

Folly 321

Chapter 321: Matchmaker

The clucking of chickens and ducks came to an end as the food in Feng Xiaohua's hands was thrown to the ground.

The whole courtyard was filled with poultry scrambling for food, looking very lively.

Mu Shuangshuang watched her feeding the chickens and ducks, thinking that she would do the same in the future, carrying a tub of chicken feed to raise their family's thirty-plus chickens in the courtyard.

Mu Shuangshuang kept standing outside the courtyard, observing Feng Xiaohua.

Indeed, she was like her name, resembling a small flower. Though her skin wasn't particularly fair, it certainly wasn't dark either, with distinctive features and a delicate oval face that gave off a particularly pleasant feeling.

No wonder her grandmother would say that if Feng Xiaohua became her daughter-in-law, she would be treated like a treasure in the family.

Suitable for both the living room and the kitchen, if she truly became her sixth uncle's wife, her uncle would be quite lucky.

Having watched for a while, it was inevitable that Mu Shuangshuang got noticed, but fortunately, she hadn't tried to hide deliberately.

Feng Xiaohua stared at Mu Shuangshuang outside the courtyard. Instead of feeling unfamiliar, she felt particularly familiar, possibly because Mu Shuangshuang looked somewhat similar to Yu Liulang.

"You are...?" Feng Xiaohua asked politely.

"Miss Feng, I'm Shuangshuang, Yu Si Niang's eldest daughter, Yu Liulang's niece."

At the mention of Yu Liulang, Feng Xiaohua's body stiffened, and she gripped the wooden basin in her hands a bit tighter.

She opened the courtyard gate after walking through a bunch of chickens and ducks.

Feng Xiaohua was somewhat flustered with Mu Shuangshuang's arrival, knowing Yu Si Niang.

Because her status in Yu Liulang's heart was extremely important, even comparable to that of Luo Xiu'er, who had been gone for ten years.

Now Yu Si Niang hadn't come, but her daughter had. Why did she come?

With this question in mind, Feng Xiaohua brought Mu Shuangshuang into her room.

Feng Xiaohua's room was clean and tidy, yet still retained a maiden's love for beauty. She placed vases in several corners of the room, filled with wildflowers picked up from the mountains.

When the wind blew into the room, it carried a faint fragrance of flowers, smelling very pleasant.

"We don't have much to eat at home; the only thing worth presenting might be the tea I've brewed. I hope you don't mind." Feng Xiaohua offered Mu Shuangshuang a cup of tea politely.

"Miss Feng, why haven't I seen Grandpa Feng? Is he not here?" Mu Shuangshuang had looked around when she entered, but there was only Feng Xiaohua in the room.

"My father went out, and he won't be back for a while. You... can speak directly with me if you have anything to say."

Feng Xiaohua smiled faintly, being of a quiet temperament. Mu Shuangshuang grew increasingly curious about how someone like her could persist in liking her sixth uncle for ten years?

Perhaps love has never been about personality and right or wrong?

"Then I'll be direct with Miss Feng."

From start to finish, Mu Shuangshuang never called her Sister Feng because she always felt that she might soon change her address to Aunt, so she didn't want to trouble herself with titles.

"Does Miss Feng still like my sixth uncle?"

With Mu Shuangshuang's simple remark, Feng Xiaohua's palm sweated in nervousness. She didn't dare to look at Mu Shuangshuang, yet wanted to know what she meant, causing beads of sweat to roll from her forehead amidst the tense emotions.

"Miss Feng, don't be nervous. I mean no harm, just trying to confirm that if you still like my sixth uncle, I'm willing to help you, and him."

Feng Xiaohua's attitude decided whether Yu Liulang had any chance of being with her.

Feng Xiaohua was great, so great that Mu Shuangshuang felt somewhat unwilling to just let her be with her uncle.

After all, Yu Liulang still had someone in his heart.

"Help him?" Feng Xiaohua was a bit puzzled.

"Yes, my uncle hasn't been doing well for the past ten years as Miss Feng might know. But what I want to say is he didn't actually care for Luo Xiu'er as much as imagined."

As Luo Xiu'er's name was mentioned by Mu Shuangshuang, Feng Xiaohua began to believe Mu Shuangshuang's words.

She tried hard for ten years, waited for ten years, naturally unwilling to give up so easily.

If there is indeed a possibility to be with Sixth Son, then her ten years of waiting weren't in vain.

"But even if what you say is right, he still can't forget, still unwilling to marry me."

"Miss Feng, you're really wonderful. If I weren't here to help my uncle, if it were someone else, I would advise you to give up.

Not because you can't be together, but because it's unfair to you, my uncle had someone in his heart before, even if no longer loves, that person still exists as a memory."

"I understand everything you said, but I can't let go; I've tried, just can't let go!"

Ten years ago, Yu Liulang was sixteen, the model youth praised by everyone in the village.

While Feng Xiaohua was just ten years old, at an age when she understood nothing, yet at this age, she almost got bullied if not for Yu Liulang's intervention; her life would've been ruined.

Since then, a seed of affection was planted in Feng Xiaohua's heart.

Her affection had long turned into an obsession, as long as they could be together, she didn't care about anything.

"Since that, would you dare act a play with me? I'll try my best to help my uncle forget Luo Xiu'er."

Mu Shuangshuang had already thought of plans in her mind, sure Yu Liulang would fall for it, now she needed Feng Xiaohua's cooperation.

"How to act?" Feng Xiaohua became interested, realizing the girl in front of her was entirely different from her, having the light of a rebel in her eyes, distinct from everyone else.

Mu Shuangshuang beckoned Feng Xiaohua with a finger, and Feng Xiaohua came closer, with a few simple sentences outlining the whole plan.

Feng Xiaohua was a bit uneasy: "Will he agree to it?"

"He probably will, the reason I came is that I believe Miss Feng holds some place in my uncle's heart, otherwise I wouldn't have come personally.

If it works out, then Miss Feng would become my aunt, but if not..."

"If not, then I, Feng Xiaohua, would remain unmarried for life, he Yu Liulang waits, I can too, he doesn't marry, and I won't marry, living life like this isn't bad."

Mu Shuangshuang was shocked by Feng Xiaohua's words and increasingly felt that such a characterful woman ought to be treated well. If she couldn't help, she would be guilty beyond forgiveness.

After confirming related matters, Mu Shuangshuang prepared to leave, never expecting that Feng Xiaohua would directly grab a hen for her.

"Miss Feng, what's this for...?"

"The chicken's not given for free, I know he's at your place, once the chicken's brought back, cook an egg for him every day, when he leaves your place, the chicken will be yours."

Mu Shuangshuang frowned slightly, fearing one wouldn't find a better woman than Feng Xiaohua.

"I'll thank you for my uncle!"

Chapter 322: Do You Like Me?

Carrying the chicken back to the Old Yu Family, Mu Shuangshuang's mind was still unsettled.

She was so shocked, perhaps just because of Feng Xiaohua's feelings for her uncle.

Hopefully, there will be a good outcome.

"Shuangshuang, why are you bringing a chicken back?"

Old Mrs. Yu was so surprised her mouth couldn't close. It was the first time she had seen someone not only come empty-handed but also leave with something.

"Miss Feng gave it to me, told me to take it back, and have Sixth Son cook eggs with it."

Yu Liulang had been busy working for the third branch recently, from reclaiming wasteland to tending the vegetable patch, he hadn't taken a day off.

Maybe that's why Feng Xiaohua was worried about him not being able to handle it.

"She really is a good girl." Old Mrs. Yu sighed and then laughed, "But one day, she will become my daughter-in-law."

"Haha, Grandma, you're right. By the way, is Fengzi still packing tea leaves?"

Mu Shuangshuang was no longer angry after walking around; she was even eager to share Feng Xiaohua's secret crush story with Lu Yuanfeng.

"No, Fengzi finished his work a while ago. He's gone up the mountain to see if there are any wild chickens."

"Grandma, which mountain did he go to? I want to take a look too." Mu Shuangshuang asked curiously.

