shuangshuang boiled half a pot of water, waiting until it boiled, then scooped two ladles of hot water aside for later use.

Next, she tossed the marinated five-flavor pork into the pot, briefly blanching it, then scooped it out.

Then, she emptied the water from the pot into the swill bucket, heated the pot again, and immediately poured in rapeseed oil, followed by sliced ginger, green onions, and minced garlic, stirring until fragrant, then added the five-flavor pork to the pot to stir-fry.

The blanched five-flavor pork, after a couple of stirs in the pot, released a meat aroma, making Mu Shuangshuang's mouth almost water.

When it was nearly cooked, Mu Shuangshuang added a bit of white sugar to the pot.

White sugar was used for coloring. After adding white sugar, red braised pork turns red, and this was the time to add some white wine.

Not to mention, white wine is indeed an essential for making large dishes.

In the room, Yu Liulang smelled the aroma and couldn't resist coming out to take a look. Seeing Shuang preparing food, he approached.

"Shuang, what are you making? It smells so good, the worms in your Uncle's stomach are all being enticed."

"Pork stewed with noodles, Uncle, if you're hungry, you can go to my room and find Xiao Han to get you some snacks to tide you over."

"Hey, I was just joking, not really hungry, but your mom really likes pork stewed with noodles. You should put more noodles in it later."

Mu Shuangshuang naturally nodded, "I know, I'll do that. You better head out now, it's suffocating in here."

"Alright!" Yu Liulang left the kitchen and returned to Mu Dashan's room to continue chatting.

Chapter 274: I Want to Eat Chicken

Mu Zhenzhen returned to the Old Mu Family and exaggeratedly accused Mu Shuangshuang again.

The rest of the Old Mu Family were so angry their mouths twisted.

"Mom, where does that brat get her money from, eating meat today and tomorrow?" Mrs. Lin looked displeased, "You say she eats, fine, but why does she eat alone and doesn't share a bit with us?"

Old Mrs. Mu was even more infuriated; she, as the grandmother, doesn't enjoy any respect or filial piety.

"Who do you think you are? I, an old woman, get none, and you, a second aunt, think you'll get something? Give it up!"

Mrs. Lin's face turned blue and white.

In her heart, she couldn't help but retort; if that old woman were willing to buy those things, she wouldn't have to be envious of that brat for what she has.

"Mom, please don't say that, I just want some meat. Go buy some from Lu Yuanfeng's place, it's only fourteen coins per pound, buy two pounds, let us have a taste." Mu Zhenzhen coaxed Old Mrs. Mu, acting spoiled.

"Zhenzhen, it's not that I don't want to buy it, it's that I truly have no money left, all the money went to your brother..." Old Mrs. Mu feared Mu Dade would go hungry, so she gave him all her remaining savings, even what was supposed to be kept for her coffin, leaving nothing for buying meat.

"Brother, brother, brother, is there anyone else in your eyes besides him? He's the one going for exams, all the silver goes to him, why don't you think of us? Hmph, I'm skipping lunch, you eat by yourself!"

Mu Zhenzhen said this, stormed off angrily.

Old Mrs. Mu felt deep pain inside, wanting to chase after Mu Zhenzhen, but Mu Xiangxiang woke up, mumbling about having no shoes to wear, no clothes.

Old Mrs. Mu glanced in Mu Zhenzhen's direction, stamped her feet, and headed towards Mu Xiangxiang's room.

As soon as she left the Old Mu Family house, Mu Zhenzhen regretted it; she had nothing on her now, was she really skipping lunch?

While walking, she unexpectedly ran into Liu Wangcai.

"Zhenzhen, why are you back?" Liu Wangcai's face instantly lit up upon seeing Mu Zhenzhen suddenly appear.

A few days ago, ever since Liu Wangcai sent Mu Zhenzhen to Dahuo Village, her pretty face and slender waist kept appearing in his mind.

Unlike the pig-wife at his home, big and thick-waisted, who likes hitting people.

Every night, Liu Wangcai thought of Mu Zhenzhen, enabling him to endure doing it once with that pig-wife.

Now that Mu Zhenzhen appeared, he felt it was the heavens giving him a chance to realize his dreams, particularly since the pig-wife had returned to her parents' home these days.

"Brother Wangcai, why are you here too?"

Mu Zhenzhen similarly felt she found hope; although Liu Wangcai was disgusting, she was desperate now. If she could have a meal at his place and get some silver to replenish her cosmetics, she could doll herself up again.

Even though Mu Zhenzhen was unreliable, her taste was impeccable. She definitely wouldn't display the kind of taste her younger sister Mu Xiangxiang did; she'd never paint her face like a monkey's rear.

"I was just taking a walk, just a walk..." Liu Wangcai smiled on the surface, but in his heart, he thought about tricking her into his home.

On the other hand, Mu Zhenzhen pondered how to get Liu Wangcai to invite her voluntarily; eventually, Liu Wangcai couldn't hold back and initiated: "Zhenzhen, you haven't had lunch yet, right? I want to throw a welcoming banquet for you. We've been friends for so many years, let me make you something good to eat as a reception."

Mu Zhenzhen waited for these words, she agreed without thinking.

"That's great, but my family is making braised pork and killing a chicken today, you have to make those for me, or else I'll go home and eat."

The pork was manageable; it only cost Liu Wangcai a dozen coins, but the chicken was his pig-wife's treasure at home. If eaten, he might get skinned.

Seeing Liu Wangcai hesitate, Mu Zhenzhen swiftly stepped back a few steps. "If you don't have it, forget it, I'll go home and eat."

"No, no, no, I'll go home and kill the chicken right now!"

With the fat meat in his mouth, how could he not eat it? At worst, when the pig-wife comes back, she can give him a beating.

Thinking it this way, Liu Wangcai felt comfortable and was more determined to get some benefits from Mu Zhenzhen.

The two were very close, walking toward Liu Wangcai's house, neither noticed Little Zhi and Little Black climbing out from the bushes, watching them leave.

Little Zhi picked up Little Black, curiously asked, "Little Black, do you know why Second Aunt went to Uncle Liu's house?"

