

Folly 431

Chapter 431: Apology

"Alright, everyone stop shouting, the matter concerning the eldest can't be delayed, the silver needs to be sent over before the Mid-Autumn Festival."

"I've inquired, there's a Scholar from Zhao Village who's going to take the exam, we can let him bring the eldest's silver, that'll save a bit of travel cost."

From Er Gui Village to Qianzhou Prefecture, without a tael of silver, you can't even reach there.

With that tael of silver, it would be better to let the son spend it.

"Dad, have you lost your mind? Why should my mother apologize? She did nothing wrong."

Xiangxiang snorted twice, stubbornly refusing to back down.

"As soon as Second Brother and Fifth Brother spoke, you sided with them. I know, you favor sons over daughters, thinking I'm just a girl and can't contribute much to the Old Mu Family. I'm leaving..."

Even as Mu Xiangxiang said she was leaving, she didn't move a step.

Because she knew, her mother wouldn't let her suffer grievances.

Sure enough, upon hearing Mu Xiangxiang's words, Old Mrs. Mu became anxious.

"Oh heavens, how could you say such things to Xiangxiang, if you do, I'll fight you to death!"

After saying that, Old Mrs. Mu lifted her grimy nails and scratched wildly at Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu couldn't dodge in time and a few pieces of skin were scratched off his face.

"You crazy old hag, still daring to make a scene. If you hadn't hit Fu Xiaonan, would our Old Mu Family be in such a passive position?"

Mr. Mu pushed Old Mrs. Mu away, she fell to the ground with a heavy thud, her head hitting the floor hard.

This time Old Mrs. Mu saw stars, her eyes went completely black.

Mr. Mu didn't help her up, instead, he took Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian with him to the Fu Family.

Behind them, Old Mrs. Mu's screams and howls echoed, making Mr. Mu's face look very grim.

He always felt his wife had been too excessive lately.

"Your mother, she only has a sharp tongue. I wonder if when she dies someone will pull out her tongue."

Mr. Mu's words left Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian looking at each other in silence.

Their mother wasn't just sharp with her words, her hands were vicious too.

Even little kids, she would use those hands to pinch and twist them around.

But these thoughts were kept in the hearts of the two brothers, unspoken.

Arriving at the Fu Family, Mu Danian went to knock on the door, which was opened by Fu Wu's wife, Mrs. Chen. Because of Fu Wu's influence, she was dressed much better than others in the village.

Not sure if she had applied rouge and powder, but she exuded a fragrant scent.

Mu Danian was immediately captivated, staring at Mrs. Chen with saliva almost drooling.

Receiving such a disrespectful look, Mrs. Chen turned around to see Mu Danian almost drooling, though he tried hard to disguise it, his predatory gaze made her feel a bit disgusted.

Mrs. Chen lost the mood to greet anyone and simply said she had matters in the kitchen, and let the people from the Old Mu Family do as they pleased.

Mu Danian's eyes followed Mrs. Chen into the kitchen.

Looking at Mrs. Chen's quite attractive face, Mu Danian was lost in thought for a long while.

"Fifth Brother, what are you looking at?"

Seeing Mu Danian not moving, Mu Dazhong nudged his arm.

"Nothing... nothing!" Mu Danian reluctantly looked away.

"If there's nothing then move along, Dad's already inside!"

Only then did Mu Danian continue walking, but unlike when he first came in with confidence, by now he had a completely different air about him, making people uncomfortable.

Mu Danian's unsettling demeanor caught Fu Wu's attention, causing Fu Wu to feel a burst of disgust, but unlike Mrs. Chen, he could still muster the energy to deal with the people from the Old Mu Family.

"Uncle Mu, why are you here? You too, Second, Fifth, you've all come."

Fu Wu appeared to maintain a calm demeanor, but in reality, he was waiting for an explanation from the Old Mu Family.

Mr. Mu, with a flushed face, said.

"Fu Wu, your Uncle Mu won't beat around the bush with you."

"Today, I've brought my two sons to make amends, your Aunt Mu did your daughter wrong, I've given her a stern talking to, and besides, she's been sick these days, so I didn't let her come."

Fu Wu naturally didn't believe Mr. Mu's excuse.

Old Man Mu, siding with his wife, dared to make a fool of even him.

Fu Wu remained silent, with a mocking smile as he watched Mr. Mu.

Motioning for Mr. Mu to continue speaking.

Mr. Mu had a whole speech prepared, yet now it was of no use.

Embarrassed, he glanced at his two sons.

Bringing the two sons wasn't just to apologize, but also to have them say something nice.

Mu Dazhong stood there like an idiot, not understanding Mr. Mu's intention.

Mu Danian was a bit cleverer, he understood what his father meant.

"Brother Fu Wu, you and my eldest brother have been childhood playmates, just later our paths differed, my brother became a Scholar while you took to trading and have done well."

"Our families are relatives, and used to be on such good terms, the mistake my mother made this time, my dad is taking responsibility for it. Can we make peace between our families?"

Mu Danian's words seemed reasonable enough.

Mr. Mu was very gratified, apart from the eldest, Mu Danian was his favorite.

He was clever and more reliable than the second son, even when slacking, he gave no reason for punishment.

Fu Wu sneered and then spoke up.

"Alright, let's just put this matter behind us."

"Our Xiao Nan was also at fault, she shouldn't have talked back to your Aunt Mu, I've told her not to speak out against the elderly in the future, even if she has a reason."

"Otherwise, she might get hit without knowing why!"

Fu Wu's words were full of insinuation, making Mr. Mu's face turn red.

He had come to apologize, and every word Fu Wu spoke was directed at him.

Fu Wu seemed to be criticizing his own daughter, but in reality, he was reproaching him, for failing to teach properly.

He couldn't even manage his own wife, causing an unfortunate incident with a reasonable girl.

Mr. Mu swallowed this bitter pill, with a smile on his face.

"Fu Wu, I'm here today because I want to sell the three mu of second-grade fertile land belonging to our family, it's the three plots in the north of the village, do you remember?"

The three mu of second-grade fertile land, at the current market price, would fetch six taels of silver per mu, totaling eighteen taels for the three mu. The extra two taels, Mr. Mu could cover himself.

Selling the three plots would be enough to gather travel expenses for the eldest.

How could Fu Wu not know about the three mu of land north of the village?

It wasn't far from the mu of fertile land initially given to the Third Branch of the Mu Family, considered the most fertile plots in that area.

Mr. Mu had always treasured it, yet he was actually willing to part with it.

"Uncle, you better not sell them now, the autumn harvest is approaching, sell them after the harvest!"

"Otherwise, half of your harvest on that land will go to someone else, quite a loss."

Chapter 432: Strong Alliance

How could Mr. Mu not understand what Fu Wu was saying?

The sale of paddy fields in the Da Ning Dynasty was generally time-restricted. If the land was sold before the harvest, half of the harvest would belong to the buyer, and the harvest would be reaped by the buyer.

So, anyone with sense would choose to sell their paddy fields after the autumn harvest.

That's the way to earn more.

But there are still a few months until the autumn harvest, and Mu Dade can't wait.

He's in a hurry for the Autumn Examination in August. If he doesn't prepare the silver now, it will be too late.

"Fu Wu, you know your Uncle Mu. Please ask around to see who might buy our land. Those three mu of land are priced at eighteen taels, not a bit more, nor a bit less."

Mr. Mu was confident that many in the village were eager to have his three mu of land.

At one time, someone even offered twenty-five taels, but he couldn't bring himself to sell it.

"Uncle Mu, I reckon your land won't sell for that much now!" Fu Wu shook his head, looking troubled as he spoke to Mr. Mu.

"What? Why won't my land sell for that much? It clearly used to sell for twenty-five." Mr. Mu was instantly stunned.

"Uncle Mu, you yourself mentioned the past; today is different from before, and the situation has changed."

"A few days ago, someone came from the town to assess the quality of the paddy fields. Your family's three mu of land have been rated as third-grade land, which now can sell for at most three taels per mu."

In the Da Ning Dynasty, land transactions were based on land grade, with first-grade fertile land priced the highest.

First-grade land costs eight taels of silver, usually belonging to the landlord's family. It has high yield and requires little fertilizer.

Second-grade land is the best for ordinary families, generally priced at five to six taels per mu.

Third-grade land is about the price of Mr. Mu's land, usually three to four taels.