Old Mrs. Yu pointed out the direction, and Mu Shuangshuang, with a wooden bucket and stick, headed out.

Lu Yuanfeng, carrying his tools, was moving through the tea trees. Occasionally, a wild chicken or two flashed across his path, quickly disappearing.

Lu Yuanfeng knew where wild chickens easily hid, so he wasn't chasing after them.

He finally chose a spot where the tea trees were quite thick and found a wild chicken nest among them. Just as he was about to move, Mu Shuangshuang appeared in his sight.

It was clear Shuangshuang was heading in his direction. He gestured to her, and she quickly stopped there.

Wild chickens are very alert. Once you find their nest, you have to catch them in one go; otherwise, if they run, they won't come back.

Lu Yuanfeng slowly approached the wild chicken nest, and when he was close enough, he pounced and caught the two wild chickens in the nest.

The wild chickens clucked loudly in distress, prompting Mu Shuangshuang to rush over.

"Wow, Fengzi, you caught the wild chickens as soon as you arrived. That's amazing!"

Seeing the live-action capture of wild chickens for the first time, Mu Shuangshuang was incredibly excited, her whole body in a state of elation.

Lu Yuanfeng blushed at the praise, but he earnestly said, "I'll teach you how to find wild chicken nests, then you can catch wild chickens yourself later."

"Really? That would be great. I've been wanting to try it out, but let's first gather the wild chicken eggs."

Mu Shuangshuang squatted down and placed the ten wild chicken eggs from the nest one by one into her wooden bucket.

She also gathered some golden hay from the ground, so the eggs wouldn't fall in the bucket.

With Lu Yuanfeng's guidance, they quickly found a second wild chicken nest.

This time, there was only one wild chicken, and Lu Yuanfeng decided to let Shuangshuang try her hand at it.

Mu Shuangshuang lay down on the ground, crawling forward. Her strange posture and constant change of direction intrigued Lu Yuanfeng more and more.

He watched as Shuangshuang slowly approached the wild chicken, then suddenly pounced, pinning it firmly in the nest before it could react.

After tying up the wild chicken, Lu Yuanfeng expressed his curiosity.

"Shuangshuang, you said you'd teach me something different. Can you teach me now?"

Lu Yuanfeng was genuinely curious, especially since he felt that Shuangshuang's moves might be useful in the military, increasing his interest.

Mu Shuangshuang had long wanted to try. "Sure, but first punch me!"

The things Mu Shuangshuang learned were defensive and attacking techniques, mainly grappling and combat moves.

If not for her frail physique, she would have loved to have a proper fight with Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't hesitate, though he did control his strength, ready to withdraw anytime.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't joking around with Lu Yuanfeng. When his fist came, she dodged, then used an over-the-shoulder throw to send Lu Yuanfeng sprawling.

Lu Yuanfeng lay on the ground for a while without reacting.

"Shuangshuang, you..." Lu Yuanfeng was greatly surprised, not expecting Shuangshuang to follow up with a kick.

Lu Yuanfeng understood that Shuangshuang was demonstrating her skills. He cooperated by dodging, both of them mindful of the intensity. For Lu Yuanfeng, it was an astonishing experience.

Having been in the military, one would have some foundational skills, taught by an instructor for life-and-death encounters on the battlefield.

But when it comes to that, those moves are often forgotten, with battles fought on instinct and fate deciding the outcome.

Yet from Shuangshuang's eyes, he saw calculation. Every step, punch, and kick was a calculated use of force.

Lu Yuanfeng realized that the power gap between him and Shuangshuang was too wide; in direct combat, he would lose in just a few moves.

After performing a complete set of combat techniques, Mu Shuangshuang lay sprawled in the tea field, drenched as if pulled from a water tank.

But the satisfaction that seeped from her bones made her feel like shouting in glee.

"Fengzi, this is the happiest day of my life."

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly said, even though she knew she'd be sore all over for days and barely able to move her limbs much.

"Why? Because of today's sparring?"

Lu Yuanfeng referred to it as sparring because he felt that if Shuangshuang's stamina were better, she could genuinely be considered a worthy opponent.

"Yes, I haven't exercised in so long, but aren't you curious why... I know these things?"

Lu Yuanfeng shook his head. "Everyone has their secrets, and it's good that you know how to defend yourself."

Lu Yuanfeng thought that even if they spent every day together, there would inevitably be times he'd overlook things. Now that Shuangshuang had some self-defense ability, he could be more at ease.

"Fengzi, you're the best person I've ever met!"

Being good to her and helping her, Mu Shuangshuang wondered if Lu Yuanfeng liked her, being so nice to her.

But thinking about it, it seemed unlikely. They were so familiar; if he liked her, he would have said so!

Realizing her thoughts were wandering too far, Mu Shuangshuang quickly shook her head.

But Lu Yuanfeng spoke again, "Do you... like me?"

Chapter 323: Plan Ahead

Lu Yuanfeng's expression was serious as he looked at Shuangshuang, his gaze revealing traces of anticipation and tension.

The palms of his hands had long been soaked with sweat, and his heart was beating unnaturally fast.

His mind was a swirl of confusion; he forced himself to stay calm, fearing he might miss Shuangshuang's answer.

Compared to Lu Yuanfeng's nervousness, Mu Shuangshuang was much more composed, or perhaps she simply hadn't thought deeply about it.

She nodded almost without hesitation. "I like him!"

It's not just her; most people would probably like Fengzi's personality, right?

Whether it's his character or his external abilities, he's the kind of person everyone would compete to have!

But as Mu Shuangshuang answered Lu Yuanfeng, a strange and unfamiliar feeling suddenly welled up inside her heart.

It was as if something was continuously spreading in her chest.

She forcefully suppressed this strange feeling and said to Lu Yuanfeng, "Let's head back first. My grandmother said we could go pick peaches later."

Lu Yuanfeng froze in place, waves of emotions—expectation, tension, disappointment—continued to churn within him.

It took him a moment to calm his restless heart; he knew that rushing things wouldn't help.

Shuangshuang had a child-like nature; she couldn't possibly accept him so easily.

However, he believed that if he persevered, he could definitely make Shuangshuang understand that his feelings for her were romantic, not just as she thought.

"Okay, let me carry everything for you, don't tire yourself."

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This trip was quite fruitful. Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng returned to the Old Yu Family with wild chickens and eggs, causing quite a stir.

Old Mrs. Yu was grinning ear to ear. When Shuangshuang said the wild chickens were caught by Lu Yuanfeng, Old Mrs. Yu became increasingly impressed with the young man before her.

"Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi go rest for a bit. I'll have your aunt make dinner early; you two don't need to go back tonight. Stay here for a couple of days; I have plenty to talk to you about.

Tomorrow, I'll take you to see our tea mountain; I'm sure you'll be satisfied. Tonight, we'll make something delicious. I just sent your grandpa to buy some bones, should be back soon, so we can have corn stew with bones tonight."

Corn stew with bones, a dish that's a mix of meat and vegetables; other than in places like Yu Family Village where corn is grown abundantly, such a dish is rarely seen elsewhere.

Yu Family Village's terrain and conditions are different from other places. There are many low hills, water is harder to access at higher elevations, so the main crops are tea and corn; rice is only grown in low-lying areas.

Generally, a family has just one or two acres of land, enough for the family's consumption.

"Grandma, Fengzi and I didn't bring a change of clothes, so we probably can't stay here tonight. Besides, nobody knows we went out, and if we don't go back tonight, people might gossip endlessly."

Mu Shuangshuang hadn't planned on staying at Yu Family Village before, and wouldn't change her mind now.

"They wouldn't dare!" Old Mrs. Yu's face tightened, showing a surprisingly fierce expression.

But Mu Shuangshuang knew Old Mrs. Yu was a particularly kind elder, respected by everyone in the family, except for the mentally impaired Mrs. Li.

"Grandma, I'm just saying, please don't get agitated. Actually, Shuangshuang has a question she wants to ask. If Shuangshuang wanted to buy some corn, do you know roughly how much it costs per pound?"

Making popcorn absolutely requires corn, and Mu Shuangshuang was simply preparing ahead.