Little Black shook its head for a long time but didn't give any useful information to Little Zhi.

"I don't like Uncle Wangcai; he always looks lecherous, and the fat girl at his house is ferocious, so bad."

Little Zhi murmured to herself, unexpectedly this made Little Black stretch out its paw, slashing fiercely in the air.

Little Zhi immediately understood, she touched Little Black's head, "Good boy, if the fat girl comes out to make trouble again, I'll take you to scratch her!"

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Liu Wangcai was almost home with Mu Zhenzhen when he spotted his pig-wife's belly band and those drab underpants still hanging on the bamboo pole. Afraid Mu Zhenzhen might overthink, he hurriedly said:

"Zhenzhen, you wait here, I'll tidy up the house. You know, I haven't married, so there's no one to clean up."

Mu Zhenzhen detested dirt, she couldn't tidy her own room well, let alone others'; she wasn't interested in cleaning or looking.

She merely waved her hand, "Quick, go on, it's best to kill the chicken as well, I can't stand the sight of blood."

"Got it, right away!"

Liu Wangcai rushed into his house like a whirlwind, tidying up the woman's clothes on the bamboo pole, fearing they'd be discovered, packaged the garments, and placed them on the roof of the outhouse, planning to bring them inside once Mu Zhenzhen left.

As soon as he left, a flock of birds flew by, dropping quite a bit of bird droppings on the clothes.

Liu Wangcai hurried to the chicken coop, grabbed a plump chicken, slaughtered and bled it, boiled some water, then called for Mu Zhenzhen.

Mu Zhenzhen didn't look around as Liu Wangcai expected; instead, she focused on the chicken, urging Liu Wangcai to hurry up and cook.

"Wangcai, if you finish cooking within the hour, I'll give you something good."

Liu Wangcai looked Mu Zhenzhen up and down; he figured the "good thing" in her words was nothing but herself.

Thus, he worked even faster, soon plucking the chicken feathers, and putting it in the pot to stew.

The rice was ready, Liu Wangcai planned to do something else, and he said to Mu Zhenzhen, who kept an eye on the stove: "Zhenzhen, are you tired? How about I take you to rest for a while?"

Mu Zhenzhen rolled her eyes, "It's not even noon yet, rest for what? Also, didn't you say you'd weigh the meat? Where is it? Without meat, I'll leave!"

She appeared ready to get up, Liu Wangcai feared her departure at that moment would make his slaughtered chicken go to waste, so he hastily said: "I...I'll go buy it now, please don't leave!"

Chapter 275: So Considerate

Lu Yuanfeng roamed the streets and alleys, finally selling the roe deer meat. Unfortunately, no one bought the remaining roe deer legs and innards; otherwise, he could have made a decent sum.

Now, he could only take everything back and ask Shuangshuang for advice on how to handle it. There's quite a lot, and certainly can't be finished in one meal; he couldn't just leave it to rot.

Upon arriving home, Lu Yuanfeng noticed a slender girl under the eaves of his house, gazing in his direction. Upon seeing him, she approached with a radiant smile.

"Fengzi, you're back just in time! Hurry and tidy up, then let's go to the house for dinner. I've sent Yuanbao ahead; we're the last ones left."

"Shuangshuang, how long have you been waiting here?"

"Not long, about the time it takes to burn a stick of incense," Mu Shuangshuang replied candidly.

Lu Yuanfeng's ears instantly turned red. He nodded, secretly taking a glance at Shuangshuang. He realized that today's Shuangshuang seemed different somehow; he couldn't pinpoint exactly what was different, but she definitely looked a bit prettier.

"Why do you keep staring at me?" Mu Shuangshuang paused while helping Lu Yuanfeng to carry things and asked.

She knew she looked quite nice, but being stared at like this continuously, was it really okay?

Lu Yuanfeng was unaware of Mu Shuangshuang's inner thoughts, but getting caught peeking made him feel embarrassed. So he just spoke his mind, "I think you look prettier than before, and especially different today."

The moment Lu Yuanfeng finished speaking, Mu Shuangshuang took a careful look at herself. Her clothes were still those old ones, nothing particularly attractive.

The shoes were the same too; the only change was that when she woke up this morning, she switched her fringe from a half-and-half parting to a three-seven parting.

So, a hairstyle is really important?

"You have good taste; I changed my hairstyle today, made a slight change," Mu Shuangshuang pointed at the top of her head, pretending to be proud.

Following her hand movement, Lu Yuanfeng's gaze landed on top of her head. He looked greedily at the person before him. Only now could he openly look at the girl in front of him; at other times, he could only sneak glances.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't feel pitiful. On the contrary, he felt fortunate because the one he liked was right in front of him. Even if she didn't know, he would cherish her until... until she finds someone she likes.

"Let's go, we've delayed for quite a while. I wonder how the pot of stewed pork with vermicelli is doing." Mu Shuangshuang said, pretending to drool.

Lu Yuanfeng responded quietly, "But how should we deal with the unsold items?"

Regarding food, Lu Yuanfeng was quite clueless. Previously, he used to roast rabbits or kill wild chickens, which he and Yuanbao could only eat for two meals at most.

If they couldn't finish it, he would send some to his grandparents, and sometimes when a few uncles came visiting, he would give them some too.

Ever since Xia Guagua caused trouble several times, he had been reluctant to visit.

"Just leave it for now, I'll come over later and turn all of it into marinated meat, and add a little bit of my homemade chili oil."

Mu Shuangshuang had long planned to make marinated meat; it's tasty and can be stored for a bit longer. Now that she had the ingredients, she decided to try it, letting Lu Yuanfeng taste it.

"Okay!" Lu Yuanfeng finally relaxed, carrying the items from the wheelbarrow into the kitchen, locking it carefully.

Maybe it was the shadow caused by Xia Guagua last time. Now, except when it's just him and Yuanbao at home, he would always lock the door to prevent anything from getting stolen again.

The courtyard walls were mostly done; wait a few days more and he could finish them. It's just uncertain if Xia Guagua would climb over them, since the walls were quite low.

After tidying things up at home, Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang went to Shuangshuang's house together.

