

## Folly 381

Chapter 381: Came Back to Life

Mu Shuangshuang, tired from hitting, simply used her feet to stomp.

The villagers who came to watch the commotion were all stunned. In the past, Mu Shuangshuang was polite and enthusiastic towards others, never a violent person, but now she was like a madwoman seeing red.

With kicks and stomps, by the time the Old Wang Family came, Wang Fugui was already beaten black and blue, his face unrecognizable even to his mother.

After learning the whole story from the villagers, Wang Dashuan not only didn't hold Mu Shuangshuang accountable, but sent someone to ask Zhang Huai Shu to help Yu Liulang with his injuries.

"Father, have you lost it? This wretched girl beat me like this, I want her to see the magistrate and rot in jail." Wang Fugui covered his face, crying and making a scene.

"You beast, we indulged your liberties in town, thinking you'd restrain yourself, yet you dared to cause trouble here in the village, utterly disgracing the Old Wang Family. Today, you're going to apologize." Wang Dashuan said angrily.

"Father, what do you mean? I was the one beaten, I'm the one wronged, and you're not only not helping me, but you want me to apologize. I have no father like you."

After shouting, Wang Fugui ran off in front of Wang Dashuan.

This made Wang Dashuan cough in anger.

Mu Shuangshuang was still agitated, and Lu Yuanfeng was helping her sort out the mess.

"Uncle Wang, please don't be angry. In this matter, Shuangshuang admits she was also at fault, you don't need to cover the medical expenses." Lu Yuanfeng said politely to Wang Dashuan.

Wang Dashuan already had a good relationship with Lu Yuanfeng. In the past, when Lu Yuanfeng hunted, Wang Dashuan would be the first in the village to reserve his game.

"Fengzi, this is our family's Fugui's fault. The one who should apologize, owe compensation, and pay, is me. Tell Shuang, I'll visit personally one of these days."

"Okay, sure."

After talking with Wang Dashuan, Lu Yuanfeng went to assist Mu Shuangshuang, while Feng Xiaohua clung to Yu Liulang, crying incessantly.

Feng Xiaohua kept muttering, "You fool, why did you push me away... it's all my fault, causing you to get hurt like this."

Yu Liulang's face was a patchwork of bruises, after all, with a few men involved, things couldn't end up well.

But he still placed a hand on Feng Xiaohua's face. "It's not your fault, I'm a man, I can't let my woman get hurt. Xiao Hua, no matter what, always remember to protect yourself first, only then can I be at ease."

"Uncle and Aunt have a really good relationship." Mu Shuangshuang, pale, forced a smile.

This smile tugged at her stomach, and Mu Shuangshuang grimaced in pain.

Seeing the pain etched on her face, Lu Yuanfeng felt a deep sorrow. He wanted to carry her back, but with the villagers still around, if seen being overly familiar, Shuangshuang's reputation might be harmed.

As Lu Yuanfeng hesitated, Mu Shuangshuang spoke up.

"Fengzi, please carry me back, I can't endure the stomach pain anymore."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't one to be pretentious. Her stomach was already aching, and after exerting all energies on Wang Fugui, she couldn't push any further without collapsing.

Lu Yuanfeng bent down and carried Shuangshuang back.

Mu Shuangshuang rested the entire afternoon, and when she woke, it was already dusk.

Opening her eyes, she saw Yu Si Niang's worried face.

"Shuangshuang, you finally woke up, I was worried to death."

"Mother, it's just because my period came, I'm okay. After a sleep, I'll feel fine again. By the way, where's Fengzi?"

Mu Shuangshuang looked around but didn't see him.

"He went back, Old Lady Lu sent someone to call him home, saying they had guests or something, but he had Yuanbao bring over some red dates, and I've cooked them up for you, they're ready to eat."

Hearing Lu Yuanfeng sent something for her, Mu Shuangshuang felt a warmth in her heart. Reflecting on her and Fengzi's plight, they just confirmed their feelings for each other and hadn't even exchanged a few words before being caught up in a heap of trouble.

This incident gave Mu Shuangshuang time to think.

After all, there was no rush; they had plenty of time to nurture this relationship.

The romance among the ancients was different from modern times, and she had a lot to discuss with Lu Yuanfeng.

Luckily, both of them had siblings, so even when they got married, they wouldn't be labeled as burdens.

Thinking of marriage brought a blush to Mu Shuangshuang's face, and the warmth flowed again below.

"Mother, I'll eat later." Mu Shuangshuang struggled to get up, realizing that her menstrual cloth needed changing.

"Hey, why are you getting up, let me bring you food, and then continue to rest."

"Mother, don't bother, I need to visit the latrine, I'll do it myself when I get back."

Yu Si Niang paused, then nodded, picking up several menstrual cloths from the table and handing them to Shuangshuang.

"I made these for you a few days ago, knowing you were due your period soon, and they're just in time."

Yu Si Niang gave ten menstrual cloths to Mu Shuangshuang, who touched one and was instantly stunned.

"Mother, is this filled with cotton?"

The menstrual cloth in her hands was soft, confirming it was indeed cotton.

"Yes, I traded some silver for cotton at Aunt Xiao Yun's, next year we'll plant our own, so there'll be no need to trade for it."

Yu Si Niang lived a rugged life, but Shuangshuang was her daughter, after all.

She was so young, so mature, and had earned so much money for the family, Yu Si Niang couldn't bear for her daughter to suffer.

Mu Shuangshuang had heard that the daughters of wealthy families in town used cotton, and she had thought about it herself, for she truly found using wood ash unsettling.

But they had no cotton, and she hadn't considered spending money to buy it.

Now that Yu Si Niang had prepared it for her, how could she not be moved?

"Mother, thank you... Shuangshuang is very touched."

Yu Si Niang patted Mu Shuangshuang's shoulder, shaking her head, "Silly child, what are you talking about, it's all the silver you earned, what's wrong with spending it on you? Besides, you're my daughter and I love you."

Mu Shuangshuang laughed along.

After a trip to the latrine and changing the menstrual cloth, Mu Shuangshuang felt alive again.

In the courtyard, Yu Liulang and Feng Xiaohua were drying gold and silver flower. Feng Xiaohua loved its scent, and in the afternoon they had picked plenty from the mountains.

The morning's events had become a distant memory for them.

"Shuangshuang, are you feeling better?" Feng Xiaohua looked up at Mu Shuangshuang with concern.

"Better, thanks for your concern, Auntie. I'll get some food first, tomorrow I'll take you and Uncle to a great place for picking gold and silver flowers, it's a sea of such flowers there."

Chapter 382: Matchmaker Visits

Lu Yuanfeng's home.

Lu Xiao sat boldly in the center of the main room of Lu Yuanfeng's house, even Old Lady Lu was only seated to the side.

Matchmaker Sun was introducing good girls from the village and nearby villages in front of Lu Yuanfeng.

"I say, Yuanfeng, I've said so much as Granny Sun, you should at least give me a response."

Matchmaker Sun shook the straw fan in her hand. This fan was a gift from her relatives, supposedly from the town, it was quite cooling.

Yuanbao angrily said from the side, "My second brother doesn't need matchmaking, you should leave."

In Yuanbao's heart, the choice for his second sister-in-law was Sister Shuangshuang; he wouldn't agree to anyone else.

"Yuanbao, the adults are talking, why are you interrupting? Get to the side." Lu Xiao said angrily.

"No, my second brother doesn't like those people, he won't marry them."

Lu Xiao slammed the table with his hand and stood up, ready to move.

Lu Yuanfeng stepped forward to protect Yuanbao.

"Enough, I've given you time, if you're finished talking, you can leave."

"When I came back, I said, I don't need you to manage my affairs." Lu Yuanfeng said coldly to Lu Xiao.

"You don't want me to manage? Ha, you speak so nicely, but don't forget, you're my son, I'm your father, you have to take care of me this lifetime. If I'm not dead, you won't have a good life." Lu Xiao shamelessly said.

As expected, Lu Yuanfeng's expression changed again.

If the person before him weren't his father.

If years ago, his mother hadn't told him to make sure to remember his father even if he made something of himself, Lu Xiao would've been kicked out long ago.

He envied Shuangshuang, envied her carefree nature that others didn't possess. She wouldn't submit to anyone, and she wouldn't back down just because it's her family bullying her.

