

Folly 281

Chapter 281: Feeling Sorry for Fengzi

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng couldn't argue with the old lady, so they finally left a hundred coins, drank a cup of gold and silver flower tea, and then prepared to return.

Already at Old Ge's house, Mu Shuangshuang still felt the lingering taste of the gold and silver flower in her mouth, extremely refreshing.

Since splitting from the family, she would use fishy grass every day to boil a pot of water for her family. Over time, everyone became nauseous from the smell of fishy grass.

If it could be replaced with gold and silver flower, not only would the effect not be worse, but everyone's reaction would surely not be as strong.

Thinking of this, Mu Shuangshuang hurriedly urged, "Lu Yuanfeng, let's hurry back. Later, we should go into the mountains to dig for wild vegetables, gather pig fodder, and see if there are any gold and silver flowers. We'll dry some ourselves; I think it tastes pretty good."

Lu Yuanfeng chuckled, just about to pick up the pace, when a woman came out of the house next door and bumped straight into him. He quickly dodged.

As expected, the woman fell to the ground.

She clutched her backside and loudly exclaimed, "Oh, who is it, are you blind, daring to bump into me!"

Mu Shuangshuang's temple throbbed as she looked at the person in front of her, suddenly feeling an unusual familiarity, especially with that almost popping chest.

"It's you guys!"

"It's you..."

They almost spoke at the same time, and Chen Hong immediately scrambled to her feet from the ground.

"Well, it's you, the brat who bumped into my chest, almost flattening it. You dare to appear in front of me today, see if I won't teach you a lesson."

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but recall the time when she first went to the market to sell things, and Lu Yuanfeng was wronged for touching someone's butt, and later she scolded this busty woman.

Now that figure overlapped completely with the person in front of her. Mu Shuangshuang was sure this was a meeting of old foes.

Lu Yuanfeng also remembered who the person in front of him was, but he didn't know that person was from Tie Dao Village back then.

Although he had been to San Dan's house several times, he had never seen Chen Hong.

Yet life is just filled with such coincidences.

The first thing Chen Hong did after realizing was to shout loudly, "Thief, thief, Tie Dao Village..."

After shouting twice, Mu Shuangshuang knocked her unconscious with a quick chop and tossed her into the nearby grass.

The entire movement was as fluid as flowing water, not dragging at all.

Villagers heard the noise, and when they came out, neither Mu Shuangshuang nor Lu Yuanfeng was in sight, nor was the yelling Chen Hong.

Everyone didn't take it seriously, just assuming that Chen Hong was up to her usual mischief, and quietly returned to their homes.

Mu Shuangshuang excitedly left Tie Dao Village, clutching her belly, laughing nonstop.

Lu Yuanfeng laughed along with her without asking for any reason, and when they were near Er Gui Village, Mu Shuangshuang suddenly said, "That woman was the one having an affair with my fifth uncle."

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly realized, no wonder the voice sounded so familiar.

"It's really interesting. I have a grudge against her, and my fifth uncle doesn't like me either. It's as the saying goes, 'birds of a feather flock together.'"

If Mu Danian married this woman in the future, the Old Mu Family would be restless again.

This incident, as Mu Shuangshuang's amusement, only caused her to restrain her laughter when they arrived at the village entrance, and she conveniently asked Lu Yuanfeng, what he meant by saying San Dan would need that silver in the future.

It's not that Mu Shuangshuang was sensitive, but rather she felt there was more to that statement.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded: "You're not wrong in guessing, I did mean something else, but this is a long story and involves San Dan.

In fact, when San Dan returned, it wasn't by choice. It was because when fighting enemies on the battlefield, part of his foot bone was cut off.

Although he was okay, walking has been inconvenient since then. The family had to sell everything just to get him a wife. The road ahead is long, so keeping money has no disadvantages."

From Lu Yuanfeng's words, Mu Shuangshuang learned that the men in their camp had many chances to go to the battlefield, even someone like Ge Sandan in the Fire Head Army had to fight when necessary.

How many times did Fengzi go?

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly felt fortunate that she was in law enforcement, so she better understood the risks involved.

"Fengzi, can you tell me how many times you've been to the battlefield? Have you ever been injured?"

Lu Yuanfeng felt his throat tighten severely. If asked how many times he'd been to the battlefield, he couldn't remember clearly. As for injuries, that was commonplace, with minor and major injuries constantly occurring.

But could he tell Shuangshuang all this?

Lu Yuanfeng hesitated for a long time. He didn't want to lie to Shuangshuang and decided to tell the truth, "I can't really remember, seems like a lot of times!"

While Mu Shuangshuang felt proud of Lu Yuanfeng, she also felt an overwhelming heartache. A teenager, far from home, engaging in life-threatening tasks, how could it not hurt? How could it not be exhausting?

Fortunately, he came back safe!

Mu Shuangshuang let out a long breath, gathering her courage, she said, "Fengzi, no matter what you do in the future, nothing is more important than your life. We don't harm others, but don't sacrifice yourself to save others either."

Mu Shuangshuang knew Lu Yuanfeng was honest. If it were truly to save someone else, losing his life was possible.

She wouldn't allow that to happen, so she had to tell him in advance.

"Hmm, I know. I won't do foolish things for others." Lu Yuanfeng nodded, then added, "Let's hurry back. Didn't you say you had lots to do? If we're late, it'll get dark."

"Oh right, let's hurry into the village!"

On the way back, they had already discussed keeping the chicks temporarily at Mu Shuangshuang's house, and when they're grown, they'll take them to the back mountain at Lu Yuanfeng's house and start learning from Zhang Huai Shu what herbs the chicks can consume to be beneficial without harming them.

Cuddling such a large bunch of chicks, naturally, once Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng returned, it attracted a crowd of onlookers.

After the double harvest, mostly the tasks were scattering fertilizer and watching the water in the fields, making sure to release water in time or check if there were any holes in the paddy slopes that might leak water.

As they say, fertile water should not flow to others' fields, and that's basically how it's originated.

These tasks family men could do, so the women at home, either embroidered a few handkerchiefs to sell when the peddler comes by for some money,

or simply continued working on busy tasks like picking cotton or tending to chores in the dryland.

The little chicks just brought back couldn't be set down for two days. Mu Shuangshuang found a handful of dry grass, stuffed some into the wooden box, worried the chicks would get overheated, and then she grabbed a half-used box from the chicken coop next to the pigsty and separated some of the chicks out.

"Yo, Shuang, is your family going to prosper? So many chicks must cost quite a bit!"

"Yeah, these chicks seem strong and lively; they should all grow well. If you raise them all, just selling eggs, your family would get rich."

Chapter 282: Liu Wangcai's Wife Is Coming to Kill

An egg for one wen; if more than thirty chicks all survive, that's thirty-something wen just from eggs each day.

Don't even mention that going to the city to work won't earn this much, even carrying burdens at the docks doesn't bring in such income.

So it's normal for everyone to be envious.

"Aunts, these chickens aren't just Shuangshuang's; they are raised by our family along with Fengzi. Shuangshuang's household utensils haven't even been used for long, naturally they're not as well-off as your aunts' established homes."

Mu Shuangshuang smiled and chatted with a few women, her neither humble nor arrogant attitude made everyone feel a bit more comfortable.

But there are always those who like stirring trouble: "I say Shuang girl, you are close with Fengzi all day long. Do you two have something going on?"

The speaker is Mrs. Zhang, a troublemaker from Ding Family in the village.

As she spoke, a few young wives looked on with interest, glancing back and forth between her and Lu Yuanfeng as if the two really had something going on.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't one to back down: "Aunt Zhang, that's not right. I just saw your second daughter at the village entrance with Mingzi, you know at this hour there aren't many people there, in case..."

Mu Shuangshuang had barely finished speaking when Mrs. Zhang got excited: "You're full of crap! I'm telling you, don't go throwing mud at others. Our second daughter and Ming have been childhood sweethearts, them being together is normal."

