

Folly 331

Chapter 331: Mrs. Lin's Craving

Mrs. Liu brought peaches through her own front door, her trembling heart not yet settled.

She was scared half to death, terrified of running into the old lady on the road.

Mu Xiaxia was tidying up the room inside and, seeing her mother looking like this, abandoned her broom and rushed over.

"Mom, what happened to you? Why are you so frightened?"

Hearing her daughter's concerned voice, Mrs. Liu exhaled deeply and lovingly looked at her daughter Xiaxia, saying, "It's nothing, your Aunt gave us some peaches. Later, feed some to Xiao Chu, and save a few for your dad. Remember to eat them quietly inside and don't let your granny catch you."

Mrs. Liu instructed her daughter while taking the peaches out one by one from her sleeves and neatly placing them on the table in the room.

Those plump red, yellow, and green peaches looked extremely tempting on the empty table.

But Mu Xiaxia didn't rush to eat them; instead, she handed a few on the table to Mrs. Liu. "Mom, you should eat some too, don't just think about us, peaches are really good!"

Mu Xiaxia is about the same age as Mu Shuangshuang. Although not as clever as Mu Shuangshuang, she is already quite sensible.

She knows her parents have it hard; ever since returning from grandma's house, she never asks Mrs. Liu for anything.

Moreover, the relationship between Mu Xiaxia and Mu Shuangshuang is quite delicate. In the past, she wouldn't talk about it; Mu Xiaxia knew Mu Shuangshuang was not clever back then, unable to get along with anyone.

But now, even though she has helped the fourth house several times, and the fourth house had dinner at Shuangshuang's place last time, Mu Xiaxia still feels that Mu Shuangshuang is distant from her family.

At least compared to that young gentleman named Fengzi, much more distant.

So Mu Xiaxia couldn't resist asking about Mu Shuangshuang: "Mom, do you know when my Sister Shuangshuang became normal again? Because of what?"

Mu Xiaxia thinks more than her family, always feeling there's something peculiar about it, suddenly recovering her senses and earning so much money.

"That, your mom doesn't know. Anyway, suddenly she became normal. But Si Niang said she was enlightened by the mountain deity. Thinking about it, Shuangshuang, that child, didn't say anything before. Apart from being enlightened by an immortal, mom can't understand how she became normal."

Mrs. Liu thought hard for a long time and finally shared her conclusion.

Mu Xiaxia picked a peach and put it in her mouth, it tasted incredibly sweet. Unfortunately, these were given by others, not their own.

Mrs. Liu returned to the kitchen to continue working as if nothing had happened.

Yu Si Niang took a bowl from the kitchen cabinet and went back to Old Mrs. Mu's room, swapping one of her bowls right in front of Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu.

"You wretched woman, is it worth it for a broken bowl, you... you're an untrustworthy ingrate. My son sure lost out marrying you, you bad luck bringer."

Old Mrs. Mu's cursing was loud, and the few people lying asleep in the room scrambled to their feet and gathered towards her room.

Mrs. Lin saw the table in Old Mrs. Mu's room filled with a large sea bowl of peaches, deliberately covered her belly and said, "Mom, your eldest grandson wants to eat peaches, been hinting at me non-stop."

But Mu Xiangxiang was faster; she grabbed the sea bowl, scooped peaches out with her hand, and the red and large peaches went straight to her mouth.

"Mom, Xiangxiang really likes peaches, are there any more?" Mu Xiangxiang said while chewing peaches, juices spilling out, looking extremely tasty.

"Eat as much as you like, if it's not enough, I'll ask your third aunt to send more."

While speaking, Old Mrs. Mu searched for the silhouette of Yu Si Niang, only to find out she had secretly slipped away at some point.

She was furious inside, but with her daughter there, she couldn't bear to leave.

"How about you give me a few too, I've got a baby in my belly." Mrs. Lin moved closer, her eyes fixated straight on the bowl of peaches held by Mu Xiangxiang.

"What does your pregnancy have to do with me, I didn't get you pregnant." Mu Xiangxiang rolled her eyes, speaking with obvious impoliteness.

"But it's your nephew." Mrs. Lin added unwillingly, only to be mocked again.

"I've got plenty of nephews; if I cared for all of them, could I manage? Moreover, if you want to eat, telling me is useless, if you have guts, go and talk to our mom."

Mu Xiangxiang was sure Old Mrs. Mu would back her up, so she spoke with impunity.

Not waiting for her to speak, Old Mrs. Mu chimed in, "Mrs. Lin, you lazy freeloader, you're asking for trouble. Peaches are so cooling, dare you eat them? If you hurt my eldest grandson, you couldn't pay even if you had ten lives."

Old Mrs. Mu inserted her hands into her waist, saliva flying onto Mrs. Lin's face.

Mrs. Lin looked downcast, like a defeated rooster, but immediately she persistently added, "Mom, I'm taking it for Gou Dan, he's never had peaches."

"Eat, eat, eat, that's all you know, when does that little beast ever behave? One meal, others eat a bowl, he eats two, really think our Old Mu Family is pigsty? Raising pigs?"

Old Mrs. Mu was never reserved in speech, reprimanding Mrs. Lin, and making a decision.

"Xiangxiang is the youngest here, these peaches aren't even enough for her to eat alone, don't bother looking. Those who should go back, go back, those who don't want to go back, help me old lady empty tomorrow's chamber pot."

Once she mentioned the chamber pot, everyone scattered like birds and beasts, fleeing quickly.

Leaving Mu Xiangxiang alone in Old Mrs. Mu's room, eating contentedly.

Old Mrs. Mu helped Mu Xiangxiang fix her hair, thinking of Mu Zhenzhen, curiously asking, "Xiangxiang, have you seen your sister Zhenzhen recently? I haven't seen her for a long time."

Indeed, Mu Zhenzhen hasn't appeared for quite a while, making Old Mrs. Mu somewhat anxious.

Previously, Mu Zhenzhen lived in Mu Dania's room. Now she moved to the main house's wing room, next to Mu Xiangxiang's room, and Old Mrs. Mu couldn't see her.

"She's starting her second spring, always running around the town, not coming back until evening."

Last time going to the town to buy clothes, Mu Zhenzhen not only figured out the ways of the town, knowing where the cheap goods were, but also learned she could find a wealthy person there to marry and become a young mistress.

So now Mu Zhenzhen is all focused outside, hardly ever coming home.

Old Mrs. Mu was extremely worried and turned to ask Mr. Mu, "Old man, do you think our Zhenzhen will get into trouble? She as a girl..."

"Stop worrying, what trouble can she get into? She's not a child anymore, even big troubles would be caused by herself, nothing to do with others!"

Mr. Mu no longer sheltered Mu Zhenzhen like before. After all, as a discarded daughter, Mu Zhenzhen's actions increasingly lacked consideration and didn't put the oldest, Mu Dade, in mind.

Chapter 332: The Scheming Plot

When Yu Si Niang was carrying her own bowl back, Mu Shuangshuang had already delivered the peaches from Zhao Yun and Zhao Gouzi's family, and she was chopping pigweed with Lu Yuanfeng in the courtyard.

One cleaver, one small knife, the two of them stood front and back, chopping pigweed in a large wooden basin, making a "thud thud" sound.

The pigweed was found by Yu Liulang early in the morning from wasteland and field ridges. It's said to be exceptionally good for feeding pigs, making them gain weight, and when dried, it's rich in protein, improving the effect even more.

Mu Shuangshuang often saw this pigweed at the foot of Niuwei Mountain and along the field ridges. She didn't know it was so good for feeding pigs. As she chopped, she discussed with Lu Yuanfeng about going to the mountain in the afternoon to pick some gold and silver flowers and to gather more pigweed since the family pig needed it.

These days had been very busy, and there hadn't been time to sun-dry the gold and silver flowers. Fortunately, she had dried some last time, which was originally for their own consumption, but now they could take those to the town to make up the number.

Noticing Yu Si Niang coming back, Mu Shuangshuang paused her action of chopping pigweed and, with a smile, said to Yu Si Niang, "Mom, I've chopped the pigweed my uncle brought. In the afternoon, Fengzi and I plan to go to the mountain to pick gold and silver flowers and get some pigweed."