But he couldn't do it.

He could avoid interacting with Lu Xiao but couldn't like Shuangshuang, take physical action to teach a lesson.

Gu Jiulian watched the spectacle from the side; she had brought the matchmaker and Lu Xiao, since the brat gave her nothing, she wouldn't let the brat have a good time.

Everything he disliked, Gu Jiulian wanted to do once.

Lu Yuanfeng couldn't touch Lu Xiao, so he simply got up to chase Matchmaker Sun away.

"You... leave my house immediately, I don't need your matchmaking, get out of our house."

At this point, Old Lady Lu and Old Sir Lu arrived too. Unlike before, this time, they stood on Lu Xiao's side.

"Fengzi, by next year you'll be eighteen, boys around your age in the village have already married. Your mother isn't here, as an elder, I must help you find a wife." Old Lady Lu attempted to persuade Lu Yuanfeng.

"Grandma, if that's what you want to discuss, then I won't join in, there's still a lot of unfinished business at home."

Lu Yuanfeng finished speaking and actually left the main room, went to his room to pick up a pile of clothes, and then went to the kitchen to fetch water to wash clothes.

Everyone didn't expect the situation to be like this, for a moment, they were all stunned.

Matchmaker Sun reacted and waved her straw fan at the Old Lu Family.

"What's wrong with your Old Lu Family, you asked me to come for matchmaking, and Feng's attitude is like this? I won't do matchmaking for anyone in your Old Lu Family anymore."

"Come on, big sister, you can't say that." Old Lady Lu panicked, there were quite a few suitable children in the family, offending Matchmaker Sun would be a problem.

"Why can't I say it? You all saw it, all afternoon, I spoke alone, and he didn't say a single word." Matchmaker Sun pointed angrily at Lu Yuanfeng.

"Fengzi is still just a child, you can't really compare him with a child, right? How about having dinner at my house tonight?" Old Lady Lu sincerely offered.

"I won't go. Regardless, my words are here, I won't do matchmaking for your Old Lu Family anymore."

Matchmaker Sun had wide connections and knew many people, so Old Lady Lu was anxious.

"Big sister, tell us what it would take for you not to hold a grudge over this, whatever you say is fine."

"Really?" Seeing that she could say whatever, Matchmaker Sun's expression softened a little.

"Of course, whatever you say is what it will be." Old Lady Lu nodded.

"Alright then, I've spent the afternoon here and achieved nothing. The matchmaker's fee is gone, so give me a hen and we're done."

"What? A hen?" Gu Jiulian was startled; she had only invited Matchmaker Sun to provoke Lu Yuanfeng, she didn't expect Matchmaker Sun to ask for something.

"What's wrong, Jiulian, you don't want to? Don't forget that your daughter's and son's marriage prospects will depend on me moving forward." Matchmaker Sun coldly glanced at Gu Jiulian.

Today she suffered the loss, which was entirely a result of Gu Jiulian's actions.

"You..." Gu Jiulian suffered silently, almost fainting from anger.

Old Lady Lu hesitated for a moment, just about to agree, by then Lu Yuanfeng, who was previously washing clothes, came back in for some reason. He dragged Matchmaker Sun out, threw her out of the yard in a few moves.

"You, Lu Yuanfeng, actually dare... you actually dare..." Matchmaker Sun was furious, starting to swear.

"You vile person, smoke with your wickedness, you'll never marry anyone, your lineage will end!" Matchmaker Sun cursed as she left, as Yuanbao picked up a stone and threw it at Matchmaker Sun's head, causing her pain. She was about to rush in but was blocked by Lu Yuanfeng.

"If you step in one more step, I won't be polite."

Lu Yuanfeng was sturdy, having been to the military camp; his casual show of momentum was enough to overwhelm most people. Feeling angry, Matchmaker Sun left, swearing at the Old Lu Family as she walked away.

Lu Yuanfeng glanced at those still present and went back to washing clothes.

Lu Xiao took the opportunity during Matchmaker Sun's trouble to look around the main room to find something valuable to take when no one was looking.

But the main room was only so big, everything was clear at a glance.

He thought for a bit, decided to check out Lu Yuanfeng's room.

Lu Xiao knew his son surely had money, always out hunting and bringing back prey, even now, a few rabbits were kept in the backyard. Those creatures didn't interest him, he wanted money.

He slipped into his son's room, searched around, even flipped the mattress, but found nothing.

"Impossible, how is there nothing?"

"What are you looking for?" A cold male voice came from the doorway, Lu Yuanfeng's body blocked most of the door.

Lu Xiao looked up at Lu Yuanfeng, startled, but immediately began speaking with a smile, "Nothing, nothing... I saw your room was messy, wanted to tidy it up for you."

Chapter 383: Second Aunt Ran Away

Such a lousy excuse, I'm afraid only Lu Xiao can say it.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't speak, he just went forward to arrange the rooms one by one, then said, "The rooms are all set, anything else?"

Lu Xiao cursed him as a beast in his heart but could only leave helplessly.

Once he went out, Lu Yuanfeng locked the door; since those people liked to stay in his house, let them stay!

The washed clothes still needed to be rinsed by the creek, and Lu Yuanfeng suddenly felt a bit worried. He wondered if Shuangshuang's stomach was still hurting, and if she had eaten the red dates or not.

Lu Yuanfeng worried about Mu Shuangshuang, and wasn't Mu Shuangshuang also worrying about him?

Eating the red dates in the bowl, Mu Shuangshuang was thinking about what Lu Yuanfeng was doing. She felt that she had returned to normal now, and since she didn't need to cook dinner, she finished the red dates in a few bites and went out for a walk.

Originally, she intended to go to Lu Yuanfeng's house but felt it would be too abrupt. Unknowingly, she found herself turning toward the wing where the main house lived.

As she got closer, she heard Mu Zhenzhen's wailing cries.

"Let me out; you people are too much. Why stop me from having a good life? Dad, Mom, let me out..."

Only then did Mu Shuangshuang remember; she indeed hadn't seen Mu Zhenzhen for several days. She thought she had found a wealthy backer in town and wouldn't come back, but it turned out she was locked up by Mr. Mu.

"Hey, Shuang, hurry and let me out."

Through the crack in the door, Mu Zhenzhen saw Mu Shuangshuang and began shouting at the top of her lungs.

Likewise, Mu Shuangshuang also saw Mu Zhenzhen, her hair disheveled, her face unkempt, and even her clothes were a mess.

Mu Zhenzhen loved to eat but not to tidy up, though she treated her own face like a treasure.

"Oh, Second Aunt, how did you end up locked in there? Trying out life experiences?" Mu Shuangshuang mocked.

Her second aunt and Mu Qingqing were both ingrates by nature; helping them brought no benefit and could result in getting bit.

"You damn girl, why's your mouth so vicious? Let me out right now," Mu Zhenzhen insisted, unwilling to give up.

"No can do; since Grandpa and Grandma locked you up, it means you did something wrong. If I let you out, Grandpa and Grandma won't let me off."

"Don't give me all this nonsense; I know you. You damn girl, you're not an honest type."

Mu Zhenzhen had been locked up in the room for a long time, never allowed out. She hadn't bathed, and all her eating and other needs were done in the room, making it almost unbearable inside.

"Second Aunt, with you talking to me like that, I'm not coming over." Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes. This woman really had a sharp tongue.

"But if you give me some benefit, I might consider helping you open the door."

"Pah! You still want benefits? It's good enough I'm not asking you for anything," Mu Zhenzhen refused. She did have good stuff, but those were gifts from Landlord Huang.

She was saving them to buy pretty clothes.

"None? Then I'll be on my way." Mu Shuangshuang said as she started to leave.

"Wait, wait, damn girl, don't go; I'll give you money, I'll give you money." Mu Zhenzhen rummaged around the room for a while and tossed a coin to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Second Aunt, are you treating me like a beggar?" Mu Shuangshuang didn't pick it up, not because she looked down on the single coin, but because of Mu Zhenzhen's poor attitude.

"You..." Mu Zhenzhen was infuriated, but under someone's roof, she had to bow her head.

Landlord Huang still wanted to take her as a concubine.

Though the concubine title wasn't pleasing, it came with wealth, better than a life in Old Mu Family with nothing to eat or drink.