"Aunt Zhang, you're the one throwing mud; your daughter with her childhood sweetheart is normal, but me with Fengzi is not. Such double standards you have!"

"You..." Aunt Zhang was so angry she trembled and gave Mu Shuangshuang a fierce glare before storming off, not forgetting to curse Shuangshuang's chickens on her way out.

"Those chickens, I wish I see thirty die in a day!"

"Aunt Zhang, you better watch out not to strangle your chicks, lest they all die out in a day." Mu Shuangshuang followed Mrs. Zhang, giving her a taste of her own medicine.

Fortunately, those watching the spectacle weren't upset by the spat between Mu Shuangshuang and Mrs. Zhang; they continued to watch with great interest.

Such talk naturally reached Old Mrs. Mu's ears, and she hurried over in a rush.

Coming over, she pointed at Mu Shuang's pile of chicks and asked Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuang girl, where did you get the silver to buy so many chicks?"

Old Mrs. Mu's imposing demeanor gave the impression Mu Shuangshuang had done something shameful.

"Of course, I earned it by trading. Didn't you ask me for the recipe last time?" Mu Shuangshuang lightly smirked.

Old Mrs. Mu recalled the capital daughter's willingness to offer fifty taels for some powder recipe, her eyes showing greedy desire. Back then she wasn't short of money, but things are different now; without Da De, her pockets were just fabric to fabric, flesh to flesh.

"Shuang girl, how do you feel your grandma treats you usually?" Old Mrs. Mu suddenly softened.

She deliberately showed an affectionate look towards Mu Shuangshuang.

Younger girls can be easily coaxed.

Mu Shuangshuang stared at Old Mrs. Mu, sometimes shaking her head, sometimes nodding, making Old Mrs. Mu feel uneasy.

"You girl, either it's good or it's not, yet shaking and nodding, what do you mean?" Old Mrs. Mu impatiently asked.

"Not really good! Grandma, you don't truly care about Shuangshuang." Mu Shuangshuang spoke the truth.

Then she added, "Grandma, you're not planning on snatching a few chicks home to raise, are you?"

Let me warn you, half of these chicks belong to Lu Yuanfeng, in case you unintentionally take his, and he gets the government involved, facing a lawsuit, I won't help."

"You..." Old Mrs. Mu's face turned green with anger, her tiger eyes glaring fiercely at Mu Shuangshuang, it took a while for her to speak.

"You ungrateful brat, you'll get struck by lightning sooner or later!"

Mu Shuangshuang acted as if she hadn't heard Old Mrs. Mu, she carried the chicks to her room, took out Little Black, then locked the door right in front of Old Mrs. Mu before leaving.

Old Mrs. Mu was so furious she almost fainted in the Old Mu Family's courtyard.

Being ignored like this, Old Mrs. Mu's anger was understandable. She stormed into Mu Dashan's room, where Mu Dashan was soundly asleep, awakened by Yu Liulang's confused gaze.

"Aunt, why are you here? Why start scolding my brother-in-law as soon as you come in? What did my brother-in-law do to provoke you?"

Yu Liulang hadn't looked into his man's affair, but Old Mrs. Mu suddenly remembered and pointed at Yu Liulang's nose, scolding him as well.

"Yu Liulang, what are you staring at? You lazy man sleeping during daytime, what kind of man are you?"

"Old third, you just know to bury yourself under the blankets all day, not even caring about your daughter, probably won't rest until you anger me to my death!"

Old Mrs. Mu's rapid-fire rant left Mu Dashan's face ashen.

Eventually, Mu Dashan couldn't bear listening any longer and spoke directly, "Mom, what has Shuangshuang done for you to keep scolding non-stop? Whatever it is, she's your granddaughter, isn't she? Consider it doing some good, could you please stop focusing on her, alright? Just think of it as your son's request."

"You... you..." Old Mrs. Mu clutched her chest, trying to catch her breath. She went over to the room's table, picked up the tea bowl, and hurled it at Mu Dashan's forehead.

The tea bowl hit Mu Dashan's head, breaking the skin of his forehead, causing him to see darkness and nearly pass out.

Yu Liulang hurriedly rushed forward, shaking the unconscious Mu Dashan.

"Brother-in-law, brother-in-law..."

But the person gave no response, Old Mrs. Mu realized the situation wasn't right and ran off, yelling "Serves you right" as she dashed away.

Yu Liulang was nearly crying from fright, he got up without even wearing shoes, preparing to carry Yu Liulang to see the village doctor.

Who would have thought, as soon as he moved Mu Dashan, the latter suddenly reopened his eyes.

"Sixth son, I'm okay, my... my mom is just like that. If I don't appear injured, she won't leave. When Si Niang returns later, if she's caught, she'll surely get beaten."

"Crazy, she's simply a madwoman!" Yu Liulang angrily roared.

"Don't get angry either, this is my family's affair. I shouldn't have let you in on it, but over the years, I haven't given Si Niang anything good, and don't want to continue hiding it from my in-laws.

However, rest assured, from now on, I will take good care of Si Niang, and won't let her suffer."

With Mu Dashan's promise, Yu Liulang felt somewhat reassured.

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Mu Shuangshuang, along with Lu Yuanfeng, went up the mountain, collecting lots of wild vegetables and gold and silver flowers.

The things in the mountains are always more than people imagine; it's a pity the villagers don't dare enter, otherwise, they could rely on these resources to live slightly better lives.

After the mountain trip, they returned with plenty, but upon their return, the sun had already tilted westward; just when they sat down at home, they heard Mrs. Lin's loud voice.

"Oh no, Liu Wangcai's wife has come attacking..."

Chapter 283: Mu Zhenzhen is Doomed

Liu Wangcai's wife is a notorious shrew in the village, a master at fighting and arguing.

When villagers see her, they basically avoid her if they can, lest they get bitten by a mad dog and have to pay for their own treatment.

This time, for some unknown reason, Liu Wangcai's wife suddenly stormed into the Old Mu Family to stir up trouble.

However, if it doesn't concern her, Mu Shuangshuang keeps her distance, lazily ignoring it, as she has a lot of other things to attend to.

The gold and silver flowers have been put in a large sieve to dry in the courtyard, the white flowers and green leaves are quite eye-catching in the sieve.

The fragrance of the gold and silver flowers wafted to Mu Shuangshuang's nose, making her feel instantly refreshed, with most of her fatigue dissipating.

After drying for two or three days, these gold and silver flowers will become dried flowers, and once stored in a pottery jar, they'll save her the cost of tea leaves.

The front yard was noisy, and even while busy chopping pig feed, Mu Shuangshuang could faintly hear demands to hand over that slut Mu Zhenzhen.

It was at this moment that Little Zhi came up, holding Little Black who had just had a big meal.

She mysteriously walked up to Mu Shuangshuang, insisting on pulling her into her room.

Mu Shuangshuang was very curious, wondering what could be so important that Little Zhi would pull her into the room to talk.

"Sister, I saw Second Aunt and Fat Girl's dad come home this noon. Is Fat Girl's mom here to make a fuss because of this?"

Mu Shuangshuang frowned in thought, reckoning it was indeed about that, but she reminded Little Zhi.

"Little Zhi, act like you didn't see anything happen at noon. No matter what occurs, you can't tell anyone about it."

If Mu Zhenzhen gets involved with a married man, once it spreads, it won't just disgrace Mu Zhenzhen herself, but also the entire Old Mu Family and the third branch, who will all be shamed.

In ancient times, anything related to reputation was always a big matter. One person's mistake brought shame to many, so Mu Shuangshuang's actions were not to help Mu Zhenzhen, but to protect herself.

"Little Zhi understands, Little Zhi heard nothing at all." Little Zhi said as she covered her mouth and ran out of the room.

Little Black followed behind her, disappearing in the blink of an eye.

Mu Shuangshuang then went out to continue working on her tasks.

