

Folly 441

Chapter 441: Mid-Autumn Festival

In the blink of an eye, two days passed and the Mid-Autumn Festival arrived.

The village began to stir with excitement, as each family prepared for the festival and the burning of paper offerings.

The Wang family went all out by inviting a drama troupe over for entertainment; by the morning, the stage was already set up in Old Wang's courtyard.

Performers donned in colorful costumes and painted faces appeared at the Wang family's place, drawing the village folks over to watch the spectacle.

The paper burning was different from the Qingming Festival; the living didn't need to go to the graveyard, they only needed to prepare incense, paper, and candles at home. Being able to invite a drama troupe like the Wang family was a matter of great prestige.

Unfortunately, there were few wealthy families in the village but many poor ones.

Thankfully, the Wang family's stage was free for everyone to watch, but everyone understood that the performance was for the dead, and if they watched, they could only steal a glance before noon.

Once night fell and the gate to the spirits opened, they were bound to be scared witless.

The alarm for the Mu family was lifted; yesterday Lu Yuanfeng bought Mr. Mu's land, and combined with Old Mrs. Mu's coffin savings, they came up with the twenty taels of silver for Mu Dade.

They already had it sent over, and that scholar should have already set off for Qianzhou.

The Mu family was revived, and their anticipation for Mu Dade's success only grew stronger.

Therefore, the ancestral rites couldn't be taken lightly by Mr. Mu.

Early in the morning, the Mu family set off firecrackers, the loud crackling was deafening.

Those who didn't know might have thought there was some joyous occasion at the Mu family.

But those who knew the customs, still caught the Mu family's joke, since everyone set off firecrackers in the afternoon, who would set them off early morning, unless they were crazy.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, speed up your folding of the ingots!"

"Second daughter-in-law, don't think you can slack off just because Da Lang is back, I'm telling you, that won't happen, so hurry up and clean the pigsty."

When it came to pigs, the Mu family really struck luck.

Back then, they caught pigs from Wang Erma's house, one died, and they ignored the remaining one completely, didn't even feed it. Who knew after two days it would perk up again.

As they raised it, time went by.

Though the pig hadn't put on weight, it had survived in the Mu family.

Today was the day her son Mu Dalang was coming home, but Mrs. Lin's excitement hadn't ended before Old Mrs. Mu shouted at her, ruining her mood.

Mu Dalang was sent to the town as an apprentice, usually learning how to raise sheep, shear wool, and milk them with his master.

Now, he returned having learned many skills, even earning two taels of silver from his master, and bought loads of stuff for Mid-Autumn Festival.

He bought big fish and big meat, among other things.

Mrs. Lin saw her son as a hero, letting her show off in front of the Mu family for once, so she walked with a spring in her step.

But even so, she still resigned herself to cleaning the pigsty.

As soon as she entered the pigsty, Mrs. Lin covered her nose and cursed, "Little beast, so young but already making trouble, pig feces everywhere, doesn't even act like a proper pig."

Mrs. Lin cursed and cleaned at the same time, the little piglet was previously in the center of the sty and was swept into the corner by her broom, but that spot had feces, and the piglet rolled and was covered in filth, dirty all over.

"You little beast, dare to act up now you dog thing."

Mrs. Lin swung her broom and chased after the piglet, beating it randomly as it ran around.

Even though it was raised for some time, even if skinny, it had some strength, and while Mrs. Lin was focusing on disciplining it, she was uncaredful, got hit in the leg by the piglet, and fell forward, landing in the pile of pig feces.

Suddenly, a stinky smell overwhelmed her.

"Ah ah ah ah, I'm going to kill you..." Mrs. Lin screamed non-stop, alerting Old Mrs. Mu inside.

Old Mrs. Mu came out and cursed Mrs. Lin thoroughly; she wasn't satisfied and even kicked her a few times, avoiding Mrs. Lin's belly.

Mu Dalang heard the commotion and came out of the house, upon seeing Mrs. Lin in such a mess, he felt a bit troubled.

"Grandma, my mother didn't mean it, just forgive her!"

Mu Dalang, being the eldest grandson, Mr. Mu's first grandson, Old Mrs. Mu relented after hearing his words.

Unexpectedly, Mu Dalang asked about the third branch.

"Grandma, is my third uncle's family coming today? I brought over some goat milk, maybe I can give them some, Shuangshuang has a weak constitution, it might help her get better."

As soon as he finished speaking, both Old Mrs. Mu and Mrs. Lin blew up.

"Are you nuts, giving that stinky girl such good stuff, she's no good." Mrs. Lin cursed angrily.

"Dalang, your third uncle has grown wings, not part of our Mu family anymore, don't be foolish and let them take advantage of us."

Old Mrs. Mu kept saying they weren't part of the Mu family, yet early in the morning she went to call Yu Si Niang over to make Mid-Autumn dishes.

Yu Si Niang declined saying her family had to prepare food, had lots of tasks, the first time she refused Old Mrs. Mu.

As a result, she was cursed harshly, it was Mr. Mu who sent Mu Danian over, asking Old Mrs. Mu not to scare the ancestors, that's when she begrudgingly left.

Mu Dalang wasn't aware of the intricacies, but he trusted Mu Dashan's character.

Back then, when he went to be an apprentice, his family didn't give him any money, it was his third aunt who gave the money, yet that winter, she was chased out by his grandma to face the cold wind.

"Grandma, mom, I have things to do, I'm going to my room first!"

Mu Dalang, being the eldest grandson, had his own separate room.

The stuff he brought for the Mu family, he placed in the kitchen: three pounds of meat, a fish, along with a pound of ribs.

The goat milk was brought back from his master's house, there was over half a bucket, originally planned for a cup each person, but his grandma scooped half away, saying it was for a bath to make his little aunt's skin white.

Mu Dalang thought it ridiculous, but managed to keep some of the goat milk.

He found a bowl and still took a bowl of goat milk over to the Third Branch of the Mu Family.

...

...

Mu Shuangshuang moved two bamboo baskets, filled with yellow paper money and golden ingot paper, early morning she sat at the doorstep folding golden ingots and yellow paper money, and once folded, placed them at the corners of her doorway.

The shiny yellow paper was quite eye-catching.

All day's meals were arranged by Yu Si Niang, Mu Shuangshuang simply needed to take care of the yellow paper, everyone divided their tasks and worked accordingly.

Lu Yuanfeng, early in the morning, took Little Black and Lai Mi to the hills to hunt, claiming they'd have a good meal today, so the third branch was quieter than usual.

Except for the little black pig that Mu Shuangshuang let out for some air again.

The tree in front of the yard had a large hole dug by the black pig, the pit grew deeper, waiting to see who would accidentally fall in.

Without Mu Shuangshuang taking more glances at that pesky little black pig, a shadow suddenly appeared, blocking her view!

Chapter 442: Mu Dalang

"Are you Shuangshuang?"

The visitor hesitantly addressed Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang looked up and saw the person fully, wearing a gray cotton shirt, appearing to be around sixteen or seventeen years old, with slightly youthful features.

His eyebrows were like distant mountains, almond-shaped eyes, looking a lot like Mu Dazhong from the second branch, with a facial shape similar to Mrs. Lin, but much more attractive than Mrs. Lin.

A thin face, with no extra flesh, and a pointed chin.

While Mu Shuangshuang stared at Mu Dalang, Mu Dalang was also staring at Mu Shuangshuang.

In his memory, the dirty girl who would only tremble in the corner now looked much prettier, her complexion fair with a touch of rosiness, and her clothes clean.

She carried a refreshing fragrance of gold and silver flower.

Her body remained thin, but compared to before, she seemed well-nourished; at least, now she didn't look like a dried-up twig.

Mu Dalang gave a bright smile, quite like a big brother from next door.

"Are you the older cousin?" Mu Shuangshuang was also hesitant, although she was certain in her heart, she dared not make too quick judgments.

Mu Dalang was probably the only one among the children who had a good relationship with Mu Shuangshuang's family.

The two from the main branch, Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying, never treated the third branch as human, thinking they could trample over them at will.

Gou Dan and Mu Qingqing from the second branch enjoyed bullying the children from the third branch since childhood.

The fourth branch, Mu Xiaxia, although she didn't actively bully the third branch, had stood with Mu Qingqing and Mu Dandan before.

Even now, Mu Xiaxia wasn't particularly close to Mu Shuangshuang, unlike Yuanbao and herself, who sincerely felt that Yuanbao treated her as a real elder sister, no different from Lu Yuanfeng.

"Shuangshuang, you've changed so much, I hardly recognize you."

