

## **Folly 401**

Chapter 401: After a Beating, He Became Obedient

The few people present were momentarily stunned at Mu Shuangshuang's movements.

Then, very cooperatively, they covered their noses and stepped back.

Mu Xiangxiang screamed and then went crazy, shouting and jumping around on the spot.

"Wow..."

Mu Xiangxiang had hated stinkbugs since she was little. Whenever she saw one, tears and snot would come flowing down her face.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't know this, but coincidentally, she unwittingly caused trouble for Mu Xiangxiang.

Just this loud yelling soon drew the furious Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu came up and affectionately hugged Mu Xiangxiang.

"Xiangxiang, what's wrong with you? How did you end up like this crying?"

The sharp stench reached her nose, and Old Mrs. Mu covered her nose. When she realized the smell was coming from Mu Xiangxiang, she panicked.

"Oh my, my dear girl, why is there a stinkbug on your head?" Old Mrs. Mu was petrified; she knew how much her daughter feared stinkbugs, even if others didn't.

Mu Xiangxiang cried even harder.

Old Mrs. Mu couldn't hold her, and she rolled on the ground. Because of Mu Xiangxiang, Shuangshuang's courtyard became much cleaner.

But that was not all; there happened to be a hen in Shuangshuang's yard that had just pooped. When Mu Xiangxiang rolled over, she landed in a pile of chicken droppings, making her smell even worse.

"Mom, save me, save me..."

Mu Xiangxiang cried until she was almost out of breath, but her eyes were still fiercely fixed on Mu Shuangshuang.

Old Mrs. Mu immediately understood that this was Shuangshuang's doing.

"You troublesome girl, how dare you—knowing your aunt fears stinkbugs—throw a stinkbug on her head? You've got some nerve; I won't rest until I beat you today!"

After speaking, Old Mrs. Mu released Mu Xiangxiang's hand, letting her roll on the ground, then picked up a dry branch from Shuangshuang's courtyard and started to chase her.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't dumb; no matter how formidable Old Mrs. Mu was, she was just an old lady—not physically her match.

But she couldn't let Old Mrs. Mu have the upper hand.

Thus, Mu Shuangshuang ran while yelling, "Help, my grandma is going to beat someone to death!"

"Ladies and gentlemen, come save Shuangshuang!"

Next to her, Liu Zian wanted to get involved but was held back by Lu Yuanfeng.

"Let Shuangshuang handle this!" Lu Yuanfeng said.

"But Shuangshuang..." Liu Zian looked at Old Mrs. Mu reluctantly.

"This is Shuangshuang's family matter; we shouldn't cause chaos for her."

Lu Yuanfeng knew that Old Mrs. Mu was not Shuangshuang's match; if Shuangshuang's uncles and aunts were standing here, Lu Yuanfeng would definitely intervene.

However, Shuangshuang had said that Old Mrs. Mu was old and was likely to fake a fall. If you touched her, she could just fall, turning nothing into something.

The term "fake a fall" was something Lu Yuanfeng initially didn't understand, but Shuangshuang later explained it to him.

"Aren't you worried that Shuangshuang might suffer?" Liu Zian asked.

"I'm worried, but I'm more afraid that Shuangshuang won't be happy!" Lu Yuanfeng said, staring in the direction Shuangshuang was leaving.

It was this sentence that made Liu Zian feel that he was quite different compared to Lu Yuanfeng.

Unconsciously clenching his fist, Liu Zian knitted his brows, pondering over the events of the day.

Mu Shuangshuang led Old Mrs. Mu around Er Gui Village, akin to a cat-and-mouse chase; every time Old Mrs. Mu was about to catch her, Mu Shuangshuang would give her a glimmer of hope, and when Old Mrs. Mu approached, she would run farther away.

After one full circle, Old Mrs. Mu was only breathing out and not in; her elder face was flushed crimson.

"You little troublemaker, I'm not done with you..."

"Not done..."

Old Mrs. Mu cursed loudly.

Inside, Mr. Mu learned that Old Mrs. Mu chased Shuangshuang around the whole village, causing him to be so angry his mouth became crooked.

He chased out from the Old Mu Family and shouted loudly at Old Mrs. Mu.

"You foolish old lady, haven't you embarrassed us enough? What are you going to do with the reputation of the Old Mu Family now?"

"You think I want this? Do you know what that little troublemaker did? She actually... she actually put a stinkbug on Xiangxiang's head, knowing full well Xiangxiang cannot eat for days after touching stinkbugs—she wants Xiangxiang dead!"

Old Mrs. Mu pointed at Mu Shuangshuang accusingly.

"Grandpa, I didn't do it; the stinkbug landed on Aunt's head by itself. Aunt's afraid of stinkbugs, so I helped her to kill it. Instead of praising me, Grandma is hitting me—I... I'm being wronged!"

Mu Shuangshuang stubbornly denied it, and since Mr. Mu was far enough away, if he wanted to hit her, she would run.

"How dare you lie? Watch me tear your mouth apart!" Old Mrs. Mu rolled up her sleeves, prepared to act.

This time, Mr. Mu was genuinely angry, giving Old Mrs. Mu a shove that sent her tumbling to the ground.

"You old fool, you..."

"What do you mean, 'you'? If you cause another scene, Da De's reputation is gone! And if you cause another scene, you can go back to your maiden home!"

Old Mrs. Mu's expression shifted before she cried and wailed loudly.

"Oh my, how unlucky I am to have married such a man! He's hitting me, hitting me..."

Old Mrs. Mu screamed, and the villagers, ready to watch the spectacle, eagerly pointed fingers at Mu Lao and Old Mrs. Mu, with comments no more than a scholar and literati, yet what poor family upbringing.

Mr. Mu became furious and got Mu Danian and Mu Dazhong to forcibly carry Old Mrs. Mu back.

Old Mrs. Mu refused, clawing Mu Danian's face and kicking Mu Dazhong several times.

"You crazy woman, is there no end to your madness? Hurry and tie her up and take her back."

Mu Danian rubbed his face, Mu Dazhong rubbed his belly, both not daring to go near.

"Grandpa, in my opinion, knock grandma out first and carry her back; at this rate, big brother's reputation will be gone."

Mu Shuangshuang added fuel to the fire nearby, and Mr. Mu made a decisive move—a hand chop to the back of Old Mrs. Mu's neck, knocking her out.

The world finally quieted down!

Now Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian dared to step forward to carry her.

Mu Dania's face was still burning with pain, and while carrying Old Mrs. Mu, he couldn't help but complain, "Dad, when mom goes crazy, she's like a mad dog, you can't think of a way to deal with her; if this continues, we will be tormented to death."

Mr. Mu's freshly calmed expression darkened again. He swung a fist into Mu Dania's face.

"Ungrateful wretch, is that how you speak about your mother?" Then, a slap landed on Mu Dania's mouth.

Mu Dania's mouth instantly swelled.

Mu Shuangshuang watched from the side as if enjoying a show; the Old Mu Family indeed obscured their own issues.

But were the villagers any different? They had tea and snacks, yet lacked a dose of the Old Mu Family's drama.

Chapter 402: The Fourth House's Rebellion

Mu Shuangshuang returned home, and several people gathered around in the yard.

They naturally knew Shuangshuang was fine; it was Old Mrs. Mu who had troubles.

But they still wanted to see more of Shuangshuang.

"Alright, alright, I'm fine, go make dinner, do what you're supposed to do, no slacking off!"

Mu Shuangshuang curled her lips into a smile, and without waiting for the others in the yard to speak, she picked up the basket on the ground and began to get busy.

She bought kelp, which needed to be soaked first, and then washed clean with loofah scrubs, then there was the meat, which had to be cut into rectangular thin slices, to be put into the bone soup later.

Thinking of so much work, Mu Shuangshuang really felt she had no time to play.

When Lu Yuanfeng entered the kitchen, Mu Shuangshuang was already making a fire, lighting the stove.