Fourth-grade land sells for one tael of silver; this land is very barren but affordable, so most people often opt to buy this type of fourth-grade land.

Mr. Mu felt a rush of blood to his chest, his mind dizzy, and a breath stuck in his throat, almost choking him.

"Father, Father, don't scare me!" Mu Danian rushed to support Mr. Mu.

At this point, Mr. Mu's face was truly unwatchable.

Pale as a sheet, face ghastly and ashen.

Three mu of second-grade fertile land had turned into three mu of third-grade land, resulting in an inexplicable loss of nine taels of silver. Not to mention, a lifetime's effort was ruined here.

How could Mr. Mu not be heartbroken?

Mr. Mu's reaction fell into Fu Wu's heart, giving Fu Wu a sense of vengeful satisfaction.

Fu Wu had seen all sorts of people throughout the years, but never someone as domineering and unreasonable as the Old Mu Family.

They even dared to ask for his forgiveness after hitting his daughter.

They even dared to ask him to help without bearing a grudge. Bah!

"Uncle Mu, think this over carefully. Once you've made up your mind, come tell me. Once you decide, I'll list it for you, keep a record, and once there's a buyer, I'll introduce your land."

Fu Wu maintained a gentle demeanor throughout, so the Old Mu Family couldn't see it was him causing trouble behind the scenes.

Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian carried Mr. Mu back home.

The family then discussed the matter of selling land again.

As soon as Mr. Mu left, Fu Wu sent his daughter, Fu Xiaonan, to pass a message to Mu Shuangshuang, also to introduce his daughter to Mu Shuangshuang.

Initially, Fu Xiaonan was unwilling to go, thinking that Mu Shuangshuang is Old Mrs. Mu's granddaughter. In the end, only when Fu Wu got angry did she reluctantly go.

She thought Mu Shuangshuang would be difficult to get along with, but who knew she not only brought out delicious treats but also actively engaged her in conversation.

Fu Xiaonan, being straightforward, quickly warmed up to Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuangshuang, the lantern you made last time was so pretty. I went to town and couldn't find any as nice as yours."

On the evening of the Double Seventh Festival, Shuangshuang made some money with her lanterns. There were still dozens of them resting in Lu Yuanfeng's utility room, just waiting for a large village event so she could make a few more for sale.

"If you like it, I'll find time to make one for you and send it over."

Mu Shuangshuang had a good impression of Fu Xiaonan, a lively and adorable girl without any schemes.

"Really?" Fu Xiaonan's face lit up with excitement.

"Of course!" Shuangshuang nodded.

The two chatted for a long time before Fu Xiaonan relayed the message her father had sent her with.

"Shuangshuang, my father wants to know when you're going to make a move. If you don't have money, he can front you."

Fu Wu's idea was not to let the benefits go to outsiders.

The Old Mu Family's land becoming third-grade land meant selling to others would profit them for sure.

In that case, it would be better for Shuangshuang to buy it.

"No way, I just told my grandpa I was out of silver. If I immediately go buy it when hearing it's selling cheap, I'll definitely get talked about."

The gossip was not the biggest concern. The biggest worry was that the Old Mu Family would cause a fuss over this matter.

She didn't have the time to waste on their nonsense!

Three mu of land cost nine taels of silver. Mu Shuangshuang had it, even though spending it meant she had to come up with another way to make money, it wouldn't affect her family's current livelihood.

And if she bought three mu, even splitting half with Mr. Mu, she'd still have one and a half mu, enough grain combined with her own to get through winter.

So far, the third branch had two mu of paddy fields, and luckily, with the careful tending of her sixth uncle, the crops were growing well.

This year's harvest should be good too.

"Is that so!" Shen Xiaonan's face fell.

She rested her chubby cheek on her hand, looking disheartened.

After a while, she said, "Shuangshuang, why don't you have your friend buy it? After all, buying and selling is a mutual thing. As long as it's not you, your grandparents wouldn't have any complaints if others bought it, right?"

Fu Xiaonan's words indeed enlightened Mu Shuangshuang.

She indeed couldn't buy the land, but Fengzi could.

Even if in the future the Old Mu Family got into disputes, if they wanted the land back, they'd have to ask outsiders for it, at least they'd consider face.

Moreover, by then, who knows how chaotic the Old Mu Family would be, they wouldn't have the energy to care about Fengzi.

Having figured it out, the gloom on Mu Shuangshuang's face vanished completely.

Once she saw off Fu Xiaonan, she took ten taels of silver and headed to Lu Yuanfeng's house to discuss the matter and handed him the money.

Lu Yuanfeng didn't refuse this time. He took the ten taels of silver, and after a while, brought out a pottery jar.

"Shuangshuang, these are all my savings. From now on, all my silver is yours!"

"Fengzi, are you sure you want to give this to me? No regrets?"

The man managed external affairs while the woman managed internal matters, and Lu Yuanfeng felt Shuangshuang should handle his money.

"No regrets, absolutely no regrets, as long as Shuangshuang isn't thinking it's too little. But rest assured, I'll continue adding to it."

No reluctance could be seen in Lu Yuanfeng's eyes, his expression sincere and serious.

Warmth flooded up Mu Shuangshuang's chest.

She took the pottery jar of Lu Yuanfeng's money, whispering, "Whenever you need money, just let me know. It's your money; I'll help you save it, and you can take it anytime you want!"

Chapter 433: Green Leaves Complement Red Flowers

Two days later, it was the day for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to go out and sell cold noodles.

The weather was starting to cool down, and the heat had diminished considerably over the past few days.

The crowds on the street were gradually increasing again.

However, most were just like Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, out to buy Mid-Autumn Festival candles and golden ingots.

The difference was Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng also had to visit Jiu Si Xuan.

Arriving at the entrance of Jiu Si Xuan, Mu Shuangshuang was surprised to find the sign outside had changed from three days before.

The sign had been replaced, and the tables and chairs inside were all new, resembling more of a tea house for listening to storytelling or watching opera.

"Little girl, you seem to be a bit later than usual today."

The Fat Chef, still welcoming guests at the door, was in his usual good spirits.

"Yes, I often get up too early making cold noodles, today I just felt like sleeping a bit longer."

Mu Shuangshuang explained.

"Haha, it's tough for you and Fengzi, at such a young age, to run back and forth so many times."

"The past few days, the cold noodles at the tavern have been in high demand. I raised the prices a bit, yet they sold out quickly."

"Little girl, if you have time, make some more next time. Otherwise, I can send someone to fetch them."

Having someone come to pick them up would be great.

But doing so would violate the terms she originally set.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to damage her reputation.

"Uncle, I'll bring more with Fengzi next time, no need to send someone. I need to do business, and if my reputation is ruined, no one would want to deal with me. Besides, coming here with Fengzi means we can buy things from town too."

The Fat Chef didn't insist and sent someone with the cold noodles to the kitchen in the back.

He even instructed the staff there to store the cold noodles properly.

"Little girl, if you have no plans today, stay for lunch at Jiu Si Xuan. I'll cook personally; after collaborating for so long, I've yet to treat you two."

The Fat Chef, now with a hefty wallet, wanted Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to share the wealth.

"And you, you're quite an impressive lad, I've been watching you for a while. You're very kind to the little girl."

Suddenly complimented, Lu Yuanfeng was taken aback but he thanked the Fat Chef and chatted happily.

The Fat Chef was surprised that the things Lu Yuanfeng said resembled those spoken by his young owner.

Only then did he realize, this lad wasn't short on words; he was giving all the attention to the little girl.

Willing to be the green leaf beside the little girl, highlighting her.

Such a person is probably a rarity.

While Lu Yuanfeng went to help with moving things, the Fat Chef solemnly said, "Little girl, that boy is your perfect match. You must treasure him and not let him slip away!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't deny it; after all, anyone with eyes could see her relationship with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Thanks, Uncle! I'll do my best!"

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Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left Jiu Si Xuan and walked together towards the City God Temple in town.

The past few days have been busy at the City God Temple, with many buying golden ingot candles, as they are the cheapest here and offer a variety of choices.

Some buy ready-made golden ingots and folded clothes or other items, but more people buy paper and fold them themselves at home.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng also chose the second option, having seen Mid-Autumn Festival offerings several times. These things were not a hassle.

Once inside the City God Temple area, Mu Shuangshuang felt the space around her shrink.