At this point, Mu Shuangshuang's family meal was already on the table. Everyone gathered around, waiting for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Once the two entered, everyone started serving dishes and dividing bowls and chopsticks. Soon, the two were seated.

Yu Liulang had a bowl of alcohol in front of him. He lifted the bowl and declared to everyone, "I, Yu Liulang, am happy today. My sister's life is getting better, and my niece has come to her senses. I'll drink first as a toast."

After speaking, he gulped down half a bowl of liquor, immediately causing his face to turn half red.

"Lao Liu, drink less; otherwise, you'll be uncomfortable again when you get drunk," his sister, Yu Si Niang, couldn't help but scold seeing her brother drinking so much all at once.

"Sis, I'm happy today. What's wrong with drinking a bit? Besides, make the most out of joyous occasions because who knows if there will be a chance to drink again."

When Yu Liulang said this, there was a hint of bitterness in his eyes, which was easily caught by everyone.

"Mom, it's a joyous day, let my uncle drink a bit. Anyway, he won't be going back today; he can sleep over if he's drunk."

Mu Shuangshuang had her own plan, so she didn't stop Yu Liulang from drinking.

Yu Liulang was satisfied after hearing Mu Shuangshuang's words. "Still my niece takes care of me, come, uncle will serve you some food!"

Yu Liulang served Mu Shuangshuang a long string of vermicelli, filling her already overflowing bowl completely.

"Enough, everyone, don't just sit there, eat! Fengzi, Yuanbao, eat more; my uncle is not an outsider, you can treat him as family."

Although Yu Liulang wasn't familiar with Lu Yuanfeng and Yuanbao, Mu Shuangshuang clearly sensed a bit of unfamiliarity between them.

With Mu Shuangshuang's words, Lu Yuanfeng began to eat. He was particularly humble, reaching for the vegetables in front of him multiple times, but never touching the chili stir-fry meat and stewed pork with vermicelli.

Even so, he still ate happily.

Mu Shuangshuang stood up, took Lu Yuanfeng's half-eaten bowl, filled it with vermicelli, braised pork, and chili fry meat, giving him a full bowl.

"Don't just eat vegetables. As I said, we're all family, so there's no need to hold back."

Lu Yuanfeng's mouth curled into a bright smile as he nodded, "I know, but I actually like the vegetables more; they taste sweet."

Yuanbao, beside them, rolled his eyes and added, "Sister Shuangshuang, serve my brother more food; my brother is quite shy."

"Haha, Yuanbao, are you worried your brother will go hungry? Rest assured, sister will complete the task." Mu Shuangshuang playfully responded, serving more food to Lu Yuanfeng.

Soon, Lu Yuanfeng's bowl was piling up like a small hill.

"Yuanbao, eat more and talk less." Lu Yuanfeng couldn't bear to let Shuangshuang not serve him more food, so he only reprimanded Yuanbao.

"Alright, brother, eat quickly. Don't be shy; Sister Shuangshuang needs to eat too, she can't always serve you food."

"You..."

Chapter 276: The Toad Wants to Eat Swan Meat

Yuanbao, known for trapping his brother, continued to trap Lu Yuanfeng tightly as always.

Lu Yuanfeng's face turned red from embarrassment due to his words, but Yuanbao himself seemed pleased, smiling slyly like a cat that had stolen fish.

During the meal, the group laughed out loud, feeling extremely content.

Meanwhile, at the Old Mu Family's dinner table, which was also during a meal, the atmosphere was somewhat depressed; everyone looked like frustrated women with a belly full of grievances.

"That old fool, what are you glaring at? You really think that Yu Si Niang's poor brother will come to see you!"

Old Mrs. Mu shouted at Mr. Mu, who was eating but still looking around casually.

Yu Liulang had arrived, and Mr. Mu learned about it just before lunch.

As a younger member of the in-law's side, Mr. Mu felt Yu Liulang should come over to greet him, not necessarily with many gifts, but at least with verbal greetings, as he was a senior and related to Old Yu Family through marriage.

"Why not? Isn't he supposed to come see me? I'm the elder; he's the junior, he has to respect me. Plus, Dade is about to become a scholar, and soon they won't be able to curry favor with me even if they wanted to."

Ever since Mu Dade went off for exams and farm work decreased, Mr. Mu found himself with more leisure time, developing a habit of overthinking, constantly feeling disrespected by others.

Just yesterday, he argued with others in the village over this matter.

Despite that, Mr. Mu still didn't think he was wrong.

"Forget it, they never treat you like an elder; otherwise, why would the third branch split off? I saw him pulling a cart over, maybe he brought lots of food.

But what does it matter? Once that stuff gets to the third branch, it becomes theirs with that protective brat around, we won't get a single morsel."

Old Mrs. Mu said sourly, having initially seen Yu Si Niang's brother, thinking she'd have a good meal today, but it was like a toad dreaming of eating swan meat, a foolish delusion.

"What is this thing? It tastes awful, I'm not eating it." Mu Xiangxiang took a bite of fried cucumber from her bowl, angrily throwing her utensils down on the table.

Turning to Old Mrs. Mu, she said, "Mom, I want meat, eating vegetarian every day makes my mouth bland. I don't even know why I came back; at my eldest sister's house, at least I can eat and drink well every day, which is way better than at home."

Old Mrs. Mu felt troubled; she had forced Xiangxiang's eldest sister for money last time, already being sternly told that unless Dade succeeds in his exams, no one is allowed to go to her house anymore.

"Mom, we still have some chickens at home, why don't you kill one? Otherwise, how do we continue living like this? My second sister even ran away from home due to the lack of food."

Mu Danian chimed in, only to end up being scolded by Old Mrs. Mu.

"Zhenzhen just went for a walk, how does that count as running away? If you're unhappy with the food, don't eat at home. Keep complaining, and get out!"

Mu Danian, after being scolded, picked up his bowl and slipped away to squat outside.

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Liu Wangcai went to Wang Erma's house in the village to buy a pound of meat, but got delayed chatting with familiar faces on the way back, eventually returning about half an hour later.

He rushed into the house, muttering, "Zhenzhen, I brought the meat back, are you still home?"