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In the front yard, Old Mrs. Mu stood alone at the forefront, balancing on her tiptoes as if rooted to the ground, not moving an inch.

Her fierce eyes glared at Liu Wangcai's wife who was causing trouble at her home, while behind her stood several unreliable sons from the Old Mu Family, Mu Dazhong, Mu Danian, and Mrs. Lin.

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian were pulled over on short notice, so they were still somewhat reluctant. As for Mrs. Lin, she stood the furthest away, as she had already witnessed Liu Wangcai's wife's ferocity.

Last time when she was watering the field, Liu Wangcai's wife claimed there was manure in her field and couldn't let water through, berating Mrs. Lin thoroughly before stopping.

And beside Liu Wangcai's wife stood Liu Wangcai, battered beyond recognition, with blood-soaked bandages on his head.

"Well, Liu Wangcai's wife, how dare you come to my Old Mu Family's front door barking, you're tired of living aren't you? Believe it or not, I'll beat you till your parents won't recognize you!"

Old Mrs. Mu was as fierce as ever, especially when it involved her second daughter, she was almost single-handedly crushing Liu Wangcai's wife.

"You old woman, don't think having a son who never passes the scholar exams makes you able to show off in front of me, today you have to hand over Mu Zhenzhen whether you want to or not."

"You dead woman, dare to insult my old lady. What makes you think you can make me hand over Zhenzhen, who do you think you are?"

"Humph, wait till you hear what low things Mu Zhenzhen has done, then you'll see if you still defend her!"

As soon as Liu Wangcai's wife finished her words, she kicked Liu Wangcai in the back, sending him sprawling to the ground.

"Worthless thing, tell everyone clearly what Mu Zhenzhen did today in front of the villagers. If you can't explain clearly, I'll knock you dead with a spade."

Liu Wangcai knelt on the ground submissively, like a criminal, shivering as he spoke: "Today noon, I met with Zhenzhen, she... she said she wanted to come to my house. As a married man, I naturally refused, and she started undressing to seduce me..."

That mention of buying meat made Old Mrs. Mu tremble inside, remembering the pound of meat her daughter brought home at noon — could it be...

But quickly, Old Mrs. Mu steadied herself, thinking her pretty daughter would never fancy someone like Liu Wangcai.

However, just because Old Mrs. Mu believed in Mu Zhenzhen, didn't mean the spectators did.

"Wow, how can Old Mu's second daughter be such a slut and want someone like Wangcai?"

"You all don't know, do you? The second daughter was divorced, so she's without a husband now, perhaps..."

"No wonder, maybe she thinks Wangcai's thing is good..."

Liu Wangcai's words made the villagers watching gossip about Mu Zhenzhen, who hadn't appeared.

Some even went so far as to speak as if Mu Zhenzhen was a promiscuous woman, spinning all sorts of dirty tales.

Elabably watching was so incensed she was about to hit someone.

Yet, Liu Wangcai went on: "Later when I refused to agree with Zhenzhen, she hit me with a large sea bowl, and stole three taels of silver from our home; those silver coins were stored in a pottery jar, and are certainly at Old Mu Family now."

"Listen, everyone, listen to what kind of daughter has Old Mu Family raised? Not only seducing other women's husbands, but also assaulting people and stealing money — such a person shouldn't stay in the village, they should be driven away."

"Yes, drive her away, Old Mrs. Mu, stop protecting her, since your daughter has done such low things, you should hand her over to be beaten to death with sticks."

Mrs. Zhang, who had argued with Mu Shuangshuang earlier in the afternoon, spoke first in agreement, thinking she couldn't get revenge on Mu Shuangshuang, she would take it out on other members of the Old Mu Family — she won't suffer losses.

Having some agreement from others, those mischievous wives in the village got all excited, clamoring to drag Mu Zhenzhen to be dunked in a pigsty.

"Everyone listen to me, Old Mrs. Mu is harboring a thief, we must rush in and we need to capture her..."

Chapter 284: Catching the Thief and Seizing the Stolen Goods

"I want to see who dares! What right do you have to claim that Zhenzhen did those unspeakable things?"

A deep male voice came from behind Old Mrs. Mu.

Mu Dashan slowly walked towards the crowd.

His steps were steady, and his expression was firm. If it weren't for needing medication every day and sometimes feeling tired, he would seem no different from a normal person.

Especially now, with his gusty pace, he seemed all the more impossible to ignore.

"Dashan, you shouldn't get involved in this matter. Your third branch is already separated, why bother with the Old Mu Family's affairs? Why care about Mu Zhenzhen?"

The gossiping onlookers, who weren't afraid of stirring up trouble, saw Mu Dashan arrive and smirked as they said this.

"Even if our third branch has separated, we're still part of the Old Mu Family. If something happens to the Old Mu Family, we in the third branch can't just hide away like turtles," Mu Dashan replied.

"Since that's the case, we won't be polite. Everyone, let's rush in, tie up Mu Zhenzhen, and drag her out to show everyone the shameless hussy's antics!"

Mrs. Zhang shouted, and those who had paused upon Mu Dashan's arrival regained their fervor, stomping towards the back courtyard of the Old Mu Family.

Before reaching Old Mrs. Mu, another person emerged from the third branch of the Old Mu Family, this time it was Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang walked over with pride, without saying a word, but everyone felt an invisible pressure, making them unconsciously want to retreat.

Mu Dashan's previously anxious heart instantly calmed down. His daughter was here, so this matter shouldn't be much of a problem.

Mu Shuangshuang gave Mu Dashan a reassuring smile just in time, then turned to the villagers and said:

"Uncles and aunties, what are you doing here? Visiting my grandparents' house? Unfortunately, I just came from the kitchen, and my fourth aunt isn't feeling well, so there's no one to make dinner." Mu Shuangshuang smiled at the crowd.

"Stop with your nonsense. Who wants to eat at the Old Mu Family's? We're here for Mu Zhenzhen's life!

The Old Mu Family loves playing these tricks. First, it's Mu Dashan, now it's you, this little brat!

Are you going to bring out Mr. Mu next? Let me tell you, stop stalling to let Mu Zhenzhen escape."

Liu Wangcai's wife pushed past the villagers who had stopped and reached Mu Shuangshuang, spewing saliva like it was manure.

The big yellow front teeth were exposed the whole time, emitting a unique stench that made Mu Shuangshuang want to turn her head away.

Goosebumps covered Mu Shuangshuang's body, feeling utterly disgusted, yet she had to face off against this woman right now.

"Aunt Juhua, you really like to joke around. What do you mean by saying my second aunt is trying to escape? What did she do to run away?" Mu Shuangshuang sneered, looking at Liu Wangcai's wife with a mocking expression.

"Did nothing? Look at the injury on my husband's head, the chickens in my home turned to bones, and our money gone. You call that doing nothing, are you blind?"

"That still doesn't prove it was my second aunt who did it, right? Just the accusation of seducing Uncle Wangcai alone is unbelievable!

My second aunt is beautiful, even if she's divorced, those who fancy her could line up from Er Gui Village to Qingshan Town, unlike Uncle Wangcai, whom she might not find appealing at all."

"What... what do you mean? Are you saying I'm lying?" Liu Wangcai's wife shouted angrily.

"That's not what I meant, but merely relying on Aunt Juhua's words is not enough to conclude my second aunt did those unspeakable things.

It's easy to start a rumor, but clarifying it can break one's legs. Besides, it's uncertain who hit Uncle Wangcai."

When Mu Shuangshuang spoke, she deliberately raised an eyebrow and glanced at Liu Wangcai's wife.

Liu Wangcai's wife bristled instantly, "What do you mean, you little brat? Are you saying I hit him?"

Even if I did, Mu Zhenzhen stealing our money jar is true, right? Let us go to her room to search. If we find it, let's see if the Old Mu Family can still argue."

Liu Wangcai's wife was convinced that her family's money jar was with Mu Zhenzhen, thinking if there's concrete evidence, the people of Old Mu Family wouldn't be so cocky anymore.