Mu Zhenzhen preferred being a concubine to a rich man rather than a wife to a poor one.

"How much do you want then?" Mu Zhenzhen said through clenched teeth.

"Not much, just a tael of silver."

This amount was within Mu Zhenzhen's capability, and there was risk in letting someone out; who knew, might Mu Zhenzhen turn around and bite her?

"Why don't you go rob someone?" Mu Zhenzhen angrily asked.

"I wish I could, but I'm afraid of a lawsuit. Besides, Second Aunt doesn't have to give it to Shuangshuang. Anyway, Shuangshuang isn't too keen on taking this risk," Mu Shuangshuang shrugged, looking indifferent.

"But I did hear that Second Aunt lives well in town, with plenty to eat and drink."

Subconsciously, Mu Shuangshuang made Mu Zhenzhen think of those past days, and sure enough, after a while, Mu Zhenzhen tossed a piece of silver out.

She urged, "Hurry up and open the door."

"Not so fast." Mu Shuangshuang picked up the silver and shook her head.

"You... dare to deceive me?"

When Mu Shuangshuang said 'not so fast', Mu Zhenzhen panicked, and started to curse Mu Shuangshuang.

"Second Aunt, why the rush, looking like that, unwashed, wouldn't it scare people if you went out like this? I told you to wait a moment, it's not that I'm not letting you out. Do you have a hairpin or wire?"

Mu Shuangshuang knew that ancient women's hairpins were not much different from the bobby pins used by modern people; there ought to be some in Mu Zhenzhen's room.

"I'm telling you, you better not play tricks, or you'll pay for it."

Mu Zhenzhen went back inside the room, and this time she handed a hairpin to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang took the hairpin and tried it on the lock, fiddled with it a few times, and it opened.

Inside, when Mu Zhenzhen heard the lock opening, her heart jumped into her throat, but the person outside still didn't open the door.

"Damn girl, what are you doing? Why not open the door?"

Mu Shuangshuang had a few final words to say; she had a feeling that after this time, she didn't know when she'd see Mu Zhenzhen again.

"Second Aunt, are you sure you want to step through this door and live the life you want? No regrets?"

Mu Zhenzhen rolled her eyes exaggeratedly. "You're nuts, why would I regret it? You said I could live the life I want, so less chatter, open the door."

"Second Aunt doesn't want to wait for Elder Brother to come back and then go together to live a good life?" Mu Shuangshuang asked, not giving up.

"Do you think I'm dumb? With so many in our family, would my elder brother—selfish as he is—let everyone enjoy life? Besides, why should I rely on him, I can rely on myself."

These days, Mu Zhenzhen had thought things through. She knew very well what her elder brother and sister-in-law were like. When they sent him to study, the family was in an uproar. Even her bride price went to her elder brother, yet her brother never said a word of thanks.

Mu Zhenzhen didn't covet those things, she knew she would have everything with Landlord Huang.

This time, Mu Shuangshuang really let go; the path was Mu Zhenzhen's own choice, it had nothing to do with her.

"Alright, you're free to go!" Mu Shuangshuang released her grip, and the lock fell to the floor, the door instantly swung open.

A pungent smell of feces wafted from the room, forcing Mu Shuangshuang to retreat a dozen steps, nearly suffocating.

In such an environment, it's no wonder Mu Zhenzhen wanted to escape. If it were her, she'd run too!

Mu Zhenzhen hurriedly packed her things and soon left with her bundle. Mu Shuangshuang also returned to her own house.

## Chapter 384: The Owner of Jiu Si Xuan

The disappearance of Mu Zhenzhen was only discovered by Old Mrs. Mu the next morning when she was delivering breakfast.

The room was in chaos, items scattered everywhere, and even all her clothes from the wardrobe were gone.

Old Mrs. Mu was frightened to death, but she didn't dare to make a fuss. Now that Mu Zhenzhen was the daughter of the Old Mu Family, if word got out that she ran off with a man, the family would be utterly disgraced.

Old Mrs. Mu hurried to the old residence to discuss the matter with Mr. Mu. Mr. Mu's reaction was much more dramatic than hers, immediately ordering a few sons to search along the road to the town.

"Overindulgence spoils the child, it's all because of you, you pesky old hag, always coddling that brat, giving her the nerve to run away!"

Mr. Mu was deeply concerned that this would disrupt Mu Dade's exam schedule and tarnish his reputation, and he berated Old Mrs. Mu mercilessly.

"Old man, your words have no conscience. Isn't Zhenzhen your daughter? If you hadn't been greedy for the dowry from Zhuangzi's family, would our Zhenzhen have to marry such a person?"

Old Mrs. Mu had harbored this grudge for a long time. Back when the family needed silver for the eldest's exams, many matchmakers had come, hoping to marry off Zhenzhen before Da De went off for his exams.

But the old man had been picky, fancying the fertile lands of Zhuangzi's family and demanding a dowry of ten taels of silver for Zhenzhen to marry Zhuangzi.

"You're quite skilled at twisting words, aren't you? Weren't you the one who sent Granny Sun to arrange the match with Zhuangzi's family? Now you won't admit it?"

Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu quarreled fiercely; Old Mrs. Mu's sharp tongue laid bare Mr. Mu's secrets in just a few sentences.

It's a pity no outsiders were around, or they would've had a good laugh.

The whole family searched for several days but to no avail; even inquiries in town yielded no sighting of Zhenzhen.

The Old Mu family finally gave up their hopes of finding Mu Zhenzhen.

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Mu Shuangshuang rested at home for two days, but by the third day, she was restless. Coincidentally, it was the day to deliver cold noodles, so she went to town with Lu Yuanfeng.

This time, the cold noodles from grinding the flour to making the dish were handled by Yu Liulang and Feng Xiaohua. She only offered guidance on the side, yet the outcome surprisingly turned out well.

The recent events brought Feng Xiaohua and Yu Liulang closer, with Luo Xiuxiu no longer a barrier between them. Mu Shuangshuang believed that with Yu Liulang's diligence and Feng Xiaohua's sincerity, their future would indeed become brighter.

On the way, Mu Shuangshuang sat on the wheelbarrow pushed by Lu Yuanfeng, feeling quite comfortable and at ease.

Lu Yuanfeng frequently asked if she needed to rest, his concern evident without words.

Perhaps because they had expressed their feelings for each other recently, Lu Yuanfeng no longer secretly glanced at Mu Shuangshuang; his looks were now overt and even more intense than before.

Mu Shuangshuang, having lived two lifetimes, had never truly been involved in romance and found herself defenseless against it. Throughout the journey, her face was flushed red, and she didn't even dare to look at Lu Yuanfeng, afraid he would notice her unusual behavior.

Halfway along the journey, Lu Yuanfeng found a large tree to rest. Mu Shuangshuang initially wanted to refuse, but couldn't resist his persistent offer of tea.

"Drink up, I added brown sugar and red dates," Lu Yuanfeng said, scratching his head a bit sheepishly.

Early that morning, his first task had been to prepare red date and brown sugar tea for Shuangshuang. Although the color turned out unappealing, he had tasted it and found it tolerable, hoping it wouldn't be too unpleasant.

Yet even so, Lu Yuanfeng watched Shuangshuang uneasily.

Mu Shuangshuang lifted the teapot and took a sip. The sweet taste filled her mouth, and she took a deep breath, feeling deeply satisfied.

Looking up, she found Lu Yuanfeng staring at her, eyes intense as if trying to ignite her.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't know why, but he suddenly felt extremely thirsty, especially upon seeing Shuangshuang's red lips, the feeling intensified.

"Shuangshuang, may I... hug you?"

Lu Yuanfeng blurted out the words in a muddled state, and when he realized what he had said, he felt as if struck by lightning, utterly shocked.

He had actually... made such a request...

But, he really did want to hug Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't much better; the moment Lu Yuanfeng spoke, her face, which was already as red as a monkey's bottom, grew even redder.

She gently bit her lip, seemingly hesitating, before finally breaking into a smile.

"Sure!"

At that moment, Lu Yuanfeng felt as if he had seen a fairy. The fairy possessed a pale, rosy smile, eyelashes like little fans fluttering, and that radiant smile instantly warmed Lu Yuanfeng like spring sunshine.