Everyone was crowded together, making it hard to move.

"Fengzi, should we have saved money by buying paper money here?"

Mu Shuangshuang tugged at the corners of her mouth, looking helpless.

"No worries, I'll protect you later. We're not just buying yellow money; I've heard that the City God Temple is good for prayer too."

"Let's... we should go and pray, ask Grandpa City God for blessings."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't believe in ghosts or gods, even if she had mysteriously traveled through time.

Even if she was standing here now.

But since they were here, she might as well pray for peace of mind.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng each requested two fortunes, one for romance, which the fortune teller praised highly.

It was nothing more than destiny, predestined love, and such.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't find it new.

But Lu Yuanfeng was grinning ear to ear.

The other was financial prospects, Mu Shuangshuang's was quite good, but Lu Yuanfeng's was less optimistic.

"Little master, what do you mean by this, is it good or bad when you say water through a bamboo basket?"

The little master also looked troubled, unsure of how to explain.

"I don't know either, I've never seen anyone with financial prospects like this. He's the first..."

Looking at Lu Yuanfeng, sweat dripped from the little master's forehead.

Beside them, Mu Shuangshuang stared at him with a look akin to wanting to eat him alive, as she said tremblingly, "Should I redo it for you? Forget the previous one; you draw another!"

"Fengzi, forget the previous one, let's draw another!"

Lu Yuanfeng chuckled lightly and shook out another, even more cryptic than the first.

This time, the little master dared not speak.

"Hey, is this stall of yours fake? Cheating!"

Mu Shuangshuang grew increasingly displeased, staring straight at the little master with irritation written all over her face.

"Miss, don't talk like that, our fortune-telling is usually accurate here, rarely wrong!"

"Maybe this gentleman is just as it is."

The little master had never seen someone with such poor financial prospects; common sense said there should be some aspect—but none for him!

"You..." Mu Shuangshuang was angry, rolling up her sleeves, ready to fight.

But Lu Yuanfeng stopped her!

"Shuangshuang, hold my hand, let's try again!"

Knowing Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't let go easily, Lu Yuanfeng came up with an idea.

Mu Shuangshuang was lucky, whatever she touched was successful.

With her holding his hand, maybe it would change.

Her delicate, slender fingers covered Lu Yuanfeng's hand, fearing a repeat, Mu Shuangshuang warmed up by rubbing around his hand first.

"We're close, I'll share half my fortune with you!"

This time, the fortune drawn stunned the little master, as it turned out well.

What nonsense!

Was it messing with him?

Despite the surprise, the little master responsibly said, "You two are quite fated, maybe complementary, why not draw another for career building?"

Men should establish themselves, and if they have a home, they should learn to start a career.

Mu Shuangshuang's financial luck was good, also bringing fortune to her partner.

Lu Yuanfeng was fortunate too, obtaining a career fortune, the little master finally relaxed his brows.

"This lord will achieve great things and have considerable accomplishments, congratulations to you, sir!"

The little master imitated his mentor and spoke seriously to Mu Shuangshuang, which drew her mockery!

Chapter 434: Zheng Xiu Was Angered to Tears by Fengzi

"Little Master, these two fortunes clearly contradict each other."

First, it says Lu Yuanfeng has poor luck with money, and then it says he'll achieve great things in the future.

Isn't this just nonsense?

How can a big man be without money?

"Shuangshuang, I think the fortune is right, I gave you all my Silver, doesn't that align with it?"

Lu Yuanfeng didn't mind, instead, he tried to comfort Mu Shuangshuang.

This made Mu Shuangshuang both laugh and cry.

"Fengzi, you're just defending him, I'm done!"

"Shuangshuang, I'm just trying to keep you from getting upset. Actually, it's nothing serious; as long as the first fortune is good, we're fine! Besides, as long as I have a golden ingot, why worry about having no money?"

Lu Yuanfeng rarely joked around.

After listening, Mu Shuangshuang felt relieved.

After all, as long as they're together, they can overcome any difficulty.

Mu Shuangshuang felt better, her face showing a bright smile again.

"Little Master, do you know how to get those incense paper ingots without queuing?"

Mu Shuangshuang was implying she wanted a shortcut.

"I... I don't know!" the Little Master nervously waved his hand.

"Are you sure you don't know? I heard that everyone at the City God Temple stalls knows each other well, and you're the one interpreting fortunes, so you must know them."

"If you don't help me, I'll tell others your fortunes contradict each other and let everyone judge!"

The Little Master felt he was facing trouble.

He reluctantly took Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to buy Yellow Paper and paper for folding golden ingots. The Yellow Paper comes in two kinds, one is large Yellow Paper, the other is smaller, and the paper for folding golden ingots is even smaller.

Mu Shuangshuang bought two bundles of each type, carefully wrapping them up.

Just when they were about to leave, a girl in a red wide-sleeve dress suddenly approached.

She came straight over and stopped in front of Lu Yuanfeng.

"It's you, you're at the City God Temple too? Are you here for a romance blessing? Did you get it? Tell me!"

Zheng Xiu was all smiles, bombarding Lu Yuanfeng with questions, completely ignoring Mu Shuangshuang beside him.

"Miss Zheng, I have other matters, please step aside!"

Without any empathy, Lu Yuanfeng directly asked Zheng Xiu to leave.

Zheng Xiu was born into an upper-class family; everyone treated her with respect, and her family spoiled her.

So, Zheng Xiu's eyes turned red immediately.

She stubbornly stared at Lu Yuanfeng, questioning, "Why are you so rude to me? What did I do to you? Among all these people, I came to find you, but you won't even smile at me. Lu Yuanfeng, I hate you!"

"..."

Zheng Xiu's words left Lu Yuanfeng bewildered. He barely knew her, having exchanged only a couple of words.

But Zheng Xiu's reaction suggested she saw herself as entitled to him.

She wanted things her way.

Lu Yuanfeng was naturally unwilling to compromise.

"Miss Zheng, we've barely spoken, nor have I been rude to you. I hope you understand."

He remained cold and aloof.

Zheng Xiu fumed internally, especially when Mu Shuangshuang's lips curved into a light smile, which Zheng Xiu perceived as mockery.

"Is this woman making you keep your distance from me?"

"Is this woman telling you not to be friends with me?"

"Is this woman badmouthing me in front of you?"

Mu Shuangshuang thought she was an innocent bystander caught in the crossfire.

Ms. Zheng really thought highly of herself.

If she did say anything, Lu Yuanfeng probably wouldn't even stand before her.

Zheng Xiu flushed with anger and asked sharply, "Are you admitting it?"

"Miss Zheng, you're overthinking it; Shuangshuang has never said anything bad about you. The reason I'm not close to you is simply because men and women should keep their distance."

"Men and women should keep their distance? Lu Yuanfeng, don't try to fool me! Have you ever kept your distance from her? Just now, I saw her whisper in your ear, and you looked so happy."

Zheng Xiu expressed what she saw, her face full of resentment.

Lu Yuanfeng grew even more dissatisfied with Zheng Xiu, suddenly reaching out to pull Mu Shuangshuang into his arms.

"I don't know why you insist on questioning my relationship with Shuangshuang, but let me be clear: Shuangshuang is my future wife, and we are open and honest!"

With that, Lu Yuanfeng planted a kiss on Mu Shuangshuang's cheek, making her blush instantly.

"You two..." Zheng Xiu was so angry that tears fell, and she ran out covering her face.

Mu Shuangshuang was thoroughly charmed by Lu Yuanfeng today.

He defended her, kissed her right in front of Zheng Xiu.

Mu Shuangshuang felt the Lu Yuanfeng she knew before was fake; the real one was this decisive and clear-cut version.

He acted without hesitation, leaving no room for misunderstandings.

"Fengzi, you were amazing today!"

Lu Yuanfeng was surprised by Mu Shuangshuang's praise; he thought she'd be upset over the sneaky kiss.

"Haha, as long as Shuangshuang is happy!"

"You little rascal, you took advantage of me." Mu Shuangshuang shyly turned away, feeling entirely protected and cherished inside.

"Shuangshuang, I didn't mean to." Lu Yuanfeng panicked, thinking Mu Shuangshuang was angry.

"Alright, let's go somewhere else, we still need to buy some things!"