It seemed she was planning to make hotpot, and Lu Yuanfeng stepped forward, saying to Mu Shuangshuang, "Leave this to me, you rest for a while."

"I'll rest once I'm finished."

Since it was hotpot, as simple as can be, the aroma of beef bone soup had long filled the big pot, Mu Shuangshuang placed the new iron pot she bought on the adjacent stove and put some rendered fat in it.

Generally, a newly purchased pot isn't used immediately; instead, it's coated with fat, left for a day, then used for cooking.

Vegetables, meat, Mu Shuangshuang cleaned them one by one, placed them in a basket to drain, and Lu Yuanfeng had also started the fire on his stove.

The only ones missing were Yu Si Niang, Yu Liulang, and Feng Xiaohua.

Yu Si Niang was busy at the Old Mu Family with dinner, Mrs. Liu was ill, developed fever since last night, half dreaming, talking in her sleep, sweating.

Late at night, Mu Dajiang asked Old Mrs. Mu for money to call a doctor, but not only did he not get any money, he was also punished to kneel for half the night.

Mrs. Liu was tough, pulled through, but felt weak all day long.

At noon, Yu Si Niang asked Zhang Huai Shu to prescribe medicine, and after drinking it, Mrs. Liu finally fell asleep.

Thus, meals at the Old Mu Family had no one to prepare them.

Yu Si Niang didn't want a sick Mrs. Liu to be forced out to work, so she took on the cooking herself.

In the kitchen, the first thing the tired-from-the-day Mu Dajiang did when he got back was help Yu Si Niang make a fire.

The fire in the stove was burning very vigorously, and Yu Si Niang was cooking sweet potato porridge, while Old Mrs. Mu had become increasingly frugal these days.

Dinner was no longer rice, just porridge cooked with vegetables and sweet potatoes.

Mu Danian and Mu Dazhong didn't do much work, which was fine, but the poor Mu Dajiang who dug the ground all day, dealing with weeds and fertilization, not only hadn't had a sip of water, but couldn't even guarantee a full stomach.

"Third Sister-in-law, thank you for helping our fourth branch, if it weren't for you often helping Jinhua, she wouldn't know how she would manage."

Mu Dajiang's face bore a shy smile; he had so much appreciation and envy for his third brother and third sister-in-law.

Envious of their straight-forward nature.

Even more envious that everything they did now belonged to themselves.

"Fourth Brother, don't say that, your... your hardships, Sister-in-law understands."

What's the fourth branch enduring now, but what the third branch endured back then?

It's just that now the third branch is separated, and Old Mrs. Mu shifts most of the work to the fourth branch.

If the third branch hadn't separated today, imagine it would be her lying in bed.

"Sister-in-law, Jinhua's medical expenses, I..." Mu Dajiang wanted to say he'd repay them later, but the fourth branch was penniless, without spare money or silver.

Unless his elder brother could become a scholar, relieving the family pressure and maybe save some silver.

"No need to repay, Shuangshuang's father and I agreed, your family isn't easy, if there's any difficulty, we will try to help wherever we can."

"Thank you, thank you..."

Mu Dajiang, a grown man, couldn't help but tear up.

Mrs. Lin suddenly charged out, pointing at Yu Si Niang and Mu Dajiang, cursing.

"Oh wow, having the mood to flirt here, don't you know to make food for me? You want to starve the Old Mu Family's precious grandson in my belly?"

"Mrs. Lin, clean your mouth, say one more wrong word and I'll rip your mouth apart!" Yu Si Niang almost exploded with anger.

Mrs. Lin was reckless with her words, but the person in front of her was her brother-in-law, words like these deserved drowning in a pig cage.

Mu Dajiang was also red-faced with anger, but didn't dare to confront Mrs. Lin.

"Yo, Yu Si Niang, you want to rip my mouth, go ahead, my mouth's right here, and my belly too, come on, see if you can knock down my son."

Mrs. Lin deliberately pushed out her empty belly, arrogantly proclaiming.

She firmly believed no one in the Old Mu Family would dare offend her.

"You..." Yu Si Niang's grip on the spatula tightened further.

"What do you mean 'you'? I'm telling you, if you don't make me food and bring it to my room, I'll tell Mother you're having an inappropriate relationship with Fourth Brother, whispering sweet nothings in the kitchen!"

"Slap!" A slap landed on Mrs. Lin's face.

The assailant was none other than the sick Mrs. Liu, who climbed up to drink water.

"Second Sister-in-law, clean your mouth, cough, cough..."

Speaking a sentence made Mrs. Liu cough several times, showing how uncomfortable she felt.

Actually, she didn't hit hard, it was just that she was used to being bullied, and suddenly fighting back, caught Mrs. Lin off guard.

Once Mrs. Lin reacted, she rushed forward to retaliate against Mrs. Liu.

Yu Si Niang timely stepped forward and held Mrs. Lin back. Once held, Mrs. Lin deliberately clutched her belly and screamed.

"Oh dear, I'm being hit, pregnant belly hit..."

"Blood, I'm bleeding..."

She cried out loud, and inside, Mu Dazhong naturally knew what was going on, quickly rushed out, supported Mrs. Lin, and joined her acting.

"You're finished, hitting my wife, if my wife's baby is gone, you're dead."

"Second Brother, we..." Mu Dajiang tried to explain but was thrown aside by Mu Dazhong.

"Get away, you wait...!"

Finished, Mu Dazhong ran to his room with Mrs. Lin, almost tripping due to Mrs. Lin's recent weight gain.

In the room, Mu Dazhong tossed Mrs. Lin onto the ground.

"You woman, what have you eaten, you're so heavy!"

Mrs. Lin climbed up from the floor, smiling sycophantically at Mu Dazhong.

"What can I eat, same as you all, just don't need to work."

Currently, Mrs. Lin was quite proud of herself, when she realized she wasn't pregnant, pretended to be, and the old lady, unwilling as she was, had to let her rest.

"What do you think, should we just say we 'miscarried' this time, blame it on the third and fourth branch, and then ask for money?" Mu Dazhong proposed.

The two had long since discussed choosing some scapegoat from the third and fourth branches for the baby, anyway those two branches were foolish.

"Are you stupid, claiming miscarriage now, who's gonna do housework?"

Chapter 403: Letter from Uncle's Family

Mrs. Lin had already calculated everything clearly.

If she were to miscarry now, the Old Mrs. Mu would only let her rest for a few days at most.

The concept of postpartum rest did not exist in the eyes of the Old Mrs. Mu; once a child was born, she had to go to work.

Even Yu Si Niang, back then when Little Zhi and Xiao Han were born, early in the morning she was carrying a manure bucket to the vegetable field to spread manure. Just a day after giving birth, she was forced to work.

Mrs. Lin didn't think she would be an exception.

"So what do you suggest?"

Mu Dazhong himself was also anxious, afraid of being discovered.

He had been involved in too many guilty dealings lately. One might be manageable, but two or three piled together were likely to cost him dearly.

"What can we do, just drag it out until I regain my health. Now that we have food and drink, who would be willing to work."

"Oh, then I'll get going!" Mu Dazhong replied indifferently.

There was no way out, really no way out. His wife was increasingly neglectful of hygiene, not washing her hair or bathing for days on end, smelling bad, yet still liked to cling to him.

Mu Dazhong couldn't stand it any longer.

Unaware of Mu Dazhong's thoughts, Mrs. Lin smiled at him, revealing a mouth full of yellow teeth, which scared Mu Dazhong into fleeing.

In the kitchen, Yu Si Niang was on edge, as was Mrs. Liu; while she felt good beating Mrs. Lin at the time, she became fearful afterward.

Afraid of getting into trouble with Old Mrs. Mu, and more fearful of something happening to the child in Mrs. Lin's belly.

Fortunately, after finishing the meal, nothing happened at home.

Only then did Yu Si Niang breathe a sigh of relief and return home.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't cook dinner. After she put some beef bone soup into a small iron pot, she added dried chili peppers and red oil, making it into spicy soup.