"Yes, let us check. If we find the money jar, hand Mu Zhenzhen over to us!"

"And if you don't find anything? Aunt Zhang, how do you plan to handle this? What about my family's reputation, and my second aunt's? Are you going to take responsibility?"

Mu Shuangshuang stepped forward in a few strides, standing right in front of Aunt Zhang, the woman who cursed her chicken to die this afternoon, daring to meddle with the Old Mu Family now. Does she really think no one from Old Mu Family is here?

At this moment, only Mu Shuangshuang was speaking at the Old Mu Family; everyone else, except Mu Dashan and Old Mrs. Mu, was watching the spectacle.

Mu Dashan was naturally concerned about his daughter, while Old Mrs. Mu cared for Mu Zhenzhen.

Fortunately, Mu Shuangshuang was capable of holding the fort, her few words were far more effective than Old Mrs. Mu's scolding.

The villagers looked at each other.

In truth, everyone was just here for the entertainment; they weren't necessarily looking to escalate things. They truly didn't care about Mu Zhenzhen's plight, only wanting some gossip to discuss over meals.

"What's this, are you all chickening out? If we don't find it, I'll take full responsibility, and the Old Mu Family can do whatever they want with me," Cai Juhua promised sternly, rekindling everyone's spirits, prompting them to charge towards the Old Mu Family again.

Mu Shuangshuang sidestepped, but Old Mrs. Mu wasn't having it, as she knew she had seen that jar and that piece of meat in her daughter's hands.

Old Mrs. Mu sat down with a thud, smacked her thigh, and began to wail, "Bullying the weak, so many people against one old woman, it's too much... You're going to break into my house and steal stuff..."

This crying and shouting tactic was quite effective in the Old Mu Family, and whenever Old Mrs. Mu used it, there was never an unsolved matter.

Mu Dashan and his sons quickly rushed to help Old Mrs. Mu, but she pointed at them and scolded, "Are you all blind? Those people are trying to steal from us, stop them..."

"Mom, don't get worked up. If Zhenzhen really did it, we should hurry to cast her out. We have so many unmarried daughters at home, we can't afford for their reputations to be ruined," Mu Danyan advised Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu, infuriated, reached out and slapped Mu Dazhong hard across the face.

"You heartless boy, your sister is being humiliated like this, and instead of helping, you're trying to distance yourself. I don't have a son like you."

Mu Dazhong felt extremely aggrieved and turned to Mu Dashan, saying, "Old Third, you tell me, if Zhenzhen did those things, wouldn't it affect your Shuangshuang and Little Zhi?"

Chapter 285: Liu Wangcai's Wife VS Old Mrs. Mu

Mu Dazhong asked the same question, which was also Mu Shuangshuang's reason for coming today.

One Mu Zhenzhen wasn't enough to make her step in, but Mu Zhenzhen was now the abandoned girl from the Old Mu Family. Her reputation was already bad, and if she were accused of stealing...

Then these girls of the next generation wouldn't have a good ending either.

Mu Dashan pressed his lips together and said nothing. Things had reached this point, regardless of whether Zhenzhen did it or not, the Old Mu Family was going to protect her to the end; otherwise, the consequences would be unimaginable.

"Second Brother, you shouldn't say that. Zhenzhen is not that kind of person. Although she's lazy and indulgent, she wouldn't sell herself for money." Mu Dashan spoke in fairness based on his understanding of his second sister.

Old Mrs. Mu's expression softened a bit.

At this moment, people from the village who had searched Mu Zhenzhen's room in the backyard came out, their faces flushed.

"What happened? Did you find anything?" Old Mrs. Mu got up again, her heart pounding with fear. When Zhenzhen took the money jar, she entered the room; if they found it...

"No, we... falsely accused the second aunt of the Mu Family, we're sorry!"

Understanding villagers apologized first, while Aunt Zhang, being too cunning, stirred up trouble and fled when things went wrong.

However, Liu Wangcai's wife was convinced the Old Mu Family had hidden things and wanted to report it to the authorities.

"Aunt Ju Hua, this matter is already so clear, how long will you keep slandering?" Mu Shuangshuang spoke again.

Liu Wangcai's wife didn't gain anything; the chicken was gone, the money was gone, and even her undergarments were ruined. How could she swallow this?

Mu Shuangshuang, who disrupted everything, became her target for venting. She rushed over, intending to teach Mu Shuangshuang a lesson, but who knew Mu Shuangshuang dodged and shouted to Old Mrs. Mu:

"Granny, Aunt Ju Hua wronged my second aunt, shouldn't you properly reprimand her!"

Without another word, Old Mrs. Mu charged forward, ready to fight Liu Wangcai's wife.

This was probably an epic battle in the village, Liu Wangcai's wife meeting Old Mrs. Mu, neither of them easy to deal with.

Liu Wangcai's wife kicked in the stomach as soon as she came up, and Old Mrs. Mu dodged and grabbed Liu Wangcai's wife's hair, pulling it desperately.

"You wild pheasant, dare to wrong our Zhenzhen, let's see if this old woman doesn't pluck all your feathers."

Liu Wangcai's wife, unwilling to be outdone, elbowed Old Mrs. Mu's chest as they grappled and rolled on the ground.

Hair lay scattered on the ground, Old Mrs. Mu's meticulously styled hair was disheveled, her clothes torn, and Liu Wangcai's wife wasn't much better.

Her body was nearly broken by Old Mrs. Mu's nails, and finally, unable to bear it, Liu Wangcai's wife started screaming.

"Liu Wangcai, you coward, I'm being beaten to death, and you're not coming to help, ouch... it hurts, it hurts, let go, you old hag..."

Old Mrs. Mu bit Liu Wangcai's wife's ear hard and pulled, causing blood to flow profusely. Liu Wangcai, seeing things go wrong, wanted to help, but the several sons of the Old Mu Family were no pushovers, each staring at Liu Wangcai.

Finally, Liu Wangcai turned tail and ran, disappearing quickly.

As for settling the dispute, that was Mr. Mu's job. After he arrived, a few words separated them, leaving Liu Wangcai's wife covered in injuries.

"You'll see, I won't let anyone from your Old Mu Family off..."

Like bad guys who make threats before fleeing in disgrace, Liu Wangcai's wife said such words before leaving.

Old Mrs. Mu, like a victorious rooster, kept scolding, not caring about the pain in her body.

"That's enough, aren't you embarrassed enough, keep yelling, they're all gone!" Mr. Mu tapped the ground heavily with his tobacco stem.

"You old fart, you just came back now, our Zhenzhen almost got bullied to death, do you know?" Old Mrs. Mu rolled her eyes and asked Mr. Mu.

How could Mr. Mu not understand this matter? He heard about it halfway through his work and couldn't even tend to the cotton in the field, rushing over to check, bumping into Yu Liulang on the way.

After explaining the situation, Mr. Mu and him hurried to block the path to the village, fearing that Zhenzhen would return and make things worse.

"We'll talk about it when we get home, I want to hear how you explain today, some people's mouths in the Old Mu Family are getting too bold."

First, the villagers learned about Zhenzhen being abandoned, then everyone gathered at the Old Mu Family. Mr. Mu wanted to see who was so bold.

Mrs. Lin glanced at Mr. Mu in a trembling manner; she was the one who told the village's young wives about Mu Zhenzhen being abandoned.

She didn't mean anything by it, just wanted to mention that being good-looking was useless, couldn't keep one's man.

It was this glance that let Old Mrs. Mu realize who was talking outside. She went up to Mrs. Lin and slapped her, leaving Mrs. Lin stunned.

"So it's you, you venomous woman, even daring to spread such matters."

"Mother, no... it's not me," Mrs. Lin explained weakly.

"Not you, huh, I know what you're up to whenever you bend over, not you, then why do you feel guilty?"

If not you, why hide and not speak, aren't you the most aggressive normally? Where's your aggressiveness now, let me see it!"