"Today we're inviting Uncle Fu, Xiao Nan, and Aunt Xiao Yun's family over for dinner; I need to whip up my specialties, make something delicious."

"Sure, but let's first stop by Uncle Da Niu's to get the mandarin duck pot, what do you think?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"Hmm, I almost forgot about that; since we have the mandarin duck pot, we might as well do hotpot. Looks like it might rain today."

Rain would lower the temperature, making hotpot perfect.

The two picked up two mandarin duck pots, declined Uncle Da Niu's dinner invitation, and continued shopping in the market for treasures.

"For hotpot, you need meatballs, hand-rolled meatballs, shrimp balls made from fresh shrimp, fish balls, and essential ingredients like kelp and bean sprouts."

"Then we'll make a pot of dumplings with various fillings, a mapo tofu dish, and miso soup. Fengzi, do you think that's enough for us to eat?"

Mu Shuangshuang listed a bunch of items before asking Lu Yuanfeng.

"That's plenty, let's go shop!"

Mu Shuangshuang weighed two pounds of meat, one pound pure lean meat, one pound of five-flavor pork, but no fresh shrimp, no tofu, and the strangest was bean sprouts.

Mu Shuangshuang only picked a small handful, and it cost three coins.

Too expensive!

The bean sprout vendor saw Mu Shuangshuang touching the bean sprouts without buying and looked unhappy.

"You little girl, if you're not buying, then move along; stop hindering my business here."

Lu Yuanfeng frowned, dissatisfied with the vendor's remarks about Shuangshuang.

"You're running a business here, and customers have the right to choose."

Chapter 435: Team Battle?

"Before anyone buys vegetables, they will look at the quality and condition. If it's good, naturally they'll buy it; if not, they won't pay."

"But with your attitude and the way you look down on people like a dog, even if your bean sprouts are top-notch, we definitely won't buy them. Even if you give them away for free, we don't want them!"

Today, Lu Yuanfeng was incredibly assertive, speaking with more confidence than usual. Mu Shuangshuang enjoyed the feeling of being protected and silently gave Lu Yuanfeng countless praises in her heart.

"You little punk, are you here to cause trouble? How dare you say you wouldn't even take my vegetables for free!"

The stall owner was infuriated. He came out from behind the stall, holding a kitchen knife, looking fierce and aggressive.

"I'm just stating a fact! Shuangshuang, let's go!"

Lu Yuanfeng said confidently, ignoring the stall owner's face darkened by anger, and pulled Shuangshuang away.

Although the stall owner was holding a knife, he dared not approach rashly because Lu Yuanfeng's sharp gaze and overwhelming presence made him unable to even raise his hand.

He was just bluffing to scare people, but Lu Yuanfeng was more imposing, leaving him unable to do anything against him.

Along the way, the smile on Mu Shuangshuang's lips revealed her good mood.

She had just witnessed the stall owner being so intimidated by Lu Yuanfeng that he didn't dare stop them.

It was indeed quite amusing and funny.

But what Mu Shuangshuang was most curious about was the exorbitantly priced bean sprouts.

"Fengzi, why are bean sprouts so expensive? Soybeans aren't that pricey, right?" Mu Shuangshuang asked curiously.

Moreover, in modern times, just a couple of dollars' worth of bean sprouts can make a big bowl, but the ones she just took weren't even enough for half a bowl.

"Rarity makes them valuable; bean sprouts are hard to cultivate, so naturally, they're expensive! People usually buy a bit of bean sprouts during festivals or when guests come, to put in hot pot."

"Generally, people don't buy bean sprouts to eat, as just a little costs three coins. I think even meat isn't priced like that."

After listening to Lu Yuanfeng's words, Mu Shuangshuang's eyes lit up.

"Fengzi, you said bean sprouts are very expensive?"

Perhaps for people of the Da Ning Dynasty, bean sprouts are difficult to cultivate, but for her, it wasn't a challenge at all?

"Yes!"

"Great, let's buy some soybeans, and I'll plant bean sprouts tomorrow, then sell them in town to earn a lot of silver!"

Mu Shuangshuang was in high spirits. She had been worrying that she spent ten taels of silver on buying Mr. Mu's three acres of land, leaving her purse empty.

This new opportunity turned into a source of income for her. She really did have good fortune; whatever she wished for, she got, whatever she thought of, appeared.

Lu Yuanfeng saw that Shuangshuang was serious about growing bean sprouts, and even though he was surprised how she knew this, he trusted her more.

If Shuangshuang said she could do it, she would!

In Lu Yuanfeng's heart, Mu Shuangshuang was almost like a deity; whatever others could do, she could!

What others couldn't do, she could as well.

Bold yet meticulous, rarely impulsive, she was thorough in everything.

This kind of Shuangshuang gave Lu Yuanfeng a sense of urgency, prompting him to work harder, or he wouldn't be able to stand before her and protect her.

"Let's check out other vegetables; if there's anything tasty, we'll buy some more."

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng took a few more rounds but didn't find anything special; it was mostly meat or fish.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng would catch fish in the river. Sometimes with good luck, they could catch quite a few.

As they were heading back, they took the wheelbarrow and pushed it out of the town.

Just as they left the town, they were surrounded by a group of people.

Seven people in total, wearing rough linen clothes, showing muscular arms.

"Hand over the money!"

Mu Shuangshuang was taken aback. She had walked this road countless times and never encountered a robbery.

Today, they suddenly encountered one, and seven people at that.

It was quite a coincidence that they blocked her and Lu Yuanfeng.

"Do you know who we are?" Mu Shuangshuang's face showed no fear.

There was nothing to be afraid of for her. She had encountered situations like this before.

Once, after work, she was blocked by some hoodlums demanding money. But after she flashed her credentials, they ran away without even daring to pick up their knives.

The seven men seemed strong and mighty, but their steps were somewhat unsteady; clearly, they were bluffing, just appearing muscular.

"I don't care who you are; I'm telling you, hand over the money, or I'll kill you!"

After speaking, the leading man drew a dagger and waved it in front of Mu Shuangshuang.

"Shuangshuang, step back a bit, I'll handle this."

Lu Yuanfeng, having spent five years in the military camp, knew that such hoodlums acted on impulse.

"Fengzi, let's not fight one-on-one today; let's battle together!"

Mu Shuangshuang's words made Lu Yuanfeng pause; he didn't quite understand what she meant.

"Shuangshuang, what do you mean by 'battle together'?"

"Battle together means the two of us charge together, beating them so hard they'll be rolling on the ground!"

The seven men on the opposite side were provoked by Mu Shuangshuang's arrogance, feeling agitated, gearing up for a fight.

Mu Shuangshuang was no pushover either; she rolled up her sleeves, and she and Lu Yuanfeng set the cart aside.

Mu Shuangshuang deliberately observed them; those seven men didn't blink at all, unlike what they claimed about seeking wealth.

The seven people charged towards Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng; the first one was kicked flying by Lu Yuanfeng, landing several meters away.

The remaining few swarmed, but before they could get close to Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng had dealt with them.

Mu Shuangshuang stood aside, dumbfounded.

They were supposed to rally together, and instead, he singlehandedly solved everyone.

The robbers lay on the ground, moaning in pain, looking utterly pitiful.

Mu Shuangshuang casually picked up a stick and, relying on the fear Lu Yuanfeng had instilled in them, boldly asked, "Tell me, who sent you. To fail so miserably at robbery, you've embarrassed all robbers."

"Who... who said we're not robbers? We are robbers. I'm telling you, do whatever you want; if I make a sound, I'm your son!"

The black lines on Mu Shuangshuang's forehead fell everywhere.

Wasn't he just howling here earlier?

Did he think she wouldn't dare to act?

Mu Shuangshuang smiled faintly, grabbed the man's hand, twisted it behind his back, and kicked him in the butt.

With a "crack," the man's arm dislocated.

"Ouch, ouch... Please spare me, ma'am, I've learned my lesson, it hurts... it hurts..."

The man screamed in pain, his followers trembling with fear, after they had assured them that Mu Shuangshuang was just a woman with no combat capability.

But she had effortlessly dislocated their leader's arm.

"This is your last chance. Who sent you? If you don't tell, I'll chop all your arms off, and you'll never show your face again!"

Chapter 436: Hopping Around the Town

"I'll talk, I'll talk... Auntie, please don't chop off my hand."

The young man close to Mu Shuangshuang was scared by her.