The hot chili peppers floated on the small pot, the fragrance alone could captivate one's soul.

"Shuangshuang, this beef bone soup is truly not ordinarily fragrant, I didn't know it could be cooked like this," Feng Xiaohua remarked emotionally.

Yu Si Niang hadn't arrived yet, but Mu Shuangshuang still served each person a bowl of soup to try.

"Aunt, if you want to know more, I can teach you next time, okay?" Mu Shuangshuang raised her eyebrows and continued, "I have quite a few recipe books."

"Really?"

Upon hearing about the recipes, Feng Xiaohua's eyes lit up.

For women, cooking, embroidering, and taking care of the home is perfect.

This was Feng Xiaohua's belief.

"Of course, roast duck, shredded chicken, whenever you want to learn, I'll teach you then."

Mu Shuangshuang responded with a beaming smile.

"Anyway, Shuangshuang is handling our wedding banquet next month, so let's have her cook this."

Weddings in the countryside were significant affairs, with plenty of meat and fish to avoid being considered stingy.

Yu Liulang had given enough money to Feng Xiaohua, and they had recently agreed not to skimp on food.

"Good, sounds good. But Shuangshuang, do you want to try it out first? My aunt's family is supposed to have a funeral this month, it'll surely be busy, and I can ask about the banquet for you?"

In ancient times, hosting a banquet had its protocols.

Red was referred to as a red celebration, emphasizing festivity, so meat and fish were essential.

White, commonly known as someone has passed, referred as eating rotten meat; Feng Xiaohua worried that Shuangshuang might not understand the nuances, wanting her to become familiar with it.

"Sure, although this has to wait, after all, talking about the deceased isn't really appropriate."

"It's okay, Shuangshuang, my grandaunt is ninety-eight, and people aren't really superstitious about such things for someone her age."

The older people were about to die, the less others avoided discussing it, and some even said mentioning it could bring good fortune and long life.

As for whether this was true, no one verified it, as it was passed down through generations.

"Thank you, Aunt! Shuangshuang learned a lot today!"

After this, Yu Si Niang arrived.

Seeing her in good spirits, Mu Shuangshuang didn't ask what had transpired at the Old Mu Family.

It was Yu Liulang who was unhappy seeing his sister frequently visiting the Old Mu Family in recent days.

"Sis, why do you always go there? You've already separated, and the work there should be done by their wives, not you."

"Mom, Uncle is right, you shouldn't go there, Little Zhi feels heartbroken seeing that." Little Zhi said as he hugged Yu Si Niang's thigh, seeking comfort.

Yu Si Niang, having no other choice, comforted him well, knowing her family was discontented.

She looked at her husband, saw him in silence, understanding not to make things difficult for him.

"All right, I know what I'm doing, you all don't have to worry, I'll handle it. Besides, these days, your fourth aunt is unwell, I can't let her work while she's sick."

Among sisters-in-law, there could be conflicts, but also mutual sympathy.

Yu Si Niang and Mrs. Liu got along well, and she didn't want to see her suffer.

"Enough said, today is Liu Zian's first day at our home, let him eat well, and tomorrow, pass some of his knowledge to Xiao Han and Yuanbao, maybe we can produce a couple of scholars too."

Mu Shuangshuang's comment lifted the atmosphere.

Mu Dashan nodded non-stop at Liu Zian.

Deep down, he admired Liu Zian's talent at such a young age.

"By the way, Zian, when exactly is your Autumn Examination?" Mu Dashan had always been curious, though he often heard it mentioned by the Old Mu family.

"August 9th, 12th, and 15th, over three days. As for the results, they will be out when the osmanthus blooms in September."

Liu Zian explained to Mu Dashan and everyone present word by word.

Mu Shuangshuang felt that Mu Dade had gone too early, expecting it to cost a lot of silver.

The town was at most seven or eight days by foot to the Provincial Government Qianzhou Prefecture; by horseback, it could be two or three days.

Plus a few days of rest, going half a month early would suffice.

Mu Dade clearly left almost a month too early.

Wouldn't the silver flow out like water staying there that long?

Mu Dashan was also pondering this, unexpectedly, the next day afternoon, a letter from Mu Dade arrived.

The following day, a courier rode up to the Old Mu Family, out of breath. Hearing Mu Dade had sent a letter, the whole Old Mu Family was in an uproar.

Old Mrs. Mu even thought it was time for the results, kneeling and bowing thrice before the courier, scaring him into thinking he was at the wrong house, ready to leave and find the right place.

It was Mr. Mu who helped up the useless Old Mrs. Mu and invited the courier to their home.

Old Mrs. Mu was always stingy, never keeping tea leaves or costly items, serving plain water to guests. But now, with the courier present, plain water wouldn't suffice.

So Mr. Mu instructed Mu Dazhong, "Second Son, go borrow some tea leaves from the third branch, saying the courier wants to drink tea, quickly!"

#### Chapter 404: Buying Dry Land

"Dad, what are you doing? You know that Third Branch brat and how protective she is. You're sending me to die, I won't go."

Mu Dazhong deliberately complained loudly to Mr. Mu.

Mu Dazhong is his own son, Mr. Mu knew his crafty nature, but the situation was urgent, and the messenger might have other tasks to do, so he said, "Don't talk nonsense with your dad. I'll ask your mother to weigh out two ounces of meat to make some snacks for you."

Upon hearing about the meat, Mu Dazhong stopped fussing and trotted off to the third branch.

Unexpectedly, the third branch was bustling at that moment.

Mu Shuangshuang had been thinking about buying the dry land for a long time, even the silver was prepared.

Coincidentally, Liu Zian was teaching three kids at Lu Yuanfeng's house today, and Yu Liulang had almost finished work in Mu Shuangshuang's field. With nothing else to do, they decided to discuss buying the land today.

Fu Wu originally didn't want to come. Last time his daughter was beaten by Old Mrs. Mu, he swore never to deal with the Mu Family and would not get involved in their affairs.

But Mu Shuangshuang personally visited him with some home-grown vegetables and freshly made rice puffs. She stated repeatedly that the third branch had separated from the Mu Family, and the land purchase was their own business that wouldn't be controlled by the Mu Family.

Only then did Fu Wu come to discuss the land purchase for the Third Branch of the Mu Family.

A few people sat in the courtyard, chatting.

On the Eight Immortals table in front of them were the sunflower seeds and peanuts Mu Shuangshuang had just bought through someone.

As for snacks, they were biscuits Mu Shuangshuang had made herself, shaped by hand and fried, crispy with a hint of sugar. Fu Wu had one and liked it.

He directly said he wanted Mu Shuangshuang to come to his house and teach his daughter to make them.

"Da Shan, I'm a straightforward person. I came today only because of Shuangshuang."

"You should have heard about my daughter and your mother. I said long ago that I won't do work for the Mu Family anymore, not for any amount of money."

Mu Dashan looked awkward. He knew when his daughter mentioned the incident from the Qixi Festival night, his mother messed things up, and they probably wouldn't be able to invite Fu Wu for affairs concerning the fields.

Today, when Shuangshuang and Fengzi planned to buy dry land, Mu Dashan hesitated, fearing rejection. Little did he know, his daughter managed to invite him over.

"Brother Fu Wu is right, my... mother was too rash, I apologize on her behalf..."

Mu Dashan's words were interrupted.

"Alright, I don't want to bring it up again, but I'm willing to help with a condition."

Fu Wu couldn't let go of the incident of his daughter being beaten. Although he couldn't really confront the elderly Old Mrs. Mu, that incident was something Mr. Mu never directly addressed him about.

Trying to sweep the matter under the rug wasn't right.

"Brother Fu Wu, please tell me..." Mu Dashan lowered his head, face pale.

This made him very nervous, fearing that Fu Wu wouldn't help.

Nowadays, anyone buying or selling land couldn't do without Fu Wu. Going to the government office to register the land purchased was nearly impossible without him; otherwise, privately it would take a lot of trouble.