Mu Dalang spoke somewhat shyly, but he seemed more like an honest child.

Mu Shuangshuang saw him holding an earthenware bowl with something white inside, looking like milk. As the youth approached, she smelled the scent of sheep, confirming that it was goat milk.

"Older cousin, wait for me a moment, I'll get you some tea."

Mu Shuangshuang set down the golden ingot in her hand and got up to make tea.

Mu Dalang declined, but Mu Shuangshuang was quick, bringing a chair and tea over in no time.

"Thank you, Shuangshuang, this is goat milk. The taste is a bit strong, but it's very nutritious. You should take it to the kitchen and give it to the family later."

In her past life, Mu Shuangshuang had a glass of milk every day. Now suddenly seeing goat milk made her feel incredibly familiar.

She placed the goat milk in the kitchen, and Mu Dalang drank a bowl of tea.

"Are you going to the town this time, older cousin?" Mu Shuangshuang asked curiously.

She knew what Mu Dalang did in town, and before, she hadn't thought about having a glass of milk or goat milk in this ancient era. Now that Mu Dalang returned, it sparked hope in her.

Goat milk should be beneficial for physical recovery. If they had a glass of goat milk every day along with an egg, her family and she should become sturdier in just a few months.

But finding milk sheep wasn't easy.

"No, I'm planning to come back, settle the marriage, and then raise sheep in the village, sell wool, and produce goat milk."

Most men in the Da Ning Dynasty believed in establishing a family before a career.

It was actually because men were young, understood things late, and thus marriages led the way.

Once the marriage was settled and children were born, as they got older, they began to think about more things.

"That sounds good, but I heard a sheep costs quite a bit."

Whether Mu Dalang had money, Mu Shuangshuang didn't know, but Mu Dazhong certainly had none; otherwise, he wouldn't live such a pitiful life.

"Yes, I plan to start small and slowly accumulate. Shuangshuang, if you can't find work, you can come and help me manage the sheep pen in the future. I'll pay you, so you don't have to endure others' pettiness!"

Mu Dalang's words made Mu Shuangshuang completely embrace this older cousin.

"Older cousin, thank you. If you really want to buy sheep, you must let Shuangshuang know."

Mu Dalang had just returned and was unaware of Old Mu Family's affairs, so he didn't know Mu Shuangshuang had earned money.

Mu Shuangshuang planned to see how prepared Mu Dalang was when the time came. If there was money to be made, she would invest and become a shareholder; after all, money in hand wouldn't grow itself.

"Okay, older cousin remembers. You should rest well."

As soon as Mu Dalang left, Mu Shuangshuang returned to her work.

Near noon, Lu Yuanfeng came back from the mountain covered in sweat.

His harvest today seemed pretty good; he carried a large prey on his back, which Mu Shuangshuang couldn't make out. When he got closer, she noticed he was carrying a wild boar.

It should be said, it was a half-grown wild boar, much more tender than an adult one.

The wild boar snorted and growled, but with Lu Yuanfeng there, it couldn't move.

In the kitchen, hearing the commotion, Yu Si Niang came out and was stunned seeing the wild boar on Lu Yuanfeng.

But she quickly reacted and drove the little black pig into the pigsty.

"Shuangshuang, bring a knife, basin, and rope over, I need to bleed the pig."

The wild boar had fallen into the trap, and at this point, even if not killed, it wouldn't recover.

Lu Yuanfeng decisively resolved it, planning to sell it in the village; today was Mid-Autumn Festival, and if there was cheap meat, they would buy it.

"Okay!"

Mu Shuangshuang obediently prepared these things.

Holding the kitchen knife, Lu Yuanfeng ground it on the whetstone for a long time.

In reality, the rural family's knives were made of iron and very sharp; even without the whetstone, killing a pig was no problem.

Grasping the knife, Lu Yuanfeng first tied the wild boar to the big tree in Shuangshuang Courtyard with hemp rope, before bleeding it.

With a single cut, the wild boar began to struggle; if not for Lu Yuanfeng firmly holding it down, the blood would have splattered long ago.

The sound of slaughtering a pig is actually very loud, and everyone busy at home was curious, wondering whose family was killing a pig to honor ancestors and relatives.

That's not something ordinary people could do.

As people investigated, hearing it was Lu Yuanfeng slaughtering a wild boar, everyone felt relieved.

That boy lived close to the forest and fed himself off it, so slaughtering a pig wasn't necessarily to worship ancestors.

Old Mu Family also heard the sound of pig slaughtering, and Mu Xiangxiang hid under the table, refusing to come out despite Old Mrs. Mu's coaxing.

"Mom, the sound is terrifying, I'm scared..." Mu Xiangxiang cried.

"Don't cry, my dear, mom will go reason with them. Killing a pig all morning, aren't they afraid of being hated."

Others in Old Mu Family didn't mind at all.

At this moment, they wished they were in the courtyard themselves; whether getting some pig blood or fatty meat, they would profit.

"What are you worrying about, that's the third branch's business, let it be!"

Mr. Mu puffed his dry tobacco a few times, preventing Old Mrs. Mu from causing trouble.

Chapter 443: Relying on Yourself

"You old fart, always siding with the third branch, didn't you see how they scared our Xiangxiang? That brat did it on purpose, scared me last time, and now wants to scare others."

Old Mrs. Mu looked like she wouldn't rest until she caused trouble.

The people nearby were all waiting to see a good show.

Mu Dalang was stunned, realizing that his grandma seemed even more unreasonable than when he left, downright unreasonable, one might say.

"Grandma, my third uncle's family probably slaughtered the pig to worship the ancestors of the Old Mu Family, not to scare us."

"Da Lang..." Mrs. Lin stomped her foot in displeasure nearby.

"Oh, you've just returned and already turning against your own. If you like the third branch so much, why don't you go live with them? Why are you sponging off us?"

When it comes to Mu Xiangxiang, Old Mrs. Mu's mind never seems to think straight, always finding someone to scold.

"You old hag, shut up for me! Da Lang just came back, say less!" Mr. Mu felt it was inappropriate and rebuked.

Just then, the sound of pigs squealing from the third branch's courtyard stopped.

Old Mrs. Mu was silenced but still looked fiercely towards the third branch.

...

...

Lu Yuanfeng collected half a basin of pig blood, handed it to Mu Shuangshuang, and then placed the wild pig on a door panel.

This door panel was something Mu Shuangshuang had removed from the kitchen halfway through to make it easier for Lu Yuanfeng to place the pork. It turned out to be quite useful now.

At this moment, Lu Yuanfeng was relying on a kitchen knife to skin the pig and then cut the meat.

His knife skills were excellent; with a few strokes, the pork was disassembled into pieces, just like a craftsman dissecting an ox, all along the joints, without using any brute force.

Mu Shuangshuang saw how hot he was and handed a cup of cold tea, along with a towel, over to him.

"Fengzi, have a sip of tea first."

Lu Yuanfeng cooperatively bowed his head, drained the cup of gold and silver flower tea in one gulp.

Lu Yuanfeng felt instantly quenched, and just as he was about to raise his head, the girl's hand extended out, presenting a plain cotton towel, wrung dry in front of him.

The towel glided over his forehead, bringing a cooling sensation.

Starting with the forehead, then moving to the cheeks, Lu Yuanfeng stood stiffly, experiencing the girl wiping his sweat for the first time.

The soft touch from her hand waved in front of him, so much so that Lu Yuanfeng felt like his soul had vanished.

He dumbly watched Mu Shuangshuang smile, eyes filled with happiness.

"Alright!" Mu Shuangshuang quietly reminded, yet Lu Yuanfeng maintained his posture, motionless, taking quite a while to snap back to reality.

Once Shuangshuang walked away to continue folding the golden ingots and spirit money, Lu Yuanfeng realized he'd entirely lost his composure.

But this loss of composure was something he was willing to accept.

Lu Yuanfeng sliced off two pounds of meat and a pig knuckle, handed them to Mu Shuangshuang, and was just hesitating about what to do with the pig head when Mu Shuangshuang spoke up.

"Fengzi, I'll use the pig head to make roast pig head, later take it to your home for offering. We can make a few more dishes, these few nights the temperature isn't high, it will be alright until tomorrow morning!"

"I've folded quite a few golden ingots for your mom, this afternoon we'll go burn them outside your courtyard."

"You can take the rest of the pork to the village to sell it, I reckon the folks here would want it."

Lu Yuanfeng nodded in agreement, and the two started dividing the tasks.

...

...

In the afternoon, once everything was ready, Mu Shuangshuang burned golden ingots and spirit money in her own home, then went over to Lu Yuanfeng's place.