He knelt down.

"I have elders above me and children below. My brother is waiting for me to bring money, my sister-in-law..."

"Cut the crap, just tell me the person!" Mu Shuangshuang interrupted the little gangster who was improvising and said fiercely.

"It was a girl in a red dress; she said if we taught you all a lesson, she'd give us one tael of silver. We... we didn't want to come!"

"But you came, so I have to think carefully about how to punish you today!"

Upon hearing Mu Shuangshuang planned to punish them, several people were terrified and covered their heads, crying for mercy.

Mu Shuangshuang originally only intended to scare the few people, not really kill or set fire.

Moreover, she knew how ruthless Lu Yuanfeng was earlier.

"Auntie, we beg you, please let us go, we really made a mistake!"

"Yes, indeed, terribly wrong!"

For a grown man to cry with tears and snots is no easy task, and the one whose hand was broken by Mu Shuangshuang looked pale.

"I can let you go!" Mu Shuangshuang agreed.

The gangsters' eyes lit up, and they immediately begged Mu Shuangshuang again.

"Enough, enough, grown men crying like this, isn't it embarrassing!"

"From here, you all frog jump around the town; when you're done, that's when you can rest!"

Speaking of frog jumping, the few looked at each other, none knowing what it was.

"How can you be so dumb? You don't even know frog jumping!"

Though she spoke harshly, Mu Shuangshuang demonstrated, and the few were delighted, thinking frog jumping wasn't hard, just squatting... and jumping?

After jumping fifteen times, the leader was already on the ground, half dead from exhaustion.

Mu Shuangshuang rushed up and kicked him.

"Get up, or I'll chop off your hands and feet!"

Mu Shuangshuang looked fierce, hitting hard, and a few small gangsters jumped desperately after being kicked by her; as for the leader, he was directly on the ground, and no one paid him any mind.

"Oh my, you... ooh... you wait for me..."

He wanted to move but couldn't.

Could only watch Mu Shuangshuang as she walked towards him.

"Don't come... don't come..."

Mu Shuangshuang went up and tugged at the man's hand again, with a "crack," the man passed out in fright, unconscious.

Only then did Lu Yuanfeng come forward, check the man's whole body, and finally speak.

"Shuangshuang, did you fix his arm?"

"Yes, this person isn't utterly evil; no need to eradicate them. However, after my lesson today, they should be more restrained. Next time, I'll bring them something fun, and perhaps they'll stay honest."

"Mmm!" Lu Yuanfeng fully agreed with Mu Shuangshuang's words.

Earlier, his heavy hand didn't seem much now, but once those folks took a break, they wouldn't be able to stand for ten to fifteen days.

"Fengzi, let's hurry back!" Mu Shuangshuang suggested.

The two packed up their things and quickened their pace, heading back to Er Gui Village.

They delayed a lot of time after punishing the people, came back late, and completely missed lunchtime.

Fortunately, Yu Si Niang had left food in the pot earlier for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

After a few days of recovery, Xing Beichen's injuries at Lu Yuanfeng's house had improved greatly; he could get out of bed, and his lunch was prepared by Yu Si Niang and delivered by Yuanbao.

Regarding Mu Shuangshuang picking someone up, Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan haven't said anything; rather, they feel Mu Shuangshuang did a good deed that would surely be favored by the heavens with no illness or disaster.

Eating lunch very late in the hour, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng glanced at each other and then burst into laughter.

"Fengzi, did Uncle Fu say when he'd sell Grandpa's few pieces of land to you?"

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly remembered this and asked.

"Didn't say; he just took the ten taels of silver you gave me and said he'd inform once negotiations were done."

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't worried about Uncle Fu taking the silver and running away; his family business was all in Er Gui Village; he wouldn't do such a thing.

What Mu Shuangshuang worried about was those in the Old Mu Family stirring up trouble again, inevitably causing a round of cries and affecting the third branch's life, not to mention becoming a laughing stock.

"Is Shuangshuang worried?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"Yes, indeed quite worried! But my grandpa and grandma should be more worried than me!"

Mu Shuangshuang guessed right; the Old Mu Family had been arguing about this for several days.

Three mu of second-class fertile land instantly became third-class land, not to mention the selling price halved.

Mr. Mu gritted his teeth and decided to sacrifice once for Mu Dade.

If Mu Dade succeeds, the land and other things won't matter.

But Old Mrs. Mu stubbornly refused.

This old lady had no other hobbies, only liking money and land.

Previously, she kept many money jars in her room, putting some money in each jar, and every night before bed, she'd take them out to count.

If more, Old Mrs. Mu would laugh heartily.

If less, she'd scold for half an hour.

Now asking Old Mrs. Mu to sell land equates to digging out her heart, draining her blood; how could Old Mrs. Mu agree?

"Old man, we can think of other ways. Anyway, I don't agree to sell land!"

Old Mrs. Mu stood fiercely in a corner of the main room, hands on hips, full of momentum.

Previously, it was Mu Dazhong who suggested selling land, and he'd already been scratched on the face by her; the others who wanted to speak dared not say anything.

"You old hag, it's you who doesn't want to live the life of mud-legs, and you want the eldest to achieve scholarly fame."

"Now wanting you to sell three mu of land, and you're unwilling. Do you want the eldest to die out there?"

Mr. Mu yelled angrily.

The entire family knew that currently, the Old Mu Family was driven up the mountain, if they didn't prepare money for the eldest, all benefits would be gone.

If Mu Dade didn't succeed, everyone would continue farming.

Rather than that, they should bet once.

"Damn old man, you dare curse my son to die. You're heartless, you're not worth anything..."

Old Mrs. Mu cursed, unchecked and reckless.

Recently several times, she completely stopped putting Mr. Mu in her eyes.

Mr. Mu previously endured, but today he couldn't anymore, and slapped Old Mrs. Mu across the face.

The slap left Old Mrs. Mu seeing stars.

"Dad..."

The members of the Old Mu Family were stunned.

Since they understood things, Mr. Mu had never hit Old Mrs. Mu; he said harsh words aplenty but knew to be careful.

Old Mrs. Mu was even more shocked, glaring with dim eyes, looking at Mr. Mu as if he were an enemy.

"You dare hit me, you old bastard, on what grounds you hit me..."

Mr. Mu originally felt regret, but hearing Old Mrs. Mu's unreformed words, he didn't regret one bit.

Chapter 437: Kitchen Anecdotes

"You old hag, this is just a warning. If you dare speak out of turn again, or stop me from doing anything, then get out and go back to your own family, don't stay here at our Old Mu Family."

"Our Old Mu Family doesn't need disobedient people!"

After saying this, Mr. Mu turned his back and walked out the door.

Leaving Old Mrs. Mu behind, both rolling on the ground and swearing.

For a while, the main room was completely uninhabitable.

Mr. Mu took the land deeds and left, heading straight to Fu Wu's home.

Fu Wu received Mr. Mu politely and casually mentioned a few people interested in buying his land.

"Uncle Mu, speaking frankly, it's hard to sell land at this time. First, it's not the post-harvest season."

"Secondly, for three acres of land, it's hard to find a buyer of that magnitude."

Most families only purchase one acre of land, and even then it's funded by scrimping and saving, squeezed out from generations of hard-earned money.

"What should we do?" Mr. Mu was anxious.

After painstakingly finding the land deeds at home.

Usually, such things are held by Old Mrs. Mu. Today, to resolve this issue quickly, Mr. Mu rummaged through the house thoroughly until he found three land deeds.

The land of the Old Mu Family was all written under Mr. Mu's name, so there wouldn't be any disputes.

"Uncle Mu, let me tell you, the potential buyer is the Zhang Family from the west side of the village. They're offering one silver coin, regardless of the type of land, as long as it's paddy field!"

"That's not acceptable, our land has lost enough already, we can't afford to lose more." Mr. Mu firmly refused.

The others either had no cash or were lowering the price.

Fu Wu appeared to be in a very difficult position.

"There's no solution, the current buyers are all lined up here, the rest are waiting to buy after the autumn harvest."

"Who?" Mr. Mu was excited, realizing his lack of composure, he continued. "I mean, who is planning to buy land after the autumn harvest?"

"Who else, it's none other than the boy from the Old Lu Family, he's earned some money, and previously had no land, so he asked me to select a few acres for him."

