

## Folly 35

### Chapter 35: Entering the Mountain (2)

"Hahaha!"

In the forest, a string of bell-like laughter rang out, instantly adding a touch of liveliness to the quiet woods.

Mu Shuangshuang clutched her belly, almost laughing herself into stitches, just shy of rolling on the ground.

Earlier, she felt someone was following her, so she walked a bit and then hid, making it hard for the person behind to find her. As a result, she overheard this little poem...

The little chubby kid from the Lu Family really was amusing, even Mu Shuangshuang, who had only seen him a few times, couldn't help but develop a liking for Yuanbao. Of course, compared to cuteness, he still couldn't beat Little Zhi.

Thinking of Little Zhi, Mu Shuangshuang continued heading north through the forest, and soon spotted a fallen tree stump. The stump was covered with wood ear mushrooms, and Mu Shuangshuang's eyes lit up as she scampered forward to pick them.

Compared to those in modern times, wild wood ear mushrooms were smaller and less fleshy, and Mu Shuangshuang knew she wouldn't be able to gather much in one go.

First, she couldn't take them home; second, she didn't have a pot in hand. At most, she could light a fire and place a wooden rack to grill fish.

Perhaps next time she would bring a basket from home, collect some wild vegetables and wood ear mushrooms, and take them to town to exchange for some small change.

Though she planned to bring a basket next time, Mu Shuangshuang still took action herself, found a few tree vines, and simply wove a basket to put the wood ear mushrooms and spinach inside. She turned around the mountains a few more times. She didn't go into the deep woods but was confident the places she ventured were areas people dared not go, otherwise there wouldn't be such old spinach.

By the time she went down the mountain, Mu Shuangshuang's inner shirt was thoroughly dry but was soon sweat-soaked again; mountain climbing in summer was rather risky due to the heat.

Fortunately, her outer shirt draped over the wooden stick had dried. As noon approached, Mu Shuangshuang feared someone might suddenly intrude, so she donned her outer garment and picked up the wooden stick she had been whittling with scissors all the way.

There were fish in the brook, Mu Shuangshuang was certain, otherwise there wouldn't have been fish going jumpy on the water's surface several times. Mu Shuangshuang crouched by the stream, her eyes fixed stubbornly on the water's surface, waiting for ripples to appear, and then she would lash out with a stick.

After several attempts, she finally caught a fish. Mu Shuangshuang lifted it to inspect; it was a whitefish, estimating it weighed a pound or two.

The offerings from the Old Mu Family were hard to come by; the only thing useful to Mu Shuangshuang was the scissors. Luckily, they weren't dull and hadn't rusted, otherwise Mu Shuangshuang would have been at a loss as to how to handle the fish before her.

With a snap, she cut open the fish's belly and began gutting it. When she reached the intestines, she cautiously avoided rupturing the gallbladder. A fish with a ruptured gall couldn't be made delicious even by a skilled chef.

However, Mu Shuangshuang had heard that if a fish's gall was ruptured, spitting on it immediately made it okay. As to whether this was true, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't sure, for she never tried it — she was skilled at gutting fish.

Back in the office days, the meals made by the office auntie weren't palatable, and the men were too busy with tasks, picky about their food, and would often complain that life was unbearable.

Mu Shuangshuang once made a meal by chance, and everyone found it tastier than the auntie's; they simply began freeloading at Mu Shuangshuang's place regularly, forcing her to take over cooking from the auntie. Eventually, it evolved where the auntie was the assistant and Mu Shuangshuang the head chef.

Of course, throughout this evolution, her culinary skills improved tremendously, almost reaching the level of a professional chef.

With the fish cleaned up, Mu Shuangshuang sprinkled a little salt on it. She had Little Zhi steal salt from the jar only to give Old Mrs. Mu a chance to teach Mrs. Lin a good lesson, but who knew it would come in handy now.

Insignificant items could all be taken from the Old Mu Family, including flintstones for starting a fire. Mu Shuangshuang began grilling the fish.

Fish without a coating of oil naturally tasted duller, but now wasn't the time for such fussing. Mu Shuangshuang knew that the Old Mu Family probably wouldn't have a taste of this kind of fish in a year. Little Zhi would likely be delighted later!

Just as the fish was nearly ready, Little Zhi, covered in sweat, finally arrived.

This area indeed had few visitors, and although Little Zhi was young, Yu Si Niang had cautioned him several times. So when arriving here, he almost ran and when he saw Mu Shuangshuang, he immediately dove into her embrace.

"Sister, I'm scared!"

"Scared of what? Isn't sister here? There are just fewer people around, don't worry, there won't be any fierce beasts that Mother mentioned."

Mu Shuangshuang believed there were large animals like wolves deep in the mountains, but closer to the mountain's edge, at most there might only be a few wild chickens or rabbits.

"But Mother said..." Little Zhi tilted his head, ready to tell what Yu Si Niang had informed him.

"Mother's worried Little Zhi might encounter bad people on the mountain, it's to protect Little Zhi. Now with sister together with Little Zhi, regardless of any danger, sister can handle it for you."

In Mu Shuangshuang's experience, humans were more frightening than animals. She usually dealt with small cases but had seen major crimes like murder and arson, though her position was too low to participate.

"Alright, little girl, your pouted mouth can hang a chamber pot now. Didn't you say you're hungry? Sister grilled fish for you, almost ready to eat!"

Mu Shuangshuang pointed with her finger, and the little head in her embrace, Little Zhi, finally revealed itself. Just then, the fish on the rack sizzled, the air filled with the aroma of fish. The golden-crustured grilled fish was tantalizing, enough to hold one's gaze.

"Sister... fish... fish... there's fish..." Little Zhi's eyes widened, pulling hard on Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve, she inhaled forcefully to confirm she wasn't mistaken, and pinched her own thigh hard.

Feeling the pain, Little Zhi dared to believe she wasn't dreaming. She couldn't stop swallowing, the sound of gulping throat water clear even to Mu Shuangshuang.

With a stomach rumbling, Little Zhi looked warily at Mu Shuangshuang.

"Sis, is this really... ours...?"

Just a few words, but Little Zhi choked on her saliva several times. Her hand clutching Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve grew tighter and tighter...

Just like the match-selling little girl holding a match, unwilling to let it go even if it burned her hand.

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly felt a pang of sadness, perhaps Little Zhi was truly hungry.

"Yes, it's ours. Not grandma's, nor uncle's; it's lunch just for me and Little Zhi!"

"But I don't dare eat... I'm afraid I'll never see something this good again if I eat it."

To Little Zhi, a fish was like a pearl of the ocean—heard of, but unseen, untouchable. She wanted to eat, but feared that having tasted it, she'd never encounter such delicacy again.

Like having never possessed something, the fear of losing it didn't exist.

"Little Zhi needn't be afraid, sister will catch fish for you every day!"