As Old Mrs. Mu spoke, her hands didn't stop moving, the sound of slaps piercingly loud.

Mu Shuangshuang frowned; Old Mrs. Mu was making a big deal out of nothing. Mu Zhenzhen being abandoned was bound to be known eventually, wasn't it?

Beating people like this was too excessive.

Mrs. Lin, her mouth full of blood from being slapped, looked at her husband for help, but Mu Dazhong pretended not to see, saying nothing.

"Enough, just teach her a lesson, stop making a fuss, let's go back and deal with this." Mr. Mu saw Old Mrs. Mu not following, returned to scold her briefly, and she reluctantly left.

Mu Shuangshuang felt she had nothing else to do, so she took Mu Dashan's arm and headed toward her room.

"Shuang, Third Son, you two come along too, the family's matters concern you."

"Grandpa, let's leave it be, the third branch has already split off, it's better not to know what's going on, Shuangshuang's not very discreet, afraid she'll accidentally say something she shouldn't, harming others and herself."

Mu Zhenzhen's words were twofold, expressing her stance that helping out didn't mean she would return to being oppressed. Also, she hinted at her displeasure with Old Mrs. Mu's arbitrary beating.

"You..." Mr. Mu was speechless, and his impression of Mu Shuangshuang, which had recently improved, became worse again.

"You old fart, she's not interested in our shabby house, wants to live in a nice house, why are you butting in?"

"Shut up, keep nagging and I'll get rid of you!"

Chapter 286: Big Uncle's Scholar Dream

Mu Dade has been in the county town for some time now, spending quite a bit of silver every day, yet he's never seen the so-called teacher.

Another day went by, and Mu Dade was left hanging, feeling a bit discouraged, sitting alone in the inn, depressed.

Mrs. Jin approached him, massaging his back and neck gently, exceedingly tender.

"Yinyin, tell me, I've been in this county town for so long; when will this end?"

The imperial examination isn't held in the county town but a hundred miles away at the Qianzhou Prefecture. Mu Dade came to the county town with the aim of finding that so-called teacher.

"Dade, I say, this matter can't be rushed. Think about it, if this person is as capable as they say, of course, not everyone can meet them. If it were that easy, why would so many people fail every year?"

Mu Dade thought about it and agreed, the more difficult it was to meet him, the more it showed those test questions were valuable.

"Why don't you ask around again and see if the person is willing to meet us?"

"I've already sent someone to inquire. We might have results in the next couple of days." Mrs. Jin said with a radiant smile.

These are the most comfortable days for her, with no need to face Old Mrs. Mu's old face, or to deal with Mu Danian's leering eyes, nor Mrs. Lin's stingy nature.

"That's good, that's good! This time, the family has great expectations for me. If I fail the exam, the family will probably go mad." Mu Dade sighed.

"Dade, don't overthink it. If they go mad, that's their business! Regardless of the outcome, once we're living a good life, we mustn't take them along." Mrs. Jin reiterated.

These days, apart from trying to find the teacher, her only task was brainwashing Mu Dade. Making him understand that, whether good or bad, he ought to forget about the rest of the Old Mu Family.

Her good days are not for others to partake!

"Master, Madam, there's a letter for you!"

Outside, a waiter gently knocked on the door, reminding Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin inside.

Mrs. Jin's face immediately lit up with joy. She had made arrangements with acquaintances to write to her if a meeting was possible.

It seems now they can meet that esteemed teacher.

"Come in, quickly." Mrs. Jin said as she moved to welcome the waiter. As soon as he stepped out, she rushed up and grabbed the envelope.

She tore open the envelope gently and eagerly read its contents, finally jumping up in delight.

"Dade, I told you we could; we can finally meet the teacher."

"Now?" Mu Dade widened his eyes in disbelief.

"Yes, right now, let's go."

Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin changed their clothes. Particularly Mu Dade, who wore the attire from his last outing, went to meet the famed teacher at the residence.

The place was indeed concealed, twisting and turning before arriving after much effort.

It wasn't his first visit, so he was quite familiar with the way, and fortunately, the doorman didn't trouble him further after seeing the letter.

Carrying a sense of excitement, Mu Dade entered the courtyard and saw the legendary Mr. Wu, who was younger than he'd imagined, sitting upright before an Eight Immortals table.

Upon seeing Mu Dade, without even raising his head, he spoke directly, "Are you here for the test questions?"

Mu Dade nodded timidly.

"Yes, I beg for the questions, and I'd be forever grateful."

Mu Dade bowed, addressing Mr. Wu at the higher seat.

"I have a rule: I like to take something from others when they take something from me."

"Isn't that natural? Yinyin, quickly bring the silver over."

"Alright!" Fifty taels of silver were handed over by Mrs. Jin without batting an eye, but Mr. Wu, indifferent, didn't even look up, seemingly dismissing the money.

Mu Dade panicked and signaled to Mrs. Jin, who added another twenty taels.

Still, Mr. Wu remained silent.

"Sir, to be honest, I left in a hurry this time and didn't bring much silver; the remaining silver is reserved for the exam trip."

Mu Dade would never admit he had no money, merely claiming he didn't bring enough due to the rush.

Perhaps moved by his seemingly sincere words, Mr. Wu finally glanced up at him.

"I wasn't referring to money when I said I wanted something from you. Originally, even without giving me silver, I would have given you the test questions." Mr. Wu's leisurely words nearly drove Mu Dade to rage.

This man was downright shameless, claiming he didn't need silver, yet accepting it before saying so?

Mu Dade's expression slightly changed, yet he maintained a respectful demeanor: "Sir, you're right. However, this silver is nothing; if I can pass, it would all be worth it."

"As long as you understand. So, I won't beat around the bush. Leave me the jade token on your head, the boots on your feet, and the golden waistband around your waist; these will be what I take from you." Mr. Wu said meaningfully, eyeing Mu Dade.

Both Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin were shocked by this request.

Mrs. Jin had never heard of anyone asking for such things.

"Dade..." Mrs. Jin couldn't help but call out, seeking her husband's opinion.

Unexpectedly, Mu Dade began indeed, undoing his hair and fulfilling Mr. Wu's requests for all the items one by one.

Once he placed the items on the table, Mu Dade transformed from a well-dressed man to a disheveled wanderer.

He stared at Mr. Wu, longing for the test questions in his hands.

Mr. Wu glanced at the items on the table, then took out a set of test questions from his sleeve.

"Keep it well. If anyone finds out, you know what awaits you."

Selling test questions is a grave offense, possibly negating exam eligibility and even landing one in legal trouble.

Mu Dade nodded quickly, and beside him, Mrs. Jin was equally elated—the thing that could change their fate was finally in their hands, soon...

The two exchanged a look and sprinted out immediately.

Once they had left, the once-proper Mr. Wu was no longer composed; he lay back on the bed, rolling comfortably.

Just then, a servant-like person emerged in the room, addressing Mr. Wu.

"Wu Youcai, you've fooled another one, and they're grateful! How did you come up with such a great scam? Look at those fools throwing money without a blink.

The last one was even funnier, almost losing his pants, yet thinking he got a great bargain."

"But what if none of them pass? Aren't you afraid they'll trouble you?"

Wu Youcai climbed off the bed, rolling his eyes at the gossipy person, "Why are you so concerned? It's their test questions they wanted. I provided them! If I guaranteed they'd all pass, would I only charge this little?"

Chapter 287: Resistance of the Fourth Room

"That's true, but where on earth did you get those exam papers from?"

The man was still curious, as Wu Youcai always gave different people different exam papers.

Yet he himself had never been to school, so how would he know such things?

"Don't ask about that! Just know that, as long as you stick with me, you'll have your fill of meat."

Wu Youcai laughed out loud, and when his gaze landed on the items Mu Dade had placed on the table, he couldn't help but show a look of disdain.

"Take the stuff that fool left behind and pawn it. Pawn what you can, and if you can't pawn much, that's fine too. That poor fellow still thinks he can take the imperial exam like others."