A large table of dishes, all prepared at the third branch's place and then brought over.

Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan didn't come over, it was just Mu Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng, Xing Beichen, and three little kids there.

Lu Yuanfeng knelt in the courtyard, feeling a bit down.

All those spirit money and golden ingots were burnt by him alone.

He wouldn't even let Yuanbao get close.

Mu Shuangshuang knew, he was reminiscing about his past life.

In the army for five years, he managed to support himself, but forever lost the mother who loved him.

Mu Shuangshuang thought, if given another chance, Lu Yuanfeng certainly wouldn't choose to go to the army.

At least not when his mother was not secure.

"Brother Fengzi is indeed a loyal and righteous person, trustworthy friend, it's a win-win to know him,"

suddenly said Xing Beichen who stood beside him.

With this period of time, Xing Beichen had almost recovered, and considering leaving, though he was unsure why he was still staying to heal.

But since Lu Yuanfeng didn't mention it, Mu Shuangshuang didn't either.

"Indeed, Fengzi is a very good person!" Mu Shuangshuang replied softly, not engaging in more talk with Xing Beichen.

"Miss Shuangshuang, you and Brother Fengzi are both good people! Last night I chatted away half the night with Brother Fengzi and learned of your future business plans. Do you need my help?"

Mu Shuangshuang quickly shook her head. "No need, I have hands and feet, I can handle my own affairs. Fengzi and I didn't save you hoping for any repayment or climbing up to higher branches. We're just living ordinary lives."

Xing Beichen thought Mu Shuangshuang misunderstood him and quickly waved his hand.

"Miss Shuangshuang, you've misunderstood me, my offer to help comes from treating you as a friend. I know that achieving something on your own relies on more than just one's fists; the strength is ultimately limited."

"The path Miss Shuangshuang wishes to tread should be even higher and further, and if one starts from the bottom to climb towards the top, it surely takes a lot of time."

Xing Beichen had been in the Capital long enough, and although his father Xing Ningtian died early, he saw clearly the world of officialdom.

"Young Master Xing, you must have heard the saying, 'The process is more important than the outcome.' If during this process there's someone you care about accompanying you, even the suffering would feel like happiness."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't shy away from hardship.

She wanted results and the process as well!

Moreover, starting from the bottom and working up, the foundation will be more stable than starting from a higher point, with stronger resilience.

After listening to Mu Shuangshuang, Xing Beichen had more admiration in his eyes for her.

"Miss Shuangshuang indeed is extraordinary! I am impressed!"

"Actually, it's nothing, people just have different choices. I say this now because I feel I have the ability to climb up. If I didn't, I'd also bow down for five bushels of grain," Mu Shuangshuang said, appearing natural.

Xing Beichen felt helpless, if it were not for the Mid-Autumn Festival, he would surely have laughed out loud.

After burning the last piece of spirit money, Lu Yuanfeng called over Yuanbao and Mu Shuangshuang.

Yuanbao was his brother, and Shuangshuang was his soon-to-be wife.

Therefore, they should all say a few words to his mother.

Yuanbao had never met his mother, but he knew his mother loved him, so he looked serious.

After burning the offerings, everyone returned to eat.

The large table of dishes, with flavors lingering on their tongues.

"Fengzi, Miss Shuangshuang, I plan to leave the village and go to the county in the next days,"

Xing Beichen originally came with a mission, and now that he had healed, it was time to leave.

Chapter 444: A Major Embarrassment

"Brother Beichen, when do you plan to leave? Let Shuangshuang and me know, and we'll see you off to the town."

Lu Yuanfeng knew that Xing Beichen likely didn't have a single coin on him. When they examined his body back then, they had him stripped down and only found that strange mark—nothing else.

Xing Beichen was taken aback but understood Lu Yuanfeng's intentions, and he felt a deep sense of gratitude.

This brother of his was a worthy friend.

"Fengzi, thank you!" Xing Beichen sincerely expressed his gratitude.

"Fengzi, aren't you going to join me again in the military to achieve greatness?"

Last night, Xing Beichen and Lu Yuanfeng had a heartfelt conversation where Lu Yuanfeng learned the purpose of Xing Beichen's visit.

And Xing Beichen also knew that Lu Yuanfeng had spent five years in the military.

Being the son of the War God, Xing Beichen had a particular fondness for men like Lu Yuanfeng, who were courageous and valorous.

Unfortunately, starting with his generation, the military power in his family had fallen entirely into outsiders' hands. Apart from him, the Xing Family had no one else capable of leading troops into battle, and he was the only heir of the Xing Family.

Even the higher-ups did not permit him to lead troops into battle.

Therefore, Xing Beichen came over to build dikes to fend off the annual floods.

"No, Brother Beichen, when I left, I had already made up my mind not to return."

What Shuangshuang wanted, Lu Yuanfeng intended to obtain through another means.

"Alright then, Fengzi, whenever you decide to go, just have someone write me a letter, and I'll make sure to handle everything for you."

After discussing matters, they finally sat down to have a meal. The table was covered with a variety of dishes, including fish and meat; it was the most lavish meal Xing Beichen had since his arrival.

Each dish was exceptionally unique, so tasty that it was hard to stop eating.

"Miss Shuangshuang is beautiful and a great cook. You're such a perfect couple, you and Feng Zizheng. I hope you have a wonderful future together, and if you get married, I'll definitely be there!"

Xing Beichen's words made Lu Yuanfeng a bit embarrassed.

The two men raised their cups and took a few casual sips.

Xing Beichen was injured and couldn't drink much.

Lu Yuanfeng was indifferent to alcohol, and since Mu Shuangshuang mostly abstained from drinking, he followed her lead even more.

Just as everyone was enjoying the meal, the kitchen door suddenly burst open, and Fu Xiaonan rushed in.

"Hahaha, got you!"

Fu Xiaonan, unaware of the situation, thought that only Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were in the kitchen. But now seeing so many people there, all looking at her like she was a fool, her face instantly turned crimson.

"You guys... why are you all here?"

She quickly covered her face, looking as if she could die from embarrassment.

Fu Xiaonan had an energetic personality and got along well with Mu Shuangshuang. She usually liked visiting Shuangshuang's house to ask about various recipes since she couldn't cook; she'd memorize them and have her mother make them.

She tended to be unruly at times; otherwise, she wouldn't have fought with Old Mrs. Mu back then. But Fu Xiaonan was well protected by Fu Wu, all bark and no bite; when it came to real confrontations, she'd end up getting torn apart.

Mu Shuangshuang stood up and went to greet Fu Xiaonan.

"Xiao Nan, now that you're here, don't worry about being shy. Come, let me introduce you. This is Big Brother Beichen; he's a distant relative of Fengzi."

Even with Fu Xiaonan, Mu Shuangshuang didn't reveal Xing Beichen's identity.

The fewer people who knew about his affairs, the better.

Fu Xiaonan blushed even more at having made such a fool of herself in front of strangers.

Xing Beichen didn't mind. Having already met the uniquely different Mu Shuangshuang, he wasn't too surprised by the lively Fu Xiaonan.

"Hello, Miss Fu!" Xing Beichen greeted softly.

Receiving a greeting, Fu Xiaonan's cheeks reddened further.

She had to reassure herself countless times before regaining her composure.

"Shuangshuang, I want to invite you to the Wang Family for a play tonight. I'm scared since that scoundrel Wang Fugui is home!"

"Sure, but we can't stay out too late; you know, after midnight, there's that..."

Mu Shuangshuang raised an eyebrow, originally trying to scare Fu Xiaonan, but unexpectedly, she clenched her fists.

"I'm not afraid! My dad asked for an Amulet from the City God Temple, and Brother Qingshan also got me one from the county!"

With that, Fu Xiaonan took out two amulets from her pockets.

One in each hand, and the one in her right hand was clearly close to her chest.

Fu Xiaonan had a childhood sweetheart in the county who was waiting to propose once she turned fifteen.

The young girl smiled radiantly, her fair face brimming with happiness.

Her gaze was as pure as water, and her actions when holding the amulet were a bit silly yet genuine and unpretentious.

Watching the heartfelt Fu Xiaonan, Xing Beichen found himself momentarily dazed.

His heart skipped irregularly.

The soft call of Brother Qingshan made him feel like he had lost something.

What if it wasn't Brother Qingshan being called?

Realizing he was thinking too far ahead, Xing Beichen took a deep breath and told himself to stay calm.

But once the waters of the heart ripple, how can they settle?

Under Mu Shuangshuang's strong insistence, Fu Xiaonan swallowed down another half bowl of rice and two pieces of pork knuckle.