"I'll go with you. Just as your uncle is busy with things in the fields these days, I don't have anything to do." Yu Si Niang forced a smile, refraining from mentioning the annoying things she encountered at the Old Mu Family's place, for fear of worrying her daughter.

But such an obvious emotional oddity, if Mu Shuangshuang couldn't see it, it would be hard to say she had any sense.

With just one look at Yu Si Niang's face, she knew Yu Si Niang had suffered a considerable amount of grievance.

"Mom, did grandma scold you?"

"No... no, your grandma was nice. She quite enjoyed the peaches." Yu Si Niang waved her hand, unwilling to admit to the grievances she suffered.

Mu Shuangshuang's mood instantly worsened, and she resumed chopping pigweed with the cleaver, but this time with more force than ever. The urgent "thud thud" sound was somewhat intimidating.

Seeing her chopping pigweed with such intensity, Lu Yuanfeng suddenly placed his hand on Mu Shuangshuang's wrist and said, "Didn't you say your wrist hurts? Take a break, don't chop anymore!"

His broad palm resting on Mu Shuangshuang's slender wrist carried his unique warmth. She looked up to see the young man in front of her gazing at her with a worried look.

Lu Yuanfeng had a relatively rugged appearance, yet it didn't seem coarse; instead, he had a youthful, tender look. His eyelashes were long, and his eyes were bright and full of spirit. Just by looking at his facial features, you could tell he was good-looking.

Aside from being a bit tanned, there was no other issue.

Realizing she had been staring at Lu Yuanfeng for a while, Mu Shuangshuang awkwardly turned her head and said to Yu Si Niang.

"Mom, you go rest for a while. Don't get angry over unimportant people. I'll handle lunch. When uncle comes back, make sure to let him... forget it, I'll talk about it at the table later!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't dwell too much on Yu Si Niang. The people of Old Mu Family were inherently ungrateful wolves. Even if you fed them, they were ungrateful and treacherous, always plotting against the third branch.

She thought instead of constantly telling Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan that the Old Mu Family wasn't good, it was better to let them experience it themselves.

If you suffer enough losses, wouldn't you learn to be smarter?

About Yu Liulang and Feng Xiaohua's matter, she still felt it shouldn't be formally mentioned. After all, his love for Feng Xiaohua wasn't shown deeply yet. If she acted deliberately, it might backfire.

Anyway, she and Feng Xiaohua agreed on a three-day period. After three days, Feng Xiaohua would send a matchmaker to propose at home, and Yu Liulang should stop it.

After chopping a large basin of pigweed, Mu Shuangshuang put it into a large pot to cook. Although there were two stoves at home, there was only one pot, and cooking pigweed could only be done in the pot used for their meals.

Lu Yuanfeng helped with tending the fire, thinking of carrying a pot back from the town for Shuangshuang tomorrow. His action of tending the fire became more vigorous.

The beehive they gathered in the morning was now being handled by Mu Shuangshuang. She peeled out the bee larvae from the hive, placing them in a small bowl. The yellow wasp larvae looked extremely adorable in the bowl.

Thinking of Shuangshuang's recipe, Lu Yuanfeng had a bit of a mouth-watering feeling.

"Fengzi, wasp larvae fried with wine is really good, want to try it later?"

Lu Yuanfeng smiled and nodded, showing a row of bright white teeth.

Mu Shuangshuang particularly liked his silly-looking, clean smile.

The pigweed was cooked, and Mu Shuangshuang had already prepared the ingredients. She cracked four wild chicken eggs and mixed them with a bunch of chives, planning to make a chive omelet.

"Shuangshuang, where should I put these cooked pigweeds?"

In the large iron pot, wilted wild greens filled it to the brim. Despite their unattractive color, thinking of their high nutrition filled Mu Shuangshuang with energy.

"You take a rest, the rest is my job now."

Mu Shuangshuang found a clean bucket and slowly scooped out the pigweed. Finally, she left some in the pot, scooping them into the pig feed bucket, adding some rice bran, and a bit of swill to stir it up, turning it into the pig's noon meal.

It must be said, Mu Shuangshuang was already proficient at these tasks, raising pigs, chickens, cleaning every day, never feeling it was a hard job.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't really rest; he couldn't help much with cooking, but could chop and tidy up the large firewood piles in the courtyard.

Finally cleaning up the large iron pot, Mu Shuangshuang breathed a sigh of relief and began to prepare for frying the wasp larvae.

The larvae, which hadn't developed wings, weren't very challenging to fry.

Mu Shuangshuang added some firewood and waited for the iron pot to heat up before adding oil.

The scent of rapeseed oil gradually dispersed, and Mu Shuangshuang threw the larvae into it, constantly stirring with a spatula.

Perhaps it was due to their rich protein content, but after a few turns, a strong aroma spread out, slowing Lu Yuanfeng's action of chopping wood in the courtyard.

Mrs. Lin, following the aroma from the latrine, slowly made her way over.

Now having a child, Mrs. Lin wasn't afraid of the rude girl making trouble. As soon as she arrived at the third branch's courtyard, she saw Lu Yuanfeng working in the yard and felt intense jealousy in her heart.

"Well, Fengzi, are you helping Shuangshuang with chores? Tell me, you as a grown man always hanging around the third branch, what does it mean? Have you taken a liking to that rude girl?"

Mrs. Lin looked into the kitchen while speaking to Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng frowned, displeased as he said, "Aunt Lin, can you not bring Shuangshuang into this? I came on my own, it's nothing to do with others."

"Fengzi, don't pretend in front of me. The whole village knows you've been infatuated with that rude girl."

Chapter 333: Expert!

"Auntie, you really don't know, what do you see in that stinky girl? No looks, no figure, she's as skinny as a washboard, she obviously can't bear sons."

When Mrs. Lin spoke, she proudly stuck out her belly, having given birth to three children, two of whom were sons.

Lu Yuanfeng's face turned dark instantly, he said to Mrs. Lin with a gloomy face, "Why is Shuangshuang so skinny, isn't it your fault? Did you ever feed her? Did you ever clothe her? Even if she's got no looks and no figure, she's still better than you!"

"Hey, you brat, you're getting too cocky, what kind of thing did Lu Xiao give birth to?"

"This seems to have nothing to do with Auntie!" Lu Yuanfeng tightened his grip on the firewood knife in his hand. If Mrs. Lin wasn't a woman, just daring to insult Shuangshuang, he'd have long cut her with the knife.

"Fengzi, you better not be ungrateful, Auntie is doing this for your own good, why pick on a stinky girl who's nothing? Have you forgotten that stinky girl smells all over? That clothes, that smell... just thinking about it makes me disgusted!"

"Enough, Aunt Lin, just because I'm not hitting doesn't mean I dare not hit. If you dare say another bad word about Shuangshuang, don't blame me for being impolite!"

"Tsk tsks, I said it, so what? Want to hit me, come on, aim for the belly, hit me hard, see if I'll stay at your family's house forever!" Mrs. Lin said loudly with hands on her hips.

"You really are defiant, talking to an elder like this, that stinky girl deserves to die..."

As Mrs. Lin uttered the word "die," Lu Yuanfeng threw down the firewood knife and almost flashed in front of Mrs. Lin, clutching her neck directly. With a little force, Mrs. Lin was scared stiff.

"I told you to stop talking, why don't you listen?"

At that moment, Lu Yuanfeng emitted a chilling aura, the look in his eyes carried the battlefield's murderous intent, instantly revealing itself.

Mrs. Lin felt like she was suffocating, the person in front of her was terrifying, one look and she felt scared.

"Fengzi, let her go!" Mu Shuangshuang came out from the house, she heard Fengzi defend her earlier and felt happy inside.

She never knew that being protected could feel so happy.

Because of work, she was used to being the protector, but truly being protected was only after she crossed over to this little mountain village.

Yu Si Niang, Mu Dashan... and Lu Yuanfeng, these people provided her different experiences, she even felt like she had lived here for a long, long time...

With Mu Shuangshuang's words, Lu Yuanfeng released his hand, Mrs. Lin was startled, covering her neck while shouting.

"Help... murder, Old Lu Family's grandson killed for the stinky girl..."