"Why? You want to eat corn? Grandma's house has plenty; just go pick some later. Pick as much as you like."

Old Mrs. Yu was excited, thinking that her granddaughter probably wanted to eat corn.

The Old Yu Family might not have many other resources, but when it comes to corn, they could let their granddaughter eat all she wanted.

"Grandma, Shuangshuang doesn't want to eat alone; she wants to buy some corn to take back. It might be quite a lot, around a few hundred pounds."

After hearing this, Old Mrs. Yu didn't show any difficult expression. She said with a smile, "It's not a big deal. When the corn ripens in the village, you can buy dozens of pounds from each household; you'll definitely have enough."

As for the price, since everyone has corn at home and nobody really aims to sell it for a high price, I reckon you can buy a pound for four or five wen."

Compared to rice that costs eight wen per pound, corn is indeed much cheaper, even buying a thousand pounds only costs five silver taels.

"Shuangshuang understands, thank you, Grandma! But Shuangshuang wants to settle this now. Shuangshuang briefly wants a thousand pounds of corn and can pay a one silver tael deposit."

Five silver taels isn't a difficult sum for Mu Shuangshuang. What she's most afraid of is if she really makes popcorn in the future and it's extremely popular, and if people find out it's made from corn, someone might pay to monopolize the corn supply.

So she has to prevent that from happening now.

"Shuangshuang, tell Grandma what you need so much corn for?"

In Old Mrs. Yu's heart, five silver taels is quite a sum, as even after saving for five or six years, most families wouldn't have that much; so why does Shuang want to use that much money so suddenly?

"For business, the popcorn Shuangshuang brought over this morning is made from corn. But Grandma, you can't tell anyone, not even the uncles and aunts."

"Of course, your grandma is smart! Now, you and Fengzi hurry and go pick peaches, while I help your aunt busy with dinner." Old Mrs. Yu said to Mu Shuangshuang with a clever look on her face.

"Thank you for your trouble, Grandma!"

Once Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left, Mrs. Li, who had been hiding in the shadows, appeared. She grabbed a wild chicken and walked to the courtyard gate, shouting loudly.

"Hey, everyone come and see, our Yu Family people are really amazing, they casually came over and caught so many wild chickens and eggs for us!"

Upon hearing the shouting, villagers came out one after another and, seeing the wild chicken in Mrs. Li's hand, stared with wide eyes.

Wild chicken tastes better than domestic chicken, with more robust meat. If one could eat a dish of fried wild chicken in summer, the taste would be...

"Er Lang's wife, who in your Yu Family is so skillful, catching wild chickens so easily?"

The villagers were curious; although in the afternoon they saw a man and a woman enter the Yu Family's house, none knew them or their relationship with the Yu Family.

"It's Si Niang's daughter; that girl is really impressive. You don't know, she caught the wild chicken like it was nothing. But she graciously said that all these wild chickens are ours."

Mrs. Li lied without hesitation; she felt that since Lu Yuanfeng caught wild chickens in Yu Family Village, half of those chickens should belong to the Yu Family. However, they weren't saying it, seeming not to want to give them any!

Chapter 324: Other People's Things Are More Tempting

Since that's the case, Mrs. Li decided to strike first.

She thought of telling the villagers that Shuangshuang had given all the pheasants to her, so the villagers would think those pheasants belonged to the Old Yu Family.

When Shuangshuang and that brat were about to leave later, she would call the villagers over to watch.

Even the thick-skinned wouldn't dare to take away these pheasants and eggs in front of everyone in the village.

"Si Niang's daughter is really something, just like Si Niang when she was young."

"Your Old Yu Family must have done something good in your ancestors' time to have such a capable granddaughter. There are many pheasants in Yu Family Village, but few can catch them. I've truly learned something today!"

"Indeed, we Old Yu Family don't keep freeloaders. If you want to eat, you have to work!"

Mrs. Li boasted to everyone until the whole village knew, then she stopped.

Old Mrs. Yu came down from the mountain, just in time to hear the villagers talking, knowing her second daughter-in-law was up to no good again.

"Second daughter-in-law, how could you say that! Those pheasants were caught by Fengzi." Old Mrs. Yu disapproved of Mrs. Li's actions.

"Mother, no matter who caught them, these pheasants are ours, and I want chicken soup tonight." Mrs. Li licked her lips, almost drooling.

"Second daughter-in-law, you are really muddleheaded. If you want chicken, there are plenty in our chicken coop. Just kill one. Why insist on taking others' things and making people dislike you?"

Old Mrs. Yu always had complaints about her second daughter-in-law, who was so eager for small gains that she would never learn from her mistakes despite suffering many times.

"Mother, you are the one who's muddleheaded. Why does other people's stuff always taste better than our own?"

Our chickens are for Tiancai and Tianmu to lay eggs. If eaten, what will your grandsons eat?

"Boiled rice with cold water? Anyway, I don't care. I just want Shuangshuang's pheasants!"

After saying this, Mrs. Li hugged the pheasants and angrily went back to her room, ignoring Old Mrs. Yu who was chasing her to put them down, and she even shouted:

"Mother, either give me that piece of red cloth or I'll take the pheasants. Anyway, if there's no bargain, don't think I'll return the pheasants!"

"You..." Old Mrs. Yu trembled with anger, standing in the yard for a long time before calming down.

Just then, Mr. Yu returned. Hearing Old Mrs. Yu's words, he wasn't angry but consoled her: "Old woman, why get excited over her words? Who would believe the second daughter-in-law? When Shuangshuang gets back, I'll take the pheasants out, let her be pleased with herself for now!"

Only then did Old Mrs. Yu nod. She remembered the silver Shuangshuang gave her and the task she had to do, and then she went out.

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Mu Shuangshuang and Fengzi were happily picking peaches on the mountain. A long bench was placed under the peach tree, with Lu Yuanfeng standing on the chair and Mu Shuangshuang holding the bench with one hand and the bamboo basket for Lu Yuanfeng with the other.

Peaches fell down with a swish, landing in the basket Mu Shuangshuang held high.

Various red and yellow peaches in the bamboo basket looked vibrant and beautiful.

Not far from them, a boy called Tiancai was also picking up fallen peaches, eating them without washing whenever they hit the ground.

By the time Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng picked two baskets of peaches, her cousin Yu Tiancai was already so full he couldn't move from the ground.

"Cousin Shuangshuang, I'm glad you came. I couldn't eat peaches before, just watching them hungrily," Yu Tiancai said to Mu Shuangshuang with a face full of joy.

"Haha, then the person you should thank isn't me, it's your brother Yuanfeng who's the real skillful one."

After all, it was Fengzi who was tall and the one climbing the tree, while she only did some trivial things.

"Yes, Brother Yuanfeng is amazing, but can I take some peaches for Tianhe and Tiansha?"

The Old Yu Family currently had only three grandchildren at home; the rest were busy outside and wouldn't return except during the holidays.

Old Mrs. Yu gave birth to six children, three sons, and three daughters. The eldest and second were sons, while her mother, third aunt, and fifth aunt were daughters who married early and seldom returned.

Over the years, several sons and their wives had been looking after Old Mrs. Yu, and despite living together, the family wasn't as contentious as their parents.

"Of course, you can take some to them!"

Mu Shuangshuang lifted Yu Tiancai's shirt, filled his pocket with peaches, and watched him go down the mountain. Then she and Lu Yuanfeng picked some more peaches before descending.

In such a short time, Mrs. Zhang's dinner was ready, the fragrance wafting from the kitchen, and Old Mrs. Yu, who had made a trip outside, had just finished dealing with Mu Shuangshuang's affairs.

She got a tael of silver as a deposit, and even found a witness for the transaction. If they didn't gather a thousand pounds of corn by the agreed time, it would be a breach of contract, and they could go to the government to sue.

Farmers feared nothing more than officials. In their eyes, if one got into a lawsuit, life was pretty much over, so Old Mrs. Yu reckoned the matter was pretty much settled.

When she told Mu Shuangshuang what happened, Shuangshuang was thrilled, hugging Old Mrs. Yu with gratitude.