"Alright!"

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The hall of the Old Mu Family!

Mr. Mu sat there solemnly, and the rest of the Old Mu Family sat below, all with somber expressions.

Just at that moment, Mrs. Liu and Mu Dajiang came back from a day of labor.

Today it was originally Mrs. Lin's turn to cook at home while Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch went out to work. Now, returning to the cold stove, Mrs. Liu was somewhat stunned.

There wasn't much food at noon, and after an afternoon of work, she was now starving.

Coupled with her son Xiao Chu constantly crying out in hunger, Mrs. Liu timidly walked up to Old Mrs. Mu.

"Mother, can you let my second sister-in-law go cook some food first? Xiao Chu is hungry..."

As soon as she finished speaking, Old Mrs. Mu stood up and began scolding her: "Eat, eat, eat, all you know is how to eat. You lazy woman, are you a pig reincarnated, doing nothing but eating!"

Such a big thing has happened in the family, and you don't even show concern, just thinking about food. Will you die if you miss a meal?"

Mrs. Liu, scolded, retreated to the corner, and although Mu Dajiang was exhausted from a day's work, what tired him the most was his mother's attitude.

"Mother, can't you stop speaking about Xiaxia's mother like that? When has she not done anything? How is she just thinking about eating?"

Originally, it was decided today that our fourth branch would go work in the hemp field, and everyone else except the second sister-in-law would go to the cotton field.

We've worked all day; it's one thing that we're hungry, but when the kids are crying so badly, shouldn't Xiaxia's mother ask about it?"

Mu Dajiang's neck reddened as he tried to make his words carry more weight.

Old Mrs. Mu's eyes widened like a tiger's, and her whole body seemed like it had been deep-fried, her nose fuming with anger.

If Mu Dashan was the honest one who didn't dare go against Old Mrs. Mu, then Mu Dajiang was the timid one, usually silent on family matters big or small.

Now, the most honest one had split from the family, and the most silent one was standing up to her in front of so many people for a mere wife.

Old Mrs. Mu felt her pride slipping away and directly yelled at Mu Dajiang.

"Well then, old fourth, your wings have grown strong, daring to speak to this old lady like that.

You're thinking of splitting the family like the third branch, aren't you? But you better see if you have the ability first.

And while you're at it, take a good look at your Xiaxia, see if she has the ability to be like those lowly women!

If you can't, then get out of my sight, stop blocking my view here!"

Mu Dajiang was so mad his face turned red, fists clenched, veins popping on his forehead.

But in the end, he said nothing and let his fists fall helplessly.

Mrs. Liu wept quietly on the side, but no one expected Xiaxia to break out and disappear into the night.

Mrs. Liu quickly stood up and ran after Xiaxia, and when it was Mu Dajiang's turn, Old Mrs. Mu directly stopped him.

"Old fourth, if you dare to go out there today, tomorrow I'll have Mrs. Liu's family take her back. We can't have a daughter-in-law like that in the Old Mu Family."

"Mother, you..." Mu Dajiang looked pained but ultimately couldn't defy Old Mrs. Mu and stayed in the room.

At that moment, Mu Zhenzhen came back, arriving late. She walked from the front yard to the back yard, extremely happy.

When she passed by the hall, seeing it brightly lit, she couldn't resist going in to show off her new buys from town.

"Dad, Mom, brothers, sisters-in-law, take a look at the new clothes I bought today in town, so expensive; this outfit cost one tael of silver."

Mu Zhenzhen wore a purple silk dress, exquisite from color to cut, with rare embroidery on it as well.

The most important thing was that this style was something no one had seen before, at least not on the streets of Qingshan Town.

Mrs. Lin's eyes lit up, immediately thinking that Mu Zhenzhen's outfit looked particularly good, though it cost a tael of silver. If she had such an outfit, she was sure she'd look even better than this second aunt.

"How about it, looks good, right?"

Mu Zhenzhen bounced around in front of Old Mrs. Mu, and unsurprisingly, she received Old Mrs. Mu's praise.

"Our Zhenzhen looks good in everything, much better than those official daughters and official wives."

Just as Old Mrs. Mu finished praising Mu Zhenzhen, Mr. Mu's heavy voice rang out, his fist pounding the table beside him, his rage palpable.

"Zhenzhen, kneel down for me!"

Mu Zhenzhen was utterly confused, then realized Mr. Mu was yelling at her, and the rebellious streak in her started acting up.

"Dad, what are you doing? Why should I kneel? I didn't do anything wrong. Or are you saying I shouldn't spend money in town and should give it to you to cover for Big Brother?"

"You beast, is that how a human talks? Your big brother needs money for exams. Look at you, you'll even seduce Liu Wangcai for money, is your heart filled with lard?"

In the presence of Mu Dade and Mu Zhenzhen, Mr. Mu didn't need to think and chose Mu Dade, and even though Mu Zhenzhen had been married off for years, any love would have worn thin over time.

Besides, there was still Mu Xiangxiang at home for Mr. Mu to adore, so how could he care about the second daughter's feelings?

"Old man, weren't you going to listen to Zhenzhen's explanation first? What's the meaning of throwing accusations like this?"

How do you know Zhenzhen seduced Liu Wangcai and not Liu Wangcai taking advantage of Zhenzhen?" Old Mrs. Mu shielded Mu Zhenzhen, directly rebutting Mr. Mu's words.

"Go ahead, spoil her, spoil her. This girl will ruin Dade sooner or later."

"Dad, what do you mean? How am I ruining Big Brother? What did I do wrong! All you do is say I'm seducing Liu Wangcai; what do you mean by that?"

Mu Zhenzhen might have guessed that her visit to Liu Wangcai's house was known, but she feared more for Liu Wangcai's life.

Seeing this, Mrs. Lin quickly exaggerated and recounted the day's events to Mu Zhenzhen, and unsurprisingly, Mu Zhenzhen exploded.

She was about to go find trouble with Liu Wangcai.

"Aren't you ashamed enough already today? Now, you tell me, how are we going to handle this situation!"

Taking someone's chicken, their meat, stealing their money, and beating them up, in Mr. Mu's eyes, these things would become stains on Mu Dade's future career.

Having a sister like that, what if it affected his promotion?

Chapter 288: Pitiful and Hateful

"What can I do? It was Liu Wangcai who was wrong in the first place. It's only right for me to deal with him.

Anyway, I've said it here. I won't return the money, nor will I admit any fault. If you aren't embarrassed for Brother, go ahead and tell others. It doesn't matter to me."

Mu Zhenzhen, with an attitude of a dead pig not fearing scalding water, said to Mr. Mu, then grabbed the rouge and clothes she bought and left the main hall.

"Zhenzhen, you haven't even had dinner yet, where are you going?"

Old Mrs. Mu followed behind Mu Zhenzhen, asking with concern, but Mu Zhenzhen couldn't be bothered to respond.

She wasn't even hungry. Before returning, she had eaten a big bowl of pork noodles in town, and the taste of pork was still fresh in her mouth, making her feel extremely comfortable!

Mr. Mu's body trembled uncontrollably. Mu Zhenzhen's words had hit a sore spot for him. It took him quite a while to recover.

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The dinner was prepared by Yu Si Niang, with Mu Shuangshuang assisting her. Lu Yuanfeng brought some braised meat, there were some vegetables, wild vegetable porridge, and golden corn.

The corn was cooked in a large pot and placed in the center of the table, emanating a tempting aroma. The golden kernels appeared especially striking under the dim oil lamp.

Little Zhi stared at the corn, drooling. She had never tasted corn before.

Although her mom fetched some each year, they usually ended up in Grandma's and Uncle's stomachs.

"Sister, I think your cooking smells particularly nice," Little Zhi began complimenting Mu Shuangshuang, hoping to eat.

"Little girl, you praised the wrong person today. Today's meal was prepared by Mom."