"Second Aunt, if you call everyone here, I'll certainly let them know it wasn't Gou Dan who stole the basket of eggs, nor was it my little aunt.

It was you and my second uncle. By then, with my grandmother's temper, see if your belly can save you from my grandmother's beating!"

Mrs. Lin instantly fell silent. Last time she and her husband luckily escaped, but if the old lady knew, not only would they have to return the eggs, they might even lose half their lives.

"You're tough, stinky girl, I'll just wait to see how you die!" Mrs. Lin threw down the sentence and stormed off angrily.

"Second Aunt, come again next time, remember to get rid of that smell from the pit before you come, you stink up our third branch's house, even the aroma in the kitchen couldn't cover it up!"

Mu Shuangshuang's mocking voice lingered from behind, Mrs. Lin heard it and felt a surge of old blood stuck in her throat, almost suffocating herself.

After Mrs. Lin left, Mu Shuangshuang pulled Lu Yuanfeng into the kitchen.

On the dining table, the fried silkworm pupae were already placed, she picked up chopsticks and handed them to Lu Yuanfeng.

"Try the taste, it should be pretty good."

The fried silkworm pupae were golden in color, somewhat like soybeans, but the taste was particularly fragrant. Because there was only one beehive, Lu Yuanfeng dared not eat much, picking up two and chewing them.

"How is it? Is it even tastier than meat?"

"Hmm!" Lu Yuanfeng nodded heavily, the taste was indeed good.

"I still have a lot of dark cuisine to make for you to taste."

Items not often seen were called dark cuisine by Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng found the term novel when he first heard it, now he had already learned to use it flexibly himself.

Mu Shuangshuang herself was greedy, all kinds of food made by her didn't follow any strict standards, as long as it tasted good.

After Lu Yuanfeng tasted the fried silkworm pupae, Mu Shuangshuang began preparing other dishes, when lunch was ready, Yu Liulang also returned from the field.

He was dirty all over, face was dark as well, Mu Shuangshuang fetched water for him.

"Uncle, you look quite happy, is there anything to share with Shuangshuang to make her happy?"

"What else could there be? It's just that your family's fertile land is growing well, today when I was fertilizing, I just carelessly threw it on, most of the fertilizer was put on another piece of land to nurture, these two plots, by late harvest, should be high yield."

In farming, Yu Liulang was considered somewhat of an expert. Old Yu Family didn't have much paddy, totaling four acres, but these four acres under Yu Liulang's management, the yield kept rising annually, combined with corn, it was entirely sufficient for a family of over ten.

Many in the village came asking for advice, through word of mouth, Yu Liulang's reputation spread.

Mu Shuangshuang was happy too, originally this piece of fertile land was forcibly taken from Old Mu Family to save Mu Zhenzhen, now thinking about it, she found herself very clever.

Since it came up, Mu Shuangshuang spoke more, "Uncle, do you think our third branch should buy a piece of land? Aren't two acres not enough for us to eat?"

The third branch currently had two acres of paddy, and one and a half acres of dry land, one acre was reclaimed and not fertile, the harvest certainly had defects.

To truly feed the third branch wasn't an easy task.

"You can buy it, but now everyone has planted stuff, buying land means waiting until after harvest, and then we can plant a season of red flowers to use as fertilizer.

But dry land can be bought, plant some vegetables and later rape seed, vegetables to sell in town, once rape seed is harvested, you can plant cotton."

Yu Liulang's plan aligned with Mu Shuangshuang, she nodded occasionally, agreeing with Yu Liulang's decisions.

"Can Uncle help me find where the land is more fertile? I want to buy two plots of paddy later, I want to buy dry land now, Fengzi also wants to buy paddy."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't forget to mention Lu Yuanfeng, ultimately having a ready-made expert there, it'd be foolish not to use him!

Chapter 334: About to Suffer Internal Injuries

"You have to first find the person here who is busy dealing with buying and selling land, then we can see where there is land for sale and go check it out, so we won't waste time!"

Yu Liulang spoke methodically.

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang finally understood why Feng Xiaohua liked her uncle. It's true, her uncle has such a sharp mind and is well-informed, which indeed adds some charm to his personality compared to ordinary people.

"Uncle, do you know about my trip to Yu Family Village yesterday?" Mu Shuangshuang casually asked.

"I do. Didn't you also bring peaches over? If I knew you didn't have them here, I would have definitely moved the whole tree for you."

"Haha, uncle, you said it. Next time you come, help me move the tree over." Mu Shuangshuang laughed and agreed.

"You little girl, so crafty and cunning. If I really move the tree over, I won't be worn out?" Yu Liulang was in a good mood and joked with Mu Shuangshuang, not feeling at all like an uncle who is more than ten years older than his niece.

"No way, my uncle is so capable, a single tree wouldn't be a problem for you. Worst case, eat a few more eggs."

When Mu Shuangshuang got up this morning, she specially cooked a chicken egg for Yu Liulang. That was Feng Xiaohua's instruction, and she had to do it.

"I heard from your mother that you brought back a hen from Yu Family Village. Was it given by your grandmother?"

This morning, Yu Liulang didn't eat that egg; he gave it to Little Zhi and Xiao Han, who are at the stage of growing and needing nutrition.

"No, it was given by a sister. She said she's getting married and said she knows who I am, letting me bring the hen back. When I tried to give her money, she refused. Uncle, how could there be such a silly person in this world, someone who gives a hen to a stranger on the first meeting."

Mu Shuangshuang harmlessly said these words, while secretly observing Yu Liulang's expression.

She noticed that after she finished speaking, Yu Liulang's face changed a bit and his eyes looked a little dazed.

Yu Liulang knew immediately after Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking who the silly person she referred to was.

Xiao Hua...

She's getting married?

To whom?

Seeing Yu Liulang lost in thought, Mu Shuangshuang raised her hand and waved in front of Yu Liulang: "Uncle, what's up with you? Remembered something?"

Yu Liulang composed himself and looked at Mu Shuangshuang: "Shuangshuang, do you... do you know who that sister is marrying?"

Yu Liulang didn't know why, but he couldn't help but ask.

"No!" Mu Shuangshuang shook her head.

Yu Liulang suddenly looked like a wilted eggplant!

"But it seems I heard someone say Chunzi or Cunzi is marrying that sister. I didn't dare to ask given I'm not familiar with her, but she didn't seem very happy, her eyes were red."

Mu Shuangshuang continued to probe while watching Yu Liulang's increasingly pale face. She felt herself to be terribly bad, but without using this method, her uncle might never find his own happiness.

"Zhao Gouchun!" Yu Liulang spat out that name.

Zhao Gouchun was quite famous in Yu Family Village, known for his forty-something age and having buried five wives so far; it's said that even in the neighboring village, no one dared to marry him.

How could it be Zhao Gou Chun?

How is it possible?

Does Xiao Hua not want to live anymore?

All kinds of questions surged in his mind, and Yu Liulang's body wobbled. If it weren't for the post behind him, he would have fallen to the ground.

"Shuangshuang, did you... did you mishear?" Yu Liulang asked.

"Probably not, I heard someone saying Chunzi was willing to become a son-in-law to that sister's family, like having an in-law meaning, to take care of her father in his old age.

But I heard that sister is marrying late due to her age. It's normal, though; in the village, the older girls are usually matched with undesirable prospects by matchmakers, either with older people, or those with missing limbs. Could it be that this sister is marrying someone like that?"

Heaven knows, Mu Shuangshuang acted innocent and was almost bleeding out with the act, especially seeing her uncle's frantic expression. The satisfaction inside Mu Shuangshuang's heart was immense!

Since her uncle couldn't recognize his own feelings, she'd add a few stokes of fire, forcing him to face them.

"Forget it, forget it, Uncle, don't think about it anymore. After all, that's someone else's business, let's go eat. I've already set the table!"

Mu Shuangshuang said and tried to pull Yu Liulang up, but Yu Liulang just wouldn't budge.

"Xiao Hua isn't somebody else; she shouldn't marry that kind of person!"

"You mean that sister is the Xiao Hua you talk about, the one you said can't be hurt?" Mu Shuangshuang exclaimed in surprise.

"Mm!"

"Isn't that even better? Once she marries someone, she'll be someone else's wife, then Uncle you won't ever hurt her. If there's hurt, it's by her husband. Come on, let's eat!"