"Grandma, people say old ginger is spicier, and I believe it now. You truly are capable and bold, I love you so much!"

"You sweet girl, Grandma can't bear to see you go." Old Mrs. Yu mused, feeling like she had a full house of sons and grandsons, yet none were as adorable and sensible as Shuangshuang, always liking her more the more she observed her.

"Grandma, isn't it because I'm busy with my uncle's big matter? Once it's resolved, he'll have to get married, won't he? Then I'll visit you often, so set your mind at ease. Shuangshuang will certainly come back to accompany you."

Old Mrs. Yu felt a bit comforted by this.

"Right, when your sixth uncle gets married, come again, and I'll get your room ready, changing the bedding to new ones for you."

Old Mrs. Yu's words reminded Mu Shuangshuang of how the Third Branch of the Mu Family had no winter clothing except a few summer clothes, making her wonder how they survived the past winters.

"Then Shuangshuang thanks Grandma!"

"Alright, alright, let's go eat. Later, I'll have your second uncle drive the ox cart to take you back. It's getting late, and it's not safe for two kids to be out."

"Grandma, we came with a wheelbarrow, no need."

"No problem, we'll bring the wheelbarrow onto the big cart together, it's more convenient!"

With Old Mrs. Yu's decisive words, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were spared the effort of walking back. Shuangshuang felt extremely moved, ever more convinced that this visit was worthwhile.

Chapter 325: Hit It Off

At the dinner table, Old Mrs. Yu kept serving dishes to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng. Most of the corn and bone stew ended up in their bowls.

Mrs. Li kept rolling her eyes in annoyance at the table.

Midway through, Old Yu stepped out of the kitchen and came back looking refreshed and at ease.

He exchanged a glance with Old Mrs. Yu, and she immediately knew that the chicken had been put back among the things Shuangshuang and Fengzi were to take back.

All the worries in her heart instantly disappeared.

"Fengzi, thank you for bringing our Shuangshuang over today. In the future, you both should come by more often. I, an old lady, may not have much, but I do have some food," she said warmly.

Old Mrs. Yu was different from Old Mrs. Mu; her whole heart was centered on her grandchildren. The family had a plot of land solely for growing various gourds.

Earlier, she had her eldest son's wife pick some ripe melons for Shuangshuang to take along. They were ready for her to bring back when she left.

"Grandma, no need to be so polite. You're really very kind." Lu Yuanfeng said sincerely. He respected Shuangshuang's grandmother, just like everyone else did.

Especially after comparing her to Old Mrs. Mu, he was more convinced that there are good people in the world.

After dinner, it was around half past four in the afternoon. Traveling from Yu Family Village to Er Gui Village took a few hours; even with an ox cart, it would take some time.

So there was no time to delay getting home.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng packed their things, placing everything on the flat cart, with the wheelbarrow laid across it. Before leaving, Mu Shuangshuang hugged Old Mrs. Yu and then departed.

Just as they left the village entrance, a shout suddenly came from Li's house.

"Mom, where's my chicken? What did you do with it?" Mrs. Li immediately confronted Old Mrs. Yu.

"Humph, who knows if it just ran off on its own? Did you tie its feet?"

"Mom, what do you mean by that? What's this about the chicken running off? I see plainly that you snuck it back when I wasn't looking! I'm furious! No, I'm going to get my chicken back."

After saying this, Mrs. Li rushed towards the village entrance, ignoring Old Mrs. Yu's calls. She was sprinting with all her might.

"Mu Shuangshuang, chicken...give me back my chicken..."

"Thief, liar..."

Chasing the ox cart carrying Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng for about two miles, Mrs. Li couldn't catch up and ended up sitting on the ground, crying and cursing them both.

Mr. Yu came out of the house, shook his head as he watched the direction Mrs. Li had disappeared.

"What a misfortune for the family. How could such an honest lad like Yu Er marry a wife like that? We shouldn't have listened to you back then, letting Yu Er marry such a thing!"

"Old man, that's not my fault. You were the one who made the decision back then. When you get down to it, it was because we were so poor at the time. Mrs. Li was the only one willing to marry in without asking for money."

The Old Yu Family had only risen in recent years. Before that, the times were unstable, and no one valued tea leaves as much as a bite of grain. It was only in recent years that, with peace and no more wars, Yu Family Village gradually developed.

But at that time, if you casually demanded five or ten taels, there weren't many takers.

As they were talking, Mrs. Zhang walked out of the house.

"Mom, the wild chicken and eggs in the coop, are we keeping them or what?"

"Eldest daughter-in-law, what are you saying, a wild chicken in the coop?" Mr. Yu didn't react for a moment.

He couldn't help but slap his hand: "Ah, damn it, that troublesome daughter-in-law of Yu Er's actually hid two chickens and even stole the wild eggs!"

"I'm going to find her!" Old Mrs. Yu was also angry.

"Dad, Mom, it wasn't Erju who took them. It was Fengzi who put them in earlier. I thought you knew, so I didn't tell you."

"Ah... this kid has a big heart, doesn't say much, and quietly does things!" Mr. Yu remarked.

"Yeah, I like this boy. I don't know what the situation is with him and our Shuangshuang. They're so close, but it doesn't seem like that kind of relationship between a man and a woman. Shuangshuang's eyes are too innocent."

Old Mrs. Yu, having lived through it, knew that if it were love, her gaze would naturally linger on the other person.

Fengzi's eyes were always on Shuangshuang. But her granddaughter was as dense as a log, never giving any response or indication, just focusing on her meal or her tasks.

After saying this, Old Mrs. Yu tugged at her sleeve and suddenly realized there was something bulging in her pocket.

Taking it out, she found two strings of Copper Coins.

"Oh my, Old Man, this..." Old Mrs. Yu exclaimed in surprise, realizing it might have been slipped to her when Shuangshuang hugged her before leaving.

Mr. Yu held his chin, smiling brightly.

"Old woman, you have to admit, our Shuangshuang and that young fellow are a perfect match.

Even the way they do things is so similar. Perhaps we were all wrong. Shuangshuang does care for the young lad, but maybe she hasn't realized it herself!"

"That makes it interesting. I just can't wait to see how Fengzi wins her heart!"

Old Mrs. Yu joined in the laughter, increasingly looking forward to what might develop between Shuangshuang and Fengzi.

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Returning to Er Gui Village, it was indeed dark, but thankfully, there was a moon, providing light. The path underneath their feet was visible enough.

Yu Erlang was sent back by Mu Shuangshuang halfway, so it was just the two of them now.

As they entered the village, Lu Yuanfeng became cautious. He insisted on walking in front and even made Shuangshuang hold a stick, saying there were many earth snakes at night, and a bite from one could be serious.

Mu Shuangshuang followed him closely, occasionally using the stick to tap the ground.

By nightfall, it was already past an hour. The villagers had all gone to rest, which made the village feel more desolate compared to the day.

They hadn't walked far when they saw Yu Si Niang and three little kids waiting, as if they had been there for a long time.

Yu Si Niang, anxious with worry, had been on the verge of panic when her daughter hadn't returned by nightfall and was too far from Yu Family Village to just wait it out.

The children's eyes were sharp, and as soon as they saw two figures, they began shouting loudly. Yuanbao dashed to Lu Yuanfeng's side and gave a big bear hug.

"Second brother, you're finally back. I missed you so much!"

"Me too, me too, brother Yuanfeng, Little Zhi thought you and sister got lost. I was so worried," Little Zhi, with a childish voice, told Lu Yuanfeng.

"Alright, let's talk when we get back. I'm exhausted from today," said Mu Shuangshuang with a tired face.

With that, everyone prepared to head back home.

Chapter 326: Try Something New

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng ate dinner early, and now after such a long journey, their stomachs were empty. Yu Si Niang brought out the sweet potato and wild vegetable rice, which was kept warm in the pot, along with a bit of side dishes for them.

Afraid they wouldn't be full, she added a stir-fried cucumber skin dish.

"Crunch"

"Crunch"

The crisp sound of cucumber skin echoed in the kitchen as Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng devoured their dinner, finally quelling their hunger.