Little Zhi awkwardly stuck out her tongue and continued, "No wonder it tastes different than usual. It's because Mom made it."

This amusing remark naturally made the rest of the third branch burst into laughter.

Especially Yu Liulang, who, although unmarried, loved children, particularly his fourth sister's three kids.

"Little Zhi wants to eat corn. Shuang, go ahead and give her one."

"See, see, Little Zhi, you're so lucky. Uncle says you should get one first, so Sister will pick a big one for you."

Including Yu Liulang, Mu Shuangshuang's house now had six people. She cooked five corns, with two people sharing one.

The remaining two were cooked for Lu Yuanfeng, to be delivered to him after dinner.

Little Zhi, satisfied, received her long-awaited big corn. She grinned widely, placing the corn beside her gap-toothed grin and quickly began munching.

The characteristic aroma of the corn spread in her mouth, providing such full-bodied satisfaction that she couldn't help but take a deep breath.

Just then, a very faint gulping sound was heard. Mu Shuangshuang glanced outside the kitchen and decisively stood up.

Upon coming out, she saw Mu Xiaxia peeking. Caught in the act by Mu Shuangshuang, she appeared embarrassed, glancing at Mu Shuangshuang before stammering, "I'm sorry, I'll leave now..."

The relationship between Mu Xiaxia and Mu Shuangshuang couldn't be called good for a long time. Back when Mu Shuangshuang was still withdrawn, she ignored everyone.

However, she'd asked Xiao Han, who said that Mu Xiaxia was a good person and hadn't bullied the third branch.

Mu Xiaxia felt her feet as heavy as a thousand pounds, each step reminding her of Little Zhi eating corn, with drool at the corners of her mouth as she desperately tried not to cry...

"Xiaxia, come in and have some dinner. Aunt Si, don't hide, join us too!"

Mu Shuangshuang called towards the shadows under the nearby orange tree, prompting Mrs. Liu to come out, her thin body slightly trembling, looking at Mu Shuangshuang with an apologetic expression.

She had seen Xiaxia coming this way and knew Xiaxia was watching the third branch having their meal; somehow, she didn't pull Xiaxia away, wanting Xiaxia to have something to eat here.

Even if it was just a sip of soup.

Yu Si Niang, hearing the commotion, began setting out bowls and chopsticks. This was the perfect time for the chopsticks Fengzi had split earlier that day. She scooped two more bowls of wild vegetable porridge from the stove and placed them on the table.

At the same time, Little Zhi and Xiao Han sensibly vacated their seats.

Seeing this, Mrs. Liu felt the warmth in her heart.

She hesitated to speak, "Third sister-in-law, don't bother, I'm... not hungry."

But just as she finished speaking, her stomach rumbled embarrassingly, her face turning even more embarrassed.

Mu Shuangshuang, being tactful, took the initiative to say, "Aunt Si, we're all family here, no need to stand on ceremony. Initially, when we third branch separated, we wanted to invite you for a meal, but Xiaxia and Xiao Chu weren't around then.

Since we met today, there's no better time than today. Let's have you over for dinner at the third branch. You start eating, and I'll call my Fourth Uncle and Xiao Chu over."

"Shuangshuang, don't trouble yourself. I really don't need to eat; just let me take this bowl of porridge back for Xiao Chu."

She didn't mind if she didn't eat, but her three-year-old should not go hungry.

Mrs. Liu was firm, but she couldn't resist the equally determined Mu Shuangshuang.

"Aunt Si, you needn't be polite. It only takes a moment for me to fetch them over. Let's have some fun."

With that, Mu Shuangshuang rushed out and shortly returned with Mu Dajiang, holding Xiao Chu.

When she got there, Xiao Chu was throwing a tantrum. If it hadn't been for her patience, he might have cried all night.

"Xiaxia's dad, Third Brother invited us... for a meal," Mrs. Liu stood up, her face pale, explaining.

"Eat up, Shuangshuang told me already, let's eat and rest early."

Mrs. Liu didn't know what Mu Shuangshuang had said to Mu Dajiang, but she saw her husband sit down without a second thought.

With more people, the kitchen became crowded. Mu Shuangshuang offered her seat, holding Xiao Chu on the threshold.

Little Zhi and Xiao Han sat on the dirt wall opposite the stove mouth, eating with relish. The entire kitchen was enveloped in a harmonious atmosphere.

Mu Dajiang, looking at the half-corn in his hand, commented with some admiration, "Third Brother, you all are doing well. Nowadays, everything is your own. You work, grow vegetables, and I heard you even raise pigs."

Mu Dajiang didn't hide his envy. The third branch's life was indeed flourishing, even the once-skin-and-bones Shuang had gained some weight.

Yet the fourth branch remained stagnant, perhaps even worse off.

"Old Fourth, you know why our third branch split. To be honest, we owe today to Shuangshuang. Without her, we wouldn't survive even with the split."

Talking about Shuangshuang, Mu Dajiang's mind flashed with the shameful words of Old Mrs. Mu, further deepening the somber look on his face.

Chapter 289: Make the Most of Fengzi

Mrs. Liu was more straightforward; she put down the bowl in her hand and started crying softly.

How much grievance is there, and how many tears are shed.

Everyone put down their chopsticks and started comforting Mrs. Liu, even Yu Liulang, who had nothing to do with it, was there kindly comforting her.

"Sister-in-law, if you feel distressed, you might as well separate like my fourth sister. Even though life would be a bit bitter, you'd get to keep all the earnings for yourself from the work you do.

Even if Fourth Brother goes to the dock to move goods, earning just a dozen wen a day in wages, it's better than enduring grievances."

Yu Liulang's words were actually the most direct solution, a bit of hardship, but if you endure it, it'll pass.

Mu Xiaxia held onto her corn, looking hopefully at her father.

Among the entire fourth branch, the one who most wanted to split the household wasn't Mu Dajiang or Mrs. Liu, but Mu Xiaxia.

Mrs. Liu was also hesitating to have her husband speak about splitting the household because of Old Mrs. Mu's scolding words.

"Xiaxia's father, we..."

"Let me think it over, think it over again!" Mu Dajiang waved his hand, not giving a definite answer.

The hopeful Mu Xiaxia instantly wilted like a frosted eggplant!

Mu Dajiang felt that for the fourth branch at present, splitting the household was somewhat fanciful, especially after tonight, when his mother said those words made Mu Dajiang think that even if the fourth branch split, they might not even get half an acre of land.

And they aren't as capable as his third brother, nor do they have daughters like Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang observed everyone's expressions around the table and realized her uncle's words brought all the issues back to square one.

Unfortunately, without breaking through the painful experience, the fourth branch couldn't grow.

Just as her fourth aunt said, after splitting, she could follow her to learn some trade. But with no bit of cleverness or tenacity, ordinary people couldn't really handle this work.

To make cold noodles, she had to work until eleven or twelve at night every three days, then wake up at three or four in the morning; most folks couldn't endure it for long.

Yet she managed to stick through it, largely thanks to Lu Yuanfeng, who accompanied her no matter what.

Whenever there was danger, he was by her side.

Speaking of Lu Yuanfeng, Mu Shuangshuang felt a warm sensation inside her, a feeling of satisfaction spreading from her heart throughout her body, making her feel incredibly comfortable.

"Sister, I want more to eat." Xiao Chu munched through half a cob of corn and handed the remnants to Mu Shuangshuang.

Perhaps truly starved, Mu Shuangshuang believed even half a cob could satisfy her.

"Shall sister get you a bowl of porridge?" Mu Shuangshuang asked with a smile.

"No, I want corn, I want corn."

Xiao Chu kept repeating his demand for corn, making the room's atmosphere tense.

Yu Si Niang felt the most awkward, the meal was hers to prepare, and the corn was hers to cook. Tonight, she hadn't boiled much, just three cobs enough for the people from the third branch.

With more people from the fourth branch here, everyone's share became smaller, and still wasn't enough.