Mu Shuangshuang mentioned eating twice, both with the intent of letting Yu Liulang know that she didn't care at all.

The less she cares, the more uncomfortable Yu Liulang should feel inside.

"But Zhao Gouchun is not the one to marry. No, I can't let Xiao Hua marry someone like that, I have to stop her!"

Yu Liulang stood up with a start and was ready to head out.

"Uncle, what will Xiao Hua do after you stop her? Never marry anyone for life? Wasting her life in loneliness?"

Mu Shuangshuang snorted coldly; her uncle's words showed no real intent to help solve Feng Xiaohua's problems, just the instinct to interfere.

"I..." Yu Liulang was a bit panicked, his words were out of order.

"Uncle, you don't understand women at all. Even marrying a fool and living a lifetime with one is better than being pointed and judged, lonely for life.

If you don't like Xiao Hua, just don't disturb her life. Let her marry well, and after a few years have a child to accompany her. Then, no matter how bad that man might be, she'd have someone to rely on."

Mu Shuangshuang's words were entirely in line with ancient women's thinking, which she personally didn't agree with.

However, in the entire Da Ning Dynasty, it was a common thought.

Women who grow old alone are scorned, but those marrying fools or madmen, no matter how tough, are pitied.

Yu Liulang hesitated; he couldn't help asking himself what he would do after stopping her.

Keep her like this, never getting married, or let her fall to another Zhao Gou Chun?

Yu Liulang's mind was in chaos, he squatted down, constantly trying to grasp his own hair, his mind filled with memories of the moments with Feng Xiaohua over these years.

He didn't even realize when Feng Xiaohua became the person whose face he could vividly see just by closing his eyes.

His heart began hurting uncontrollably...

Mu Shuangshuang knew that at this time, she should let Yu Liulang calm down, as any impulsive decision wouldn't be as reliable as those made with a clear mind.

But she still looked forward to her uncle's answer!

Chapter 335: This Feeling is Awesome!

"Shuangshuang, your dad is asking when you all will eat."

Yu Si Niang came out from the kitchen and saw her brother Yu Liulang sitting on the ground; she quickly shifted her gaze to her daughter.

Seeing her daughter shake her head, Yu Si Niang was worried but didn't say anything.

Mu Shuangshuang stood up and said to Yu Liulang, "Uncle, you figure things out, I'm going to eat with mom."

Mu Shuangshuang pulled Yu Si Niang towards the kitchen, and once inside, Yu Si Niang came closer.

"Shuangshuang, what's wrong with your uncle, why is he like this?"

Yu Liulang has always been sensible; he never spoke harshly to her, nor did he ever ignore her.

But just now, when she went to him, not only did Liulang not respond, he didn't even answer her when she spoke.

"It's nothing, mom, don't worry. My uncle is making an important life decision. Let's eat and prepare a rice ball with some vegetables for him later, maybe he'll need it."

As Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, Yu Liulang suddenly stood up from where he was squatting on the ground and walked towards the kitchen in the direction of the third branch.

He entered the room and said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, I don't want Xiao Hua to get married. No matter what, I will stop it. Even if Xiao Hua hates me for the rest of her life, I must do this."

"Uncle, I understand what you're saying, but if you messed up their engagement, what about the others? They'll be ridiculed by the villagers for a lifetime."

Mu Shuangshuang remained indifferent, determined to restrain Yu Liulang. The more anxious he became, the more she prevented him from doing what he wanted.

With Yu Liulang's character, he certainly wouldn't marry Feng Xiaohua out of responsibility. If that were the case, Feng Xiaohua would have married him long ago.

Yu Si Niang chimed in, "Liulang, since you don't have a solution, don't bother them; let others live their own lives. If you prevent her from marrying, how will they get through life?"

"I will marry her! I won't let her marry Zhao Gouchun because I want to take care of her for a lifetime and support her father!"

Yu Liulang's voice was confident, not at all like he was joking.

Yu Si Niang was shocked. She didn't expect, in her lifetime, to hear her brother mention marriage. She always thought he would live under the shadow of Luo Xiu'er...

"You...aren't joking, right? Liulang, marriage is a big deal, you can't deceive people." Yu Si Niang clutched her chest, trying to suppress her excitement.

"Yes, uncle, if you're doing it to help that sister, it's really unnecessary, because it will hurt her."

Mu Shuangshuang relished the unfolding drama and continued to fuel the fire. At this point, she believed Yu Liulang made this decision out of love, especially with his character—it wouldn't be out of sympathy.

"I'm not doing it to help her; I'm doing it to help myself. Sister, Shuangshuang, brother-in-law... and everyone, I'm going back to find what is most important to me.

If it works out, I'll bring Xiao Hua to celebrate Qixi; if not, I'll never marry in my lifetime."

Yu Liulang looked resolute; clearly, he had thought through this decision carefully.

"Then have something to eat before you leave!"

Yu Liulang had worked all morning and hadn't eaten or rested yet. Worried he would be too exhausted, Yu Si Niang stood up to serve her brother a meal.

"Sister, forget it, I'm in a hurry to go back, I don't want anything, and I won't eat."

He must have been truly anxious, as Yu Liulang didn't want anything, said his piece, and headed towards the yard outside, ignoring Yu Si Niang's calls.

Mu Shuangshuang remained casual, "Mom, don't worry; my uncle's actions are pretty good—being hungry can score him points with Aunt Xiao Hua. If she's happy and marries my uncle, everything will be just fine."

"You rascal, how can you think of such cunning tricks? Aren't you afraid your uncle will be mad at you when he finds out!"

Yu Si Niang couldn't believe Shuangshuang's scheme of forcing a marriage, feeling both fresh and a bit worried.

"Not afraid; I'm still a kid, my uncle wouldn't hit me, right? Besides, Fengzi can help me, I'm not afraid."

Mu Shuangshuang mentioned Lu Yuanfeng, as he was quite skilled. If she truly got into trouble, he would be there to back her up.

"Exactly, with my second brother around, who would dare bully Sister Shuangshuang? Even if my second brother couldn't handle it, I've got Little Zhi and Xiao Han."

Yuanbao extended his chubby little hands to roll up his sleeves, and he did look quite convincingly like a big brother.

The named Xiao Han and Little Zhi nodded enthusiastically.

No choice, Mu Shuangshuang held an important place in their hearts, and they would fight anyone who dared bully her.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't speak, but his eyes had already shown his stance.

Yu Si Niang was amused and touched—what started as a joke had her children banding together.

Forget it, it's okay for the kids to be united. At least she wouldn't worry about them being bullied by others.

"Let's eat, let's eat!"

After all this talking, the food had yet to be touched; Mu Dashan had been eyeing the plate of bee larvae, fried and unrecognizable.

"Shuangshuang, what's this, is it edible?" Mu Dashan asked.

"Of course it is; these are bee larvae. They're baby bees taken from a hornet's nest before they've grown wings, only deep-fried with nothing else added.

They're very nutritious, dad, have more, mom, Fengzi, don't be shy—eat whatever you like."

Mu Shuangshuang especially enjoyed dining with the whole family at a table, and if the atmosphere was lively, all the better.

It was hard for the mood not to be lively with Yuanbao and Little Zhi around.

"Sister, do you think if Little Zhi eats it, a baby bee will grow in her belly?"

Little Zhi asked fearfully while holding a small bee larva with her chopsticks.

"Of course, not only will you grow baby bees, Little Zhi will also grow wings, so Little Zhi best not eat them—give them all to me."

Recognizing it as a deliberate tease, even at her young age, Little Zhi knew her sister was deceiving her.

"Humph, no way, sister is lying; Little Zhi wants to eat them herself!"

Little Zhi tossed the bee larva from her chopsticks into her mouth and started chewing. After finishing one, she happily exclaimed, "It's so delicious; Little Zhi has never had anything this tasty before; I love you, sister!"

"Sister Shuangshuang, I love you too. You have to make more delicious food for me, come to my house often, and stay with my second brother..." Yuanbao rattled on, all for the sake of tasty food.

Mu Shuangshuang laughed uncontrollably!

The meal was satisfying and enjoyable.