She had intended to eat her fill, but was too full since she had already had dinner before coming.

After the meal

the group swaggered off towards the Wang Family.

Xing Beichen walked in the center. Because he was unfamiliar, many villagers had already asked who he was, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng consistently said he was a distant relative.

Distant relatives were always intriguing since ancient times were full of collateral and branch families, making half the county practically related in some way.

Back then, distant relatives could marry, which is why nobody probed too deep.

Xing Beichen felt this place had an honest folk culture, truly a suitable place for recuperation and life.

"If I get old and am unable to move, I'll definitely settle here and enjoy my final years!"

Xing Beichen expressed with a look of longing.

"What's so good about this place? No chicken lays eggs, no birds poop, the fields aren't fertile, and the land isn't productive," Fu Xiaonan quickly replied.

Xing Beichen laughed. "Then, Miss Xiao Nan, where do you think is a good place to retire?"

"Of course, it's the county! Leave the house with a carriage, enter with servants attending, everything to eat, use, or wear can be bought just a few steps away!"

Fu Xiaonan spoke while laughing.

"You like that kind of high-society life?" Xing Beichen's eyes suddenly twinkled as if expecting something, yet also not.

"No, I only like a simple life. But since Brother Qingshan is in the county, I'm his future wife, so I'll eventually have to move to the county.

Besides, as long as I'm with the person I love, it doesn't matter where we are. If you don't believe me, ask Shuangshuang and Fengzi!"

Passing the topic to Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang, Fu Xiaonan quickened her pace to join the fun.

Xing Beichen focused his gaze on Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, with a perplexed look in his eyes!

Chapter 445: Theater Disturbance

After all, they're people who have never truly loved, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng exchanged a glance and spoke simultaneously.

"Xiao Nan is right! Being with someone you love, the place isn't the key, and the kind of life you live doesn't matter."

Xing Beichen seemed to understand, but he still had a question.

"If it's poverty, would you still be willing? Isn't there an old saying that poverty dims every aspect of a married couple's life?"

This question needed Mu Shuangshuang to answer.

"Logically, it shouldn't matter! But between Fengzi and me, there's no such pressure! We won't let ourselves live in poverty, and we certainly won't let ourselves starve."

"That's right, with me here, I won't let Shuangshuang go hungry! Although we're not wealthy, if we have kids in the future, we can send them to school, and there's no issue with having enough to eat and wear."

Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang shared similar values; neither had considered being together just to suffer.

Life is short, be able to work and also learn to enjoy.

At this point, Xing Beichen finally understood.

He grinned widely, genuinely admiring Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng from deep inside.

At this moment, the Wang Family's theater stage had already started, having prepared all day, everyone was heading to watch the play.

The Wang Family was the wealthiest in Er Gui Village, and the quality of the troupe they hired was respectable.

Approaching, you could hear the operatic singing from the stage.

Because it was the Mid-Autumn Festival, the villagers quietly listened to the opera, none of them moved close to sit on the chairs under the stage.

Those were prepared for the ghosts.

By now, presumably, the whole village had arrived. The Old Wang Family's courtyard walls had been torn down three days ago, just to avoid crowding the villagers.

Mu Shuangshuang was not familiar with opera and hadn't been influenced by it; she wouldn't have come if Fu Xiaonan hadn't asked her directly today.

Fortunately, in the afternoon, she baked a batch of cookies, listening to the opera now, munching on cookies to pass the time.

The Wang Family provided water and sunflower seeds, and the villagers were cracking, cracking sunflower seeds.

Mu Shuangshuang and her group mingled among them, eating cookies and listening to the opera.

"Mom, hurry up, if we miss the front row, I won't be able to see."

The loud noise came from behind.

Mu Xiangxiang had changed into a peach-colored dress, making herself up like a peach blossom, the makeup on her face extremely thick, bright red rouge visible from far away.

"Xiangxiang, wait for Mom, Mom will take you with her!"

Old Mrs. Mu was chasing after Mu Xiangxiang from behind, but after all, she was elderly, soon panting heavily.

Finally reaching the Wang Family's courtyard, seeing everyone gathered together, Mu Xiangxiang squeezed forward. She stepped on others' feet several times without a word of apology and continued pushing ahead.

Mu Xiaohan saw Mu Xiangxiang's figure and tugged at Mu Shuangshuang's sleeve. "Sis, that's our little aunt!"

"Shh, Xiao Han, listen to the opera, don't talk!"

At times like these, Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to acknowledge knowing Mu Xiangxiang.

"Oh!" Mu Xiaohan lowered his head, and then Lu Yuanfeng reached out his hand, picked up Mu Xiaohan, and lifted him onto his shoulders.

In this way, he could clearly see the stage.

Lu Yuanfeng was originally standing in a corner spot, with no one behind him, so this move did not obstruct others from watching opera.

The sensation of being lifted made Mu Xiaohan a bit nervous, but being able to see the stage made it not as important.

Mu Xiaohan was not tall, when standing among the crowd, he was completely submerged.

But he was quite well-behaved, even if he couldn't see, he didn't make a sound, while Yuanbao and Little Zhi couldn't see, so they moved to the front.

The two picturesque young children spoke politely, so even when cutting in line, the villagers generously forgave Yuanbao and Little Zhi.

Mu Xiangxiang didn't have this favor; she rarely appeared in the village, and usually didn't engage with these villagers, so naturally, she wasn't liked.

Mu Xiangxiang stood at the front for a while, felt bored, saw the empty rows of chairs ahead, no one sitting, with a sneer inside:

These poor wretches, even with chairs to sit in, don't know to sit, insisting on standing—what servility!

Thus, Mu Xiangxiang walked up front, chose the most comfortable spot, and sat openly, unashamedly eating from the snacks on the table.

Witnessing this, the villagers were nearly fuming.

On stage, the actor singing momentarily forgot their lines.

With a face full of terror, they stared at Mu Xiangxiang.

"Get off!" the performer mouthed silently to Mu Xiangxiang.

Mu Xiangxiang rolled her eyes, pretending not to see.

The villagers began to gossip.

"Old Mu Family's youngest daughter is way too much, obviously meant for ghosts to sit, what's she doing joining in?"

"That's right, such an important day, everyone doesn't dare laugh aloud, and here she comes, dressed gaudy, like a temptress."

"After all, isn't it because the Old Mu Family's upbringing is poor, treating a young daughter like treasure? The other day, I even saw Old Mrs. Mu bullying the daughter of the third branch for that youngest daughter."

"Ay, what a sin, quickly get her down!"

Old Mrs. Mu was on the outskirts, unable to move inside, asking the villagers to make way, yet they were unwilling, stubbornly holding their place, not giving Old Mrs. Mu any leeway.

After a while, you could hear Mu Xiangxiang wailing from beyond the crowd.

"Mom, save me, murder! They're committing murder..."

Mu Xiangxiang was held up by two strong men from the village, like a fat pig, one holding her head and the other grabbing her feet, the scene was quite humiliating.

The crowd spontaneously opened a path, allowing the strong men to throw Mu Xiangxiang out.

Just then, Old Mrs. Mu stood at the end, seeing her daughter being carried like livestock, she instantly fumed with anger!

"You, you, what are you doing? Let go of my daughter!"

Old Mrs. Mu charged forward like a mad mother dog, wildly scratching at the two strong men.

The strong men winced in pain, losing their grip, releasing their hold, letting Mu Xiangxiang fall to the ground.

Her rear felt shattered.

Mu Xiangxiang clutched her backside, wailing loudly.

"Wuuu... it hurts... Mom, they're bullying me!"

By 'they,' Mu Xiangxiang meant all villagers, whereas Old Mrs. Mu assumed it was just the two strong men in front of her.

"Cao Dafu, Zhang Dahai! How dare you bully the daughter of the Old Mu Family, I, this old lady, will fight you!"

Without asking why, Old Mrs. Mu charged at the two strong men, scratching furiously.

Both men were honest folk, not daring to retaliate, enduring Old Mrs. Mu's fury, even having a chunk of flesh torn off their arms.

Such a commotion caused everyone to turn around.

"Old Mrs. Mu, what are you up to, why bully those two kids!" the same village's Granny Zhao questioned.

"What am I up to? Why not ask what these beasts did, bullying our Xiangxiang, these dogs, thinking that with our Old Mu Family's men absent, we'd fear you all? Dream on, whoever bullies our Xiangxiang, I'll be ready for a fight!"

Chapter 446: One Against a Hundred

Old Mrs. Mu looked extremely fierce, with an unreasonable demeanor.

Granny Zhao was no pushover either.