Now, the corn in Da Hai's bowl was already gone, and Yu Si Niang couldn't say there was no corn left.

Because on the stove, in an earthenware bowl, were the two largest and yellowest cobs, meant for Fengzi and Yuanbao.

Seeing Yu Si Niang's dilemma, Mu Dajiang was about to scold Xiao Chu when Mu Shuangshuang swiftly spoke first.

"Mom, slice the corn from the stove, will you."

"If the corn is sliced, what about Fengzi? After all, he just brought us such delicious meat." Yu Si Niang panicked, blurting out her thoughts involuntarily.

This made the fourth branch, who were freeloading tonight, suddenly embarrassed.

"Third Sister-in-law, forget it, Xiao Chu was just joking around. Normally...normally, he doesn't eat much," explained Mrs. Liu.

"Yes, our Xiao Chu just finds the corn fresh, that's why he's calling for fun." Mu Dajiang echoed, but deep inside felt bitter.

"No worry, Fourth Uncle, Fourth Aunt, don't stress over it. These were cooked for eating. I'll cook Fengzi's portion later on; he won't mind."

"Alright then!" Yu Si Niang stood up and did as Mu Shuangshuang suggested.

This time, she sliced the two corns into several sections, increasing the share for everyone.

The meal carried on throughout this strange atmosphere.

After dinner, Mrs. Liu offered to wash dishes for the third branch as appreciation for the meal.

Yu Si Niang refused, "Fourth Sister-in-law, you just go and rest, I'll handle this."

"Third Sister-in-law, don't say that, we're fine with eating and not doing anything, it makes me feel uneasy."

Mrs. Liu forcibly finished washing the dishes Mu Shuangshuang was handling, and polished the stovetop cover until it shone before returning.

Before leaving, she thanked repeatedly, almost making Yu Si Niang feel awkward before she finally left.

Once she left, Yu Si Niang leaned over.

"Shuang, what about Fengzi's supper? Didn't you say he'd help someone work late tonight and go to bed very late? Without supper, will he go hungry? If he gets sick from hunger, what should we do?"

Yu Si Niang asked with an evident concern, her care for Lu Yuanfeng was overflowing, almost like a mother towards her own son.

"Mom, why are you so worry about him, your daughter has been busy all day, hasn't even sat down, and you don't even care about me." Mumbled Mu Shuangshuang, pouting.

"Mom sees Fengzi as pitiful, being sent to the army so young, finally returned, with mom gone, he has no family connections and helped our family so much. Is it not right for Mom to care for him?"

"Okay, you're right, I'll go visit him later to check if he's hungry, whether to cook something for him."

"No need, it's night, you shouldn't go alone, unless mom accompanies you. Besides, do you know what work Fengzi is doing?" Yu Si Niang asked, curious.

"Yes, just some carpentry work."

The village carpenter had urgent business and went far away, coincidentally Lu Yuanfeng's was the second-best carpentry skill close by.

The carpenter had taken a job earlier and promised someone the goods by tomorrow, now gone, had to ask Lu Yuanfeng to finish it.

"Mom always said Fengzi was capable, good at hunting, farming, and also woodworking, look at our two cabinets, everyone in the village finds them enviable, even your uncle says they're good things."

Yu Si Niang tirelessly brainwashed Mu Shuangshuang, talking so much her head spun.

"Mom, I heard, I've remembered everything you've said."

Mu Shuangshuang put down her work, leaning softly on Yu Si Niang's shoulder, whispering in her ear.

"Since you know, better seize it, if Fengzi is snatched away, I'll see how you'd handle it."

Chapter 290: "The Man in 'Her' Heart

This brainwashing mode of Yu Si Niang was activated in the afternoon.

The thirty or so chicks at home made her completely approve of Lu Yuanfeng.

If a man is willing to do so much for a woman, and you still don't hold onto him, then something's wrong with your head.

Yu Si Niang felt that too many people in the village had their eyes on Lu Yuanfeng. Just this afternoon, someone asked her if her daughter had anything going on with Lu Yuanfeng. If not, they would send their own daughter over.

Yu Si Niang increasingly believed that Lu Yuanfeng was becoming a hot commodity.

"Mom, I get what you're saying, don't worry. Even if I don't turn Fengzi into your son-in-law, I'll at least make her your son."

This was considered a private conversation between mother and daughter, so Mu Shuangshuang spoke with a relaxed expression.

In her heart, she felt that Lu Yuanfeng gave her a different feeling from others, but whether that was liking, she wasn't sure herself.

And as for what Lu Yuanfeng meant, she couldn't quite figure it out. When Aunt Ge said today that she was Lu Yuanfeng's wife, he denied it particularly quickly, not seeming like he had that kind of intention.

Just thinking about it gave Mu Shuangshuang a headache. In the modern world, although she was amidst men, she never dated or tried to like someone...

"Look at what you're saying, child. Let's hurry up, or Fengzi will be hungry."

Yu Si Niang rummaged through a pile of corn for a long time, found two of the largest ears, along with the half bowl of dried cucumber peels she had set aside in the evening. Crisp and refreshing cucumber peels that she thought Fengzi should try.

After some preparation, by the time they were heading out, Yu Si Niang's bamboo basket was packed full of things.

Mu Shuangshuang held her hand, carrying a wooden stick, as they headed to Lu Yuanfeng's home.

In modern times, Mu Shuangshuang disagreed with this saying, but in ancient times, she found it made sense.

Population represents labor force; the more labor, the more work gets done, and the more income is received.

By the time they got to Lu Yuanfeng's house, those strange noises finally subsided.

As they got closer, they could still hear the sound of Lu Yuanfeng shavings wood, and Yuanbao's constant cries of hunger.

Lu Yuanfeng was planing wood in the utility room, ignoring the commotion from Yuanbao next to him. However, he soon noticed something different in the utility room.

First, the oil lamp was covered, then someone walked up. When he looked up, he saw Mu Shuangshuang smiling broadly at him.

The planer in his hand was immediately put down, and Lu Yuanfeng excitedly stepped forward to greet her.

"Shuangshuang, why are you here? It's so late."

Yu Si Niang was completely ignored, but she didn't feel anything was wrong. Young people, if they truly like each other, their eyes can't contain anyone else.

Seeing Fengzi act this way, she was more certain that he liked her daughter.

"My mom said you worked hard tonight and brought me over to make you a late-night snack."

Only then did Lu Yuanfeng notice Yu Si Niang beside Mu Shuangshuang.

"Aunt Si, sorry, I... I didn't see you just now."

"Fengzi, Aunt Si will go make something delicious for you, see if there's anything Shuangshuang can help with."

Seeing this, Yuanbao followed behind Yu Si Niang. "Second Brother, I'm hungry. I'll go watch Aunt Si first, and when the tasty food is ready, I'll be the first to eat."

In an instant, only Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were left in the utility room.

Mu Shuangshuang carefully examined the utility room. It was particularly clean, with tools arranged neatly.

Lu Yuanfeng's family had no land, so they didn't have any farming tools, but they did have quite a few bows and arrows and such.

Two large bows were hung on the north wall, and a box full of arrows lay in the quiver box.

These were all Lu Yuanfeng's survival tools. Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but take a few extra glances, and when she finished, she realized Lu Yuanfeng was watching her.

He seemed to have been looking for a long time, his gaze full of focus, even though Mu Shuangshuang had already turned away, he didn't notice.

Mu Shuangshuang blushed from being watched, thinking there was something on her back, but after several touches, she found nothing.

"Fengzi, you were staring at my back earlier, is there something there? I couldn't feel anything."

Lu Yuanfeng paused, realizing he'd been distracted watching Shuangshuang's back.

He quickly averted his gaze, looking at Mu Shuangshuang still touching her back, bit his lip, and suddenly said, "You have cobwebs on your back, I... I saw them."

Though curious about when she might have touched cobwebs, Mu Shuangshuang still turned her back to Lu Yuanfeng.

"Help me get rid of them, or a spider might crawl up later."