After the meal, Mu Shuangshuang rested a bit, slung a bamboo basket on her back, took Little Black, and headed into the mountains with Yu Si Niang and Lu Yuanfeng.

Chapter 336: Too Unusual

Since marrying into Er Gui Village, it's been almost a decade, and Yu Si Niang has never been to Niuwei Mountain.

Because there are too many legends about Niuwei Mountain, nearly all of them involve man-eating beasts.

Almost every year, someone at the foot of the mountain gets dragged away by wild beasts, leaving no trace of their bodies.

Even Lu Yuanfeng's mother was taken away by the beasts from the mountain.

Along the way, Yu Si Niang was trembling with fear. Every step made her legs shake, and when they reached the edge of the creek, she dared not go further.

"Shuangshuang, Fengzi, why don't we go up there? It's not safe above, I'm scared..."

"Mom, you don't need to worry. With Fengzi and me here, we won't let anything happen to you. If you're really scared, why don't you wait down here, and I'll go with Fengzi to pick some gold and silver flower."

"No, I want to go with you. I won't be at ease if you go." Yu Si Niang shook her head, disagreeing with her daughter's suggestion.

"Aunt Si, why don't you just gather some bitter vegetables at the foot of the mountain? There's quite a lot there.

Gather more, dry them at home, and they can be used to feed the piglets. As they grow, they'll definitely need more food."

"Yes, Mom. You don't have to worry about Fengzi and me. It's not our first time going into the mountains, and he has a bow and arrow. Besides, you've never been to the mountains, and if anything happens, you might not be able to run."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't worried that her words would upset Yu Si Niang because going to the mountain indeed carried some risks.

Even Lu Yuanfeng couldn't absolutely guarantee his safety, and adding her and Yu Si Niang to the mix would only make things worse.

"Alright," Yu Si Niang nodded helplessly.

"Mom, remember one thing. We're not going up the mountain now, and later don't go just out of curiosity or worry. Absolutely don't go!"

Mu Shuangshuang was cautious, but no matter how cautious, constant reminders to those around her were necessary.

These were lessons learned from years of experience—it wasn't scary to leave someone in a safe area; the true fear was if that person wandered into a danger zone without you knowing.

"Mom knows. You two come back early!"

On the mountain, Mu Shuangshuang set Little Black free. It was at home in the forest, and going up meant returning to its territory.

Little Black was thrilled, darting and running about, but it never strayed too far from Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang.

In short, both Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng could always keep an eye on it.

The place they went to gather gold and silver flowers was halfway up the mountain, not far from Mu Shuangshuang's usual spot for picking wild vegetables, and not within the beast zone, so they felt relatively relaxed.

The path was still challenging, but Lu Yuanfeng supported Mu Shuangshuang the whole way, worried she might trip.

Finally, they reached halfway up the mountain.

The fragrance of gold and silver flowers could be smelled from far away. Mu Shuangshuang set down her basket and started picking the flowers with both hands.

Soon, Lu Yuanfeng joined in. Both were adept at the task, and Mu Shuangshuang's hands worked tirelessly.

Lu Yuanfeng watched her hands constantly move, and in an instant, more white blossoms were added to the basket.

Watching Shuangshuang work was truly enjoyable; she worked gracefully, exuding an air of elegance.

It felt as though she was not doing farm work, but like she was threading a needle or playing a musical instrument.

"These gold and silver flowers are really fragrant, plentiful too, enough for us to make quite some money selling them in town."

Three wen per pound for dried gold and silver flowers, and just thinking about it filled Mu Shuangshuang with energy.

While working, she chatted with Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, about buying dry land, it might have to be postponed.

I asked my sixth uncle, and he said that now everyone has crops in the fields, and it's unlikely anyone will sell land.

Plus, it's not worthwhile. Better to buy one or two mu of dry land to grow vegetables and rapeseed, and next year, plant cotton. What do you think?"

Previously, Mu Shuangshuang planned to buy land for Lu Yuanfeng, as he had refused his share of Silver several times before.

"Alright, I'll buy dry land too!" Lu Yuanfeng naturally agreed.

Once settled, Mu Shuangshuang resumed working.

No matter how quick their hand speeds, the small size of the gold and silver flowers took quite some time.

After about half an hour, the playful Little Black suddenly let out a strange "hissing" sound, harsh on the ears.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly said, "Little Black must have encountered something. Let's go take a look."

The two followed the grass and unexpectedly found the source of Little Black's hissing—there was a snake.

The snake's body was dark, about the thickness of a human wrist. It spat its tongue as its eyes gleamed with a terrifying cold light, and when staring at Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang, something unidentifiable appeared at the corner of its mouth.

Underneath it lay a motionless black puppy that seemed bitten by the snake, not knowing if it was dead.

"Fengzi, this little beast's gaze is off, be careful."

Mu Shuangshuang hadn't seen this type of snake before, but it was definitely venomous—otherwise, the black dog beneath it wouldn't be motionless.

Just as Mu Shuangshuang finished speaking, the snake coiled and lunged at them, and despite Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng's quick reflexes, they were somewhat flustered.

Lu Yuanfeng had his bow and arrow ready, while Mu Shuangshuang picked up a large stone and climbed a tree.

With a shared glance, they understood each other's intentions.

The snake was agile, more so than any others Mu Shuangshuang had seen. Wherever Lu Yuanfeng went, it would swiftly block his way.

It's like it wouldn't rest until it had eaten Lu Yuanfeng.

The saying "man's heart is insufficient for snakes to swallow elephants" was apt—this snake, merely wrist-thick and far from being an anaconda, dared to try to eat a human.

With a swoosh, Lu Yuanfeng's first arrow shot out, striking the snake's body but only scraping off a bit of skin, not even causing it to bleed.

Mu Shuangshuang seized the chance, aiming a forceful blow at the snake's head.

Unfortunately, she missed; the rock struck the snake's body, making it even more ferocious. It whipped its body around, focusing entirely on Lu Yuanfeng.

"Fengzi, aim for its seven-inch spot, hit it there."

Being attacked by a snake not even quite large was embarrassing; thankfully, Lu Yuanfeng was agile and adapted swiftly to escape.

A few rounds later, he was drenched with sweat.

Mu Shuangshuang kept searching for opportunities but then saw the pitiful Little Black move towards the puppy, persistently reaching out its paws.

The puppy tried to rise but soon its head drooped again.

Witnessing this, Mu Shuangshuang felt a sharp pang in her heart, as if something stabbed it painfully.

She jumped down from the tree and grabbed a wooden stick to smash the snake forcefully.

Simultaneously, Lu Yuanfeng's arrow flew through the air, striking the snake's seven-inch point.

Chapter 337: New Member

The snake finally died. Lu Yuanfeng was busy dealing with the snake and then walked towards Little Black.

Little Black stared at Mu Shuangshuang, all its previous arrogance and swagger gone.

It kept pointing at the Little Black Dog, seemingly pleading to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at the Little Black Dog on the ground; it didn't even have the strength to stand up, and even its gaze had become somewhat blurry.

It should die, right!

Mu Shuangshuang didn't know if Little Black considered the Little Black Dog as its friend and was momentarily at a loss on how to speak.

"Little Black... the Little Black Dog will die..."

She didn't know when the Little Black Dog was bitten, nor how to treat it, and in this era, there was no serum available.

Little Black lay on the ground, letting out a series of wails, different from the way it used to be when she first saw it.

At this moment, it was desperate...

Mu Shuangshuang felt extremely uncomfortable, scooped up the Little Black Dog from the ground, and rushed down the mountain, mumbling as she went.

"Lu Yuanfeng, handle everything here; I'm going to find Grandpa Zhang!"

Mu Shuangshuang nearly unleashed the energy she used in police academy competitions, dashing straight down the mountain in one breath.

Thickets and thorns were all charged through by her, as long as there was a passage. Yu Si Niang down the mountain only saw a black shadow, and when she looked again, it was gone.

When she reached Zhang Huai Shu's house, her face was scratched, her wrists were covered in blood, and even her clothes were torn and tattered.

"Grandpa Zhang... I beg you, save this dog. It was bitten by a snake, a black one, as thick as a wrist, with triangular-shaped eyes..."