He carefully reached out, then pulled the long-yearned-for person into his arms, their hearts thumping against each other.

They remained immersed in this simple embrace until they heard the sound of an approaching cart, prompting them to quickly separate.

Mu Shuangshuang regained her senses, feeling secretly annoyed with herself for getting caught up in such a spell, embracing Lu Yuanfeng in broad daylight. Thankfully, no one had seen them, or she'd lose all face.

Compared to Shuangshuang's fluster, Lu Yuanfeng was much calmer. With a silly grin, he packed their belongings neatly and helped Shuangshuang onto the cart, continuing towards the town.

Of course, he didn't forget today's essential topic: "Shuangshuang, is your stomach feeling better?"

He had consulted Zhang Huai Shu's wife from the Cui Family, who said that women typically have their cycle for three to seven days, so Shuangshuang was likely still on her period.

Mu Shuangshuang took a deep breath to ease her nerves before speaking. "Better, let's go!"

Lu Yuanfeng had initially discouraged her from going, as a trip to town can be tiresome.

However, Mu Shuangshuang insisted on discussing popcorn business today. Every time she went to town, she brought a large bag, but until now, there hadn't been any return. If it wasn't finalized soon, she would lose sleep over it.

Moreover, if the profits were significant, she could buy a few acres of dry land to plant some vegetables at the right time.

The journey took a bit longer than usual, pausing now and then. Fortunately, Fat Chef from Jiu Si Xuan had no complaints.

Mu Shuangshuang noticed a difference in Fat Chef today. He had changed out of his usual cooking apron and donned a new silver-gray outfit.

All his fat squeezed into the light-colored clothes made him look even rounder, yet his expression was warm and friendly, greeting everyone with a smile.

After someone took over the items Mu Shuangshuang brought, Fat Chef advised her and Lu Yuanfeng, "Our owner is here, in the private room upstairs, you should head up now!"

#### Chapter 385: Discussing Business

The Fat Chef and the Shopkeeper are relatives, but it's clear that this so-called owner should be quite a formidable person; otherwise, as a chef, he wouldn't have changed his clothes.

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly felt more tense than usual. She was accustomed to dealing with rural village women, but a big boss appearing out of nowhere was making her uneasy.

Beside her, Lu Yuanfeng sensed this and held her hand, quietly comforting her: "Just treat him as an ordinary person, don't overthink it. Even if you say something wrong, it doesn't matter. Worst case, we won't cooperate."

Lu Yuanfeng's words made Mu Shuangshuang completely relax.

Indeed, she now has nothing, so it couldn't be worse.

After coming to terms with this, Mu Shuangshuang straightened her back and swaggered up the stairs.

The Fat Chef happened to overhear Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang's conversation and inexplicably started to feel that this young man was not simple.

In his impression, Shuang could handle all sorts of situations. However, she was tense earlier.

Only this young man remained calm and collected, as if he didn't care at all about who they were going to meet next.

Having gone up the stairs with Uncle Ah Fu's guidance, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng entered the private room.

Though she had been delivering items to Jiu Si Xuan for quite a while, it was Mu Shuangshuang's first time coming to the private room upstairs, but she could distinctly feel that the second floor was at least a notch higher than the first floor. Even the timber in the rooms appeared better than those downstairs.

"Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi go in yourselves; I'll stay out," Ah Fu said gently to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Alright, thank you, Uncle Ah Fu," Mu Shuangshuang nodded in response.

Lu Yuanfeng also expressed his gratitude.

Feeling courageous, Mu Shuangshuang didn't hesitate for a moment and directly knocked on the door of the private room, and from inside came a crisp female voice.

"Come in!"

Mu Shuangshuang was surprised that the boss of Jiu Si Xuan was a woman when the door to the private room opened.

The one who opened the door was indeed a young girl, about fourteen or fifteen years old, wearing a bright red silk dress, her makeup simple and elegant, with a radiant smile gracing her eyebrows.

Mu Shuangshuang took a glance and confirmed that this was not the owner of Jiu Si Xuan.

Jiu Si Xuan is a medium-sized tavern. If you weren't someone exceptional, you wouldn't be able to manage it. The young girl before her, with eyes untouched by the world, simply wasn't capable of such things.

So Mu Shuangshuang refocused her gaze within the room.

Inside, there was a small Eight Immortals table, and beside it sat a man in purple brocade clothes. Just by his attire, you could tell he wasn't of ordinary status.

He sipped tea calmly, without uttering a word, but Mu Shuangshuang knew his peripheral vision was likely monitoring her and Lu Yuanfeng.

It's quite strange, she and Fengzi are just two farmers, is it worth such covert observation?

"Sister, you deliver items to my brother's tavern? You look really young." The young girl glanced at Mu Shuangshuang and asked with a smile.

"Mm!" Mu Shuangshuang merely nodded and didn't say anything else; after all, she wasn't one to warm up quickly.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang ignoring her, the little girl felt bored and turned back to the Eight Immortals table.

On the table were four teacups, one for the young gentleman, one for the young girl, and the remaining ones were presumably for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng. Mu Shuangshuang sat down naturally, and Lu Yuanfeng showed no sign of timidity.

There was no reason to be timid; Mu Shuangshuang held the method for making popcorn, so negotiation was possible if she wanted it.

The young gentleman didn't react much, but the young girl showed complete surprise on her face.

"You made the popcorn?" Zheng Zhi spoke formally, without revealing any emotions to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Fengzi and I made it together," Mu Shuangshuang answered.

Zheng Zhi nodded slightly, then spoke: "Liu Dapang should have discussed things with you, right?"

"He mentioned it before, but said the specifics need your decision," Mu Shuangshuang's attitude was neither humble nor arrogant. But internally, she was curious about just how much her popcorn could sell for.

"Since that's the case, I'll be straightforward: many people indeed like your popcorn, especially during performances and musical acts. It's excellent for passing the time."

Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but feel a bit smug upon hearing this.

Just look at how popcorn is used in the modern day—for a movie lasting a few hours, it's relied upon to pass the time alongside cola. Regrettably, she hadn't yet found a way to make cola; otherwise, she would earn even more.

"I do own quite a few businesses, and currently, your supply might not suffice. That's why I'd like you to sell the recipe to us."

As soon as Zheng Zhi spoke, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help but roll her eyes.

Originally, having the division change from a sixty-forty split to a ten percent fifty-fifty split, she hadn't complained, and now, they want her not to even receive a five percent share. Truly black-hearted, did they really think she was a fool?

Mu Shuangshuang didn't speak, and Zheng Zhi knew Mu Shuangshuang was disagreeing. However, he was confident that once she heard his terms, she would compromise.

"Miss Shuangshuang, wouldn't you like to know how much silver I'm offering for the recipe?"

"No need; if I'm not mistaken, you must be offering a hundred taels."

Mu Shuangshuang had been observing Zheng Zhi ever since entering the room. He wasn't an easy character, and she sensed a familiar aura from him.

Of course, she meant that Zheng Zhi gave her the impression of being akin to someone from an official family, somewhat like a child raised among officials.

After all, in her past life, Mu Shuangshuang was somewhat a small official herself, interacting with various types of people. The person in front of her not only had a merchant's cunning but spoke with a hint of officialdom.

Habitual in giving orders!

Zheng Zhi was indeed surprised for a moment, and his gaze at Mu Shuangshuang deepened with further inquiry. But he was more curious about Lu Yuanfeng beside Mu Shuangshuang.

This person had only come out of the Northwest Camp a few months ago, and even without knowing his background, there were indeed instructions from above to treat him well.

When they were issuing aid, Zheng Zhi's father deliberately offered an extra twenty taels, but this foolish young man refused, insisting on receiving the same as everyone else.

Lu Yuanfeng also recognized Zheng Zhi, County Magistrate Zheng Gang's eldest son. Although it was just a brief encounter, neither would easily forget the other.

"Miss Shuangshuang, if you had the choice, how would you calculate this account?"

It's uncertain whether Zheng Zhi was curious about Lu Yuanfeng's background or if he indeed fancied what Mu Shuangshuang held in her hands, but he unexpectedly took a step back.

Though this might not entirely be a good thing for Mu Shuangshuang, at the very least now, she cannot make offers that are too outlandish, or the business won't be concluded.