It was already late, so Mu Shuangshuang moved her things off the wheelbarrow and let Lu Yuanfeng go home first.

At night, lying on the bed, Mu Shuangshuang's entire body was sore, as if her bones had fallen apart. The aftereffects of her over-exercising during the day emerged, and now she was in great pain all over.

By the middle of the night, lying in bed, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't take it anymore. She got up and rolled several times on the muddy floor of the house, endured the pain, exercised a bit more, and broke into a sweat.

After taking a fresh shower, she finally lay back in bed and fell asleep in a daze.

The next day, the swelling pain turned into soreness, making it difficult for Mu Shuangshuang even to get out of bed. She smiled bitterly to herself, wondering when she had ever been so awkward.

It all boiled down to her body's poor foundation. No matter how smart she was or how much she knew about modern martial arts, if her physical strength couldn't keep up, she would be sore for days every time she exercised.

Unless her body gradually adapted to these movements.

It seemed she needed to find time every day for running exercises.

With a determined mind, Mu Shuangshuang made a schedule in her heart: every night before bed, she would run a few laps around the village, get sweaty, then take a shower before sleeping.

Suddenly, there was a burst of noise in the courtyard. The big popcorn maker from yesterday had nowhere to be stored, so Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left it in the yard.

Early in the morning, as she got up to poop, Mrs. Lin saw it and gathered everyone from the house, hollering.

"Mom, the brat's place has a popcorn maker, get some glutinous rice, and let's make our own popcorn!"

Little Gou Dan went home yesterday and cried and screamed for popcorn without stopping.

Mrs. Lin was craving as well and mentioned it to the old lady, but to her dismay, Old Mrs. Mu refused under the pretext that the old man who made popcorn was gone. Mrs. Lin was down all day and couldn't hold back when she saw the object in Shuangshuang's courtyard today.

"Are you crazy? Do you even know how to use that thing?"

Of course, Old Mrs. Mu was unwilling. Mrs. Lin was just pregnant with a child, not a golden egg, yet she wanted to eat everything, thinking she was some empress dowager.

"But Shuangshuang knows! Since she bought such an iron lump, it must be for making and selling popcorn. I'm her second aunt; she has to give me some, right?"

"Sorry, Second Aunt, but I really don't know how to work this thing. If you aren't afraid of getting blown up, go ahead and play with it; I won't stop you."

Mu Shuangshuang, fully dressed, casually responded to Mrs. Lin's scheming with a nonchalant expression.

Sometimes, Mu Shuangshuang really felt that this Mrs. Lin was like a sticky molasses, never learning after being scolded.

Knowing she wouldn't get anything to eat from her, Mrs. Lin shamelessly stuck herself over.

Thick-skinned, Mrs. Lin replied, "Shuangshuang, your second aunt is pregnant and just wants something fresh. Give me some, please. The little brother in my belly is yours too!"

"No need, Second Aunt, if you want something fresh, there's plenty of grass on the road. Pick some and stuff it into your mouth, surely it'll be fresher."

"You... Mom, listen to this! The little brat's mouth is so venomous, asking me to eat grass. Only animals eat grass; how dare she talk to me like this?"

Old Mrs. Mu gave a cold snort to Mu Shuangshuang, grabbing Mrs. Lin by the sleeve, and dragged her towards the Old Mu Family's place.

"You dare eat the little brat's stuff, not afraid of being poisoned? Hurry and roll back to your pigsty. If anything happens to my grandson, I'll have your life!"

Strangely enough, Old Mrs. Mu did not curse at Mu Shuangshuang but directed her anger at Mrs. Lin instead. It was truly peculiar.

What Mu Shuangshuang didn't know was that Old Mrs. Mu was brooding over how to make Mu Dashan support her.

Her son taking care of her in her old age was a must, even if the family was split up. Her son had to be responsible for her for life.

So she didn't argue with Mu Shuangshuang this time.

Mu Shuangshuang found it strange but wasn't a tapeworm in Old Mrs. Mu's stomach. She couldn't know what she was thinking.

So she relaxed and thought about dealing with things as they came.

After a night's rest, her spirits were revived, and she started preparing breakfast early. The food from last night had long been digested, and she felt ravenous.

For breakfast, she decided to make more: corn porridge, steamed sweet potatoes, and crispy golden fried dough sticks, each made in small portions.

By the time breakfast was ready, the family members also started waking up one after another.

She served Lu Yuanfeng and Yuanbao a big bowl of porridge, gave them two of the largest fried dough sticks, and a whole sweet potato, which should be enough for them.

Just as she was nearing Lu Yuanfeng's house, she unexpectedly saw Wang Fugui and Xia Guagua together, walking towards the direction of the abandoned house.

Mu Shuangshuang had no interest in Xia Guagua's affairs, so she didn't go to eavesdrop.

Xia Guagua was wearing a new dress bought by Wang Fugui, yet her face did not show any trace of happiness.

"Didn't you say you'd deal with that little brat for me in three days?" Xia Guagua immediately questioned as she opened her mouth.

"Not here, Gua Gua. Let's go over there; no one is around."

In Wang Fugui's words, "over there" referred to the abandoned house in the village.

Speaking of it, both he and Xia Guagua went there, as did Mu Danian and Chen Hong, yet they never crossed paths or knew of each other's presence. Each thought they were the only ones aware of the place.

However, Mu Danian wasn't going there anymore because his injuries hadn't healed.

"Gua Gua, you look really beautiful today." Wang Fugui, lecherously feeling about Xia Guagua's waist, said while his face was filled with sleaze.

"Save these sweet words. You haven't answered my question yet."

"Didn't you also not drug Lu Yuanfeng? I'm just waiting for you to do it so I could deal with that little brat. Besides, she's just a little brat. What can she do to you?"

Wang Fugui showed a casual attitude. He had money and connections, thinking he could effortlessly crush Mu Shuangshuang.

"You know that my brother Yuanfeng's courtyard wall is completed. I can't get in."

Lu Yuanfeng's courtyard wall was different from others. To prevent Xia Guagua from entering, he even placed spikes on top of the wall, ensuring anyone who tried climbing over would turn into a porcupine.

"Then wait for my good news. Luckily, I have some free time these days, so I can play around with that Mu Shuangshuang. But if I help you and you don't give me what I want, what then? A woman's heart is not simple!"

Wang Fugui feigned seriousness, but his eyes hungrily lingered on Xia Guagua.

Chapter 327: Dominant Man

"If you don't want to help me, forget it, I'll find someone else."

Xia Guagua didn't like Mu Shuangshuang, but she wasn't irrational enough to let Wang Fugui take advantage of her.

Xia Guagua pretended to leave, but Wang Fugui blocked her path.

"Why are you so stubborn, young lady? Just lower your head and say something nice, is it that difficult?"

"You mean, just saying something nice will suffice, nothing else?" Xia Guagua asked suspiciously.

Wang Fugui had a terrible reputation in the village. To put it nicely, he was uninhibited; to put it bluntly, he was lewd and shameless.

"Of course, since you haven't married Lu Yuanfeng yet, our previous promises don't count."

Wang Fugui wasn't stupid. If he laid hands on Xia Guagua now, it would definitely cause trouble. But if he helped Xia Guagua and Lu Yuanfeng, the woman would still be his, without any responsibilities. Even if there was a green hat involved, it would be Lu Yuanfeng wearing it.

"But I still think you need to settle things with Lu Yuanfeng first. After all, he's a man. No matter how miserable I make Mu Shuangshuang, if he doesn't mind, you're out of luck."

Wang Fugui had sinister thoughts. As long as Lu Yuanfeng and Xia Guagua consummated their relationship, Xia Guagua would be in his grasp.

Listening to Wang Fugui, Xia Guagua began to worry internally. She had to completely ruin Mu Shuangshuang without giving her any hope.

"Thank you, please make sure to help me." Xia Guagua tiptoed and lightly kissed Wang Fugui's cheek, then feigned a shy look.

Only she knew how disgusted she felt!

Wang Fugui laughed heartily, taking advantage of the situation and still trying to act considerate.