Mu Shuangshuang described the features of the snake she saw to Zhang Huai Shu, hoping he could prescribe the right medicine.

Zhang Huai Shu just took one look and shook his head.

"It's too late, this dog... cannot be saved..."

Little Black, who had rushed over, wailed again and again.

The cries made Mu Shuangshuang heartache, but what pained her most was the puppy in her arms. It seemed no more than a few months old, could it really die just like this?

"Grandpa Zhang, I beg you, please try to treat it. I'll return the ten taels of silver I owe you later. No matter how much it costs, I'll pay for this dog. Please, please..."

As Mu Shuangshuang pleaded, Little Black also knelt beside her, showing its spirituality. Perhaps this puppy was the friend it had chosen.

Mu Shuangshuang told herself, she must, must save it...

"Child, it's not about the money; it's that it can't be saved."

"You haven't even tried to save it, can you really say that? At least you should attempt it!"

Mu Shuangshuang refused to give up, and Zhang Huai Shu reluctantly took the Little Black Dog into his house. Before entering, he said, "I can't guarantee I'll save it!"

Mu Shuangshuang and Little Black waited outside for Zhang Huai Shu's treatment, waiting for two hours.

After two hours, the sun had already slanted west, and Zhang Huai Shu came out holding Little Black, covered in sweat.

"I treated it and gave it medicine. Whether it survives depends on tonight."

"Thank you, Grandpa Zhang. It... it will be alright, I believe! How much is the medical fee this time? I'll bring it to you, including the previous ten taels of silver."

Mu Shuangshuang originally planned not to return Zhang Huai Shu's silver immediately.

After all, the agreed deadline was six months, and now that she was here at his place, there was no reason not to pay back the silver.

"It's fine, I didn't put much effort today, so don't worry about the silver. As for your dad's consultation fee, we agreed on six months, so six months it is, I am not in a hurry to use it."

Mu Shuangshuang said nothing, but she had made up her mind. These days, she had earned quite a bit of silver, almost twenty taels altogether.

Even if she returned Zhang Huai Shu's silver, there would still be more than ten taels left, but after deducting the purchase of corn and Xiao Han's tuition, there would be very little left indeed.

Returning inside with the Little Black Dog in her arms, it was still the same motionless state. As soon as she put the Little Black Dog on the ground, Little Black came up to it.

It just stayed there, squatting on the ground, its eyes glued to the Little Black Dog.

Mu Shuangshuang felt a pang in her heart, closed the door, and instructed Xiao Han and Little Zhi not to disturb Little Black in her room.

Earlier, she hadn't felt the pain from her injuries, but now, as she relaxed, Mu Shuangshuang realized her whole body ached, her wrists and legs were full of thorns. It took her quite a long time to remove them all one by one.

When Lu Yuanfeng returned, his bamboo basket was already filled with gold and silver flowers and bitter greens, gathering a whole sack full.

He had originally intended to return earlier, but since Yu Si Niang was alone there, he wasn't at ease.

As he knew with Shuangshuang around, there wouldn't be any major problems, he finished all the mountain work before coming back.

"Shuangshuang, how's the little black dog doing?"

"I don't know, Little Black has been keeping watch, and I felt too sad, so I came out." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head.

"It will be fine, Shuangshuang, don't worry. I think the snake was poisonous, so I didn't take it, but I did bring back the gallbladder."

The most precious thing from the snake is its gallbladder, even if Lu Yuanfeng didn't take the body, he had to keep the gallbladder.

"Yeah!" Mu Shuangshuang's interest seemed low, her mind still preoccupied with the little black dog, unsure if it would make it.

Lu Yuanfeng, knowing Shuangshuang's mood wasn't good, silently undertook all the work.

He discussed with Yu Si Niang, removed the door panel of the kitchen and spread the gold and silver flowers on it to dry them out.

For the remaining space that wasn't enough, Yu Si Niang found a piece of unused cloth, laid it on the ground, and spread the gold and silver flowers on it to dry.

Instantly, the entire courtyard was engulfed in the fragrance of gold and silver flowers.

A whole sack of bitter greens was also chopped up by Lu Yuanfeng, and for a whole hour he was busy without uttering a word of complaint, not even pausing to rest.

By dinnertime, Mu Shuangshuang perked up and started preparing dinner and grinding grist for making cold noodles at night.

She worked until the middle of the night, and Little Black hadn't left the room, not eating anything but just continuously watching over the Little Black Dog.

Mu Shuangshuang, unable to sleep, simply sat with Little Black through the night.

On the second day, as the dawn light broke, Mu Shuangshuang realized, to her surprise, that an entire night had passed.

Little Black maintained the same posture, constantly staring at the Little Black Dog.

Fortunately, the Little Black Dog didn't die. In unfortunate circumstances, luck prevailed, and finally, its eyes regained clarity.

Little Black excitedly barked around, the happiest it had been from yesterday to today.

"Little Black Dog, welcome as a new member!"

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang finally breathed a sigh of relief; everything was fine at last, but now she had to head to town for work.

Chapter 338: Old Mrs. Mu Was Scared to Tears

Mu Shuangshuang got up and gathered the things she needed to bring, then she and Lu Yuanfeng moved the big iron lump for making popcorn outside.

The main event today was to have Fat Chef try some popcorn and then finalize the selling price.

Previously, when Mu Shuangshuang helped Fat Chef, he said she could sell anything at his place.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't plan to go there everyday herself to sell popcorn; she opted for the simplest way by being the primary seller and letting Fat Chef be the secondary seller.

This method saves time, and people will generally be more conscientious.

"Fengzi, this time, let's not make too much, just one pot will do. Rare things are more valuable. Maybe we can even rip off Fat Chef a bit."

Lu Yuanfeng knew that Shuangshuang was back to her lively self.

He was happy and agreed, then started helping to make popcorn. Making popcorn is the kind of technical work that Mu Shuangshuang, who had done it once, needed to handle.

Lu Yuanfeng watched from the side, carefully noting down each step. As the iron pot heated evenly, Mu Shuangshuang moved it aside and picked up the small iron hammer.

She told Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, I'm going to hammer now. The sound might be really loud later, so remember to cover your ears."

"Okay~" Lu Yuanfeng nodded.

When Mu Shuangshuang was hammering the iron pot, instead of covering his own ears as promised, Lu Yuanfeng moved beside her and covered her ears the moment she struck the pot.

With a loud "bang," Old Mrs. Mu, who was sleeping, was startled and ended up wetting herself out of shock.

Her lower body was wet, and her face turned green.

She crawled out of bed and shouted towards the outside.

"Which damned bastard made a racket for this old lady, come out now..."

Mr. Mu was awoken by Old Mrs. Mu's angry shouting. Before he could ask what happened, the stench of urine nearly made him vomit.

"Old woman, did you knock over the chamber pot? Why is it so smelly..."

Mr. Mu frowned and wanted to get up, but his hand accidentally touched the wet mattress.

In his fifties, having wet the bed, Mr. Mu felt extremely disgusted and didn't sleep anymore, leaving Old Mrs. Mu to clean up.

Even Old Mrs. Mu found it off-putting, but if she didn't clean it, it would be even more disgusting in the room.

Old Mrs. Mu stood up, went outside the fourth room, and scolded again.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, you lazy woman, the sun's already shining on your butt, and you're not up yet. Are you waiting for this old lady to cook and dress you?"

Mrs. Liu, still sleeping, heard Old Mrs. Mu's shouting, shivered, and hurriedly got up to dress.

At this time, the sky was just getting light.

It's summer, the days are longer, and the sky brightens early. It was probably not yet the hour of Mao (5 a.m. to 7 a.m.). Usually, she wouldn't get up to make breakfast until half an hour after Mao.

But Mrs. Liu didn't dare ask and quickly dressed to rush to the kitchen, but was stopped by Old Mrs. Mu.

"Why are you running? Go to my room, take the bedding out to dry, wash the sheets, empty the chamber pot. Don't think about being lazy, or I'll have the fourth son divorce you!"

After the scolding, Mrs. Liu could only dejectedly comply.

In the room, an unbearable smell of urine lingered. At first, Mrs. Liu thought it came from the chamber pot, but after emptying it, the smell persisted.

She moved and washed the sheets, doing all the tasks by herself.