He called out several times without getting a response, and when he charged into the kitchen, he found Mu Zhenzhen sipping soup from a large bowl.

The table was covered in the remnants of chicken bones, and the pot, once full with a whole chicken, now had not even scraps left, let alone the delicious soup.

Burp Mu Zhenzhen set down the large bowl, letting out a satisfied belch.

"It's really nice, the feeling of eating a whole chicken by oneself!" She casually grabbed a cloth to wipe her mouth clean and told Liu Wangcai, "Wangcai, I've finished the chicken, clean up later. I was planning to cook braised meat, but waited so long and you didn't come back."

Liu Wangcai's eyes widened; looking at the scraps, he felt heartbroken, realizing that even the washing water from the pot hadn't been left, all devoured by Mu Zhenzhen.

"What's the matter? You surely won't begrudge the money, right?" Mu Zhenzhen's face changed, adding a touch of disdain to her gaze at Liu Wangcai.

She believed, since Liu Wangcai invited her, he had to provide for her meals, and his reluctant attitude now made her wonder what his intentions were.

"No, I'm willing, I'm willing, I'll buy whatever you want." Liu Wangcai replied, looking guilty.

"Really? You're not tricking me?" Mu Zhenzhen looked at Liu Wangcai skeptically.

"Really!"

"I don't believe it; I know Liu Wangcai's type clearly. You were stingy as a child, hiding even a piece of malt sugar. You're lying now, right?" Mu Zhenzhen deliberately mocked Liu Wangcai.

Her previous plan was to eat well, then trick him for money, and having eaten, it was time to deceive for money.

Having childhood issues revealed, Liu Wangcai felt naturally embarrassed, so he dashed into the room, grabbed the pottery jar, and placed it on the table.

"This is the money I saved, if you agree to my conditions, it's all yours."

Liu Wangcai wasn't really intent on giving Mu Zhenzhen the money, he just thought that if anything happened between himself and Zhenzhen, the money would eventually come back.

Mu Zhenzhen stepped forward and shook the jar lightly, finding it quite heavy, her face glowing with happiness.

"Got it, got the Silver, now I believe your generosity. As for the meat, I'll take it home, I haven't eaten braised meat for lunch today."

Picking up the pound of meat from the table, Mu Zhenzhen was ready to leave, when Liu Wangcai decided it was time, stepped forward, and shut the kitchen door.

"What are you doing? Liu Wangcai, are you regretting the money or the pound of meat?" Mu Zhenzhen looked suspiciously.

At this moment Liu Wangcai revealed his true colors, his gaze towards Mu Zhenzhen no longer concealed, he said to Mu Zhenzhen, still puzzled, "Zhenzhen, whatever you want to eat, I'll make, and I've given you money too, now what I want, you should give as well, right?"

"What do you want?" Mu Zhenzhen clutched the money jar, hiding the meat behind her.

"You know what I want, don't you? I liked you since I was a child, back then you looked down on me, but now it's different, I'm capable of providing for you, if you're with me, you'd be assured of eating well and living in abundance."

With words spoken to this point, Mu Zhenzhen understood, Liu Wangcai's generosity aimed for more with her.

"Pah! You're a stinking toad wanting to eat swan meat, don't you take a look at yourself, covered in sores, leaking pus, yet dare touch me, Mu Zhenzhen? I'm warning you, if you don't open the door, I'll shout."

Liu Wangcai's face flushed red; although he was ugly, that didn't mean he was open to such humiliation.

"Wretch, shout if you dare, I'll let everyone know it was you who seduced me!"

Chapter 277: Visit Fengzi's House More Often

"Pah, me seducing you? I must be blind. Even if I chose a pig, it would be better than choosing someone as ugly as you!"

Liu Wangcai's word "bitch" thoroughly angered Mu Zhenzhen, and she cursed at Liu Wangcai without holding back.

Liu Wangcai also got angry. He rushed towards Mu Zhenzhen step by step, drool already dripping from his mouth.

Mu Zhenzhen hurriedly retreated, and suddenly she was next to the dining table, where she saw the big soup bowl she had eaten from earlier.

She put down the piece of meat in her hand, picked up the big soup bowl, and fiercely smashed it on Liu Wangcai's head.

With a "clang," Liu Wangcai's head was broken, and blood flowed profusely.

He looked at Mu Zhenzhen in disbelief, opened his mouth, and felt dizzy, before ultimately collapsing in front of Mu Zhenzhen.

Mu Zhenzhen was startled, her hands trembling uncontrollably. If people found out that she beat someone like this, she wouldn't be able to escape responsibility.

If he died, she might even face a lawsuit.

"What do I do now? What do I do?" Mu Zhenzhen fretted in circles, her hands, feet, and body shaking simultaneously, her mind a complete muddle.

Just then, outside the courtyard, Liu Wangcai's mother suddenly called his name.

"Wangcai, when Guihua left, she wanted me to remind you to prepare dinner for her return. Also, remember the kids need to eat meat, so don't forget to get some!"

Hearing Old Mrs. Liu's words outside, Mu Zhenzhen realized Liu Wangcai never had good intentions from the start; he wasn't being sincere or kind to her.

"Liu Wangcai, Liu Wangcai, turns out you're just a fraud. You made me think this beast really had feelings for me."

The immediate consequence of anger being replaced by fright was Mu Zhenzhen crouching down and slapping Liu Wangcai's face viciously. With a series of slaps, her hand was covered in blood before she released him.

After cleaning her hands, Mu Zhenzhen grabbed the money jar and the meat from the table and rushed out of Liu Wangcai's house.

When she returned home, Old Mrs. Mu greeted her with concern.

"Zhenzhen, where did you go? Why are you only coming back now? I've saved some food for you, it's in the pot. Do you want me to bring it out?"

"Mom, I'm not hungry. This is the meat I bought; cook it tonight and save some for me. I'll eat it when I come back."

Only then did Old Mrs. Mu notice the meat in Mu Zhenzhen's hand, and she immediately started salivating.

"This must have cost a lot, Zhenzhen. Where did you get the money to buy meat?"