Mentioning Lu Yuanfeng made Mr. Mu frown.

Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang have a good relationship. Who knows whose land it will be in the future?

"Alright, Uncle Mu, don't rush, I'll inquire in other villages. Fengzi's money is for buying top-grade fertile land, your land doesn't meet his criteria."

"What? Top-grade land?" Mr. Mu was taken aback.

Which farmer buys top-grade land, that's insane!

"Yes, but Fengzi says he can't cultivate land, if it's not fertile, the land won't hold up, and then it'll end up being sold to someone else."

Hearing this, Mr. Mu's eyes lit up.

Indeed, he had forgotten, that boy is a hunter, he has no experience in farming, he's not cut out for it.

If his land was bought by that boy, he'd eventually sell it.

Right now, what Mr. Mu needs is silver to circulate.

"Fu Wu, help Uncle Mu out, talk with Fengzi, let him buy my land, I'll add one acre of dry land, have him gather eleven silver coins for me. Then, combined with Old Mrs. Mu's coffin savings, the twenty silver coins will be complete."

"It's no use, Fengzi isn't interested in such land, he wouldn't cultivate it well." Fu Wu shook his head.

Fu Wu clearly understood Mr. Mu's intentions.

Simply believing that his earlier words gave him hope of reclaiming those acres of land.

It's sheer wishful thinking.

"Fu Wu, just consider it Uncle Mu pleading with you. When our eldest makes it to the top, there'll be benefits for you!"

Mr. Mu brought up Mu Dade, making Fu Wu barely agree.

"Alright, let's leave it at that, as for the result, I have to first discuss it with Fengzi."

"Then make it quick!"

Mr. Mu returned home worried, and Fu Wu wasn't in a rush to find Lu Yuanfeng. Tonight, when he goes to invite Shuangshuang for dinner, Lu Yuanfeng will be there too, he can discuss it with him then.

...

...

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng had lunch, then Lu Yuanfeng went home to make a cool mat and check on Xing Beichen.

Mu Shuangshuang stayed in the house preparing things for the evening.

Meatballs needed to be shaped in advance, and the beef bones bought last time could be used today, since the meat was cleaned off and the bones dried by Mu Shuangshuang.

After washing the beef bones, Mu Shuangshuang lit a fire, initially intending to keep the beef's original flavor, she prepared to add nothing, letting it simmer directly for two hours, until the beef bone broth gushed into the soup, then adding some spices, etc.

Shaping meatballs is also a meticulous task, requiring mixing various ingredients, fortunately, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't busy with anything else and could enjoy being engrossed in work alone.

In the evening, Yu Si Niang returned from the fields, having inspected the few acres of dry land in Tie Dao Village, planning to finish them within the next few days.

Discussing with Mu Shuangshuang, they decided to do it after the Mid-Autumn Festival burn, Yu Si Niang would rent an ox from the Wang Family, letting Lu Yuanfeng plow the fields.

But now that Lu Yuanfeng's status has changed, Yu Si Niang no longer hides her concern for Lu Yuanfeng.

"Shuangshuang, Fengzi has done so much for our family, remember to thank him properly. He's an honest kid, don't bully him!"

"Mother, you're hurting Shuangshuang now, Shuangshuang is your daughter, yet you're helping Fengzi bully me. I'm hurt, I'm sad!"

Mu Shuangshuang said so deliberately, to see Yu Si Niang's reaction.

Unexpectedly, Yu Si Niang admonished, "You naughty child, speaking nonsense again, Fengzi isn't as clever as you, you're a little sprite who knows how to take care of herself."

Yu Si Niang loved Mu Shuangshuang, and occasionally did say playful things.

Like the word "little sprite," actually meaning someone smart and astute.

"Alright, alright, anyway, you only care for Fengzi, I won't say anymore." Mu Shuangshuang pouted, quickening her pace with her hands.

By now, the beef bone broth was ready, filling the kitchen with a fresh beef aroma.

All the ingredients were prepared meticulously by Mu Shuangshuang.

Clean vegetable leaves, and the veggies for the hotpot, were all placed in a large basket.

In rural households, the baskets are large, one could hold several big sea bowls.

Yu Si Niang, smelling the fragrance of the food, and watching her tirelessly busy daughter, felt warmth surging in her heart.

Tired after a day of work, being able to see a bustling figure for her in the kitchen was an extraordinarily happy sight.

It could erase all fatigue.

Having a few words with someone she cared for, no matter how tiresome, felt truly blessed.

"Shuangshuang, do you need mother's help?" Yu Si Niang went up and asked.

"No need, I've almost finished. After I fry a few dishes and cook a pot of rice, once everyone arrives, I'll start the hotpot."

Eating hotpot, it's best eaten freshly prepared.

Yu Si Niang nodded.

"Then I'll check on your father, and pour him a glass of water!"

Chapter 438: Feeling Proud

In the kitchen, the aroma fills the air.

Outside the kitchen, the weather is getting colder.

Dark clouds are pressing over from the distant horizon, ominous and somewhat terrifying.

A gust of chilly wind blew from head to leg.

Everyone started preparing to collect clothes and occasionally check the doors and windows at home to prevent sudden rain.

When Uncle Fu went out, everything was fine, with the sunset overhead and the evening glow reflecting on people, but now, the dark clouds covered everything.

He felt somewhat lucky to have instructed his wife and daughter before leaving.

Fu Xiaonan didn't come, saying there were too many people and she didn't want to be crowded, but she asked Uncle Fu to sometimes invite Mu Shuangshuang over for meals.

Regarding his daughter's kind gesture and initiative to befriend Mu Shuangshuang, Uncle Fu was quite pleased.

When they arrived at the Mu Family's Third Branch, Zhao Yun's family and Dogzi were already there.

In the kitchen, which wasn't small, the sudden arrival of so many people made it crowded.

"Everyone's family here, no need for formalities. Eat well, drink well!"

Mu Dashan said to the newly arrived Uncle Fu and the recently entered Zhao Yun.

"Dashan, rest assured, we're not the type to hold back!"

Mu Shuangshuang set dinner on the table, with two stoves placed on the floor, each supporting a divided pot.

The broth in the pot is separated into clear and spicy parts.

Upon taking seats, everyone looked curiously at the divided pot.

"Shuangshuang, this is really something. A pot with two colored soups."

Uncle Fu was the most experienced among them, but even he was secretly amazed at the divided pot.

"Yes, Shuang, is this your latest creation?" Zhao Yun teased from the side.

She often visited the Mu Family's Third Branch, and each time she did, there was something new, sometimes food, sometimes snacks.

"Yes, Uncle Fu, Aunt Xiao Yun, today, let's first taste Shuangshuang's cooking. After tasting, if you have any questions, Shuangshuang will certainly answer."

With Mu Shuangshuang's words, everyone began to sit down.

The broth, stewed from beef bones, was perfect for hot pots, and with Mu Shuangshuang's personally crafted spicy broth, everyone enjoyed it immensely.

The children mainly chose the clear broth, which wasn't spicy and was especially delicious.

"Sister Shuangshuang, why do I feel today's dishes have a special flavor?"

Yuanbao held his large bowl curiously.

"A special flavor? Really, let me taste."

Mu Shuangshuang picked a piece of cabbage and ate it.

Indeed, there was a hint of savoriness in the aroma, but why?

The Da Ning Dynasty didn't have MSG, and Mu Shuangshuang's cooking didn't have that savory taste.

She carefully recalled if she had bought any seasoning.

She thought over and over but reached no conclusion.

Until Lu Yuanfeng put a piece of seaweed in her bowl.

"Shuangshuang, seaweed is good for you, eat more."

Listening, Mu Shuangshuang ate a bite of seaweed, and all questions were answered.

The savoriness came naturally from the seaweed, as did many seafood products, with seaweed being particularly potent.

Mu Shuangshuang even considered adding a couple of seaweed pieces to large dishes or chopping it up, drying it, for seasoning in the future.

"Dashan, your daughter is impressive, works hard, earns money, and now your Third Branch even bought land!"

"And then there's Fengzi, capable and young. You two are the only ones in Er Gui Village young enough to buy land independently."

"Honestly, Dashan, I truly envy you. You have such a good daughter and a capable son-in-law."

Uncle Fu had a few drinks, his face flushed, speaking energetically.