"Gua Gua, don't worry, I'll definitely help you get rid of that smelly girl Mu Shuangshuang."

To gain Xia Guagua's trust, Wang Fugui began looking for a few of the village's good-for-nothing men right in front of her.

One of them was Ma Houhou, who once enraged Mu Shuangshuang so much that she spat blood.

Upon hearing it was about dealing with Mu Shuangshuang, Ma Houhou enthusiastically agreed, especially given his house was quite close to Lu Yuanfeng's, making them practically neighbors.

Particularly since last time, his mother stole a piece of meat from Lu Yuanfeng's stand, and that pesky girl ruined it, leaving his mother with no face in Er Gui Village since then.

"Fugui, don't worry, even if you don't pay me, I'll deal with that nasty girl. I'll wait for her on her way back, so everyone in the village knows how she seduced me!" Ma Houhou vowed confidently.

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Mu Shuangshuang, carrying breakfast, arrived outside Lu Yuanfeng's courtyard. Seeing the wall covered with thorns, she was very satisfied.

Lu Yuanfeng had mentioned that his courtyard wall wasn't very high, and anyone determined could climb in.

Of course, she knew he meant Xia Guagua. She casually mentioned how modern people put glass and iron hooks on their walls, and he ended up using thorns.

Those thorns piercing the skin couldn't help but make one shed a layer.

Lu Yuanfeng was working on some carpentry in the courtyard. Perhaps due to the convenience of the courtyard, he brought his work outside.

Yet with the weather not cool, once the sun came up, wouldn't he be scorched?

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but frown!

"Fengzi, open the door. I brought some breakfast over."

Lu Yuanfeng looked a bit stunned, gazing dazedly at Mu Shuangshuang for a while before reacting. But it was Yuanbao who shouted excitedly, "Ah ah ah... there's breakfast! Sister Shuangshuang, I love you..."

Children expressed their affection openly, making Mu Shuangshuang delighted with Yuanbao's endearing words.

After the courtyard door opened, she waved the basket at Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, stop standing there and come eat. Later, we can think of more tricks for your courtyard."

Lu Yuanfeng set down his axe, rubbed his palms, and saw Shuangshuang enter the house. When she emerged again, she had a basin of water ready.

A towel was tossed into the washbasin, unclear whether it belonged to Lu Yuanfeng or Yuanbao, but likely meant for washing up in the kitchen.

After washing, Yuanbao hadn't yet brushed his teeth. Or maybe he did, but he remembered to wash his hands and face.

"I'm on it!" Yuanbao said, grabbing a locust branch from the bucket by the bamboo pole. He chewed the end soaked in water, dipped his fingers in salt, and started brushing his teeth.

After Yuanbao finished brushing, Lu Yuanfeng washed his face. Using the same water, Yuanbao washed his face too.

Despite waking early, even now the sun hadn't risen. A chilly breeze blew, so Lu Yuanfeng and Yuanbao decided to bring out a table for breakfast.

Corn porridge, steamed sweet potatoes, and fried dough sticks were set on the table by Mu Shuangshuang. Seeing such a lavish breakfast, Yuanbao drooled and kept saying how delicious it was, even before tasting it.

"Shuangshuang, won't you eat with us?"

The breakfast was for two. Unable to resist asking, Lu Yuanfeng queried.

"I'll eat later at home; there's plenty left!" The porridge and sweet potatoes Shuangshuang preferred cold, plus she had plenty of errands to run later and couldn't linger.

Lu Yuanfeng remained silent, broke a sweet potato in half, and handed it to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Eat!"

"I'm really not hungry; I'll eat when I get back." Mu Shuangshuang grimaced helplessly. She was here to deliver breakfast, not eat it.

Unexpectedly, Lu Yuanfeng stood up, went into the kitchen, and spent some time tinkering. When he returned, he had two bowls, one filled with freshly fried eggs, two of them.

The other was an empty small bowl. He scooped porridge from a big ocean bowl on the table into Mu Shuangshuang's bowl, and shared an egg between Mu Shuangshuang and Yuanbao.

Mu Shuangshuang stared wide-eyed as he completed everything alone, cradling a rough earthenware bowl and sipping porridge himself.

"Fengzi, I really don't want to eat..." Mu Shuangshuang mumbled, marveling at the situation internally.

"You're too thin, you should eat more. If it's not enough, I can cook more porridge or make some stir-fried rice for you."

Her protest was completely ignored, as Lu Yuanfeng handed chopsticks directly to Mu Shuangshuang.

Yuanbao, smiling broadly, looked up, "Sister Shuangshuang, you should eat. I've never seen Brother Yuan change his mind on something once decided!"

"Yuanbao, no talking while eating!" Lu Yuanfeng sternly addressed Yuanbao, keeping a straight face.

"Okay, okay, I'll eat, but if Sister Shuangshuang doesn't, I can't finish mine either!"

Chapter 328: Ma Houhou Looking for Trouble

Yuanbao is probably the most troublesome kid Mu Shuangshuang has ever met, not caring about her brother eating so little, but instead showing concern for her.

And he's the kind who keeps his word; if Mu Shuangshuang doesn't eat, he won't pick up his chopsticks, staring at her with unwavering attention, drooling.

Being watched like this, Mu Shuangshuang has to eat even if she doesn't want to.

But she learned to be smart, giving half of her egg to Lu Yuanfeng, and half of her sweet potato too. Afraid he might go back on his word, she immediately said: "If you dare put more in my bowl, I won't eat anymore. I'll just starve!"

Her words carried an undeniable determination, her attitude was resolute, not at all like she was joking.

Lu Yuanfeng indeed didn't make a move, nibbling on a quarter piece of sweet potato with vigor.

Lu Yuanfeng always eats quietly, no matter what he eats, he does so refined, which honestly doesn't quite match his outward image. Mu Shuangshuang felt that he should at least be boldly drinking wine and eating meat expansively.

Unfortunately, in this mountainous village, he turned out to be that kind of uniquely tempered young lad.

Breakfast was finished in a very quiet atmosphere. Lu Yuanfeng took on the task of washing dishes, while Mu Shuangshuang thought about how to help him avoid exhaustion while working in the yard.

She finally decided to have Lu Yuanfeng set up a small canopy in the yard, using bamboo for the frame, and dry grass for the roof.

From then on, wheelbarrows and such could be kept under the canopy, and it would be best to also raise a dog.

A rural family raising a dog doesn't cost much, giving it leftovers, or pig food when cooking for pigs, allows it to survive.

But its role as a watchdog far outweighs the little value you give it.

After Lu Yuanfeng finished washing the dishes, Mu Shuangshuang shared her idea with him, and he immediately went to the back mountain to cut four bamboo sticks. They had wood ready at his house, so he didn't need to wait for it to dry before using it.

Mu Shuangshuang thought Lu Yuanfeng might not be able to manage alone, so she sent Yuanbao to her house, to tell her family to eat breakfast first without waiting for her.

Although it was just a simple canopy, the two of them busied themselves for several hours, piling stumps and laying a roof.

Mu Shuangshuang was aching all over, unfit for any complex activities, so she basically watched Lu Yuanfeng from below.

Finally, with the shade canopy completed, both Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang breathed a sigh of relief.

By now it was quite hot, so Mu Shuangshuang didn't stick around long; she drank a bowl of tea and decided to head home.

"Fengzi, don't bother sending me during the day. I'll go myself."

Usually, Lu Yuanfeng would escort her home at night, but during the day she didn't want to trouble him, as he wasn't idle and had work to do.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded, standing at the garden door without going any further, but he didn't enter the house immediately either, instead standing at the door, watching Shuangshuang go.

Mu Shuangshuang realized she was running late, and still had something important on her mind, so she walked harder than usual, but not faster.

As she walked, her aching legs twitched, and at a sparsely populated area of the village, suddenly a man jumped out.

Mu Shuangshuang focused her eyes and saw it was none other than Ma Houhou, Aunt Zhang's idle son.

Ma Houhou had been waiting for Mu Shuangshuang all morning, already impatient, irritated by the strong sun, wanting to find something fun to vent.