While drying the bedding, she noticed a large stain on it, realizing Old Mrs. Mu had wet the bed, but she could only swallow the grievance.

Old Mrs. Mu changed clothes, tossed them into a basin, and returned to bed to continue sleeping.

Mrs. Liu busied herself all morning, washing clothes, cleaning, and cooking. By the time the food was set, the Old Mu family members started getting up one by one to eat.

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Upon reaching the town, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng headed straight to Jiu Si Xuan. As soon as they arrived, Fat Chef greeted them.

"Little girl, I've been waiting for you today. I've been telling customers about my spicy chicken for three days. Did you bring the gold and silver flower?"

Fat Chef's face broke into a smile, his chubby cheeks scrunched together, but he looked quite friendly.

Although it had only been three days since Mu Shuangshuang last visited Jiu Si Xuan, she suddenly noticed a change in the setup. Previously, tables were placed in the center of the hall, but now a high platform was there.

On the platform was a table that somewhat resembled a desk.

Mu Shuangshuang certainly didn't think it was a scholar wanting to study there. It must be a storytelling setup, popular in ancient times.

"Uncle, have you got a storytelling master here?"

Mu Shuangshuang was genuinely curious, as ancient things seemed more intriguing than modern ones.

All kinds of little novelties, and large events were especially interesting too. She had wanted to listen to storytelling for a long time but never found the chance.

"Yes, our owner brought him from the Capital, said to be quite impressive. Each storytelling session costs quite a bit of silver."

Fat Chef was a relative of the shopkeeper, but behind the shopkeeper was the owner, making his words credible.

Mu Shuangshuang finished hearing the gossip and began her business for the day.

"Uncle, you said last time you needed something fresh; do you still need it now?"

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't in a hurry to reveal what it was; she wanted to observe first.

If popcorn were in a pastry shop, it should be quite popular too.

"Of course, little girl, what fresh thing have you got?"

Fat Chef scooted closer, his eyes intensely fixed on Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang stepped outside Jiu Si Xuan and brought in a clay jar.

She raised the jar high and handed it to the Fat Chef. "Try it first, and you'll know this fresh novelty."

Fat Chef's curiosity piqued, he reached into the jar, eyeing the white, flower-like things in his hand, and asked, "What's this? It looks pretty nice."

"Try it!" Mu Shuangshuang urged.

Fat Chef tossed the popcorn into his mouth, the sweet but not greasy taste filling his mouth.

With a crunching sound in his mouth, after finishing the popcorn in his hand, he grabbed another handful.

By the fourth reach into the jar, after eating and sipping tea, he let out a long, satisfied sigh.

"What is this, how is it so delicious?" Fat Chef eyed Mu Shuangshuang with admiration.

"Popcorn, a fresh novelty that Yuan Feng and I cooked up. Do you think others will like it?"

Fat Chef still felt the sweetness in his mouth and nodded vigorously. "Of course, if served on a small dish with a pot of tea, that flavor..."

Fat Chef smacked his lips in reminiscence, glancing at the stage in the middle of the restaurant, finding the little girl before him even more remarkable.

"Girl, you're really my lucky star!"

Chapter 339: Sweet to the Core

"Haha, as long as you like it."

Mu Shuangshuang smiled awkwardly. She still found it difficult to handle the increasingly enthusiastic Fat Chef.

"Well, although last time we talked about you selling your goods here, uncle knows you probably don't have time to come here every day.

How about this time, you sell your goods to me, I'll resell them. Once you have time, you can come to town daily, and my offer will still stand. What do you think?"

Everyone wants to earn money, and Fat Chef knows that what Mu Shuangshuang lacks is time. It's not easy for a country girl to come to town regularly.

Mu Shuangshuang initially had this idea. She hadn't yet gathered enough resources or money to set up a shop of her own, and even if she somehow managed to do so, these fresh novelties might not sell as well as they would at Jiu Si Xuan.

It would be better to first gain fame, and once her goods become well-known.

Using that notoriety, she could open her own shop and even attract more people.

"Let me discuss it with Fengzi," although Mu Shuangshuang had already made up her mind, she didn't show it.

Merchants prioritize profit, and she loves money.

Acting a bit reluctant was better than agreeing immediately; it often results in more benefits.

Mu Shuangshuang pulled Lu Yuanfeng aside and asked for his opinion. He believed this time Shuangshuang could be a bit firm, and a 60-40 split would be fine.

The ingredients and recipe were in Shuangshuang's hands, and she was also the one delivering the goods.

Mu Shuangshuang also felt that Lu Yuanfeng was right; a 60-40 split was already quite generous since Jiu Si Xuan was functioning mainly as a broker.

After discussing, Mu Shuangshuang returned to Fat Chef to express her thoughts.

"Little girl, a 60-40 split isn't impossible, but you know, we doing restaurant business have to bear risks ourselves.

And we have to communicate with customers directly, uncle has done so many deals with you, so there's no need to hide from you.

This time, uncle plans to make your popcorn the exclusive refreshment before and after meals, perfect for our owner's storytelling sessions; folks need snacks while listening to tales."

Fat Chef's intention was to make Mu Shuangshuang's popcorn the main attraction, with it extending as a tea snack.

During hot summer days, enjoying a cup of tea, a dish of popcorn, and a storytelling session is truly delightful.

Since it's a main product, they definitely need to invest heavily; a 60-40 split would be unfair in this case.

Mu Shuangshuang was reasonable; knowing they planned big, she understood she wouldn't earn less.

"Then how much can you offer?"

"Half a percent!" Fat Chef gently uttered.

"Half a percent?" Mu Shuangshuang frowned. Fat Chef's half percent wasn't five percent, but half of one percent — that's quite a drastic reduction.

Just as she was about to refuse, Fat Chef added.

"Yes, and it's exclusive supply. Don't underestimate this half percent, our owner doesn't just have one restaurant.

If your popcorn truly becomes popular, we can trade across the whole Da Ning Dynasty."

Hearing this, Mu Shuangshuang understood; Fat Chef's business plan was akin to modern chain business.

If they cover the entire Da Ning Dynasty, even if she gets a small portion, the bigger pie would mean she wouldn't be at a loss.

But the question was, how would they send these goods to other places? She couldn't manage producing all of them alone!

Fat Chef understood Mu Shuangshuang's concerns.

"Girl, uncle has eaten more salt than you've eaten rice, I understand your worries.

Our owner might return from the Capital soon, when he's back, we'll further discuss this business deal.

For now, just keep delivering them, the restaurant will cover material costs, and we'll negotiate a price per trip once we set it, okay?"

This was possibly Fat Chef's most cautious negotiation; Mu Shuangshuang realized he never overstated anything, rendering it flawless.

"Whatever you say, it's not like I'm in a rush."

After all, business deals aren't always about instant profit.

She had some money left, not yet at the verge of desperation.

"Alright, we're settled then!" Fat Chef nodded with a smile; suddenly he said, "I saw two wild chickens on your wheelbarrow earlier; why not sell them to me too?"

"Sure!" Since someone wanted to buy them, Mu Shuangshuang was glad and saved an extra trip.

They weighed the chickens, took the Silver Tael, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng went to town to sell a few straw fans.

Summer heat had not yet disappeared, although it was already July; in three days, it would be the Qixi Festival, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng decided to buy some essentials for the festival.

Then there were the Sky Lanterns, two Wen a lantern, Mu Shuangshuang bit her lip and bought them.

Walking on the road, Mu Shuangshuang began to feel contemplative.

"Fengzi, do you think my uncle and Miss Feng have gotten together?"

Initially, Mu Shuangshuang advised Feng Xiaohua not to agree easily, suggesting she set a few hurdles for her uncle.

But she wasn't sure how things turned out.

"Probably so!"

Lu Yuanfeng felt the same as Shuangshuang, hoping that good things come to those who love.

He tilted his head, looking at the girl beside him. She was always smiling, recovering quickly even when sad or angry.

Lu Yuanfeng found himself losing control again; just staring at Shuangshuang made him feel flushed and excited.

Mu Shuangshuang sensed a burning gaze on her face and turned to meet Lu Yuanfeng's eyes.