"Old Mrs. Mu, you're protecting your daughter, but is this the way to do it? Do you know what your daughter did?"

"The opera troupe invited by the Old Wang Family was meant for their deceased relatives and other dead people to watch."

"Everyone knows that seat is not to be occupied by the living. Your daughter just went up and took the seat without a word, even took the offerings intended for the Wang Family. How could anyone not throw your daughter out?"

Upon hearing this, Old Mrs. Mu felt a jolt in her heart and suddenly got scared.

Although whether one believes in ghosts and spirits is up to them, Old Mrs. Mu internally believed in them. Otherwise, when Mu Shuangshuang first arrived and was seriously ill, she wouldn't have agreed to Mr. Mu's idea to spend four hundred cash to save her.

"Xiangxiang, did you really do that?" Old Mrs. Mu was evidently unsure of herself.

She knew her own daughter's temper.

Moreover, she was rarely at home and was not aware of these taboos.

"Mom, they bullied me and you are taking their side? I can't live like this..."

Mu Xiangxiang pouted and cried loudly.

"Alright, alright, it's Mom's fault. Let's not bother with this matter anymore, let's go home!"

Old Mrs. Mu softened and decided to take her daughter and leave quickly, but Mu Xiangxiang would not comply.

"I'm not leaving, Mom. Unless you tear their mouths apart, I'm staying here. I want to watch the opera, I want to sit in the front!"

Now, Old Mrs. Mu was extremely anxious.

If others didn't understand Mu Xiangxiang's temper, she did.

But this just wouldn't do!

"Xiangxiang, be good, Mom will make you something delicious when we get home. This opera is for the dead; we, the living, don't need to listen!"

Old Mrs. Mu held Mu Xiangxiang by the shoulders to prevent her from rolling on the ground.

Mu Shuangshuang, watching from the crowd, suddenly felt justified in stopping Xiao Han from calling Mu Xiangxiang earlier.

This mother and daughter duo were truly embarrassing.

As Mu Xiangxiang cried, she somehow noticed Lu Yuanfeng, and without bothering to wipe the snot on her face, she pointed at Lu Yuanfeng and said:

"Mom, I want Fengzi. Call him over, and then I'll go!"

Old Mrs. Mu's face fell instantly, stuck with anger and frustration.

Moments ago, her words had already offended the villagers.

So many people were watching the opera, and Old Mrs. Mu said only the dead would watch. Nobody would take such an insult.

An opera for the dead and claiming that those watching were dead are two entirely different things.

"Spit, this girl, at such a young age, is shameless, even vying for a man with her niece!"

Someone in the crowd muttered a curse.

More people began to speak.

All were cursing Mu Xiangxiang, with all kinds of harsh words, saying she'd be better off dead.

Mu Xiangxiang, never having suffered grievances before, rushed up, ready to fight.

Seeing this, Old Mrs. Mu loudly called for Lu Yuanfeng.

"Lu Family's boy, come help, help me get Xiangxiang back home!"

Lu Yuanfeng stood still, not moving an inch.

He was with Shuangshuang, he couldn't touch another woman!

Mu Shuangshuang glanced at Lu Yuanfeng out of the corner of her eye, saw that he wasn't even looking in that direction, and nodded with satisfaction.

She, as a person, didn't like others touching what was hers, and similarly, she wouldn't touch what belonged to others.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng unmoved, Old Mrs. Mu got angry!

"Lu Family's boy, are you deaf? Get over here!"

Like before, Lu Yuanfeng didn't move, and Old Mrs. Mu vented her anger on Mu Shuangshuang.

"You brat, go get Lu Yuanfeng to help your aunt. Can't you see how she's crying?"

"Grandma, Fengzi has his own choices and I can't force him to do anything. Yelling at me won't help!"

As soon as the words were out, Old Mrs. Mu charged over furiously, trying to drag Mu Shuangshuang out.

Of course, Mu Shuangshuang knew what Old Mrs. Mu intended.

When Old Mrs. Mu got close, she slipped into the crowd. No matter how much strength Old Mrs. Mu used, she couldn't find her. With the villagers intentionally protecting Mu Shuangshuang, Old Mrs. Mu was exhausted but couldn't grasp anyone.

"You damn girl, just you wait!" Old Mrs. Mu's eyes bulged so wide they looked like they'd pop out.

This commotion finally brought out Old Master Wang, along with his son Wang Fugui.

"Sister-in-law Mu, I won't take issue with today's events. You've caused enough of a scene with Xiangxiang; it's time to cool it down. Our Wang Family is small, we can't afford you causing such a spectacle, you'd better leave!"

Old Master Wang was, in fact, being very polite.

Considering what Old Mrs. Mu and Mu Xiangxiang had done, it was already generous of him not to hit them.

For the Wang Family, today was significant, and their ancestors might have attended.

Now turned into such a mess, what does it make of them!

"You're asking me to leave?" Old Mrs. Mu had never faced such indignity before.

Her son is a Scholar, who wouldn't treat her with courtesy?

Mu Shuangshuang saw this, figuring Old Mrs. Mu was going to be humiliated today. But with the Wang Family present, her disgrace was also her own disgrace.

Mu Shuangshuang had Lu Yuanfeng put down Mu Xiaohan and asked him to fetch Mr. Mu, saying Old Mrs. Mu was fighting with the Wang Family while the whole village watched.

Mr. Mu valued his reputation, and knowing the whole village was present, he would definitely come.

At this moment, Mu Shuangshuang stepped out as the mediator.

"Grandma, my aunt is still crying, please help her up. The ground is filthy, what if there are snakes or bugs?"

Old Mrs. Mu gave Mu Shuangshuang a fierce glare; she intended to scold her, but seeing Mu Xiangxiang's tear and snot-streaked face, her heart broke.

Mr. Mu practically sprinted to the Wang Family, followed by several others from the Old Mu Family.

The group had originally planned to watch the opera together, but Mu Xiangxiang disliked the smell of their work clothes, so she went ahead with Old Mrs. Mu.

Upon arriving, they saw Old Mrs. Mu defending Mu Xiangxiang while verbally sparring with Wang Fugui.

Wang Fugui, with an already sharp tongue and a dislike for Mu Shuangshuang, started causing trouble once she appeared to mediate.

"Look at your girl, ugly as a horse, what's that smeared on her face? Is that crap? She's so ugly, she shouldn't come out to frighten people. It's the Mid-Autumn Festival, those who don't know might think she's a ghost!"

"You bastard, you're the one who's a ghost. You speak such malicious words; be careful of being struck down by the Duke of Thunder!"

Both disregarding taboos, they spoke various curses on this Mid-Autumn Festival, making the hairs of those around stand on end.

Mr. Mu stepped forward and pulled Old Mrs. Mu aside.

"You damn old hag, shut up! Aren't you embarrassed enough already?"

Without inquiring further, Mr. Mu started scolding Old Mrs. Mu.

After scolding her, he ignored her resistance and had Mu Dazhong and Mu Danian carry her back.

Mu Xiangxiang was left crying bitterly, and Mr. Mu, enduring a headache, said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuang, help carry your aunt back. I need to have a word with Old Wang."

Chapter 447: Can't Afford to Provoke

In front of everyone, Mu Shuangshuang naturally wouldn't embarrass Mr. Mu.

She squatted down, grabbed Mu Xiangxiang like a little chicken, and carried her away from the Old Wang Family's yard.

Lu Yuanfeng saw this and followed her.

With Lu Yuanfeng there, Mu Xiangxiang surprisingly stopped struggling and let Mu Shuangshuang carry her.

On the stage, the actor sang melodiously, while in the audience, everyone focused on the Old Mu Family, not even watching the most anticipated drama.

"Old Wang, for this matter, our Old Mu Family is at fault. I apologize, and tomorrow I will have Danyan send you something as amends!"

Old Master Wang's face didn't look good, being confronted was really bad luck.

Especially after Old Mrs. Mu said so many curses about his son dying.

"Enough, your Old Mu Family did nothing wrong, don't apologize to me. I can't afford it!"

Old Master Wang waved his sleeve and left, leaving Mr. Mu looking pale.

Mr. Mu let out a long sigh, feeling embarrassed, and quickly departed.

Mu Xiaohan stood among the crowd, not knowing what to do. Thinking of Little Zhi and Yuanbao still watching the play up front, he decided to go back with them later.

Once home, Old Mrs. Mu, still angry, slapped Mu Dazhong hard.

"You animal!"

Mu Danian covered his mouth, secretly laughing next to them.

But soon, Old Mrs. Mu noticed.

"Mom, I didn't mean anything by it. Isn't Xiangxiang not back yet? I'll go find her!"