At her appearance, his wicked intentions emerged, and his words weren't polite at all.

"Hey, Old Mu Family's Shuangshuang, how long has it been since we last saw each other? You've grown so beautiful! Let me have a good look; with such fair skin, you surely feel amazing to touch..."

"Tsk tsks, if I didn't know how bad you smell, I'd really want to hold and kiss you!"

Ma Houhou said profane, vile, indecent things, thinking Mu Shuangshuang was still that poor girl who only knew to hold her head in silence after being bullied.

About the time his mother suffered a loss, Ma Houhou thought it was just bad luck for her, not realizing Mu Shuangshuang had changed.

Mu Shuangshuang coldly sneered at Ma Houhou; she'd wanted to deal with this person for a long time.

Back when she first came across, this person was also filthy mouthed, causing her such anger she nearly died.

Today, she must teach this disgusting, obscene thing a lesson, or else he wouldn't know what dying is.

"Ma Houhou, why do you think I, Mu Shuangshuang, would be interested in you? Are you worth anything? Please look in the outhouse at yourself; anyone who sees you loses their appetite.

It's hard for Aunt Zhang, trying to protect your ugly face by stealing meat from others, and ending up with nothing."

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes dramatically, scornfully said to Ma Houhou.

"You... who do you think you are? You don't even hold a mirror to yourself, skinny like a walking stick. Just because you can squat to pee doesn't mean you're a woman. If someone marries you, they might as well marry a hen."

Ma Houhou's level was higher than those before, and his words were vexing.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't angry, knowing it's unwise to quarrel with beasts.

She was utterly unaffected by Ma Houhou's words, actually feeling quite smug: "I just looked at myself with a basin of water today, and I'm very good-looking.

All of Qingshan Town can't find another as good-looking as me; otherwise, you wouldn't stick around deliberately trying to block me!

Though bottom-tier like you could at best serve as livestock, not fit to be human. You only burn eyes, nothing else."

"You... you..." Ma Houhou had never seen someone so thick-skinned, claiming to look good, but he was more angered by her insulting words, gritting his teeth, veins popping on his forehead.

"Smelly girl, today I'll make sure you understand regret!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't even want to look at his disgusting face, but while speaking, she purposefully surveyed the surroundings and found a huge hornet's nest on a willow not far away, occasionally with hornets flying out.

Her idea came instantly.

She lowered her stance, speaking softly: "Don't be so fierce, I was just joking with you. You're good, many 'things' in the village really like you."

Ma Houhou heard the light 'you're good' and his anger faded significantly.

With a sleazy smile, he softened his attitude: "Smelly girl, you know what's best! With your stinky demeanor, I'm telling you, no one in the village dares to marry you except me.

But don't worry, you get with me, and I'll guarantee a life of eating and drinking well, anything you want."

Chapter 329: Spoil You

"Really?" Mu Shuangshuang asked, feigning surprise.

"Of course!" Ma Houhou replied with confidence, thinking to himself, "It's just a brat, being able to eat pig feed is good enough."

"Then I want to eat stir-fried willow branches," Mu Shuangshuang said, eyeing the willow tree with a wasp nest.

"What? Willow branches? Hahaha... you're really silly, eating something like that, I'll humor you,"

Ma Houhou looked around and set his sights on the willow tree Mu Shuangshuang was staring at. He walked over casually and began to bend the willow branches under the tree.

Mu Shuangshuang followed behind him, finding the angle and height suitable for throwing stones. Suddenly, she bent down, picked up a large stone, and hurled it forcefully at the wasp nest.

With a "clang," the wasp nest fell to the ground, landing right by Ma Houhou's feet.

From inside the nest, a swarm of wasps began to fly out, buzzing loudly. Mu Shuangshuang ran with all her might, coincidentally bumping into Lu Yuanfeng, who was worried and had chased her from Zhang Huai Shu's house.

Mu Shuangshuang shouted loudly, "Fengzi, run... wasps... wasps are coming!"

Lu Yuanfeng didn't hesitate. As Mu Shuangshuang approached, he grabbed her hand, and the two started running desperately, leaving the wasps far behind.

At the tree, the wasps, unable to find the culprit who disturbed their nest, took out all their anger on Ma Houhou.

The buzzing swarm of hundreds of wasps stung Ma Houhou relentlessly, injecting him with venom. Under the willow tree, Ma Houhou danced, hopping around and shouting incessantly.

"Help... oh my... someone's gonna die!"

"Help!"

"Ouch... it hurts..."

The sound was pitiful and pathetic, as Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng hid in the grass, watching him dance helplessly like a shaman.

Shortly after, Ma Houhou's face was covered in stings.

The low wailing sound was so pitiful it was heartbreaking.

But Mu Shuangshuang was in a great mood, lying in the grass, laughing uncontrollably, to the point where even Lu Yuanfeng beside her could feel her body trembling constantly.

Lu Yuanfeng knew Ma Houhou was bullying Shuangshuang, which is why he ended up so miserable. He didn't consider Shuangshuang's actions excessive, but rather regretted not participating himself.

"Shuangshuang, I..."

"Don't talk, let's wait a bit more, wait until the wasps have stung Ma Houhou enough, then we'll collect the nest."

The small wasp pupae in the nest are good stuff, rich in protein, even more effective than meat and eggs.

By now, some villagers had heard the commotion and came to watch the fun, though no one dared get too close, fearing involvement.

"Damn it, do you think Ma Houhou's brain is sick? He even dared to poke a wasp nest, everyone knows that wasps are as venomous as snakes in June. We're barely past June, and he did something so stupid."

"Right, he doesn't seem normal, does he? Look, he's not even hiding, just letting the wasps sting him."

"I reckon Aunt Zhang did too many bad things, maybe Ma Houhou got possessed and doesn't know what he's doing."

The villagers gathered, each chiming in energetically.

As they talked, Ma Houhou ran out of energy to bounce and was just shaking like a sieve.

After a while, it seemed even the wasps lost interest, some flew away, others returned to their nest.

The villagers, having seen enough of the spectacle, didn't bother with Ma Houhou's continued wailing and went back to their business.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng kept waiting until everyone dispersed. Mu Shuangshuang found some dry grass on the ground, mixed it with some leaves, and used the flint in Lu Yuanfeng's hand to ignite the dry grass.

Because the leaves were wet, they produced a thick smoke. Taking advantage of the smoke, Mu Shuangshuang intended to collect the wasp nest herself but was stopped by Lu Yuanfeng.

"Give it to me, your leg hurts, if something happens, you won't be able to run. It's better if I do it, at least I'm faster."

"You knew?" Mu Shuangshuang froze, she had been trying hard to appear calm.

Lu Yuanfeng nodded, and then took out a bottle of medicine from his pocket: "Just got it from Uncle Zhang, he said to apply it wherever it hurts for a quick recovery!"

Mu Shuangshuang took the medicine Lu Yuanfeng handed over, her heart suddenly swirling with mixed emotions, and her heartbeat became unusually fast.

Her palms sweated profusely...

In the grass, she watched Lu Yuanfeng run towards Ma Houhou. Her heart felt like it was in her throat, worrying not only about potential stinging wasps in the nest but also the danger of Ma Houhou lying there.

Lu Yuanfeng, after using the smoke to disperse the wasps, calmly used a stick to pick up the nest, and before leaving, gave the endlessly wailing Ma Houhou a kick.

Immediately, another heart-wrenching scream came.

Mu Shuangshuang thought that one kick alone was enough to make Ma Houhou suffer, not to mention the stings all over his body.

Lu Yuanfeng came over, and before he arrived, he had made sure that the nest no longer had wasps.

"Shuangshuang, what do you want the nest for? Honey?" Lu Yuanfeng asked curiously.

"No, it's the pupae inside the nest, very nutritious. We'll fry them in hot oil later, they'll taste heavenly!"

Fengzi, you might as well come home with me, yesterday's things haven't been touched, there's wild eggs and the dried fern my grandma sent, fry the fern with lard, it's bound to be delicious."