"How this account is calculated depends on the gentleman's ambition and investment. If you're only aiming for town or county business, then profits won't be overly significant, and naturally, I won't earn much either."

Chapter 386: Uncle Has No Money

"But, if you expand the scale, the silver earned is definitely not a small amount, and what I earn naturally increases."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke while observing the expression of the young master Zheng Zhi.

Seeing no ripple on his face, she confirmed that she could continue speaking.

"Of course, there are risks in doing business, ups and downs are common! I'm not greedy, if it's just selling popcorn in Jiu Si Xuan in town, the base price is ten wen or less, I can take only ten percent of the Jiu Si Xuan's income, which means if you sell items worth a hundred wen, I earn ten wen."

A portion of popcorn, Mu Shuangshuang estimated that it would sell for up to ten wen in Jiu Si Xuan, after all, being paired with refreshments, even if it's special, not everyone would buy it.

If Jiu Si Xuan could only accommodate sixty to a hundred people watching opera or listening to storytelling in a day, she calculated that she wouldn't earn much in a day.

However, since the owner of Jiu Si Xuan approached her, it seemed not just to do business there, but aiming for a larger venue.

Zheng Zhi didn't expect Mu Shuangshuang to be so clever. According to her calculation, from the full earnings, she takes ten percent, even if Jiu Si Xuan earns merely one or two silver a day, she could earn three taels a month.

If it's a year, then thirty taels, and at most three years she would exceed the hundred taels silver he initially invested.

"What if I want to expand the scale?" Zheng Zhi showed interest.

"It depends on how much you want me to earn. More or less, it doesn't matter, as long as there's income." Mu Shuangshuang smiled warmly.

"If agreed upon, I can give you the recipe directly."

The recipe for popcorn is certainly important to Mu Shuangshuang, but if it's really as the young master in front of her said, pursuing a bigger picture, then she couldn't afford the cost in raw materials, nor had the capital.

Mu Shuangshuang gave Zheng Zhi enough autonomy, and this satisfied Zheng Zhi quite a bit.

"Miss Shuangshuang's terms sound good, but I wonder if Miss Shuangshuang can tolerate our restaurant's operating method; we start accounting for dividends at the end of each year.

This year has already passed more than half, so logically, we can only start counting at next year's end, according to ten percent of ten percent."

While the man spoke, Mu Shuangshuang started calculating in her mind.

If this man earns one tael, she earns ten wen; if he earns ten thousand taels, she only gets a hundred taels; the question is, can this man make ten thousand taels a year.

She quickly ran the calculations, over and over, there was still some risk.

Zheng Zhi seemed to understand what Mu Shuangshuang was worried about, he said, "Fortune favors the bold, why doesn't Miss Shuangshuang take a risk and try?"

"Then let's sign the contract today."

Mu Shuangshuang knew, business is such a thing, no one can predict. Whether money is made this time or not, at least she made a connection with the man in front of her.

In case one day, her uncle strikes it lucky and passes the exam, this man might help her in a significant way.

Mu Shuangshuang was quite straightforward, so was Zheng Zhi. After asking someone to draft the contract, they signed it and had it registered in town immediately.

The red-clothed girl, Zheng Xiu, seemed uninterested in what Mu Shuangshuang and her brother were discussing, but there were only a few people in the room, so she simply chatted with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Hey, what's your relationship with this sister? She seems to like discussing everything with you."

Before making a decision, Mu Shuangshuang had asked Lu Yuanfeng for his opinion. Lu Yuanfeng was not good at business, but since Shuangshuang agreed, he had no objections.

Lu Yuanfeng originally wanted to say Shuangshuang was his future wife, but feared ruining Shuangshuang's reputation, so he altered his words a bit, saying, "We have a good relationship."

"You're really a taciturn person. I know you have a good relationship, but what's the specific relationship? Like how me and my brother are siblings, that's how you should answer!"

Zheng Xiu was evidently dissatisfied with Lu Yuanfeng's response, especially his lukewarm attitude toward her.

Clearly, he smiled at Shuangshuang, but he wouldn't smile at her?

Does she not compare to this village girl?

Lu Yuanfeng didn't pay attention to Zheng Xiu, ignored her chatting attempts, waited until the contract was brought back by the attendant, and then things finally concluded.

"Miss Shuangshuang, before you have been sending popcorn to our Jiu Si Xuan, this amount hasn't been accounted for, just according to your initial saying, we earn one tael, you earn a hundred wen. I'll ask the shopkeeper to give you the silver later."

"Okay!" Mu Shuangshuang wasn't foolish; the money she could get in her hands was truly hers.

"Also, you continue to send it for another month. This month, I want to spend more effort to make the name recognizable and then send it to different shops."

By this time, Mu Shuangshuang had not yet given the recipe to the people at Jiu Si Xuan, since the cooperation was to start in September this year.

Right now, it's only early July, and she estimated that by then, her uncle's exam results should be out.

Sometimes Mu Shuangshuang was really conflicted, hoping her uncle would pass and take away those annoying leeches from the Old Mu Family quickly.

But she also felt her uncle didn't deserve to be an official. Besides harming the people, Mu Dade probably couldn't do anything else.

It's really troublesome as long as it involves Old Mu Family matters.

She hoped Mu Dade, the pest, wouldn't harm the people from the Third Branch of the Mu Family in the future.

Far away in Qianzhou Prefecture, Mu Dade suddenly sneezed, and Mrs. Jin was instantly scared out of her wits, calling for the doctor and medicine.

"Dan Dan's mother, don't worry, it's just a tickle in my nose, no harm done."

Only then did Mrs. Jin relax and nod in relief.

Ever since buying the test questions in the county, Mu Dade went to Qianzhou Prefecture, initially setting out with a hundred and ten taels of silver, seventy taels were given to the seller of test questions.

Money was needed for lodging and meals in the county, and since Mu Dade's family insisted on eating and drinking the best, twenty taels quickly vanished, leaving them only twenty taels by the time they reached Qianzhou Prefecture.

Currently, they've rented a quadrangle courtyard in Qianzhou Prefecture, one person per room, costing two taels of silver monthly rent. Plus, during this period, his family of four ate at big restaurants outside, and the twenty taels silver had dwindled drastically.

Mrs. Jin hesitated a moment before speaking, "Da De, the silver we have now can at most last until the end of this month, but next month is the Autumn Examination, what should we do?"

Mu Dade was worried too, but helplessly, they couldn't earn money, not like Shuangshuang who could do business in town to get money.

"Why not write a family letter and ask my dad to send another twenty taels of silver?"

Twenty taels, spending frugally, would be enough for the four of them until the Autumn Examination is over.

Only by doing so, they wouldn't be able to shop and buy things in Qianzhou Prefecture.

"That's fine, but do you think your parents would agree?"

#### Chapter 387: Shuang Is Not Easy to Mess With

Mrs. Jin had a touch of hesitation on her face. She didn't doubt the old lady's fondness for her husband and believed that she was willing to gather silver for him.

But when her husband was preparing for the exams, all the silver in the house was pooled together, and even the last ten taels given by the old man contained quite a few copper coins.

This was enough to prove that the Old Mu Family now only had an empty shell left.

Mu Dade saw the hesitation in Mrs. Jin's eyes, but he wasn't worried at all.

Not to mention anything else, as long as it's in the Old Mu Family, whatever he wants, his parents would sell everything they have to find it for him.

Besides, if his parents don't have it, there's still the third branch, right?

The third branch should have earned quite a bit of money, and there's no reason his parents wouldn't ask them for it.

He didn't believe his parents would dismiss the impending glory and wealth lying at hand.

"Yinyin, stop worrying. If I say this money is for my exams, how could my parents disagree?"

"Moreover, I'm already at the point of no return. If they refused, all their previous efforts would be in vain."

"And my third brother didn't contribute initially, so it's only fair for them to shed some blood."

Mu Dade spoke as if it was obvious, giving the impression that the Old Mu Family and the third branch owed him.

Mrs. Jin finally let go of the little worry in her heart, and her face brightened with more joy than before.

"Dan Dan's father is right, but that Shuang girl from the third branch isn't easy to deal with, she..."

Mrs. Jin, having been beaten a few times, was still somewhat afraid.

"Why be afraid of her? Eventually, daughters are meant to marry off, and if my mother loses her temper, a little girl couldn't possibly withstand that."

Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin discussed at length and were about to start writing a family letter when suddenly the crisp laughter of Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying echoed through the courtyard.

Having been in Qianzhou Prefecture for some time, Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying grew fairer, with their good clothes making them look no different from the official's daughters.

Listening to the long-missed laughter of the two daughters, Mrs. Jin felt this trip was truly worth it. At first, Old Mrs. Mu didn't want Mu Dade and Mrs. Jin to take the two daughters out, saying the house lacked people to work.

Mrs. Jin finally managed to persuade them to bring the daughters out.

At the Old Mu Family, her daughters would surely be used like maids by Old Mrs. Mu, something Mrs. Jin couldn't bear.

How could she allow her daughters, raised like proper young ladies, to be ruined by the old lady?

"Speaking of it, Dan Dan and Ying Ying are of marriageable age now, so after the Autumn Examination, let's find a good husband for Dan Dan. What do you think?" Mu Dade considered before speaking.

"Of course that's good. I didn't want my parents to arrange marriages for Dan Dan and Ying Ying, because I wanted to wait until our family has made a name for itself, to find a suitable match for the two girls."

In Mrs. Jin's heart, her daughters were not lacking in beauty, and with Dade becoming a scholar in the future, she wouldn't look down on an average family.

"Alright then, let's keep this in mind and for now write a family letter urging my parents to quickly send money over."

Mu Dade took up the pen swiftly and wrote the letter, then spent a tael of silver for Mrs. Jin to specially hire a horse from the courier station to deliver this one letter.

Money can make the impossible possible, and Mu Dade deeply understood that with money, even a hundred miles could be reached in a day or two, and by then, they would simply wait to receive the money!

...

...

Mu Shuangshuang and Zheng Zhi discussed business and took ten taels of silver from the shopkeeper. This was the amount agreed upon after negotiation. Mu Shuangshuang would provide the ingredients for popcorn, and Jiu Si Xuan would cover the cost. She only needed to deliver popcorn every three days.

After clearing the account this time, until the end of next year, Jiu Si Xuan would not account for the popcorn money anymore.

Though it sounded a bit like a servitude contract, the thought of getting a hundred taels a year later put Mu Shuangshuang at ease.

Just treat it like an ancient insurance with full deposit and withdrawal. A year later, when Xiao Han and Yuanbao need to study, perhaps it's a good time to spend silver.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't rush to split the popcorn silver with Lu Yuanfeng because she planned to use the money to buy four acres of dry land, which was perfect since it was also the vegetable planting season.

After strolling around on the street with Lu Yuanfeng, they came to a meat stall. Coincidentally, the stall owner was throwing bones into a wooden barrel beside him. These bones were quite large and hard.

Ordinary people wouldn't stop to look, but Mu Shuangshuang inexplicably did.

Because she noticed the meat being sold on the stall was beef.

"Uncle, are these beef bones for sale?" Mu Shuangshuang asked as she walked over to look in the barrel, which was filled with beef thigh bones, perfect for making soup.

"What? You want these bones?" The stall keeper was startled. He was planning to discard these since all the meat had been cleaned off, and nobody would buy them.

"Yes!"

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang wasn't joking, the man thought and said, "Two copper coins, take them all!"

"Alright, thank you, uncle!" Mu Shuangshuang sweetly replied, with Lu Yuanfeng quickly paying next to her.

Indeed, the feeling of having a "boyfriend" is quite good — you don't have to pay for things nor carry heavy items yourself.

Actually, even without confirming the relationship between Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, Lu Yuanfeng would do these things because he was genuinely happy to help Shuangshuang.

After packing the beef bones into the wooden barrel she brought, Mu Shuangshuang didn't rush off but instead looked mysteriously at Lu Yuanfeng.

"Do you know what I want these beef bones for?"

Lu Yuanfeng honestly shook his head, "I don't know, but everything Shuangshuang does has its own reason."

The implication being, whatever Shuangshuang says, he, Lu Yuanfeng, wouldn't question.

"Alright, then I'll reluctantly tell you. I want to use these beef bones for soup — red soup and clear soup. If there were a Mandarin duck pot, it'd be great."

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly reminisced about food endlessly. Lu Yuanfeng knew Shuangshuang had likely thought of something but encountered a problem.

Mandarin duck pot, it should be a type of pot, and since it was a pot, it must have to do with iron.

Lu Yuanfeng suddenly grasped Mu Shuangshuang's small hand, his palm being large enough to completely wrap around hers.

Holding like this in broad daylight unexpectedly made one feel nervous enough to have sweaty palms.

"Fengzi, what...are you doing?"

Mu Shuangshuang was somewhat embarrassed, with Lu Yuanfeng grasping her hand in broad daylight at the marketplace.

"I'm taking you to see if there's a place to make a Mandarin duck pot, and also get another pot to cook pig food."

Mu Shuangshuang's house only had one iron pot, which was given by Lu Yuanfeng. Later, that pot was used for boiling water and cooking meals, as well as cooking pig food. After cooking pig food, it had to be cleaned again. The cooked pig food had no place to store, which was quite troublesome.

With Lu Yuanfeng's words, Mu Shuangshuang felt he was indeed thoughtful.

Chapter 388: Shuangshuang Is My Wife

Lu Yuanfeng brought Mu Shuangshuang to the place where she and he last bought a small pot.

She still remembered that time when she wasn't very familiar with Lu Yuanfeng, he was such a doofus then.

Thinking about it now, it must not have been that he was dumb, it must have been that he thought he was too good, so that's why he behaved that way.

Mu Shuangshuang, full of a mysterious self-confidence, walked into the blacksmith shop just in time to see some business going on.

Coincidentally, someone was buying an iron pot too, and Mu Shuangshuang joined in.

Little Niu still had a somewhat juvenile face, but when bargaining, he was already quite methodical.

"Aunt, I'm sorry, this small pot is our shop's main product, perfect for hot pot in winter. My dad set the price at thirty wen, can't go any lower."

Mu Shuangshuang was dumbfounded at the time.

Thirty wen, wasn't it three wen?

Savvy as she was, she immediately realized what was going on. She turned her gaze to Lu Yuanfeng, who was blushing.

This silly boy started squandering money so early...

"Cough, cough... Shuangshuang, don't look at me, let's go have a look at the boiler room."

Lu Yuanfeng seemed to know the way, and with just a glance at Little Niu, he headed straight into the boiler room, the crucial place of the blacksmith shop.

The temperature in the boiler room was extremely high; upon entering, they were soaked with sweat, wiped several times, yet the more they wiped, the more came. Mu Shuangshuang simply ignored it, treating it like a sweat bath.

From the moment they entered, Lu Yuanfeng was always protective of her, blocking Shuangshuang from going near anything that seemed dangerous.

The further inside they went, the higher the temperature. The red-hot furnace, along with various pots and pans scattered on the ground, and a roughly fifty-year-old man hammering red-hot iron with a heavy hand.

The old man wore only a singlet, revealing his rough arms.

Mu Shuangshuang wanted to go closer but was blocked by Lu Yuanfeng.

"Shuangshuang, don't go over there, it's dangerous. You watch from the side, I'll have a word with Uncle Da Niu."

Calling it a conversation, Mu Shuangshuang saw Lu Yuanfeng pulling off his clothes, revealing his solid shoulders. At this point, he was bare-chested, his chest muscles and eight-pack abs bulging.

Sweat trickled down his neck, slowly dripping, first to his chest, then to his abdomen, and finally below, around his Adonis belt, where droplets cascaded.

It gave people a bit of imagination.

Mu Shuangshuang's face blushed a bit more suddenly, her eyes following those beads of sweat down.

In her mind, she was repeatedly hypnotizing herself, she was just looking, nothing more.

But Lu Yuanfeng's physique was just too good, making one feel like drooling.

Mu Shuangshuang thought she had seen a half-naked man several times before, but none had ever made her feel so parched.

Uncle Da Niu felt someone had come from behind, assuming it was Little Niu, he didn't mind. But when he saw such a tall figure in the boiler room, he suddenly turned around.

"Oh, Fengzi, it's you!" The old man's eyes suddenly welled up, genuinely surprised at Lu Yuanfeng's presence.