Everyone familiar with Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng knew about their relationship, and that Lu Yuanfeng planned to marry Mu Shuangshuang when she turned fifteen and came of age.

Honest folks don't tend to complicate things, so this agreement practically equated to being engaged.

When the time comes, a matchmaker would just formalize it, and only selecting the wedding date would be left!

Thus, Lu Yuanfeng, in the hearts of these few people, was considered Mu Dashan's son-in-law.

Mu Dashan was already in a good mood today, and with such compliments, his spirits lifted even more.

His lips slightly curled upward, laughing occasionally.

"Indeed, Fengzi and Shuangshuang are good kids. I'm just a simple man, not expecting any great achievements, as long as the kids are well."

Today, Mu Dashan felt most proud. In the past, he could only stand in the background; now, he could stand in the spotlight, basking in everyone's admiration.

"Dad, as long as you're happy, nothing else matters," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"Yes, Uncle Dashan, I'll take good care of Shuangshuang, and treat you and Aunt Four as my own parents!" Lu Yuanfeng nodded, firmly echoing Mu Shuangshuang's sentiments.

"Good, good, with your words, there's nothing for me and Shuangshuang's mother to worry about!"

Here, the Third Branch of the Mu Family drank joyously, enjoying good food and drink.

Over at the main household of the Old Mu Family, there wasn't even anything tasty, just a bowl of watery porridge and some wild vegetables as dinner for handling these people.

Mrs. Lin looked at the ochre sweet potato and white rice porridge on the table, losing her appetite instantly.

"Mom, this watery stuff is like crap. How am I supposed to swallow it? Even the baby in my belly doesn't want it!"

Mrs. Lin sneered at Old Mrs. Mu.

Old Mrs. Mu snorted twice, asking Mrs. Lin, "Are you sure you won't eat?"

"It's not that I won't eat; it's just that this stuff isn't nutritious for the baby in my belly." Mrs. Lin foolishly replied.

"Need nutrition? Should I kill a chicken for you, so my grandchild eats better?"

Old Mrs. Mu's eyes were full of gloom.

Unfortunately, Mrs. Lin's foolishness made her lose all sense of reason upon hearing the word chicken.

She nodded foolishly, "Oh wow, oh wow, mom, you're really good to your grandson; I promise to tell him every night that his grandma is the best person in the world."

Mrs. Lin's fawning expression was highly displeasing.

Old Mrs. Mu snorted coldly, taking Mrs. Lin's porridge bowl.

"You lazy woman, do little work but have plenty of ideas. If you don't eat, there are people who will!"

Finished speaking, she poured the porridge from the bowl into the bowl of the fourth daughter-in-law, Mrs. Liu.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, finish the porridge, don't waste it."

"Don't learn from that foolish second daughter-in-law, only eating and not working!"

Old Mrs. Mu vented all her dissatisfaction on Mrs. Lin, and her scolding was vicious.

Mrs. Lin's face changed from being scolded, but it wasn't just the scolding; even her bowl of porridge was gone. She was merely talking; she hadn't meant to skip eating.

"Mom, I was wrong, I won't complain anymore. I'll just drink the porridge, okay?" Mrs. Lin admitted her mistakes meekly.

"Too late. Today I asked the fourth daughter-in-law to cook less porridge, and that was the last bowl. If you want to eat, go make your own tomorrow morning!"

Chapter 439: The Man's Hardship

"Mom, I can go without eating, but your grandson is still little, he can't handle not eating..." Mrs. Lin used her trump card, glancing at Mu Dazhong for help.

Mu Dazhong quickly joined in to plead.

"Mom, you know this woman, Mrs. Lin, she's always been a bit slow, not good with words, but she's got a good heart, she really respects you deep down.

Besides, isn't the child in her belly your eldest grandson? She's just afraid the kid will go hungry."

"Enough, don't use the child as an excuse. Who hasn't been pregnant? I've had seven kids, none of which were as delicate as yours!

If you don't have the life of a lady, don't give me the attitude, or you'll end up like a dead rat."

Old Mrs. Mu wasn't buying any of it. Once she made up her mind, no one could change it or gain the upper hand.

Mrs. Lin and Mu Dazhong suffered a big loss, opened their mouths but ended up saying nothing.

Mrs. Liu finished the porridge belonging to Mrs. Lin, trembling, and finally filled her belly.

But with her belly full of water, she felt worse than being hungry.

Just then, Mu Danian finished eating and left.

At the table, as soon as someone leaves, Mrs. Liu could get up, or else Old Mrs. Mu would surely scold her. But before she could seize the opportunity to get up, Mu Danian came back.

"Dad, Mom, I saw my third brother hosting a feast, Fu Wu, Zhao Gouzi, and the Zhang family are all there."

"It seems they've made a big table of dishes, my third brother's already drunk."

As soon as Mu Danian finished speaking, Mrs. Lin and Mu Dazhong, who were deflated earlier, seemed reinvigorated.

"What, the third branch is hosting a feast? Doesn't that mean lots of food?" Mu Dazhong exclaimed.

"Dad, Mom, let's go to third brother's place to eat. Today's porridge doesn't taste good anyway. With the feast at third brother's place, there must be lots of dishes, maybe even some meat!"

Speaking of meat, everyone's eyes in the room lit up.

Gou Dan licked his lips, his face covered with saliva and snot.

The two kids from the fourth branch lowered their heads, they wanted to eat but wouldn't show it like the others.

Fortunately, Mu Xiangxiang was eating in her room, or she would have caused a scene too.

"Look at you, wagging your tails over a bit of food, losing even the basic dignity of being human."

No matter how fine the dishes or exotic meats at their house, it's theirs, not yours.

If he really meant it, he would have invited us long ago, why humiliate yourselves by going and inviting insults?"

Old Mrs. Mu regarded her sons with contempt, her words full of sarcasm.

The Old Mu Family members blushed red with embarrassment, looking extremely uncomfortable.

Mrs. Lin thought: isn't it just because you, old hag, are usually so stingy, giving all the little good stuff to the eldest brother and that little beast of a daughter.

Luckily, Second Aunt left, or I'd not even have a bowl of sweet potato porridge.

"Mom is right, my third brother is so wrong, he'd rather invite outsiders than call us family, Mom really wasted her concern on him!"

Mu Danian flattered Old Mrs. Mu, calming her down and massaging her legs.

Everyone was puzzled by Mu Danian's actions.

Old Mrs. Mu usually isn't good to the third branch, why is he saying she cared for them?

But what Mu Danian said, Old Mrs. Mu liked hearing.

In her heart, the third branch had wronged her and were considered ungrateful.

"Enough, enough, when your elder brother has enough money, we'll have a good meal, in a few days it'll be the Mid-Autumn Festival, let's prepare adequately so as not to lose face then."

"That ungrateful thing will get their comeuppance, just wait and see!"

Quietly cursing, the Old Mu Family drama finally settled down.

The feast at the third branch was nearing the end.

Yu Si Niang helped send Fu Wu, Zhang Yutou's family, and Zhao Gouzi home.

Luckily, even though it was dark for a while, it hadn't rained, or they'd have been drenched.

Mu Dashan was sitting in the kitchen, his face unnaturally flushed, he laughed freely, seeming drunk but not really, just a bit dizzy and weak.

"Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi did great!"

"Dad's pleased, people finally look up to us!"

The man laughed genuinely, showing how happy he was at that moment.

"Dad, you're drunk, let Fengzi and I take you home." Mu Shuangshuang signaled to Lu Yuanfeng, who stepped forward.

However, he didn't let Shuangshuang support Mu Dashan, instead he carried him alone and led him inside.

On Lu Yuanfeng's back, Mu Dashan began to lose awareness, muttering aloud.

"Shuangshuang, why don't your grandparents think well of me? All these years I've done so much for the Old Mu Family, but in the end, I'm the villain, everything I say is wrong, everything I do is incorrect."

"Your grandma never liked me since I was young, and later despised the scar on my face, said I was ugly, wouldn't let me greet guests."

"Shuangshuang, am I really useless? Disliked by your grandma, ignored by your grandpa, must one really study to be successful?"

These were the most daring words the man had said in his life.

When sober, he feared everything, dared not speak; only when drunk could he speak his mind.

Mu Shuangshuang felt anguished listening.

Yet she found it understandable.

It's not that she's cold-hearted, but often, the more you bear the pain, the more others think you're easy to bully.