Old Mrs. Mu remembered when her daughter was sent home, she hadn't brought back even a single piece of clothing. If she hadn't saved some clothes before leaving to wear later, she probably wouldn't have any now.

"Mom, what do you mean, can't I have money? Only that brat from the third branch gets to eat well while I have to eat scraps?"

Mu Zhenzhen got angry, glared at Old Mrs. Mu with discontent, tossed the meat onto her lap, and went into her room.

Back in her room, she poured out all the money from the money jar and counted it carefully.

Oh my, with the silver and copper coins alone, there's as much as three taels. Mu Zhenzhen thought about how she hadn't bought clothes or rouge in a long time, quickly tidied herself up, found a cow cart at the village entrance, and went to town for shopping.

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After lunch, Mu Shuangshuang and Yu Si Niang were busy tidying the kitchen, while Lu Yuanfeng helped to bring the drunken Yu Liulang into Mu Dashan's room.

There weren't enough rooms at Shuangshuang's house, so at night, Mu Dashan and Yu Liulang would sleep together, while Yu Si Niang squeezed in bed with Mu Shuangshuang.

Once Lu Yuanfeng settled Yu Liulang, and came out, Mu Shuangshuang had finished cleaning up the dishes and was making pig feed.

Half a bucket of pig feed was prepared; Lu Yuanfeng noticed there were wild vegetables, rice bran, and some leftover food from lunch.

He quickly went up to help Mu Shuangshuang lift the pig feed bucket.

"Shuangshuang, go rest. Cooking and working must have made you tired."

Mu Shuangshuang was indeed a bit tired, but she didn't rest and followed Lu Yuanfeng to the pigsty.

In the pigsty, the piglets were already squealing non-stop from hunger.

As soon as Lu Yuanfeng approached, the piglets started climbing the pen. Unfortunately, their bodies were too small, and after several attempts, they couldn't get up, making Mu Shuangshuang burst out laughing.

"You know what, raising pigs is quite amusing," Mu Shuangshuang said with a sigh. "Though three meals a day must be on time."

When she's home, Mu Shuangshuang doesn't spend much time there; usually, it's Yu Si Niang feeding them.

"If you don't have time, I'll come and feed them!" Lu Yuanfeng said directly without thinking.

"Haha, Fengzi, what silly things are you saying? Feeding the pigs is just a few steps away; you have to walk much farther. Don't worry, I can handle this."

"Okay!"

While the two were chatting enthusiastically, Yu Si Niang suddenly appeared and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, didn't you say you needed to help Fengzi with something? Why haven't you gone? Don't keep him waiting."

Lu Yuanfeng quickly waved his hand: "Aunt Four, I'm not in a hurry, Shuangshuang is tired, let her rest."

"Fengzi, don't worry about Shuangshuang. She can rest at your place too," Yu Si Niang said, sounding a bit impatient, as if she couldn't wait for Mu Shuangshuang to leave.

Lu Yuanfeng stood awkwardly, not knowing how to react, and looked at Mu Shuangshuang for help.

"Since Mom wants me to go out, I'll go. Anyway, Mom can't wait for me to leave," Mu Shuangshuang said, pouting with a sad look.

Yu Si Niang was alarmed and quickly explained, "I didn't mean it like that, I just don't want Fengzi waiting too long. Why would you misunderstand me, child?"

"Mom, I'm just joking!" Mu Shuangshuang, seeing Yu Si Niang worried, quickly grinned widely and reassured her.

Yu Si Niang glared at Mu Shuangshuang, but she was no longer panicked.

This girl simply doesn't understand her thoughts; she just wants her daughter to spend more time with Fengzi, since feelings need time to grow. If they never stay together, how could a relationship possibly develop?

"Mom, go take a nap. I'm off to Fengzi's. When Uncle wakes up, ask him to drink more water and don't let him go far; I have matters to discuss with him."

"Alright, you and Fengzi be safe on the road, walk under the shade and don't get sunburned."

Yu Si Niang tirelessly instructed Mu Shuangshuang, walking alongside her and Lu Yuanfeng for quite a while, only returning when their silhouettes faded in the distance.

Yu Si Niang sighed, "These blockheads, who knows if it'll work out. If it does, I can start preparing early!"

Chapter 278: Very Seductive

Here, Mu Shuangshuang followed Lu Yuanfeng back to his house, without taking a break, the two started cleaning up the leftover things from midday.

To make braised meat, quite a few ingredients are needed. Fortunately, they are not hard to come by, and Lu Yuanfeng's family has most of them.

Mu Shuangshuang was busy preparing ingredients in Lu Yuanfeng's kitchen, while Lu Yuanfeng was beside her helping wash various items to be braised.

The two cooperated extremely well. By the time Mu Shuangshuang had all the ingredients ready, the ginger, garlic, and scallions were properly chopped, and Lu Yuanfeng had washed most of the odd bits left from the roe deer.

The most troublesome thing at this moment was the intestines, requiring both wine and vinegar, and if it wasn't for Shuangshuang's guidance, Lu Yuanfeng would have been quite confused.

While Lu Yuanfeng was still battling, Mu Shuangshuang had already started the fire to prepare the braised meat.

She set Lu Yuanfeng's rapeseed oil aside and waited for the iron pot to heat up, then started putting in rapeseed oil. Once the oil was hot, she began adding five-spice, Sichuan pepper, ginger, garlic, and scallions. This frying of the spices could attract a crowd with its fragrance alone.

Gu Jiulian had just had lunch and planned to visit the outhouse, relieve herself, and then take a nap. Unexpectedly, while squatting, she caught a whiff of a peculiar fragrance, so enticing that even though she was full, it made her mouth water.

As she squatted, she couldn't help but wonder what could possibly smell so good. Gu Jiulian hastily grabbed a nearby wooden stick, wiped her behind, and followed the scent, eventually stopping at the door of Lu Yuanfeng's kitchen.

"Fengzi, what delicious things are you making? Let me have a taste, the aroma is making my mouth water."

Gu Jiulian went straight up, staring at the things in Lu Yuanfeng's hands over and over again.

"Wow, these are roe deer legs, intestines. Fengzi, you went hunting again, why not send a little to your grandma, eating alone here."