Things might not even get done.

"You should write the deed in Shuang's name. Otherwise, your parents might interfere."

After hearing Fu Wu's words, Mu Shuangshuang's appreciation for Fu Wu increased.

Typically, such words are hurtful, but Fu Wu said it anyway.

It proved his disdain for the Mu Family was deep-rooted.

And anyone who disliked the Mu Family was sure to be liked by Mu Shuangshuang.

There's an old saying: the enemy of your enemy is your friend.

Upon hearing the condition, Mu Dashan relaxed instead and nodded without hesitation. "This land was bought by Shuang; it's right to write her name on the deed."

"Does Shuang have any objections?" Fu Wu turned and asked Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang had planned exactly this from the start; she wouldn't write her parents' names on the deed to prevent them from being fooled by the Mu Family and losing the land.

"No objections!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Since that's settled, let me talk about the dry land in my hand."

Discussing his profession brought a more serious look to Fu Wu's face.

"Currently, the land around here in Er Gui Village is the least fertile, apart from the dozen or so acres held by the Wang Family, and my own and Mr. Mu's few acres; the rest can't really be considered good land."

Land represents wealth, and the poverty of Er Gui Village folks has its reason; poor land doesn't yield good harvests.

"So what do you mean?" Mu Dashan asked politely, keeping his breath light in front of Fu Wu, afraid even to anger him and lose the privilege of buying land.

Yu Liulang and Feng Xiaohua listened quietly on the side, without saying a word.

Lu Yuanfeng let Mu Shuangshuang decide everything.

Yu Si Niang was in the kitchen preparing dinner for tonight.

Since Liu Zian would return tonight, the Liu Family Village isn't far from here but still takes some time, so Yu Si Niang was planning to cook earlier.

"Buy land in Tie Dao Village, Old Liu has five acres of dry land that he's looking to sell."

"Old Liu?" Lu Yuanfeng raised his eyebrows.

In Tie Dao Village, Lu Yuanfeng wasn't familiar with many aside from Chen Hong's family.

Wasn't Old Liu's land treated as a treasure?

How could he bear to sell it?

Knowing that Lu Yuanfeng was acquainted with Old Liu, Fu Wu didn't hold back.

"What else, Old Liu had several months' worth of chickens stolen, grown feathers and all, he got so angry he fell ill and hasn't recovered yet."

Somehow, Mu Shuangshuang linked this matter to Mu Danian.

Back then, Mu Danian captured a chick that had grown feathers.

And Mu Danian frequently visited Tie Dao Village where Chen Hong lived, he liked theft and sneaking around, surely Mu Danian did it.

"Uncle Fu, did the thief leave any clues?" Mu Shuangshuang asked concernedly.

"There are no clues, but Old Liu claimed those chickens were marked, and if he saw them again, he'd recognize them."

"What mark?"

Mu Shuangshuang asked, and everyone froze, fearing Fu Wu's displeasure, Mu Dashan quickly said, "Shuang, don't ask Uncle Fu Wu, it's not..."

"Da Shan, it's fine, don't blame the child! Old Liu said he marked the chicks on their belly with a spot of cinnabar. Just flip them over and you'll see."

Mu Shuangshuang became more certain.

The chicken from the Mu Family that came over to steal food, she saw, had a red belly.

"What's up, Shuang, do you know something? If you know, you can tell me. I can get Old Liu to reduce the land price for you!"

Chapter 405: You've Rebelled

"Yo, Shuangshuang, you've even invited Uncle Fu Wu over. Are you planning to sell that good acre of land you swindled from your grandfather?"

Mu Dazhong happened to overhear the talk of "selling land" and spoke without any filter.

"I knew it, you took great effort to take that piece of good land from our family, just waiting for a time when our parents aren't paying attention to secretly sell it. Listen to me, if you don't give me my share, I'll go tell Mom!"

Mu Dazhong shamelessly pushed his limits.

He didn't care if there were outsiders present at the moment.

Mu Dashan's face turned red with anger, and he quickly explained, "Second Brother, I'm not selling land, I'm..."

"Enough, Third Brother, you don't need to explain. I won't tell Mom about this, but first let Shuang bring me some tea leaves."

As Mu Dazhong spoke, he kept a sharp eye on the Eight Immortals table in the courtyard.

On the Eight Immortals table, the various shapes of cookies made Mu Dazhong's eyes light up, and he reached out to grab them.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly snatched the cookies away and put them to the side.

"Shuang, what are you doing?" Mu Dazhong gave Mu Shuangshuang a dissatisfied look.

"Second Uncle, what are you up to? There are guests here. Can't you wait to talk about whatever you need?" Mu Shuangshuang was not warm towards Mu Dazhong's sudden approach.

People say you need to judge the situation before speaking or acting. Clearly, Mu Dazhong was trying to make trouble for the third branch.

"Hey, you damn girl, you really don't treat me, your second uncle, with any respect. It's just food, what's wrong with that? You damn girl, so protective!"

"Eating food is not an issue, but it depends on who. These are meant for Uncle Fu Wu, Second Uncle, you just can't touch them!"

"You..." Mu Dazhong became angry and glared at Mu Shuangshuang for a long time.

"Are you saying you won't give me any tea leaves either?" Mu Dazhong asked again.

"Second Uncle, you're banging on an empty pot. Our family doesn't have any tea leaves, where would we get tea leaves for you?"

Shuangshuang's house indeed had tea leaves; Yu Liulang had brought a jar of freshly picked spring tea. But Mu Shuangshuang just didn't want to bring them out.

"Alright then, just you wait!" Mu Dazhong made a threat and ran off towards the Old Mu Family.

Mu Dashan thought to himself that his second brother was going to lodge a complaint again, and he anxiously stood up.

"Dashan, don't get involved in this matter. Let's go to Old Liu's house right now and check out the land. What do you think?"

Mu Dashan certainly wanted to go, but given the situation, the family was about to break into chaos.

Yu Liulang saw Mu Dashan looked troubled and stood up: "Brother-in-law, I'll go. I know which plots are good, I'll make sure to check them out well for you."

"Good, good!" Mu Dashan quickly nodded, the family's matters were still waiting for him to handle.

Once Uncle Fu Wu and Yu Liulang left, Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu angrily charged over, their eyes filled with malice.

Old Mrs. Mu came up and started clawing at Mu Dashan, her dark nails frantically scratching at his body.

"You beast! Dare to sell the Old Mu Family's land, I'll scratch you to death. Our Old Mu Family's little bit of wealth is about to be depleted by you, this beast!"

If Lu Yuanfeng hadn't pulled her away in time, Mu Dashan's face would have been torn apart.

"Grandma, why are you hitting my dad?"

Mu Shuangshuang was also upset. This old witch, did she think she was dead or something?

"Why? It's this damn girl who instigated Old Third to sell the land. What is your damn girl heart made of, how did it become so dark?" Old Mrs. Mu cursed, stomping her feet.

And Mu Dazhong, who came hurriedly, looked smug and sneering beside them.

He thought: If they had given him the money earlier, there wouldn't have been any issues, but they insisted on crossing him!

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't dumb; she knew this was all connected to Mu Dazhong and her hatred for him grew stronger.

"Grandma, what did I do wrong? Why do you only listen to what Second Uncle says? If Second Uncle says we're selling land, it means we're selling land? Why won't you listen to our side?"

"Why? I'll teach you what 'why' means!" With that, Old Mrs. Mu lifted her foot, trying to kick Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang naturally dodged, while Lu Yuanfeng, trying to hold the old lady, was getting occasionally scratched.

The scene became extremely chaotic, and Mr. Mu stood by enjoying the show without any intention of helping. Mu Shuangshuang saw the family's ugly face.

Mr. Mu as a man wouldn't step in, letting Old Mrs. Mu cause a scene first, and only when things became irreparable would he step in, making everyone grateful to him.

But life isn't that simple.

Mu Shuangshuang grabbed a nearby stool and rushed up to Mu Dazhong, beating him furiously.