Mu Danian dashed out, leaving Mu Dazhong being hit for nothing.

Leaving the Old Mu Family yard, Mu Danian wasn't looking for Mu Xiangxiang but went to find Chen Hong.

At this time, every village was busy with Mid-Autumn Festival affairs, making it a good time for business.

Mu Shuangshuang let go of Mu Xiangxiang in the Old Mu Family yard. She had expected Mu Xiangxiang to go back on her own, but unexpectedly she blocked Lu Yuanfeng's path.

"Fengzi, I know you still have feelings for me, otherwise you wouldn't have saved me just now!"

Women who are blinded by love always overthink. Clearly, Mu Shuangshuang saved Mu Xiangxiang, but this drama queen attributed it to Lu Yuanfeng.

She even acted as if she was ready to offer herself in gratitude.

"Mu Family's Little Aunt, you're home, you should go back early. It's Mid-Autumn Festival today, and unclean things tend to go after those like you with weak yin energy. I've heard many stories about people jumping into wells, not voluntarily, but because they were entangled by those things!"

Lu Yuanfeng seriously talked about scary things. He's normally not one to scare people. Maybe he's been around Shuangshuang too much, making his problem-solving methods darker and more smooth.

"Ah..."

Sure enough, hearing Lu Yuanfeng's words, Mu Xiangxiang screamed while covering her head and dashed into the Old Mu Family.

Mu Shuangshuang stood there, unable to cry or laugh. Why did she suddenly realize Lu Yuanfeng is a funny guy too?

"Haha, Fengzi, with this trick, I bet my little aunt won't even dare go to the outhouse at night for days."

Lu Yuanfeng laughed along.

On Mid-Autumn Festival, Mu Shuangshuang didn't want to stay outside any longer, so she prepared to return with Lu Yuanfeng to pick up the children, but then they ran into Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu's face looked grim, he said to Mu Shuangshuang, "Shuang, come inside, I have something to ask you!"

"Okay!"

Mu Shuangshuang turned around and apologetically said to Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, please help me pick up the kids. If my grandpa finishes early, I'll go with you. If it's too late, just bring the two little ones home for me."

Lu Yuanfeng nodded, signaling Mu Shuangshuang to hurry inside.

Following Mr. Mu, Mu Shuangshuang clearly felt a lingering chill from him.

But Mu Shuangshuang wasn't afraid at all. After all, the third branch had separated, and today's mistake wasn't hers. The blame lay with Old Mrs. Mu for spoiling the kids too much.

Entering the yard, Mr. Mu stopped.

"Shuang, tell me, why did your grandma get so angry today?"

Mr. Mu had apologized, but there was still something stuck inside him.

It's extremely uncomfortable!

"My little aunt sat on a chair prepared by the Old Wang Family for the deceased, and they hauled her away. Grandma felt they bullied my little aunt, so she started arguing with them. Things got out of hand, so I had Xiaohan call you!"

Mu Shuangshuang explained simply, and Mr. Mu realized how overboard his daughter had been.

"Oh, what to do now, my Old Mu Family's reputation was ruined by your little aunt!"

Mr. Mu had always been friendly to outsiders, coupled with having a commendable eldest son, so everyone gave him face.

But now, that's all gone.

Mr. Mu suddenly seemed much older.

Mu Shuangshuang noticed his hands naturally drooping a lot, and his steps were unsteady.

By all rights, Mr. Mu shouldn't have any pressure now, Mu Dade's money was all prepared, just waiting for Mu Dade to pass the exam and live well.

However, as the Autumn Examination loomed closer, he increasingly wanted others' respect, seemingly eager to prove himself, prove the Old Mu Family.

"Grandpa, don't sigh, this matter can't entirely be blamed on my little aunt. She didn't know beforehand that she couldn't sit there."

Although a reasonable mind would know, everyone prefers standing over sitting, showing it can't be sat on.

Who doesn't enjoy themselves? But enjoyment depends on the setting and occasion.

Mu Shuangshuang thought this way, and so did Mr. Mu.

"Shuang, speaking honestly, you're actually better than them all!"

After getting all of Mu Dade's money together, Mr. Mu thought all night about what would happen if the eldest son succeeded in the exam for the Old Mu Family.

Thinking over and over, the more he thought, the more he feared. Mr. Mu still had to remind everyone at home not to make mistakes afterward.

Mu Shuangshuang's mouth twitched a bit.

Mr. Mu's words were quite meaningful.

She's better than them; who does "them" refer to?

Even if she's better, Mr. Mu doesn't favor her. This topic carries no significance at all.

"Grandpa, do you have anything else to say to Shuangshuang? If not, it's already late, Shuangshuang wants to sleep!"

"Go ahead, take good care of your dad and mom. I'll try to make sure your grandma doesn't disturb you!"

"Okay!"

Mu Shuangshuang left quickly, feeling a shadow from Mr. Mu's occasional kindness.

Whenever something happens, Mr. Mu remembers the third branch's merits, but normally doesn't even think about them.

The third branch is just there to be overshadowed by the other sons.

It's like being shot while lying down!

Back home, Xiaohan and Little Zhi were sent back by Lu Yuanfeng. It wasn't early, so Mu Shuangshuang sent them to the yard gate and returned to prepare for sleep.

Suddenly, she remembered she overlooked two people tonight, Xing Beichen and Fu Xiaonan.

It seemed like, since watching the play, she hadn't seen them!

Chapter 448: The Cousin Isn't Simple

The heart knows that there won't be anything between Xing Beichen and Fu Xiaonan.

But still feels uneasy.

Mu Shuangshuang hesitated whether to go looking for them, just at that moment, Xiao Han called Mu Shuangshuang's name from outside.

"Sis, are you asleep?"

"No, wait, let me put on my shoes."

Mu Shuangshuang moved, and Little Black in the room also got up. At night, Mu Shuangshuang kept Little Black in her room, while Lai Mi was chased near the chicken cage every night to be with the little chicks.

After putting on clothes and shoes, Mu Shuangshuang lit the lamp.

As soon as the door opened, she saw Mu Xiaohan, already washed up, wearing only a single garment.

Mu Shuangshuang let him in and handed Mu Xiaohan a stool.

"Sis, can I sleep with you tonight?"

After all, he was a child, and today was the Mid-Autumn Festival, still a little scared.

Mu Shuangshuang looked at the seven-year-old Little Douding and nodded!

"You sleep inside, I sleep on the outside, no snoring or scratching feet at night!"

Although curious why his sister said such things, Mu Xiaohan obediently nodded.

"Sleep!" Mu Shuangshuang closed her eyes and said to Mu Xiaohan.

After a long time, Little Douding behind her suddenly wrapped his arms around her neck, hugging Shuangshuang tightly.

Only this way did Mu Xiaohan feel safe!

...

...

Two days later, Lu Yuanfeng borrowed a cow from the Wang Family, leading the cow and bringing plowing tools to Tie Dao Village.

Mu Shuangshuang got up early and began preparing breakfast for the family and lunch for her and Lu Yuanfeng.

Although Tie Dao Village is not far from here, going back and forth would take some time, it's better to eat nearby.

She steamed a basket of buns and cooked a large pot of sauerkraut soup; in the morning, have sauerkraut soup with buns, and a plate of pickled cucumbers, and at noon, simply give each person two buns and a cold water.

Eating buns paired with sauerkraut soup, Lu Yuanfeng looked content.

Mu Shuangshuang sat across from him, watching him eat, occasionally chatting with him.

"Fengzi, if you think the buns aren't tasty, I'll see if there's anything else to eat."

White buns do seem a bit monotonous.

Plain but not too plain, flour is not cheap, and it's not watered-down soup either.

"No worries, it's enough!"

Having eaten and drank enough, just before leaving, they didn't expect Mu Dalang to come.

He was sweating profusely, seeming to have rushed over.

"Elder cousin, what are you doing here?" Mu Shuangshuang looked surprised.

This cousin, just came back not long ago, but has visited her house several times.

"I heard you were going to plow the field in Tie Dao Village today, so I came to help!" Mu Dalang wiped the sweat off his forehead.

"No need, elder cousin, I have Fengzi here."

Mu Shuangshuang waved her hand. This Mu Dalang could be considered a breath of fresh air in the Old Mu Family, actually volunteering to help the third branch.

"It's nothing, I'm idling around at home anyway, might as well come along!"

Mu Dalang said it this way, and Mu Shuangshuang couldn't refuse. She nodded. "By the way, elder cousin, have you had breakfast?"

Mu Dalang sheepishly shook his head. "Not yet, my Aunt Four is doing laundry over there. Yesterday, my little aunt changed clothes, and grandma made her wash my little aunt's clothes first before making breakfast!"