Gu Jiulian chattered endlessly like a fly, and Lu Yuanfeng ignored her because this wasn't the first time Gu Jiulian had come. Every time she came, she would speak a pile of unpleasant words and then take this and that.

Sometimes, when Lu Yuanfeng wasn't around, she would take things directly without saying a word.

Even salt jars, oil, and vinegar could be found in her kitchen.

When Lu Yuanfeng ignored her, Gu Jiulian turned to nag Mu Shuangshuang.

"Isn't this Old Mu Family's third daughter's girl? She's getting prettier as she grows. It's true that clothes make the man. Before, your stinky appearance smelled worse than the shit in the outhouse."

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes but didn't stop her hand from putting the meat into the pot.

"You, girl, why do you come here to Fengzi every day? Cooking for him, washing his clothes, could it be that you two have something?"

Gu Jiulian looked at Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng with excitement, her eyes full of gossip.

"Aunt Nine, you chatter all alone, don't you get tired? My ears hurt just listening. What do you mean me and Fengzi have something? What do you mean I wash his clothes, which eye of yours saw me washing his clothes?"

Mu Shuangshuang tightened the spatula in her hand; she really had no feelings for Lu Yuanfeng's stepmother. She knew clearly that Lu Yuanfeng didn't like her, yet she kept pushing her way in.

Not only that, she always wanted to take advantage of it. Truly shameless to the extreme.

"You, girl, why speak so harshly? What do you mean I chatter? Isn't it your constant closeness with Fengzi? If there was nothing, why stick together every day?"

Gu Jiulian wasn't really aiming to say bad things about Mu Shuangshuang, she just wanted to put a blame on Mu Shuangshuang to get Fengzi to give her good food.

It wasn't her first time doing this anyway.

"What has it got to do with you? I do as I please, I go to whichever house I want, but you, why come to Fengzi's house if you have nothing to do? Stealing things? Or trying to steal food?"

"Hey, you ill-mannered brat, dare to speak to me like that."

Gu Jiulian angrily rolled up her sleeves, ready to fight Mu Shuangshuang. Lu Yuanfeng stood up and pushed Gu Jiulian away.

"Don't come here looking for trouble, I have nothing for you, and even if I did, I'd rather feed it to a dog than support you, you lazy bug," Lu Yuanfeng said coldly.

"Fine! Lu Yuanfeng, you ungrateful thing, if your brother Lu Yuanbao hadn't been raised by me for five years, he'd have starved to death. And you still hope to rely on your gambler dad, dream on!"

"Shut up, don't mention Yuanbao again. If he hadn't been cared for by my grandma during those years you took him, do you think he would still be alive? If Yuanbao hadn't survived, I would've killed you already."

Lu Yuanfeng roared, stepping forward to Gu Jiulian, grabbing her collar, then walked a few steps and threw her out.

Almost simultaneously, Mu Shuangshuang brought a basin of water she used to wash the roe deer intestines to the kitchen door. Just as Gu Jiulian opened her mouth to curse, she splashed the filthy water onto her.

Gu Jiulian screamed in fright, her nose catching the stinky smell of excrement.

"You... you dirty brat, what did you splash on me? It's so stinky!"

Mu Shuangshuang curled her lips: "Poop. Aunt Nine, is your nose a problem, or your eyes a problem? A big basin of poop was splashed on you, and you didn't know?"

Gu Jiulian's face turned green with anger, stomping furiously and spat towards Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Wretched couple, scoundrels, you'll regret this!"

"Fengzi, bring me a bowl of the freshly brewed broth. I'm making pig's hair today."

"Okay!" Lu Yuanfeng turned into the kitchen, sensing Lu Yuanfeng's wrong stance, Gu Jiulian bolted.

She dashed straight into her house, quickly shut the door, and after a long while, realizing Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang hadn't followed her, she relaxed.

"Stinky girl ruined a perfectly good piece of clothing!"

Gu Jiulian cursed vigorously, and inside, freshly awakened Xia Guagua couldn't help but step forward to ask: "Mom, what happened to you? Why do you smell bad all over, did you fall into the outhouse?"

"Bah, it's all because of that Lu Yuanfeng and that stinky thing from the Old Mu Family. What's so good about him? You follow him around and he nearly killed me."

Hearing Mu Shuangshuang was there, a shadow flashed across Xia Guagua's eyes.

"Mom, Brother Yuanfeng wasn't like this before. I remember when we first came, he'd bring us good things, it's that woman who's brainwashed him, it's that woman's fault."

"You're so grown yet you're no better than a waste! Can't even handle a man! Mu Shuangshuang's a stinky girl who's uglier and poorer than you, yet she knows to help Lu Yuanfeng cook and wash, please him. Why can't you go do these things?"

Chapter 279: One Wife Serving Two Husbands

"You think I haven't tried? Laundry, cooking, I've done everything, but he doesn't even look at me, what can I do?"

Xia Guagua's face changed slightly, her tone also filled with resentment.

Especially at this moment, Gu Jiulian was adding fuel to the fire.

"That's because you're useless, you can't blame others. If you were shameless like that little girl, wouldn't you be the one in Fengzi's kitchen now?"

"Alright, you only know how to criticize me. Aren't you the same, unable to control your gambling husband? Now we're like crows perched on a coal pile, no one is better than the other!"

After Xia Guagua finished speaking, she ignored Gu Jiulian's twisted face and went straight back to her room.

After a while, she freshened up, changed into her best new dress, and adorned her hair with a pretty hairpin.

Gu Jiulian changed into clean clothes, and when she saw her daughter all dressed up, she assumed she was going to Lu Yuanfeng's place and didn't stop her.

Xia Guagua left her yard and headed towards Wang Fugui's house, coincidentally bumping into Wang Fugui who was also going out.

Wang Fugui wouldn't let a beauty who comes to his doorstep go to waste, so he pulled Xia Guagua into an abandoned house in the village, shut the door, and forcefully kissed her, leaving Xia Guagua's face covered in saliva.

"Oh, little minx, last time you resisted so fiercely, why are you so compliant today? Have you fallen for big brother?"