"Hmm, Uncle Da Niu, long... time no see!"

Lu Yuanfeng was also a bit emotional, yet he remained much more composed than the old man.

"Uncle Da Niu, let me handle this here, you take a break."

The old man initially wanted to refuse, but upon seeing Mu Shuangshuang watching not far away, he suddenly felt calm inside.

A man must show his skills in front of the girl he likes.

Lu Yuanfeng picked up the sledgehammer, imitating Da Niu's movements, hammer by hammer striking the iron shovel.

The clash of iron produced a rhythm that sounded almost musical.

Mu Shuangshuang unconsciously hummed along to Lu Yuanfeng's hammering rhythm, and Da Niu, watching from the side, seemed very pleased with every move Lu Yuanfeng made, even starting to praise him later.

"Fengzi, your craftsmanship hasn't dulled a bit over the years, it's truly impressive."

Lu Yuanfeng said nothing; all his focus was on the hot iron piece in his hands. Despite feeling a bit fatigued from the constant refining, glancing at Shuangshuang behind him instantly revitalized him.

Once an iron shovel was finished and set aside, Lu Yuanfeng's clothes were soaked enough to wring out water.

"Fengzi, come, let's go out and have a good chat; Uncle hasn't seen you for a long time."

"Sure, Uncle Da Niu, this is Shuangshuang, my future... wife, Shuangshuang."

When saying 'wife', Lu Yuanfeng's face was mostly red.

He actually wanted to announce to the world long ago that Shuangshuang was his wife, but feared that Shuangshuang would be angry.

Today, having done something he hadn't for a long time—ironworking—emotionally charged, he impulsively called her wife.

Lu Yuanfeng secretly observed Mu Shuangshuang's expression and, seeing she wasn't angry, felt the burden in his heart instantly lift, but how could Shuangshuang not be upset?

With this thought, the three of them left the boiler room.

Suddenly, Mu Shuangshuang felt refreshed; the shop seemed filled with gusts of cool wind, soothing her face.

But Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't let her feel the breeze. Blocking her, he said, "Just coming out of the boiler room, don't get hit by the wind, it's easy to catch a fever."

Summer fever isn't easy to treat, and with Shuangshuang being so slender, Lu Yuanfeng naturally had to protect her like a treasure.

Not only that, he also found a towel, letting Shuangshuang wipe the sweat off her forehead and neck clean.

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at the towel and realized it was new, heightening her appreciation for Fengzi's thoughtful actions.

Mu Shuangshuang felt that her relationship with Lu Yuanfeng should be quite peculiar. Others discover various goods before getting together, whereas she was still discovering Fengzi's goodness after being together.

And these discoveries were never the same.

In high spirits, she wiped the sweat off her face and was just about to wash the towel when Lu Yuanfeng took it from her.

She thought he meant to wash it but unexpectedly, Lu Yuanfeng began using it to wipe off his own sweat.

"Fengzi, you..." Mu Shuangshuang was a bit surprised; didn't he mind it being dirty?

Lu Yuanfeng understood her implication from her expression and quickly shook his head.

"It's not dirty; the towel used by Shuangshuang I don't dislike, as long as Shuangshuang doesn't dislike me."

Somehow, Mu Shuangshuang's mind suddenly recalled a memory she had never thought of before.

It was from when she had just transmigrated here, when she was so infuriated by Ma Houhou that she vomited blood and needed to find a creek to bathe.

During that time, someone had carried her for quite a distance and, bringing her inside, covered her with a quilt, not despising her at all then.

Recalling these things, Mu Shuangshuang felt there might indeed be a destined bond between her and Fengzi.

#### Chapter 389: Big Transformation

"You're not bothered by me, and I'm not bothered by you either!" Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile.

Lu Yuanfeng also grinned foolishly and felt like there was a candle lit in his chest, warming him up wonderfully.

Lu Yuanfeng sweated more than Shuangshuang, and when he wiped it, the cloth was completely soaked.

"Fengzi, give me the cloth, I'll wash it for you."

"No, I'll go myself, I'm more familiar with this place."

After speaking, Lu Yuanfeng walked towards the backyard.

The layout of the blacksmith shop was particularly simple. The front was for selling ironware, directly leading to the backyard. To the left was the forge room, and to the far right was the living quarters, with the kitchen and storage rooms in the middle.

Mu Shuangshuang guessed it was probably for insulation.

Drawing a large bucket of water from the well, Lu Yuanfeng cleaned the cloth in a basin and wiped his body several times until he felt fresh.

Uncle Da Niu happened to come in at this moment.

"Fengzi, you have to eat lunch at home today. I've sent Little Niu to buy two catties of lamb to go with the meal."

Da Niu hadn't seen Lu Yuanfeng for a long time, and knowing he was used to eating wild game, normal pork might not impress him.

"Thanks, Uncle Da Niu." Lu Yuanfeng didn't refuse. "But I want to ask you for a favor."

"What favor? Just tell me, with Uncle you can say anything, just don't mention politeness."

Uncle Da Niu seemed to be straightforward and sincere, and Mu Shuangshuang could sense his fondness and interest towards Lu Yuanfeng.

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang even felt that Uncle Da Niu treated Lu Yuanfeng better than his own family did.

Like her grandmother, she wasn't as good as Aunt Xiao Yun's family to them.

Fengzi's family appeared harmonious, but on the other hand, they were not much different from the Old Mu Family.

At least she had her parents' love, while Lu Yuanfeng didn't even enjoy the simplest joy of parental affection.

"Shuangshuang, if there's something you want, tell Uncle Da Niu, maybe he can get it for you."

Only then did Da Niu focus his attention on Mu Shuangshuang.

"Oh, Fengzi, you're doing well, almost have a wife, unlike our Little Niu who blushed and refused to go out when the matchmaker came yesterday."

The old man looked proud and pleased when talking about his son.

He probably didn't mind the matchmaking business.

Lu Yuanfeng noticed it too and said, "Little Niu is young, no hurry there. He's good at business, he can establish a career first and maybe find an even better wife."

"Good boy, you know what to say!" Da Niu clapped Lu Yuanfeng on the shoulder before turning to ask Mu Shuangshuang.

"Little girl, tell Uncle what you want, I promise not to charge you."

Mu Shuangshuang laughed, finding the person quite amusing.

"I want to make a mandarin duck pot; it's actually not difficult. It's somewhat like the hotpot you sold before, just slightly bigger but with a flat bottom and an iron block to separate the middle..."

Mu Shuangshuang explained the mandarin duck pot she knew to the old man, unexpectedly noticing a sudden flash of light in his eyes.

As if he had suddenly found hope.

"Fengzi, your fiancée is something else. I've been making pots for years but never heard of a flat pot—this is great! Now, people buying hotpots from me won't need two pots."

Lu Yuanfeng was thrilled too.

He knew Shuangshuang had lots of clever ideas, but didn't expect this.

"Little girl, do you know how much money this idea could make in winter?"

Uncle Da Niu was so excited, as if he saw countless coins waving at him.

Lu Yuanfeng knew what Uncle Da Niu was thinking and laughed, "Uncle Da Niu, you could ask Shuangshuang if she's willing to lend you the idea or if you'd like to collaborate with her."

"Collaborate?" Uncle Da Niu felt waves of excitement.

"Yes, if I'm not hunting in winter, I could help with making pots and forging. Shuangshuang can help sell in the front yard with Little Niu, and we two men handle the back—won't worry about not making money!"

"Right, that sounds good!" Uncle Da Niu slapped his thigh hard, highly agreeing with Lu Yuanfeng's plan.

But he wasn't impulsive; Shuangshuang hadn't responded, so it's still uncertain.

"Little girl, what do you think of Fengzi's idea?"

The old man looked eagerly at Shuangshuang, deeply longing for her agreement on Fengzi's proposal.

"Naturally, it's excellent!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded.

"Great, my blacksmith shop will make a fortune this winter." Uncle Da Niu shouted, then said to Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, "I'll go work on your flat pot right away. But there won't be any ready today, you'll have to wait three days, then I'll check if they're done."

"Yes, you can take your time."

Mu Shuangshuang had also seen it; making pots required molds, and pouring red-hot molten iron into the mold, then shaping it.

It's not an easy task.