Everyone had been focusing on Old Mrs. Mu's tantrum, who would have thought Mu Shuangshuang would grab a stool and hit Mu Dazhong? Everyone was dumbfounded.

"Calling you out for talking nonsense, calling you out for throwing mud, did the third branch owe you or wrong you? Why would you try to harm us like this?"

The stool relentlessly swung at Mu Dazhong, the crackling sound made his bones feel shattered as he fell to the ground, wailing endlessly.

"Oh dear, I'm dying..."

"Dad, Mom, save me, this damn girl went crazy, crazy..."

A nearly thirty-year-old man getting beaten by a girl in her teens was indeed shameful, but the shame couldn't compare to the pain.

Mu Shuangshuang had tolerated it before, always acting privately; doing something right in front of Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu was unthinkable.

Time after time of tolerance hadn't taught these people to behave; instead, they kept pouring mud.

"Second Uncle, don't you like throwing mud? Keep throwing it. Tell my Grandpa and Grandma whether our third branch is selling land or buying land!"

Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu were stupefied upon hearing this.

What? The third branch was buying land, not selling it?

"Old Third, is what Shuangshuang said true?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Of course, Dad. No matter how desperate we are, the third branch would never do such heartless things against our ancestors." Mu Dashan held his chest with a look of pain and anguish.

Mr. Mu initially didn't believe it, but the second son spoke so confidently and even said Shuangshuang indicated there were tea leaves but wouldn't let anyone from the Old Mu Family drink.

Upon hearing this, Mr. Mu was naturally enraged.

The child raised by his own hands became an ingrate, which was intolerable for anyone.

"Dad, save me, it hurts..." Mu Dazhong continued to wail, but Mr. Mu no longer had the slightest intent to save him.

Stirring up trouble and spreading rumors, this second son needed a lesson; Mr. Mu chose to ignore Mu Dazhong's cries for help!

But Old Mrs. Mu was unhappy; if anyone was to discipline her son, it would be her, not an outsider.

"Shuang, let go of your second uncle, overthrow him!"

## Chapter 406: Mr. Mu Was Slapped in the Face

Mu Shuangshuang obediently let go of Mu Dazhong and 'accidentally' stepped on his fingers placed on the ground.

A scream like a pig being slaughtered emerged from Mu Dazhong's mouth.

The piercing sound made Mu Shuangshuang twitch her ears, and she feigned apology, "Sorry, Second Uncle, Shuangshuang's eyesight isn't great!"

Mu Dazhong clutched his fingers, crying and yelling simultaneously.

Old Mrs. Mu was still being restrained by Lu Yuanfeng at this moment. She struggled several times but couldn't break free, so she simply shouted at Lu Yuanfeng.

"You stinky brat, let go of me!"

Lu Yuanfeng refused to release his grip. "Mu Family, unless you promise not to bother Shuangshuang or make a move here."

"You stinky brat, is it your turn to speak here? Don't forget your surname." Old Mrs. Mu continued to struggle, but Lu Yuanfeng wouldn't let go.

The sharp pain in her wrist left Old Mrs. Mu with no choice but to relent.

"Loosen... my hand, I won't touch that little brat!"

Lu Yuanfeng focused his gaze on Mu Shuangshuang and, seeing that Shuangshuang didn't nod, still didn't let go.

This scene caught Mr. Mu's eye, and he said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuangshuang, listen and have Feng let go of your grandma."

"Grandpa, my grandma is so agitated. What if she hits my dad, me, or Fengzi later?"

Mu Shuangshuang crossed her arms, clearly stating her attitude.

She didn't trust Old Mrs. Mu's words!

"You... you child, you..." Mr. Mu was too angry to speak, and he turned to look at Mu Dashan, but Mu Dashan just turned his head away.

Earlier, he was frightened by Old Mrs. Mu's ferocity. He knew that if it weren't for Shuangshuang's strength today, it would have been him getting hit.

Being hit himself didn't matter, but if, as Zhang Huai Shu said, he got injured and became useless from then on, it would hurt his third wife and Shuangshuang for a lifetime.

"Old Third, even you..." Mr. Mu felt a surge of anger building up in his chest, and any joy from the recent letter from the eldest was completely gone.

Old Mrs. Mu felt the grip on her wrist grow heavier, causing increasing pain.

"Ouch... it hurts..." Old Mrs. Mu's complexion changed.

Seeing this, Mr. Mu had no choice but to speak, "Shuangshuang, I assure you, if your grandma dares to hit, I won't be polite with her!"

Only then did Mu Shuangshuang nod, and Lu Yuanfeng released Old Mrs. Mu. As soon as she gained freedom, Old Mrs. Mu waved her claws, intending to discipline Mu Shuangshuang, but was stopped by Mr. Mu.

"Enough, today's drama is over for you, go back and reflect!"

"You old fool, I'm getting bullied, and you scold me? Has your brain been messed up by a piss bucket?"

Old Mrs. Mu unleashed a torrent of filthy words and showed no intention of stopping even towards Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu, being scolded to his face, was unwilling to let it go and dragged Old Mrs. Mu back to the Old Mu Family's place.

Meanwhile, the messenger was still in the front yard. He wanted to leave, but since the Old Mu Family hadn't yet given him the reward, he could only sit there.

Mrs. Lin was entertaining the messenger in the front yard but the stench of her clothes almost made the messenger vomit.

This Old Mu Family isn't like a normal family.

After thinking about it, the messenger spoke, "Forget it, I'm not drinking this tea. Old Sir and Madam, come out and take the letter promptly!"

Upon hearing this, Mrs. Lin wiped her nose with her sleeve and exclaimed, "Give the letter to me, won't you? I'm the sender's sister-in-law, and I'm on good terms with my brother-in-law."

Mrs. Lin didn't care what she said in her attempt to get the letter.

Coincidentally, Mu Dazhong, Old Mrs. Mu, and Mr. Mu heard these words as they came inside.

Mu Dazhong's face turned pale and green. Having failed to gain anything at the third branch earlier, upon entering, he heard his own wife saying something embarrassing, and without a word, he slapped Mrs. Lin.

"You stinking woman, how can you claim to have a good relationship with my big brother, what kind of good relationship?"

Old Mrs. Mu, too, went up to grab Mrs. Lin by the hair, "You stinking woman, dare to ruin the reputation of the eldest, I'll strangle you, you old wench!"

The corners of Mr. Mu's mouth twitched, and he slammed his smoking pipe heavily on the table.

"Behave yourselves, if you don't want to stay in this family, then leave!"

The Old Mu Family finally fell silent.

Mr. Mu took a deep breath, smiling as he approached the messenger and said apologetically, "Mr. Messenger, I apologize. Those in my house have never seen the world. I've already asked my third daughter-in-law to make you a nice pot of tea. Please wait a little longer, and surely you'll enjoy some of our tea."

"Dad, what are you talking about? The third family doesn't want to give any tea." Mu Dazhong thought Mr. Mu had gone senile, knowing well the third branch was unwilling, so how could they make tea?

Isn't that lying?

"Get out! Cough, cough..." Mr. Mu, flushed with anger, couldn't even speak clearly.

He had lost all face in one year, just today.

"Fine, leave, I don't care anyway!" With that, Mu Dazhong walked out.

Mr. Mu still had to put on a smiling face for the messenger.

But now, the look of disdain in the messenger's eyes deeply stung Mr. Mu, making him feel as if he was naked being laughed at and leaving him utterly ashamed.

He opened his mouth, wanting to tell the newcomer that his son was a scholar and destined to become a champion scholar in the future.

Yet he found himself completely voiceless, unable to utter a single word.

Things had reached the point where the messenger plainly knew he was getting nothing from this trip.

"Pah, what bad luck!" With a flick of the hand, he tossed the letter and swaggered out of the Old Mu Family's house.

The moment the letter hit the ground, Mr. Mu felt as if someone had slapped him hard across the face.

The pain was excruciating.