Xia Guagua didn't speak, staring straight ahead, and after a while, tears streamed down her face like water.

"You said you'd help me deal with Mu Shuangshuang, but she's still fine. Didn't you say you like me? If you like me, help me this time, alright? After this, I'll listen to whatever you say..."

Seeing the tearful person in front of him, Wang Fugui felt a pang in his heart; it was the first time he ever felt this way.

"Alright, I owe you this time. Take this and mix it into Lu Yuanfeng's food. After he eats it, you can do whatever you want with him."

Wang Fugui took out a small white porcelain bottle and handed it to Xia Guagua.

"What do you mean? I asked you to deal with Mu Shuangshuang, why are you dragging Lu Yuanfeng into this?" Xia Guagua furrowed her brows and asked unhappily.

"Big brother has seen more women than you've eaten salt. Do you think I don't know what you feel for the Lu Family's boy?"

You like him and want to be with him, right? With this, I guarantee he'll marry you. But from now on, you'll have to serve two husbands."

Wang Fugui's words were extremely lascivious, yet Xia Guagua was tempted.

She didn't want to really serve Wang Fugui, but was thinking about how to make Wang Fugui and Mu Shuangshuang disappear together.

"Here's the deal, I'll drug Yuanfeng in three days, and the next morning, you find someone from the village with the loudest voice to come over. Once Yuanfeng agrees to marry me, I'll give myself to you!"

"That would be perfect. The Lu Family's boy marries a wife and I'll have a warm bed."

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Mu Shuangshuang put the last piece of roe deer intestine into the pot, covered the lid, while Lu Yuanfeng cooperatively added firewood to the stove.

Perhaps it was because of what Gu Jiulian said earlier, but Lu Yuanfeng's gaze was fixed intently on Mu Shuangshuang, filled with warmth yet mixed with other emotions.

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't take being stared at anymore, so she spoke up, "Fengzi, I didn't take what Gu Jiulian said to heart at all, don't worry, I won't distance myself from you because of this."

Lu Yuanfeng didn't have many friends, Da Hu and Da Niu counted, but the two brothers often traveled around for a living, and the times when they weren't around were far more than when they were.

Similarly, Mu Shuangshuang had no friends. Besides the two kids at home, a pet, there were only Lu Yuanfeng and his two brothers.

Lu Yuanfeng felt his throat tighten, the words he wanted to say were swallowed back.

"Fengzi, the braised meat needs to cook for about a half hour. Remember to remove it yourself later. I'm a little tired."

After hustling all morning, Mu Shuangshuang wanted to find a place to rest. She rubbed her sleepy eyes, occasionally nodding off.

Lu Yuanfeng, seeing this, was extremely distressed, looking at Shuangshuang with a worried expression: "Why don't you... rest at the hill behind? Yuanbao cleaned it up, laid out a cool mat. He usually takes naps there at noon, but today he's playing with some kids, I doubt he'll come back."

Lu Yuanfeng wanted Shuangshuang to rest in his own room more, but considering Shuangshuang was a girl, losing his reputation didn't matter; hers did!

Mu Shuangshuang felt dizzy and it seemed a bit difficult to walk back, so she agreed without hesitation.

Following Lu Yuanfeng up the hill, the vegetation behind his house was quite simple – bamboo and fir trees. From the base to halfway up the hill, it was all bamboo. Maybe because Yuanbao often came up, there was a small, clean path.

Halfway up the hill, a straw mat was laid to one side, Lu Yuanfeng laid it out for Mu Shuangshuang, wiped it with hot water, and while she slept, he was beside her splitting bamboo for chopsticks and bamboo brushes.

Bamboo brushes are even better for scrubbing pots than loofah gourds, but making them by splitting bamboo into strips required skill.

Fortunately, Lu Yuanfeng's craftsmanship was good; with a carving knife and a bamboo tube, within the time of a stick of incense, the bamboo turned into a bamboo brush.

When Mu Shuangshuang woke up, the ground was already filled with a bunch of bamboo chopsticks and six or seven bamboo brushes.

The first thing she did upon waking was to pick up the items, examining them from every angle.

Mu Shuangshuang knew bamboo brushes, and in the modern world, one could sell for several bucks; as for ancient times, whether they're valuable, she didn't know.

Without a doubt, the joy Mu Shuangshuang exhibited made Lu Yuanfeng very happy – he felt his efforts hadn't been in vain.

"Shuangshuang, take these bamboo brushes and chopsticks home, use them in the house. I don't know when I'll make more next time."

Lu Yuanfeng wiped the sweat off his forehead. He hadn't rested the whole afternoon, yet there wasn't a trace of fatigue on his face, indistinguishable from someone who had just woken up.

Mu Shuangshuang stared at Lu Yuanfeng for a long time before curiously asking, "Fengzi, why are you so good to me?"

Buying fabric for her, giving her things, even helping with gardening.

Why?

Because of affection, because of love, because I can't bear to see you suffer!

Lu Yuanfeng recited silently in his heart, but the answer that came out was different: "Because Shuangshuang is also good to me, always inviting me over for meals, and... you take good care of Yuanbao."

"Oh!" Hearing this answer, Mu Shuangshuang felt a bit disappointed in her heart, as if this wasn't the answer she was hoping for.

But soon, Mu Shuangshuang rallied. "Fengzi, I think there's something we can do on this mountain!"

Chapter 280: Getting Married

"What's going on?" Lu Yuanfeng came over, curiously asking.

"Raising chickens, you see, with such a big space, raising a few dozen chickens should be quite nice."

Mu Shuangshuang had seen others raising chickens on their own hills in the past, producing wild local chickens that were ridiculously expensive. However, back in the old days, it was all naturally sourced, so there weren't so many concerns.

But if some effort was put into the chickens, they might sell for a bit more.

"Fengzi, have you ever heard of medicinal cuisine chicken?" Mu Shuangshuang blinked, asking with a mysterious look.

Lu Yuanfeng shook his head, "No, raising chickens is just raising chickens, I've never heard of medicinal cuisine chicken."

Perhaps because Lu Yuanfeng spent most of his time in the army, even when he came back, he didn't know much about the market in town. These things weren't something he understood well.