Old Mrs. Mu continuously exploits Mrs. Liu, Mu Dalang couldn't stand it and argued a bit, resulting in getting kicked out.

Incidentally, Mu Dalang remembered hearing from the family yesterday that the third branch bought some land and planned to plow today, so he came to help.

"Then eat at my place now, I just made breakfast, only white buns. Elder cousin, just make do."

Taking Mu Dalang to the kitchen, after he had eaten, the three set off together.

With an extra pair of hands, they worked with extraordinary energy in the morning. Lu Yuanfeng plowed with the cow while Mu Dalang dug with a hoe. The two worked together and amazingly plowed two acres by noon, leaving one acre to finish by afternoon.

"I think we can go back and enjoy a good meal, what do you think?"

They took the white buns in the morning out of fear of delays in plowing, but now that they've exceeded expectations, they shouldn't be too casual.

"Sure, I also think finishing by the afternoon won't be a problem!"

Working hard all morning, Lu Yuanfeng didn't seem too tired, but Mu Dalang was almost exhausted.

Totally worn out!

Considering this, Lu Yuanfeng decided to go back; he wouldn't let Mu Dalang come out in the afternoon, couldn't let him get sick from exhaustion.

The three dragged their feet home, where Yu Si Niang was preparing lunch. Initially planning to make some simple porridge, when she saw Mu Dalang come, she decided to make sweet potato and wild vegetable rice and a few dishes.

Inspired, Mu Shuangshuang wanted to see if the century eggs she made were ready.

She had made quite a few century eggs back then, sealing them all in a jar.

Not having looked at them for a while, she was unaware of their progress.

When Mu Shuangshuang opened the jar and took out a century egg, shaking it, it seemed there wasn't any liquid left. She washed off the material outside the century egg.

Before Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Dalang, she cracked open the century egg, unexpectedly, the century egg was ready.

Mu Shuangshuang was stunned.

"They were supposed to be ready in September." Mu Shuangshuang was puzzled.

"Perhaps because the weather is hot?" Lu Yuanfeng suggested.

Mu Shuangshuang then recalled making the century eggs in winter, which made sense considering lower temperatures, so two months was normal.

"Today I'll make a special dish for you all!" Mu Shuangshuang raised her eyebrows and took out five more century eggs from the jar.

Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Dalang had no idea what Mu Shuangshuang was up to, they could only watch as she busied herself.

After peeling the six century eggs, the color was a deep yellow.

Looking very novel, Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Dalang were fixated.

Mu Shuangshuang cleaned the century egg membranes off each egg and rinsed them with cold water.

Cutting century eggs requires a clean kitchen knife, without impurities, otherwise, it won't look neat.

Each century egg was cut into four equal parts and placed on two plates.

Chop ginger and garlic into small pieces and set aside.

Prepare a small bowl with five tablespoons of vinegar, one spoon of soy sauce; she had made seaweed into small pieces previously, which is perfect for adding flavor now.

Actually, Mu Shuangshuang considered whether she should boil the seaweed until the water evaporates completely, would it result in salt-like granules?

If possible, she wouldn't need to use seaweed bits for flavor anymore.

Having mixed the sauce, Mu Shuangshuang took out chili oil.

Chili oil, sauce, ginger, and garlic were all drizzled over the century eggs, bringing out the aroma.

Just looking at it, Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Dalang were salivating.

Mu Dalang was more direct, in his heart, he had already decided that this cousin was anything but ordinary!

Chapter 449: Two Men Talking

Lunch, because of Mu Shuangshuang's cold mixed preserved egg, turned into a particularly blissful event.

The tangy and spicy taste, in this rather hot weather, was simply a delight to eat.

Mu Dashan was extremely excited.

The things his daughter made were simply a culinary delight.

He reckoned he wouldn't taste anything so delicious for the rest of his life.

"Shuangshuang, your preserved egg is amazing, I've never eaten anything this delicious!"

Mu Dalang's face turned red from the spice, but he still couldn't stop praising Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang calculated in her heart, if a batch of preserved eggs could be produced every half a month, how much she would earn, including the bean sprouts she had.

These past few days, Mu Shuangshuang had been observing the batch of bean sprouts, growing exceptionally well,

They were at the stage that they could be eaten, but Mu Shuangshuang liked long bean sprouts, so if she harvested them tomorrow, she could take fresh ones to sell at the town.

Thinking about earning soon, Mu Shuangshuang's heart drifted away.

Until Lu Yuanfeng served her some preserved egg, she snapped back to reality.

"Eat more so you can gain weight, you're too skinny!"

Lu Yuanfeng looked at Mu Shuangshuang, his eyes full of affection.

The family was used to this open display of affection and didn't feel it was inappropriate; instead, they envied the couple.

Beside them, Xiao Han, seeing how well Lu Yuanfeng treated his sister, hesitated for a moment and then placed a piece of preserved egg into Lu Yuanfeng's bowl.

"Brother-in-law, you've worked hard, eat more!"

This form of address by Xiao Han was both recognition and responsibility for Lu Yuanfeng.

Xiao Han had always been somewhat cold towards him, which he knew.

He had been trying to get Xiao Han to accept him, but it's been challenging.

They seldom interacted; however, recently, things changed, and Xiao Han began initiating conversation, even sharing personal thoughts and sometimes seeking Lu Yuanfeng's advice.

Today, Lu Yuanfeng finally felt a sense of relief.

"Thank you, Xiao Han!" Lu Yuanfeng said sincerely.

"That's great, Brother Xiao Han acknowledged my second brother, now I have another brother!"

The happiest about Xiao Han accepting Lu Yuanfeng was, undoubtedly, Yuanbao.

For the matter between Lu Yuanfeng and Mu Shuangshuang, he had been worried sick, always planning to create opportunities for his second brother and Sister Shuangshuang.

Fortunately, heaven rewards those who strive, and he finally succeeded.

Little Zhi, still young, didn't quite understand what it meant but laughed along with everyone.

For a moment, the kitchen was filled with laughter and became incredibly lively.

Beside them, Mu Shuangshuang also looked gratified.

Finally, she managed to train the little guy well, no need to worry about various things anymore.

A meal later, the dishes were swept clean.

Even the leftover chili oil from Mu Shuangshuang's cold mixed preserved eggs was eaten completely, and everyone rubbed their round bellies, feeling immensely satisfied.

If one could eat a cold mixed preserved egg every day, it would be a particularly happy affair, wouldn't it?

After eating and drinking enough, rest well, and then get back to work!

...

...

In the afternoon, Mu Dalang still went along. He said he had nothing much on his own and thought he might as well help with the work, instead of staying at home seeing things he didn't want to see.

Having lived in the town for so many years, Mu Dalang was more accustomed to a peaceful life.

Feeding sheep, shearing wool, milking them, these were meticulous tasks, and without a quiet environment, he wouldn't know where to start working.

Yu Si Niang had nothing to do in the afternoon either and wanted to follow Mu Shuangshuang to see how the land in Tie Dao Village was.

The group of four worked on organizing the fields and turning over the soil, surprisingly finishing all the tasks.

Three acres of land were tidied up neatly by the two big men.

Once the organized field is left for two days until the mud settles, then a hole can be dug to sow seeds, wait for them to sprout, grow for a while longer, then water them with manure, causing the planted vegetables to grow very well.

Everyone was busy with sweat dripping, yet they felt immensely happy.

In this world, probably nothing is happier than tending to your own land.

In a farmer's home, owning an acre of land is much like having insurance at a modern-day job; not only gives peace of mind, it truly provides security.

After a tiring day, Mu Dalang and Mu Shuangshuang said their goodbyes at the Old Mu Family.

He wouldn't be having dinner at the third branch, wanting to return to the Old Mu Family for dinner, though Mu Shuangshuang tried to keep him, she couldn't.

However, after Mu Dalang left, a rare guest arrived at home.

Xing Beichen showed up this afternoon and chatted with Mu Dashan all afternoon.

Since being able to walk around, these past few days, he has stopped avoiding strolling in the village. People no longer looked at him strangely, and some even greeted him.

He increasingly liked the people of Er Gui Village.

Yet what he couldn't stop worrying about was Fu Xiaonan.

On the Mid-Autumn Festival, from encountering Fu Xiaonan to later accompanying her to verify whether ghosts existed, Xing Beichen knew that his heart was in turmoil.

But Fu Xiaonan's heart only held her childhood sweetheart.

Even though Xing Beichen wanted to stay, he must leave.

This time, he's here to say farewell, and he'll leave tomorrow.