Seeing the messenger in such a state, Old Mrs. Mu cursed loudly a few times, then, heartbroken, picked up the letter from the ground.

"Dog thing, how can you just throw my son's letter away like this, what nonsense."

"Mom, hurry and open the letter to see what Big Brother said, whether he passed." Mu Danian, who had been watching eagerly from the side, urged.

Old Mrs. Mu smugly opened the letter, but as soon as she saw the words on the paper, she was dumbfounded.

"Fifth, I can't read!"

Not only could Old Mrs. Mu not read, nearly no one in the entire Er Gui Village could. To make it worse, the messenger had left just now.

Old Mrs. Mu spun around anxiously.

"What to do, I can't read!"

"Old man, what should we do?" Old Mrs. Mu asked Mr. Mu.

Right now, Mr. Mu seemed several years older, looking both old and weary, his back bending.

"Old fool, speak up, are you mute?"

Old Mrs. Mu was still blabbering senselessly, but Mr. Mu still couldn't say a word.

"Mom, why not take it to the third brother's house? I heard yesterday that Shuangshuang invited a teacher from town specifically to teach Xiaohan and Little Zhi, and he hasn't left yet," Mu Dajiang hesitated before speaking.

However, as soon as Mu Dajiang spoke those words, the weight on Mr. Mu's chest grew heavier, making the wave of discomfort even harder to bear...

Chapter 407: Heartache

"Aren't you going to quickly take the letter to that person!"

Old Mrs. Mu held up the letter, bossing Mu Dajiang around.

At this moment, Old Mrs. Mu had already forgotten how she had been strutting around in the third branch, threatening to beat this one and kill that one.

Mu Dajiang didn't take the letter, hesitating for a moment before speaking. "Mother, that gentleman was invited back by Shuangshuang, I'm worried..."

"What are you worried about? If anything happens, this old woman will handle it. Does that brat think she can turn the sky upside down?"

"No, mother, I mean to say, I think we should discuss it with Shuangshuang first."

"Old Fourth, what do you mean? This old woman decides what to do, do we need a brat to make the decision? If you don't go, get out of the Old Mu Family with your fourth branch!"

Mu Dajiang was scolded so harshly that he eventually was forced to go out to find Liu Zian.

Not knowing where Liu Zian was, he went to the third branch to ask.

Mu Shuangshuang was tidying up the courtyard at that moment. To say she was tidying up, in fact, she was just arranging the chair Mu Dazhong had been sitting on. She cherished her family's possessions very much.

The courtyard was quite lively; Little Black Dog was chasing the free-range chicks around, while Little Black followed behind with a flattering expression, helping Little Black Dog catch the chicks.

The duo of "troublemakers" worked hand-in-hand, chasing the family's chickens in a frenzy.

When Mu Shuangshuang saw this, she stepped forward and slapped Little Black and Little Black Dog twice with Lai Mi, causing the little troublemakers to hide in the house and not come out for quite a while.

Watching the scene, Mu Dajiang couldn't help but feel a bit envious inside. He looked at the flock of chicks in the third branch's courtyard and the little black pig tied under the willow tree, rooting in the soil with its charming demeanor that never failed to amuse.

The kind of life a farmer spends a lifetime pursuing seemed to be realized in the third branch.

A house, livestock, and, perhaps, a few more acres of land — a family living happily.

And if they earned more money in the future, let Xiao Han study, become a scholar, a Champion Scholar...

The more Mu Dajiang thought about it, the more hopeful the life of the third branch seemed, unlike their fourth branch which didn't even have the right to an extra mouthful of food.

Mu Shuangshuang sensed the burning gaze from behind, turned and saw Mu Dajiang standing in the corner of the courtyard, looking enviously at the chicks and the little black pig.

"Fourth Uncle, you're here." Mu Shuangshuang approached him with warmth, and this softened Mu Dajiang's heart.

He took out a letter from his pocket and waved it in front of Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuangshuang, this is... it's your grandma... it's the family letter sent by your elder uncle, asking the gentleman you invited to help read it."

Mu Dajiang was somewhat incoherent in his speech, knowing that just a moment ago his parents had caused quite a stir in the third branch, and the anger should not have subsided yet.

"Can I take a look at it?"

Mu Shuangshuang was dealing with the matter, not the person. The fourth branch was already suffering enough, she saw no need to vent her anger on them; otherwise, it would be just like the people of the Old Mu Family.

"Sigh~" Mu Dajiang responded and handed the letter to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang opened the letter, glanced at the content, and felt a strong urge to curse internally.

Damn!

Mu Dade's letter actually mentioned asking for money, and it's 20 taels.

If she remembered correctly, Mu Dade had left with 110 taels of silver. Many farming families would have to spend 40 or 50 years without eating or drinking to save such silver taels.

Some families living in hardship might never see so much silver in their lifetime.

Yet, Mu Dade had been gone for just a few days, and he not only squandered all the silver but was now concocting excuses to ask for more money!

Mu Dajiang watched his niece's suddenly changed expression, mistakenly feeling she could read. But clearly, Shuangshuang couldn't!

Despite his thoughts, Mu Dajiang still asked.

"Shuangshuang, do you know what's written in the letter?"

"No, Fourth Uncle, how would I know? Yesterday, Liu Zian taught me a few words. I just compared them to the letter to see if they match, but I didn't find any."

"Then that's good, then that's good..." Mu Dajiang nodded.

"Shuangshuang, where is Liu Zian? Can I go look for him?" Mu Dajiang hesitated for a long moment before speaking.

"At Fengzi's house, go ahead, Fourth Uncle! By the way, here are some snacks, you can take them to Xiaxia and Xiao Chu."

Mu Shuangshuang went into her room, and when she came out, she carried a small oil-paper wrapped package, containing popcorn she made in the morning and cookies she had fried.

Of course, Mu Dajiang was unwilling to take them and tried to decline.

"Shuangshuang, you should keep these for Xiao Han and Little Zhi, don't bother about Fourth Uncle."

"Fourth Uncle, aren't you being too polite? We have plenty at home. Even if they run out, I can make more myself. Just take these to Xiaxia and Xiao Chu quietly, don't let others see."

Mu Shuangshuang lowered her voice, confidently believing that Mu Dajiang understood her intentions.

Sure enough, Mu Dajiang accepted the oil-paper package and quietly made his way towards the Old Mu Family's place.

After a while, there weren't any cursing sounds coming from the Old Mu Family, so perhaps he got away with it.

"Fengzi, shall we go for a walk in the mountains? Perhaps there might be another argument later."

Mu Shuangshuang said towards Lu Yuanfeng, who was placing water into the trough for the little black pig.

"Alright!"

The two casually packed up a bit, took two baskets, and headed north towards Niuwei Mountain.

Right now, it was early July, the weather was far from refreshing, and stepping out, they were soaked in sweat; Mu Shuangshuang kept wiping the sweat from her forehead, breathlessly panting.

Lu Yuanfeng carried a basket to shade Mu Shuangshuang from the sun, though it wasn't quite effective as the sunlight was omnipresent, yet his earnest efforts touched Mu Shuangshuang deeply.

"By the way, Fengzi, are you going to burn offerings on Mid-Autumn Festival?"

Mid-Autumn Festival is also known as the Ghost Festival. Besides the Qixi Festival in July, a second significant event is the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Ancient peoples regarded traditional festivals with great importance, and each one was celebrated with grandeur.

Moreover, the Ghost Festival concerns deceased relatives and ancestors, making it a family matter of utmost importance.

Lu Yuanfeng paused, seemingly taken aback by Mu Shuangshuang's question, before speaking after some contemplation.

"Yes, in a few days, I'll go buy some yellow paper money and candles!"

Mu Shuangshuang thought of Lu Yuanfeng's mother, who was carried off by wolves, and her mood suddenly became heavy.

In comparison, she really was much happier, having parents who loved her, whereas Lu Yuanfeng had a father whose presence made no difference.