"Simply put, when the chickens are small, you feed them a bit of Chinese medicine or something. Eventually, when people eat the chicken, these chickens with medicinal effects end up in people's stomachs, and the effects are quite good."

As Mu Shuangshuang spoke, she observed Lu Yuanfeng's expression. Seeing his interested look, Mu Shuangshuang knew this could work.

"Unfortunately, I don't know anything about Chinese medicine."

Being a modern person, Mu Shuangshuang had never really encountered Chinese medicine, although she had seen plenty of Western medicine.

But what she hadn't seen didn't mean Lu Yuanfeng hadn't.

"I can go ask Uncle Zhang. He's the village doctor, and he has a lot of herbs at home. We can also buy a few dozen chickens to try out Shuangshuang's idea of medicinal cuisine chicken."

"Hmm!"

Mu Shuangshuang nodded vigorously. This was exactly what she was waiting for, and she knew how to make the medicinal cuisine chicken delicious. Most importantly, she planned to sell the method to Fat Chef at Jiu Si Xuan, while continuously supplying them with chickens.

"Then let's not wait any longer. I know Aunt Ge in the neighboring village has a new batch of chicks. She was in the village yesterday asking if anyone wanted to buy."

In this era, raising chickens wasn't such an easy task. An egg used to cost three coins, now it's one coin, but that doesn't mean chick prices have dropped. Chicks have consistently been three coins each.

Plus, chicks are the most prone to illness. With a bit of negligence, the whole batch could be wiped out, with not even one chicken making it.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng didn't think too much about it. After all, investments without risk don't make money.

Finding a wooden box, Lu Yuanfeng took Mu Shuangshuang to the neighboring village.

This was the closest village to Er Gui Village, Tie Dao Village. On ordinary days, there were quite a few people from Tie Dao Village visiting Er Gui Village, and many women from Er Gui Village married into Tie Dao Village as brides.

Aunt Ge's family was well-known in Tie Dao Village, and the chicks in several nearby villages came from her family, although they couldn't guarantee that all would survive. But grabbing about twenty chicks and having five or six survive was still quite certain.

Upon reaching Tie Dao Village, Mu Shuangshuang followed Lu Yuanfeng around and finally stopped in front of a thatched house.

"This is Aunt Ge's place. Her son and I were in the same army camp, but he was in the Fire Head Army, and I was in the Charging Camp, but we've met."

That's why Aunt Ge went specifically to Lu Yuanfeng's house to ask him if he wanted chickens. Initially, Lu Yuanfeng hesitated since, being a man, it wasn't feasible for him to regularly raise chickens and ducks.

Hearing Shuangshuang's idea, Lu Yuanfeng decided to buy a batch of chickens. Even if it meant having more opportunities to see Shuangshuang daily, it was worth it.

Mu Shuangshuang followed Lu Yuanfeng into the Ge family's house. Shortly, an elderly woman, over fifty, came out and greeted Lu Yuanfeng.

"Oh, Fengzi, is this your wife?" Aunt Ge exclaimed with surprise the moment she spoke.

Lu Yuanfeng blushed and hurriedly explained, "No, Shuangshuang, Shuangshuang..."

"Alright, no need to explain, I know what you're thinking," Aunt Ge laughed at Lu Yuanfeng with a knowing look.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't say anything, just listening to the conversation between Aunt Ge and Lu Yuanfeng.

Knowing that Lu Yuanfeng was there to get chicks, Aunt Ge, without a word, went into the house and came out with a bamboo box. Inside were over thirty chicks, with half their shells still stuck to them, and their feathers sticky and unkempt.

"Auntie, aren't these the chicks from yesterday?" Mu Shuangshuang asked at a glance.

"You have a good eye, no wonder Fengzi likes you!" Aunt Ge was certain that Lu Yuanfeng liked Mu Shuangshuang the moment she spoke.

"Auntie, please don't say that..." Lu Yuanfeng said anxiously from the side.

"You silly boy, what's there to be embarrassed about? Look at our Ge Sandan; he got married right after returning.

Now my daughter-in-law Xiuxiu already has a baby in her belly. If you don't work harder, you'll just be a bachelor in your village."

"This..." Lu Yuanfeng was almost out of breath with anxiety. He had to stop Aunt Ge from continuing while observing Shuangshuang's expression to make sure she wasn't upset; otherwise, he would have to explain himself.

Fortunately, the only relief was that Mu Shuangshuang wasn't upset and didn't refute Aunt Ge's words.

Mu Shuangshuang understood that enthusiastic village housewives liked to matchmake like they were pairing ducks, assuming people were together as soon as they saw anyone together.

"Alright, alright, I won't tease you anymore. Look how nervous you are," Aunt Ge sighed with a helpless smile.

She had heard about Lu Yuanfeng's family situation mentioned by her son Sandan and knew it was quite a touching story.

In front of her, this girl named Shuangshuang seemed obedient and sensible. Though she appeared a bit young and thin, if she was with Fengzi, they would make a good pair.

"Auntie, thank you for your concern. If the day ever comes for me to marry... to get married, I'll definitely invite you," Lu Yuanfeng said earnestly.

He wasn't just being polite. When he got married, he wanted to marry someone he liked and have a meal with familiar elders and friends, making it lively—definitely not with people he didn't like.

"I knew you were a kid with a good heart. Here's what I'll do — there are thirty-five chicks here, give me a hundred coins, and those five coins can be my gift of two free chicks."

Aunt Ge was quite generous. She hadn't done such a big business deal in a while, so it wasn't much to offer a discount of five coins.

But Lu Yuanfeng insisted, "Auntie, whatever it is, that's what I'll pay you. Sandan has it tough too; you should save more money, maybe he'll need it someday."

"Yes, Auntie, we're here buying chicks from you not because we want to take advantage of you but because we trust you. Whatever the price, that's what we'll pay. So the next time Fengzi and I can continue doing business with you," Mu Shuangshuang chimed in.

Yet the old lady was stubborn. Upon hearing that Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't take her bargain, she sat straight down on the ground, refusing to get up, clearly showing her determination to argue with them.