This wasn't the first time they locked eyes, but never before did Shuangshuang feel the glow in Lu Yuanfeng's eyes like she did now.

Gentle yet intense.

"Let's hurry and head back!" Mu Shuangshuang lowered her head hastily, blushing intensely.

She inwardly scolded herself: "Gosh, Mu Shuangshuang, just a glance and you're already flushed; if someone says they like you, wouldn't you be frightened to death?"

The word 'like' struck her mind, sending a shiver throughout Mu Shuangshuang's body like an electric shock.

Her hands and feet began to tremble uncontrollably.

Mu Shuangshuang felt unwell, grabbing the water Lu Yuanfeng brought over and gulping heavily.

A faint sweetness started to rise slowly from her heart...

Lu Yuanfeng blinked dumbly, watching Shuangshuang holding the water jug, wanting to remind her she took the wrong one, but it seemed like he discovered a significant secret.

His heart began to stir with ripples once more...

He tightened his grip on the wheelbarrow, lightly licking his lips as if savoring something...

Chapter 340: Yu Liulang Chasing His Wife

Yu Liulang went back and faced a shut door. Not only did he fail to see Feng Xiaohua, he instead encountered the visiting matchmaker.

He sat outside Feng Xiaohua's courtyard, waiting in silence throughout the night.

He didn't dare to make a sound, nor did he dare to go inside and disturb her.

Early the next morning, Feng Xiaohua opened the courtyard gate, only to find Yu Liulang sitting on the ground.

"Xiao Hua, you've finally come to see me. I... Please don't marry Wang Gouchun, okay?"

Yesterday evening, the first thing Yu Liulang said when he appeared at his own doorstep was the same.

A wave of emotion swept through Feng Xiaohua's heart, but she recalled what Shuangshuang had said: "What men can't have is always the best."

That woman Luo Xiu'er was remembered by Yu Liulang for the same reason—because he couldn't have her.

If you want Yu Liulang to completely forget Luo Xiu'er, you must make him realize that you are even harder to obtain than Luo Xiu'er.

So, no matter how much Feng Xiaohua wanted to be with Yu Liulang, she had to keep a steely face.

"Brother Yu, do you realize what you're saying? You better not stay at my courtyard gate anymore, or if people see this, who will dare marry me?"

While Feng Xiaohua was speaking, the chickens and ducks in the entire courtyard were going wild, frantically squawking and running around.

In the past, the first thing Luo Xiu'er did every morning was to feed these chickens and ducks.

This time, because of her concern for Yu Liulang outside, she set this matter aside. Who knew they'd react so strongly?

"I need to go feed the chickens first!"

Throwing out a sentence, she returned to the kitchen, grabbed half a ladle of oil cakes, and half a bucket of wild vegetables cooked last night, mixed them together, and started feeding the chickens and ducks in the courtyard.

"Chickadees... chickadees..."

Feng Xiaohua called out while working on the feed, pouring the chicken and duck food into the basin in the courtyard.

With food provided, the chickens and ducks in the courtyard finally returned to normal.

Yu Liulang watched the girl in front of him with greed, realizing he had never known that just the sight of her yelling could hold him so spellbound.

He couldn't help but curse himself for having eyes unable to see.

All these years, he hadn't noticed her virtues, instead always treating her like a sister...

Just thinking about that cursed word made Yu Liulang feel a pang of discomfort.

Feng Xiaohua's movements in feeding the chickens paused briefly, as she could distinctly feel the scorching gaze from the courtyard gate fixed on her.

Feigning nonchalance, she entered the kitchen and began to prepare breakfast.

She planned to make fried rice with eggs for breakfast, as it's easy to cook and he probably hadn't eaten.

Yesterday, his father sent someone over saying he'd be staying with relatives for a few days, advising her to be cautious herself. Thus, there wasn't anyone at home to reprimand her.

Lighting the fire, adding oil, and cracking eggs, Feng Xiaohua skillfully put a large bowl of rice into the pot. The pot sizzled, producing a cheerful sound.

Soon, the aroma wafted from the kitchen to the outside of the courtyard.

Yu Liulang smelled the fragrance of food and realized he hadn't eaten a grain of rice nor drank half a cup of water since yesterday noon until this morning.

The feelings of exhaustion, thirst, and hunger suddenly surged into his heart, yet he still stood outside the courtyard, refusing to leave.

He didn't mind being seen by others, thinking that if anyone saw him there, Xiao Hua wouldn't have to marry Zhao Gou Chun.

But his intentions didn't mean Feng Xiaohua would offer him that opportunity.

Once the meal was finished, Feng Xiaohua walked up to him.

"Don't stand at my courtyard gate anymore. My father isn't home; if neighbors see this, how can I face them? Do you want me to die?"

Yu Liulang looked troubled; he didn't want to give up so easily, but hearing Xiao Hua mention death, he finally made a bold decision and followed Feng Xiaohua into the courtyard.

Yu Liulang laughed self-mockingly; he had already thrown caution to the wind, and unless Xiao Hua changed her mind, he absolutely wouldn't return.

Yu Liulang's brazen actions made Feng Xiaohua stomp her feet in anger.

"Get out!" she demanded.

"Promise me you'll cancel the engagement with Zhao Gou Chun, and then I'll leave."

There was actually an unspoken line after that—asking Feng Xiaohua to agree to his proposal—but Yu Liulang worried he'd be kicked out if he said it, so he didn't.

Precisely because of this, determination flickered in Feng Xiaohua's eyes once again.

She even felt that Shuangshuang was right—Yu Liulang still couldn't forget Luo Xiu'er.

But if that's the case, then why come to stop her?

Brother to sister?

Returning to the kitchen, Feng Xiaohua took just one pair of chopsticks and a single set of dishes.

The bowl of fried rice in the large da Hai bowl was cooked with three eggs, hence the egg pieces stuck to the rice, their golden color enticing enough to make one's mouth water.

Yu Liulang stood at the side, drooling.

Feng Xiaohua's meals were comparable to his niece's cooking, and coupled with his long fasting, his stomach kept growling incessantly.

Feng Xiaohua heard the noise but pretended not to notice, although she ultimately couldn't bear to let him go hungry.

She picked up a mouthful of rice with chopsticks, took a bite, then stood up and walked over to the slop bucket.

"What are you doing?" Yu Liulang grabbed her bowl in one swift motion.

"Throwing it away, I'm not hungry."

"Ah?" Shocked, Yu Liulang licked his lips, swallowed a mouthful of saliva, and asked pitifully, "Can I eat it? So many eggs; I don't want to waste them."

It was originally made for Yu Liulang, so giving it to him wasn't an issue. But thinking of his audacity made Feng Xiaohua feel unwilling.

"No, I ate from it; it has my saliva."

"I... I don't mind!" Yu Liulang continued.

"But I do mind. I don't want someone unrelated to me touching things I've touched."

As soon as she mentioned being unrelated, Yu Liulang was anxious.

"How are we unrelated? We clearly are!"

"In what way?" Feng Xiaohua pressed on, seeking an answer.

Was he here out of sympathy, or because he truly liked her?

"I... I..." Yu Liulang hesitated, unsure how to start. He thought, if he said he wanted to marry Xiao Hua, would he be rejected?

Would she think he was pitying her?

During Yu Liulang's moment of hesitation, Feng Xiaohua had already set the bowl and chopsticks on the table.

"Eat up, there's cool water in the jar."

Though Feng Xiaohua struggled to say "Eat and leave," she couldn't bring herself to utter the words.

She left the kitchen and started tidying up the house. Having fed, the chickens and ducks would find their own spots to rest, leaving the threshing floor clear for her to clean.

Speckles of chicken and duck droppings in the courtyard permeated the air with a foul odor, but Feng Xiaohua was used to it and didn't find it bothersome.

Once she finished cleaning, the entire courtyard was spotlessly clean.

In the kitchen, after finishing a large bowl of egg fried rice, Yu Liulang finally regained his strength.

He washed the dishes and chopsticks clean and placed them in Feng Xiaohua's cupboard, then went to stick by Feng Xiaohua again.

He thought, since he was already here, he had to finish what he set out to do today.

While Feng Xiaohua washed clothes, he followed along, not minding whether the clothes belonged to a girl.

After all, they'll be his wife's in the future!