Lu Yuanfeng was feeling a bit hungry, and considering it was almost noon, he said: "Should we grab a wild chicken from home to eat?"

Having caught three wild chickens, Lu Yuanfeng left one at Yu Family Village, intending to give the rest to Shuangshuang, but she refused and suggested selling them next time they go to town.

Last night, Lu Yuanfeng had fed some food to the chickens, and they were more tame.

"No need, let's sell the wild chickens; if we want chicken, we can buy a domestic one, much cheaper."

At the moment, Mu Shuangshuang is counting every penny, as she needs to pay off debts, save up silver to buy corn, and prepare for Xiao Han and Yuanbao's tuition fees in spring—all requiring money.

Lu Yuanfeng grinned and nodded: "Alright, whatever you say goes!"

"That's what you said, so you'll take care of your own meals and not worry about me, okay?"

I know you think I'm too thin and want me to eat more, but gaining weight isn't something that happens overnight. Even if you roast me a pig, I can't eat it all, and even if I did, it won't turn into my flesh."

This has happened several times already, so Mu Shuangshuang treated it as a serious matter, lest the foolish guy gives her all the good stuff.

Chapter 330: Can't Be Scolded for Nothing

Lu Yuanfeng stayed silent; it seemed he wasn't willing to discuss.

"The girl is too skinny, not healthy, having some meat makes her look better. Eating is always better than not eating!"

He felt he had to force feed, and even deep down, Lu Yuanfeng had an idea to let Shuangshuang return to his home and feast on fish and meat. Perhaps after a few months, she could become plump like Yuanbao.

Mu Shuangshuang angrily stomped her feet, yet felt helpless against him!

"Fine, feed me however you like! Anyway, I'll just eat myself to death. Once I'm fat to death, no one will dare marry me!" Mu Shuangshuang resigned herself to despair.

Lu Yuanfeng merely laughed, increasingly certain of his plan.

Starting tomorrow, he must patrol the mountains!

Mu Shuangshuang was unaware of Lu Yuanfeng's intentions but still led him back home.

By this time, Yu Si Niang had already fed the chickens and pigs, but it was now the hour to feed the chicks. Yu Si Niang placed a wooden plank on the ground in the yard, put the chicks on it, and a half-bowl of rice mixed with bran on the plank, letting the chicks scramble for it.

"Shuangshuang, you're just in time. I've washed some peaches. Later, you can deliver some to Aunt Xiao Yun's house and also to Uncle Er Gouzi's house. They probably haven't tasted them yet."

"Sure!"

After Yu Si Niang spoke, she added, "How about I send some to your grandparents too?"

Since the family split, Yu Si Niang had hardly sent any food over there, but this time with just a little treat, she considered sending some.

"Alright, pack a bowl to bring over. Also, take a few separately to my aunt's house."

The items sent to the Old Mu Family were certainly not going to be eaten by the fourth branch.

"Certainly, your mother will handle it!" Yu Si Niang enthusiastically stood up and called out the playful Little Zhi from the room.

These days, Xiao Han seldom came out. Except for tasks required of him, he would sit in Mu Shuangshuang's room holding a stool, writing and doodling on the floor with a tree branch, imitating what was in books.

Encountering characters he didn't recognize, he would ask Mu Shuangshuang.

Recalling the study-minded Xiao Han, Mu Shuangshuang asked Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, do you want Yuanbao to learn a few characters first, so it wouldn't be as tough for him when he enters school later."

For ten years, ancient scholars faced trials and tribulations in the imperial exams. Gaining knowledge early would lead to an early relief.

"No need, Yuanbao is still sturdy, loves playing. I haven't planned for him to necessarily strive for Champion Scholar or anything. It's fine if he knows all the characters."

Lu Yuanfeng saw things clearly now; some matters can't be forced, they must happen naturally, like him and Shuangshuang!

"Alright, but if he ever wants to learn, he can ask me. Liu Zian sold me a few books, I've been exploring them recently."

"Alright!"

Yu Si Niang placed the washed peaches into a large sea bowl, carrying them to the Old Mu Family, where Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu happened to be home.

Especially Old Mrs. Mu, who was still criticizing the third branch, talking about how they're shameless, always thinking of ways to be lazy, spewing all kinds of unpleasant words.

Yu Si Niang stood awkwardly at the door, wanting to leave, but hesitated since Mr. Mu had spotted her.

"Enough, just say a few words less!" Mr. Mu softly chided, then turned to Yu Si Niang, asking, "Third son's wife, what brings you here?"

Mr. Mu clearly saw Yu Si Niang's sea bowl but purposely didn't acknowledge it.

He was waiting for Yu Si Niang to show him due respect.

"Father, Mother, yesterday Shuangshuang visited her grandmother's place and picked some peaches. I intended to bring them over last night but it was too late, fearing you'd be asleep, so I brought them today."

Mr. Mu nodded, responding kindly to Yu Si Niang, "That's thoughtful. You can place them on the table!"

"Thoughtful? Thoughtful about what? The last time there was fish, none was sent; the time before, good food wasn't sent either, yesterday there was porridge but no thought for us, even after catching pigs and chicks, haven't seen any filial piety shown to us."

"Always taking, never giving, hiding in their broken pigsty eating alone, what kind of logic is that in the world!"

Old Mrs. Mu's incessant complaints, though unpleasant to Mr. Mu's ears, he didn't interrupt. Deep down, he had grievances towards the third branch.

Yu Si Niang's face turned pale, placing the peaches down on the table. She remembered the sea bowl belonged to her family, tentatively asking, "Mother, I want to take the bowl back, or I could fetch one from the kitchen to exchange?"

Yu Si Niang's kitchen wasn't in their own house anymore due to the family's split, her possessions were separate from the Old Mu Family.

Old Mrs. Mu reacted sharply, "Hey, you woman, how can you be so petty! Do you think I'll eat up your cheap bowl or what? I've been a mother-in-law for all these years and never seen anyone as stingy as you, sending a gift and still asking for a bowl back. Perhaps you think the bowl is the most valuable thing, huh!"

"No, no!" Yu Si Niang quickly waved her hands. "The household items aren't complete; we're missing a bowl, making lunch inconvenient."

"Are you crying poverty here? Rest assured, I'm old Mrs. Mu and don't need your support at all! My son, third son, will take care of me in old age, avoid you greedy woman from constantly eyeing third son's money."

"But third son is my son; what I say goes. If you dare play tricks behind our backs, I'll have third son divorce you, let's see what storm you can stir then."

Old Mrs. Mu's words fired off like a machine gun, leaving Yu Si Niang feeling utterly humiliated, wishing she could bury herself beneath the ground.

Feeling she came only for ridicule, yet the people before her were her in-laws, no matter the gravity of injustice, only the in-laws could chastise her, not the other way around.

Yu Si Niang left the house teary-eyed, too scared to retrieve the bowl, only able to walk back home, ashamed and embarrassed.

Passing by the kitchen, she glanced casually and saw Mrs. Liu alone, preparing lunch, just at the vegetable selection stage, already sweating profusely.

Unwashed bowls from last night's large family meal were strewn about on the floor.

Mrs. Liu's back was now more hunched than when Yu Si Niang last saw her.

Seeing Mrs. Liu this way, Yu Si Niang suddenly felt fortunate; at least she hadn't been scolded in a long time.

"Jinhua, do you want to eat peaches? I've got some peaches here." Yu Si Niang entered the kitchen and took out the peaches hidden in her sleeve, having ensured no one was around when she came in.

Mrs. Liu looked at Yu Si Niang, feeling a warm wave surge in her heart.

"Thank you, Shuangshuang's mother, but I'm working right now, if mother finds out..."

"You can secretly take them back, let the children eat. Just don't get caught, I've already sent some to father and mother."

Mrs. Liu's trembling hands accepted the peaches, carefully tucking them into her clothes, afraid of being noticed. Her steps were shaky as she walked out, verifying multiple times before daring to exit the kitchen.

Watching Mrs. Liu's behavior, Yu Si Niang thought of her bowl and made a decision: even if scolded, she'd retrieve the bowl, or else the scolding would be in vain.