Uncle Da Niu headed into the forge room, leaving Mu Shuangshuang idle, so she began tidying the yard of Uncle Da Niu's house.

Lu Yuanfeng went to the pile of firewood, picked up an axe, and started chopping.

Crack, crack, soon enough, the firewood in the yard was chopped, and Mu Shuangshuang had cleaned the yard inside and out, even removing extra weeds from the vegetable garden.

Little Niu came back with the lamb, seeing the transformed yard, his mouth was left open in awe.

"Yuan Feng bro, you... you and Shuangshuang..."

Lu Yuanfeng was older than Little Niu, and Little Niu was older than Shuangshuang, so the way of calling was correct.

"We helped tidy the yard, how is it, isn't it a fresh look?" Mu Shuangshuang said with a smile.

"This isn't just a fresh look; I feel like this isn't even my place anymore."

Little Niu sighed in his heart.

Little Niu's mother was gone a long time ago, in those years, Da Niu raised the children alone without letting them suffer, and hadn't remarried, everything at home was done by the two men.

The house was always dirty, Da Niu had no time, and Little Niu wasn't very skilled.

"Haha, then it's funny." Mu Shuangshuang found Little Niu's words quite amusing and couldn't help but speak up.

"Little Niu, don't feel awkward, we're family, don't worry about it." Lu Yuanfeng comforted as well.

"Hmm, thank you Yuan Feng bro, thank you Shuangshuang, I'll go make lunch."

It wasn't actually lunchtime yet, but Da Niu thought they lived far away, so if they didn't start cooking early, they might return too late.

Chapter 390: Why haven't you gone to take the exam yet?

"Little Niu, it's too early to cook now. Wait until it's closer to noon; I'll do it,"

Mu Shuangshuang volunteered to take on the cooking.

She believed that, generally, a big guy would not cook tasty food unless he was really committed to learning.

Like Lu Yuanfeng; if you let him roast meat, the flavor turns out quite good, probably because he's accustomed to this lifestyle in the military camp.

But if you ask him to cook meals or stir-fry, he's bound to make a lot of culinary disasters.

"That won't do, Shuangshuang, you are the guest here. Let me do it!" Little Niu hurriedly waved his hand, a hint of blush appearing on his face due to his haste.

Speaking of which, although Little Niu and Uncle Da Niu are father and son, they look completely different. Uncle Da Niu is robust, somewhat overweight, whereas Little Niu is quite lean—his ribs visible at a glance, quite similar to Mu Shuangshuang's physique.

However, after some time of nutritional care, Mu Shuangshuang had gained a little weight but was still skinny.

In modern times, many people might favor Little Niu's figure.

But in ancient days, people seemed to prefer a sturdier build, someone with more strength, able to handle heavy labor.

Little Niu's type wasn't particularly liked.

"Let me do it. The shop needs you to manage it, plus I want to show off in front of you all so you can praise me," Mu Shuangshuang laughed.

Little Niu was amused yet helpless; he encountered someone seeking compliments for the first time.

However, feeling troubled, he sought Lu Yuanfeng's opinion.

After all, it was Lu Yuanfeng who brought her here, and Little Niu felt that Lu Yuanfeng treasured Mu Shuangshuang, unlikely to let her work.

"Little Niu, since Shuangshuang suggested this, go along with her plan. I'll be her assistant later,"

"Hmm! Thank you, Brother Yuanfeng, thank you, Shuangshuang!"

Little Niu modestly accepted and handed the vegetables he was holding to Shuangshuang, who took a trip to the kitchen to place them in the cupboard before returning.

"Fengzi, I looked around, and we need to buy some flour for lunch. I'll make cold noodles for you,"

"Cold noodles?" Lu Yuanfeng was taken aback.

The items sent earlier were cold noodles, now it's cold noodles. Is the preparation similar?

"Yeah, similar to cold noodles but without using the stone mill,"

Mentioning the stone mill, Lu Yuanfeng suddenly grabbed Mu Shuangshuang's hand, lowered his head to look at her, and said, "Shuangshuang, let's keep the stone mill at my place. I'll handle the task of grinding mung beans every three days."

Though the stone mill looked not very big, it required some strength.

"Cough, cough..." Mu Shuangshuang choked on her saliva.

"No, grinding mung beans is a job that must be mine."

Mu Shuangshuang stated, then realized her excitement and quickly explained, "I mean pushing the mill is beneficial for my health."

Mu Shuangshuang relied on the mill-pushing every three days to build her arm strength; she needed to quickly restore the abilities she had in her previous life, otherwise, come winter, trips to the mountain would turn her into a snack for beasts.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng hesitate, Mu Shuangshuang quickly explained, "Fengzi, a healthy body doesn't have to be fat, but it must be firm.

Just like yours! I know, your physique wasn't built by eating, but through regular exercise.

Someone like my second uncle, who's fat because of his eating, may look heavy, but he isn't healthy."

Mu Shuangshuang patiently explained to Lu Yuanfeng, and he understood.

Yet he continued to insist.

"Don't grind soybeans at night anymore; I'll wake up two hours earlier and we can do it together."

With him watching, Shuangshuang wouldn't exhaust herself.

"You're crazy, waking up so early is harmful," Mu Shuangshuang shouted, startled.

"Didn't you just say my body is strong? Since that's the case, I should work more." As he spoke, Lu Yuanfeng made a muscle-flexing gesture, which amused Mu Shuangshuang greatly.

It was the first time she found Lu Yuanfeng so humorous!

"Okay, let's put it aside for now and discuss it in three days!"

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng headed straight to the market, bought two pounds of flour, and two pounds of five-flavor pork, with Lu Yuanfeng carrying the goods and Mu Shuangshuang with empty hands.

On the way, Mu Shuangshuang talked incessantly to Lu Yuanfeng about what to cook at Uncle Da Niu's place later, and at crucial points, she couldn't help but drool.

Lu Yuanfeng listened dotingly to every word Shuangshuang said, always cooperating with expectant expressions, making Mu Shuangshuang feel especially accomplished!

Just as they were about to turn back, a young man in a greyish-blue robe called out to Mu Shuangshuang on the street.

Mu Shuangshuang fixed her gaze and realized it was Liu Zian.

"How come you're here? Weren't you off to Qianzhou Prefecture for exams?"

Mu Shuangshuang looked shocked, remembering that her convenient uncle left more than half a month ago.

Liu Zian's face reddened as he seemed to weigh how to explain.

But upon seeing Lu Yuanfeng beside Mu Shuangshuang, he no longer wished to explain.

Because at that moment, Lu Yuanfeng's expressive face, embodying happiness at hand, made Liu Zian frown.

He glanced back and forth between Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang's faces, ultimately surprised to find that the two who once seemed mismatched were now standing harmoniously together.

A fleeting panic passed through Liu Zian's heart.

"Liu Zian, what are you spacing out for in the street?" Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand in front of Liu Zian.

She was bewildered, having said nothing to warrant a daze, so why was he gawking?

Could it be the Silver was gone?

"I—I'm fine!" Liu Zian quickly waved his hand as he regained his senses.

"Good to hear, so what are you up to here?" Mu Shuangshuang remained curious.

"I'm... I'm giving lectures in the town to earn enough for travel expenses to Qianzhou," Liu Zian said and, fearing Shuangshuang would worry he might be out of funds, explained further, "I have enough money."

"I see, then continue with your lectures!"

Mu Shuangshuang smiled, without the intent to invite Liu Zian for lunch, since they weren't close.

Though she once planned to connect with Liu Zian for future needs,

She was now someone with a "boyfriend" and found it better to keep some distance from other men.

Mu Shuangshuang felt her emotional intelligence had improved since being with Lu Yuanfeng, though she couldn't let Lu Yuanfeng find out.

The silly boy, lost in thought, might overthink things!

"Hmm!"

Liu Zian actually had no lectures today, he could return to his village, but couldn't resist the call from within, ending up wandering and unexpectedly encountering Shuangshuang.

Feeling joyous inside, yet somewhat lost.

Liu Zian took a deep breath, preparing to leave.

As a man too, Lu Yuanfeng could see Liu Zian's disappointment, but he knew better that if not disappointed, it'd be him feeling bitter.

Lu Yuanfeng was undoubtedly delighted inside. At least Liu Zian's appearance didn't capture much of Shuangshuang's attention!