All fist strikes land on you.

The weak are always targeted! The ancients did not deceive us!

Setting Mu Dashan on the bed, Lu Yuanfeng helped remove his shoes, just as Yu Si Niang entered the room, taking over to care for Mu Dashan.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng left Mu Dashan's room, heading towards the kitchen.

The sky was pitch black, but with someone behind her, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't the least bit scared.

The kitchen was in a mess, Mu Shuangshuang had to clean it up before resting.

Lu Yuanfeng entered and started cleaning the dishes on the table.

This meal, Mu Shuangshuang really showed her skill, everyone was full of praise.

"Hey, where's Yuanbao?" Mu Shuangshuang looked around but didn't see Yuanbao, asked curiously.

"I sent him off to bring food to Xing Beichen."

At night Mu Shuangshuang had asked Xing Beichen to come for dinner, but he didn't want to cause trouble for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, insisted on Lu Yuanfeng bringing him some later.

Lu Yuanfeng certainly wasn't in a hurry to go back after eating, so he sent Yuanbao with the food.

"That's good, I need to grow bean sprouts later, you can watch, maybe learn a useful skill."

Mu Shuangshuang laughed, the two began cleaning the kitchen.

Yu Si Niang came in once to fetch water, probably to wash Mu Dashan, and when she returned again, her face showed some embarrassment and shame.

"Mom, is there something you need?"

Chapter 440: Growing Bean Sprouts

Yu Si Niang stood hesitantly at the doorway for a long time.

She didn't know how to start the conversation.

Today was the big day for the third branch to buy land, and by rights, her in-laws should be invited, but since Fu Wu held grudges against her in-laws and considering it was supposed to be a celebratory day with guests, Yu Si Niang couldn't help but harbor selfish thoughts, not wanting anyone to ruin it.

In front of others, she didn't act on it, and that made Yu Si Niang feel uneasy deep down.

Privately, she thought she ought to make some gesture.

After all, those two were her husband's biological parents, and her daughter's paternal grandparents.

"Shuangshuang, I noticed we still have two bowls of the meatballs you made earlier, might it be okay if I take a bowl to your grandparents? They're busy preparing your uncle's silver and surely won't make anything nice to eat."

Knowing that Mu Shuangshuang never let herself get the short end of the stick, Yu Si Niang spoke in a tone full of negotiation.

In her heart, she envied that her daughter had that kind of character that never suffered losses.

Sometimes, Yu Si Niang even felt that her own handling of things was not as smooth as Shuangshuang's.

Yet, as the years went by, she just couldn't learn how.

Mu Shuangshuang said nothing. In her heart, she was reluctant to let her belongings feed those ungrateful wolves who, once satisfied, not only wouldn't be grateful but would also try to devour your flesh.

But she didn't want Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan to be caught in a tough spot either.

Today, Mu Dashan's words seemed to express all the dissatisfaction he felt towards Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu, but in truth, Mu Shuangshuang knew he still had some reluctance.

Or rather, he was unwilling to accept it, just like a child who never receives a mother's affection, first looking for reasons within themselves, thinking it must have been something they did wrong.

Mu Dashan might be thinking the same in his heart, that something he did wasn't good enough, hence why Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu didn't like him.

He probably still hoped for Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu to acknowledge him genuinely and sincerely.

Although, in Mu Shuangshuang's view, this was almost impossible.

But since this request came from her mother, Yu Si Niang, Mu Shuangshuang thought, it's just a bit of food after all. If it's given, so be it.

"Sure, mom, you go ahead. Try to give it to Auntie Si, and avoid running into grandma. If you see her, try to dodge."

"Okay, then I'll go!"

Yu Si Niang slipped over to the cabinet, opened its door, and taking a bowl of meatballs, she slipped off to the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng tidied up the kitchen, and after cleaning it, Mu Shuang took a half basin of soybeans and asked Lu Yuanfeng to help boil some water.

Before making bean sprouts, there's a soaking process for the beans. Once the boiled water cools enough to handle, it can be used to soak the soybeans.

Lu Yuanfeng took the fire striker from beside the stove, lit the fire, and soon enough, the hearth was ablaze.

With the warmth of the fire, the kitchen noticeably brightened up a bit, and Mu Shuangshuang moved the oil lamp to the dining table.

Eventually, the water was boiled.

Luckily, since it was cold weather, it didn't take long for the water to cool to the temperature that Mu Shuangshuang needed.

Pouring the hot water into a wooden basin, Mu Shuangshuang said, "Fengzi, these soybeans need to soak for three hours. Why don't you head back first and come back tomorrow to check on the bean sprouts?"

In modern timekeeping, it was already past eight, and Mu Shuangshuang would have to wake up in the middle of the night to check on the soybeans and rinse them with cold water.

But Lu Yuanfeng couldn't stay until then.

"Alright, Shuangshuang, don't see me off tonight, it's cold outside. You rest early and make sure to bundle up at night. Don't worry about breakfast tomorrow, I'll cook corn porridge myself."

Lu Yuanfeng tirelessly gave Mu Shuangshuang a bunch of instructions.

Mu Shuangshuang listened attentively, nodding from time to time.

After she saw Lu Yuanfeng out of the courtyard and returned to the kitchen, she found Yu Si Niang sitting alone, shedding silent tears.

She rushed over in concern.

"Mom, did you run into grandma? Did she say something to you?"

Realizing Shuangshuang had come in, Yu Si Niang quickly wiped her tears, pretending to be strong, "No, your grandma didn't say anything. I just got some sand in my eyes."

"Mom, why can't you learn? Last time you gave grandma something, she wouldn't even give you the bowl back.

This time, you meant it as filial piety, but she thinks you're guilty, trying to atone for your mistakes.

This only makes her see you as easy to bully. You know why Aunt Si is always the pitiful one? Because she doesn't know how to resist; grandma tells her to go east, she doesn't dare to go west.

In this situation, don't you think grandma always picks on Aunt Si whenever something arises? She just vents her anger, not caring who is enduring it."

Yu Si Niang nodded, wiped her tears dry, and then said to Mu Shuangshuang, "I understand, I won't give anything anymore."

"That's more like it, Mom, we're barely making it ourselves, so don't worry about others. Besides, when grandpa came to borrow money and we didn't lend it, grandma wasn't happy."

"From now on, if you can't refuse someone, just avoid them. Don't stay silent, or they think you're agreeing. If you nod, they think you're easy to bully."

Yu Si Niang kept nodding, "Shuangshuang, luckily I have you. Without you, who knows what chaos our home would be in. In front of your grandma, I'm like a mouse meeting a cat, filled with fear."

This metaphor made Mu Shuangshuang both laugh and cry.

Besides comforting Yu Si Niang, there wasn't much else she could do.

People have to overcome their barriers themselves.

"Mom, grandma is nothing to fear; she's not a cat, and you're not a mouse. Let's be bold when we see her. I'm here, and if you can't handle it, just run. Shuangshuang has your back."

"Haha, you little rascal, daring to say anything. If I run, won't grandma take it out on me even more? Don't worry. I'll try resisting grandma. Once I get used to it, she won't be able to boss me around anymore!"

After opening up with Mu Shuangshuang, Yu Si Niang felt enlightened, the previous gloom swept away.

"Oh, earlier I saw you soaking soybeans. Are you making soy milk or something?"

Mu Shuangshuang had made soy milk once before, and it tasted great. Though she didn't make it often because it took a lot of effort to grind once.

"No, Mom, Shuangshuang is making bean sprouts, so our family will have an extra dish on the table."

"You can even make bean sprouts?" Yu Si Niang was astonished.

Back when she did odd jobs in town, Yu Si Niang remembered an old lady particularly wanting bean sprouts in the dead of winter, but none were available. No matter how many people she asked, everyone said the temperatures were too low for soybeans to sprout.

"I saw some being sold at the market today, and Shuangshuang thought, bean sprouts are quite expensive. If they turn out well, they should sell at a good price. Even if they don't, we'd only lose a few soybeans."

"True, every endeavor requires trying. If you don't try, you'll stay in the same place!"

Shuangshuang, I've been wanting to tell you, I think you're working too hard. Actually, I could join you in town for business, so you can rest more.

You're still a child, and staying up late isn't good for you. In the future, I want to shoulder more of the family's burdens, and you deserve to be protected by your mom."