The money for renting the horse carriage, Mu Shuangshuang already gave to Xing Beichen, wasn't much, just one tael of silver, but it was enough for him to return to the county. Once back, he'd find a chance to thank Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng.

After resting at home for a while, Mu Shuangshuang began preparing dinner.

Lu Yuanfeng and Xing Beichen were chatting.

Xing Beichen opened by saying he was leaving.

"Fengzi, I may be leaving tomorrow." As he spoke, Xing Beichen's eyes showed a thousand unwillingness and helplessness.

Feeling very suppressed inside.

"Come again next time when you can, Shuangshuang and I will entertain you well!"

All good things must come to an end, Lu Yuanfeng understood!

With Lu Yuanfeng's words, Xing Beichen felt relieved instead.

Though he was leaving, the friendship remained. Whenever he wished, he could return for it.

"Fengzi, thank you and Shuangshuang. I will come back."

Hopefully, then, he could see Xiao Nan again!

Xing Beichen told himself this inside.

Looking from Mu Shuangshuang's perspective, Lu Yuanfeng and Xing Beichen standing together showcased that innate military aura.

Both stood straight up.

Lu Yuanfeng's demeanor was consistently the best among anyone Mu Shuangshuang had met.

Whether it was his sitting posture, standing, or spirit.

Just watching felt like a kind of enjoyment.

Someday, she'd also practice it, for the past life's things should not be forgotten.

Though her body seemed weak, as long as practice was appropriate, she'd eventually reach her prime.

"Hey, you two, stop standing there, hurry up and help start the fire, I'm going to cook!"

Mu Shuangshuang called out to the two guys outside, and both of them came over.

"Fengzi, start the fire, Xing Beichen help me wash vegetables, no work, no meal!"

Chapter 450: Good Intentions Gone Wrong

Lu Yuanfeng starting a fire is understandable since he often helps Shuangshuang with chores.

But Xing Beichen washing vegetables; that's a bit tricky.

Although Xing Beichen isn't a scholar who can't even bind a chicken, he's never really touched household chores.

He looked at Mu Shuangshuang with a troubled expression, seeming a bit at a loss.

"Miss Shuangshuang, how do I wash these vegetables?"

"..."

Mu Shuangshuang was momentarily dazed and handed the picked bok choy to Xing Beichen.

He took it, confused, picked up the bok choy from the wooden basin, and unexpectedly tossed it into a bucket of water.

A full bucket of water was instantly wasted.

Mu Shuangshuang was so angry that steam seemed to rise from her head.

"You... just stand aside and watch!"

Lu Yuanfeng almost laughed himself breathless; it's fortunate it was Xing Beichen, if it were anyone else, they'd probably have been kicked out by Shuangshuang.

Xing Beichen awkwardly rubbed his nose, looking to Lu Yuanfeng for help, as if saying, why is your wife so fierce?

Lu Yuanfeng remained unmoved, refusing to step forward!

What a joke, whatever his wife Shuangshuang says is right, he would never contradict her.

Seeing Lu Yuanfeng like this, Xing Beichen made a tooth-baring grimace at him, only to be caught by Mu Shuangshuang who turned around.

This directly led to a misunderstanding; Mu Shuangshuang thought Xing Beichen was upset with her, and with a big wave of her hand, she decided Xing Beichen's fate.

"Xing Beichen, since you don't like being busy in the kitchen, go clean the pigsty. If you can't do it well, I'll kill you!"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke viciously, her eyes full of fierceness!

Xing Beichen, having grown up, encountered such a woman for the first time.

Clearly gentle in front of Fengzi, but so fierce in front of him?

...

...

Mu Dalang headed straight back to the Old Mu Family's kitchen, washed his hands and face without incident, only to be caught by Old Mrs. Mu who came to inspect.

Without saying a word, Old Mrs. Mu started questioning, "Da Lang, tell Grandma, where did you go?"

"I went to Third Uncle's; today Third Uncle is tending the dry fields and working the land!" Mu Dalang was unrestrained.

He felt he hadn't overstepped, yet Old Mrs. Mu clapped her hand in anger.

"You wretch, if you're going to help anyone, why them? You want to die, don't you? Eating the food of the Old Mu Family and betraying us!"

Old Mrs. Mu's words were bold and unrestrained.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Liu timidly stood at the hearth's edge, fearing she'd be pulled out as a scapegoat, her voice was much softer.

"Grandma, Third Uncle is also your son, my Third Uncle; helping his family is only right, and Third Uncle is recuperating at home, we should be helping him!" Mu Dalang spoke righteously.

In the whole Old Mu Family, it was only Mu Dalang who dared confront Old Mrs. Mu.

Even as a child of the second branch, he did not join them in doing wrong; he'd listen to reason, but he couldn't accept the unreasonable.

"Oh, you've turned against me." Old Mrs. Mu's face turned blue with anger.

She turned and yelled at Mrs. Lin, who was lazily at home.

"Second Daughter-in-law, get out here and see your son who dares talk back to me."

Old Mrs. Mu spoke at length, but Mrs. Lin did not appear. She was so angry she wanted to ram the door but was stopped by Mu Dalang.

"Grandma, this matter has nothing to do with my mother; she's pregnant, don't touch her."

The more Mu Dalang defended Mrs. Lin, the angrier Old Mrs. Mu became.

Could not hit the eldest grandson, after all, he was already sixteen.

She turned to Mrs. Liu, who was already curled up, and slapped her twice.

Mrs. Liu's face swelled instantly.

"You lazy thing, not cooking yet, trying to starve me!"

Mu Dalang wanted to intervene, but it was too late; he watched helplessly as Mrs. Liu was slapped by Old Mrs. Mu.

"Grandma, why are you hitting my Fourth Aunt? What did she do wrong?"

Old Mrs. Mu snorted coldly. "I won't just hit, I'll kick too!"

Old Mrs. Mu raised her foot, ready to kick Mrs. Liu on the ground, who sobbed but dared not move.

In the kitchen, Old Mrs. Mu exuded a pressuring aura.

But in the end, her foot didn't land, stopped by Xing Beichen.

Xing Beichen couldn't find tools to clean the pigsty, intended to borrow from others, and happened to walk to the Old Mu Family's kitchen, where the cries made him halt and witness Old Mrs. Mu trying to kick someone.

"What are you doing?" Xing Beichen stepped in.

"Who are you to meddle in my affairs?" Old Mrs. Mu glared venomously.

"You don't need to know who I am, but I won't tolerate your behavior. A wife belongs to her husband, not to the mother-in-law, and she wasn't brought in to be hit. You should understand a wife's hardship, having been one yourself."

Matters of the inner court were ones Xing Beichen usually ignored, as he was single, and his father had passed early, letting only clean issues come to him.

But today's incident was truly excessive; even a stranger couldn't stand by.

Yet Old Mrs. Mu, as the mother-in-law, thinks of a wife as nothing but a tool for childbirth; as long as the son is present, a wife gone can be replaced, just a matter of bride price.

Moreover, Mu Dade's promotion was imminent, elevating the family's status, making brides swarm like wasps even without bride price.

"Hmph, today you'll learn what it means when I say I'll hit the daughter-in-law; try and stop me!"

Old Mrs. Mu lifted her foot to kick...

Mu Shuangshuang was cooking the first dish in the kitchen when Mu Xi Xia rushed in, kneeling in front of her.

"Sister Shuangshuang, please, save my mother, please..."

Mu Shuangshuang tossed the spatula aside, asking anxiously, "What happened to Fourth Aunt?"

"My Grandma is hitting my mother; she's kicking her..."

Mu Shuangshuang was startled upon hearing this.

Usually, Old Mrs. Mu would at most slap people; why was she using her feet this time? Without further thought, Mu Shuangshuang told Lu Yuanfeng, "Fengzi, help me clean the kitchen, I'll be right back, and don't follow me!"

Mu Shuangshuang meant nothing else; the issue was likely between women, better for Lu Yuanfeng not to get involved.

To avoid innocently becoming collateral damage.

When Mu Shuangshuang arrived at the Old Mu Family's kitchen, Xing Beichen was already holding Old Mrs. Mu's wrist, looking fierce and intense.

Mu Dalang helped Mrs. Liu outside the kitchen, comforting her softly.

Looking at Old Mrs. Mu, a pair of fierce eyes glared at the crying Mrs. Liu.

Mu Shuangshuang thought to herself: This is bad; Old Mrs. Mu already disliked Mrs. Liu, and with this fiasco, Mrs. Liu's life might become untenable.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly told Mu Xiaxia beside her, "Hurry, go call Grandpa from the field, quick!"