Mu Shuangshuang moved closer, took one of the baskets from Lu Yuanfeng's hands, and softly said, "How about we go together? When the time comes to fold golden ingots and such, I'll help you, and you can treat me to some good food, how's that?"

Lu Yuanfeng's gloomy mood vanished, he grabbed Mu Shuangshuang's hand, and the two of them headed up Niuwei Mountain together.

## Chapter 408: Up to No Good

Mu Dajiang brought the food home, and Xiaxia and Xiao Chu came running over.

Being young, Xiao Chu hugged Mu Dajiang's leg right away, grinning and exposing a smile with two missing front teeth.

"Dad, what did you bring? Xiao Chu smells something delicious!"

Mu Dajiang felt a warmth in his heart, but thinking of the possible people outside, he made a gesture to Xiao Chu to keep his voice down.

On the bed, Mrs. Liu struggled to get up but was stopped by Mu Dajiang who spotted her.

"You're still not well, rest a bit more. This is food Shuangshuang brought us, have some."

Mu Dajiang handed all the food to Mrs. Liu without reservation, but Mrs. Liu refused to take it.

"Give it to the kids, I'm already grateful to be able to lie down!" Saying this, Mrs. Liu began coughing again. "Cough, cough..."

The summer fever came suddenly, and in just one day, Mrs. Liu's originally slim body became even thinner, her chin turning sharp.

"Jinhua, don't worry, I'll give the food to the kids!" Mu Dajiang handed the food to Mu Xiaxia.

Mu Xiaxia took the food, and tears started to fall.

Xiao Chu saw this and began bawling as well, making Mu Dajiang anxious. He reached out to cover Xiao Chu's mouth.

"Don't cry, don't cry, if your grandma hears you later, she'll scold you again."

Looking at the cautious man, Mrs. Liu's tears started to fall as well.

"Jinhua, how about we split from the family after elder brother passes the examination?"

These days, Mu Dajiang had been pondering a lot. Ever since the third branch split off, life for the fourth branch had gotten harder; even when his wife was sick, she couldn't get a proper rest.

They had to work for survival; it would be better if after elder brother passes the exam and the family moves, to get a couple of acres of land and then deliver goods in town, a better life than now.

"You really think so?" Mrs. Liu looked at her husband with hope.

Though as a wife, she should be dutiful to her parents-in-law, but life had become unbearable.

The children were nearly starving.

"Yes, I've... made up my mind!" Mu Dajiang nodded.

Inside the house, Mrs. Liu suddenly laughed, and Mu Xiaxia did too.

As long as they split from the family, the fourth branch would one day be like the third branch, having their own pigs and chickens, and when Xiao Chu grows older, he can also go to school.

Mrs. Liu's smile deepened, but before she could celebrate, Old Mrs. Mu shouted loudly from outside.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, are you raising yourself for slaughter fat? At this time, the stove is still cold, the water isn't heated, and no food is prepared. What, you want us to starve?"

Mrs. Liu's face turned pale instantly.

Old Mrs. Mu continued to bang on the door, while Mu Dajiang asked Mu Xiaxia to hide the food and he went outside himself.

"Mom, Xiaxia's mom is sick and still resting, so please don't shout, I'm begging you as your son."

"Bah! For a woman, saying such degrading words, get out of the way. I'll check if that lazy deceitful woman is really dying, if not I'll peel her skin!"

Old Mrs. Mu said, starting to shove Mu Dajiang.

Mu Dajiang stood still, not moving an inch, letting Old Mrs. Mu hit him.

Realizing her son was protecting Mrs. Liu, Old Mrs. Mu got furious, picked up a broom from the ground, and was about to hit Mu Dajiang with it.

Mu Danian, who had gone out to relieve himself, surprisingly showed some compassion and went up to hold Old Mrs. Mu's frenzied hands, comforting her.

"Mom, what are you doing? Let go, let go quickly!"

"Fifth, you came just in time, look at the fourth, he dared to rebel against me for a woman, he must have eaten bear's heart and leopard's gall, copying that heartless bunch from the third branch."

Actually, Old Mrs. Mu couldn't do anything to the people from the third branch, so she took it out on the fourth branch.

Who told the fourth branch to be like a soft target.

If she didn't trouble them, who would she trouble?

"Mom, my fourth brother doesn't have that ability, my third brother's family was enchanted by that stinking girl, besides Xiaxia can't be compared to that stinking girl, don't be angry."

As Mu Danian spoke, he signaled to Mu Dajiang.

"Fourth brother, weren't you going to deliver the letter to someone? Hurry up and go!"

Mu Dajiang glanced at Mrs. Liu inside the house, but his feet remained unmoved.

At this moment, Mu Danian felt like scolding him, his fourth brother was just foolish, there were plenty of women in this world if not one then another, why stick to just one.

"Fourth brother, if you don't go, and delay elder brother's business, what will you do?"

As soon as Mu Dade was mentioned, Old Mrs. Mu miraculously threw down the broom in her hand and said to Mu Dajiang, "Go quickly as the fourth said, the meal, you can have your wife prepare later."

Old Mrs. Mu saying this meant she wasn't going to the fourth branch now.

Mu Dajiang was relieved.

Took the letter and quickly headed towards Lu Yuanfeng's house.

When he returned, Mu Dajiang's face didn't look good, it was pale and a bit frightening.

Old Mrs. Mu got scared seeing his expression, almost feeling a pang of fear.

"Fourth, what's with that face? What happened?"

"Mom... elder brother he..." Mu Dajiang choked as he started speaking.

"What happened?" This shocked Mr. Mu, too.

"Yes, fourth brother, speak up, choking like that, who are you scaring?"

Mu Danian who had spoken good words for Mu Dajiang earlier urged him.

Mu Dazhong who had been beaten so badly he couldn't speak could only watch Mu Dajiang anxiously.

After a while, Mu Dajiang finally gained his composure.

"Mom, Dad, elder brother says he caught a cold in Qianzhou Prefecture, ran out of silver, and now doesn't even have money for the exam, asking you to arrange twenty taels."

"What? Eldest is sick?" Old Mrs. Mu exclaimed, then sat down on the ground, patting her thighs continuously.

"Oh my poor son, my dear, how did he get sick..."

Old Mrs. Mu's wailing startled Mr. Mu so much that he fell straight to the ground.

"Dad, what happened to you? What's wrong?" The Old Mu family members hurriedly gathered around, showing great concern.

After a while, Mr. Mu regained consciousness.

The first thing he asked was for Mu Dajiang to repeat what had happened.

This time, everyone knew that Mu Dade had caught a chill but was now fine, just short on money, wanting his family to gather silver for preparing the August autumn examination.

"What do we do now, when elder brother left, that fifty taels was borrowed with a promissory note, where does the family have any silver for elder brother now!" Mu Danian, fearing Mr. Mu would put the burden on him, quickly said.

"Exactly, Dad, Mom, the family has no money left." Mrs. Lin also hurried to clear herself.

Mu Dazhong hurt badly couldn't speak but made his stance clear with his actions.

No money, just his life!

Without money, Mu Dade absolutely can't continue the exam.

Chapter 409: The Old Master Visits

Mr. Mu's face was ashen, and his mood grew heavier.

"Dad, why not borrow from the third branch, the third is waiting to buy land today." Mu Dazhong struggled to speak after forcing a smile.

"Yes, our third brother is quite capable. With him around, why worry about money?" Mu Danian's eyes darted, clearly up to no good.

If a family has one bad apple, it will surely disturb the peace of the whole house!

In the Old Mu Family, where most of the members are troublemakers, the chaos is even worse.

Mr. Mu lit his pipe and puffed contemplatively, pondering whether to approach the third branch for help.

Earlier in the afternoon, he had made a scene that left the third branch in an awkward position. What if the third bore a grudge and refused to lend them money now?

Mr. Mu hesitated, which made Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian uneasy.

"Dad, why are you hesitating? The third is your son, and it's his duty to be filial to you. Besides, don't you want him to break free from that little girl's control?" Mu Dazhong, holding back his discomfort, blurted out his thoughts all at once.

"Dad, my second brother is absolutely right. Our third brother is your child, a member of our Old Mu Family. He has the responsibility to share our family's difficulties. Besides, can he really avoid relying on our big brother's success?"

Mr. Mu considered this and realized that if the eldest son succeeded in the future, the benefits would surely extend to the third branch.

There was no way the third branch wouldn't help him now.

"Alright, I know what to do!"

With Mr. Mu's declaration, Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian felt assured.

Since their father said so, it meant he would definitely seek out the third branch. With the third branch footing the bill, it had nothing to do with the rest.

...

...

At that moment, Mu Shuangshuang had no idea that the Old Mu Family had concocted such a plan. She was secretly pleased with her own cleverness, having left her own house.

Little did she know, the Old Mu Family knew well she was no pushover, and they wouldn't come looking for her.

Mu Shuangshuang wore a happy expression, evidently in high spirits.

July was certainly not the season for hunting. Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng scoured the mountains without even finding a single wild chicken. What they did find were common wild vegetables and mushrooms.

If this continued, tonight's dishes would surely be nothing special.

"Shuangshuang, shall we go to the cotton fields to see if there are any quail nests? In this season, there should be quite a few good things in the cotton fields."

Lu Yuanfeng knew much more than Mu Shuangshuang, knowing where to find food in each season.

"Sure!"

With time still on their side, the two picked some wild vegetables and descended the mountain.

They headed towards the cotton fields.

The cotton was already at the stage of bearing large bolls. It wouldn't be long before there'd be cotton to gather. When that time came, the Old Mu Family would be swamped with work.

Mu Shuangshuang was thankful that they didn't allocate any cotton fields to the third branch this season. Although she'd still have to sell the cotton herself, it was better than working for the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang followed Lu Yuanfeng into the cotton fields. He quickly glanced over the well-kept, weed-free fields, but paid special attention to the ones that seemed neglected.

After much effort, they found a patch with lots of weeds, and discovered a nest of gooseberries.

"This is Aunt Zhang's field!" Lu Yuanfeng said.

Mu Shuangshuang thought for a moment; wasn't this Lu Yuanfeng's neighbor who once stole his meat?

Her son, Ma Houhou, was stung by hornets thanks to her, and still couldn't go out.

"Haha, Fengzi, I think..." Mu Shuangshuang blinked, and Lu Yuanfeng immediately understood, nodding.

"We should come back at night though. In broad daylight, getting caught would surely cause trouble!"

"Hmm!" Mu Shuangshuang nodded in satisfaction.

Lu Yuanfeng headed forward solo and indeed caught a quail and found a nest of quail eggs.

It seemed that foolish people sometimes stumbled upon good luck.

Mu Shuangshuang carried the eggs, and Lu Yuanfeng held onto the quail as they returned home.

Mr. Mu arrived at Mu Dashan's house just as Mu Shuangshuang's family finished preparing dinner: braised quail and quail egg soup. Just these two dishes alone were more than enough to outshine the Old Mu Family's meals for the past six months.

Upon seeing Mr. Mu, Mu Dashan excitedly stood up, needing Yu Si Niang to help stabilize him so he wouldn't fall.

"Dad, what brings you here? You haven't eaten yet, have you? We just started. Please join us." Mu Dashan steadied himself and said.

Mr. Mu originally intended to decline, but seeing the lavish spread, he found himself unable to move his feet. He glanced at the smartest person in the third branch, Mu Shuangshuang, to see if she would show any reluctance.

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Who knew, Shuangshuang directly stood up and offered her chair to Mr. Mu.

"Grandpa, sit here."

"Sis, sit here!" Mu Xiaohan stood up right after her.

Then Lu Yuanfeng, Yuanbao, and everyone else kept saying they wouldn't let Mu Shuangshuang stand.

"Alright, you all sit; I'll sit by the stove door." Mu Shuangshuang picked up her bowl of rice, grabbed some vegetables, and moved over to the stove.

The meal hadn't been cooking for long, and sitting by the stove, a wave of heat rushed over her, sweat pouring down like rain.

Lu Yuanfeng walked over.

"Shuangshuang, go grab some food; I'll stay here for a while."

"Fengzi, I'm fine, you go sit down!" Mu Shuangshuang had enough understanding with Lu Yuanfeng to know what he meant.

Mr. Mu watched this scene from the side, and for some reason, felt a bit uncomfortable.

The third branch and the Old Mu Family were completely different.

If there was only one stool at the Old Mu Family's place, everyone would scramble for it. Unlike the third branch, where they kept offering seats to each other!

Mr. Mu sighed in his heart, and suddenly felt warmth inside.

A smile appeared on his face, rarely seen.

"Dad, this is your meal. If it's not enough, ask the wife to add more." Yu Si Niang picked up a large bowl and served Mr. Mu a big bowl of white rice.

There wasn't even a bit of sweet potato or wild vegetables.

Mr. Mu glanced at the bowls of the other people, noticing how little rice they had while wild vegetables were piled high. Even sweet potatoes seemed too scarce to eat.

Feeling moved, Mr. Mu softly spoke to Yu Si Niang.

"Third son's wife, share the rice with the kids. I can eat some sweet potatoes."

"Dad, it's fine. The kids are used to it. It's rare for you to come by, don't go hungry."

At the dining table, the quail emitted an enticing aroma, and everyone casually picked at the dishes before them without eyeing the quail hungrily, much less dividing the food.

Today, Mr. Mu felt the third branch completely overturned his understanding.

They ate well without fighting for food, entirely different from what he saw at the main residence.

At the main residence, if there was any dish, especially one with meat, it'd be snatched up until not even broth was left in a blink.

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"Dad, why aren't you eating?"

For some reason, perhaps because it was Mr. Mu's first visit for a meal, Mu Dashan was grinning much more than usual.

His back was straight, occasionally engaging Mr. Mu in conversation.

Mr. Mu was out of sorts the whole time, only responding with a few nods here and there.

Yet even so, Mu Dashan couldn't stop smiling.

After a few bites of food, Mu Dashan suddenly asked, "Dad, how about some wine? We brewed some last time. We've been asking Shuangshuang to use it for cooking; now's the perfect time to enjoy it."

"I... I'll pass on drinking!" Mr. Mu, preoccupied, didn't even want to drink.

Mu Dashan thought Mr. Mu was just being modest, so he graciously said, "Dad, I haven't had the chance to serve you alone. Consider this wine my filial respect. Don't worry about it. Just tell me what you want; if I have it, it's yours!"

Mr. Mu felt a wave of emotion and really started drinking.

A few drinks later, his face flushed and his heart raced.

The matters weighing on his mind were completely forgotten.

Upon leaving the third branch's house, Mr. Mu was already a bit dazed, his walk somewhat unsteady.

Yu Liulang and Lu Yuanfeng escorted him home, inevitably encountering Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu scowled and cursed at them.

"Worthless dogs, feeding you so much horse piss."

Lu Yuanfeng and Yu Liulang exchanged a glance, deciding not to argue with Old Mrs. Mu.

But Old Mrs. Mu persisted, loudly cursing.

She even said things like how they were harming her husband and that having sons without p-yan was brutal.

After Lu Yuanfeng left, Old Mrs. Mu climbed onto the bed and began probing Mr. Mu.

She pushed his body, lowered her voice, and asked.

"Old man, how did the talk go? Is the third son willing to give money?"

In Old Mrs. Mu's eyes, the word 'borrow' was absent; Mu the Third was her flesh and blood, and the money earned was hers.

The Old Mu Family needed money, and the third branch ought to provide it naturally.

Mr. Mu, drunk and muddled, upon hearing someone speaking nearby, thought it was still Mu Dashan urging him to drink, boldly replied.

"Drink..."

Upon hearing this, Old Mrs. Mu was infuriated and fiercely pinched Mr. Mu's arm, fearing he wouldn't feel the pain, then gave a full 360-degree twist.