

Folly 571

Chapter 571: The Crisp Sound of a Slap

"What are you all yelling about? Can't a person sleep around here?"

Mu Xiangxiang walked out from Mu Dandan's room, disheveled, wearing a loose-fitting pajama.

"Xiangxiang, why are you in Dandan's room?" Mu Dade frowned slightly.

Mr. Mu was surprised too.

Mu Xiangxiang had her own room.

When the side rooms were built, it was with the expectation that the daughters from the Old Mu Family might return, so a large room with two kang beds was specifically created for them.

Mu Xiangxiang had always lived there, so why did she come out of Mu Dandan's room today?

"My room is a mess, no one cleans it. I just came over to stay for a few days. Now that Dandan is back, as her aunt I certainly won't occupy her place. I'll go back!"

With that, Mu Xiangxiang ran back to her room.

Mu Dandan was not polite to Mu Xiangxiang. When she returned to her room and saw the state of it, she almost collapsed at the doorway.

The room was filthy, especially the bed — the sheet was crumpled like bean curd residue.

In the center of the room, there was a chamber pot, and the smell of urine was overwhelming.

"Dad, Mom, look at what my aunt has done."

Mu Xiangxiang's room was right next to Mu Dandan's, so she heard the noise and came out to argue with Mu Dandan.

"What's wrong, what's wrong? What good thing did I supposedly do? Dandan, your room was dirty. I reluctantly stayed there. Do you want me to clean the room for you too? Dream on!"

Mu Xiangxiang put her hands on her waist, just like when she argued with Old Mrs. Mu.

"Alright, everyone stop arguing. I'll let Xiangxiang's mom come over to clean later. The eldest's family has just returned, let them have a good rest!"

Mr. Mu returned to the main residence of the Old Mu Family, but the faces of the people in the first branch were not looking good.

Mu Dandan looked at the filthy room and cried uncontrollably.

"Dad, Mom, how can we live in this place? It's a pigsty!"

"Mr. Dan Dan, I told you! Coming back here wouldn't be good. We should have stayed in the county. At least Xianxian's family could support us with good food and drinks," Mrs. Jin said with a resentful face.

Mu Dade also felt uncomfortable, but saying anything wouldn't be good.

"Let's just wait and see. If it really doesn't work, we'll leave. Anyway, I've already passed the exams. We can have a meal anywhere! But I still need the travel expenses to the Capital for the exam. My parents and others will have to cover that!"

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The episode at home temporarily concluded, and Mr. Mu returned to the Old Mu Family only to realize he hadn't asked the most important question.

Naturally, this matter was blamed on Mu Xiangxiang.

Mr. Mu scolded Old Mrs. Mu and made her arrange someone to clean up.

Old Mrs. Mu immediately chose Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch without much thought.

"Fourth daughter-in-law, go clean up the eldest's room and Xiangxiang's. As for those two girls, they're not disabled, ignore them!"

Before Mrs. Liu could agree, Mrs. Lin volunteered herself.

"Mom, let me do it instead. It doesn't feel right to always let the fourth daughter-in-law do the work, and she's preparing dinner tonight!"

Mrs. Lin had her own plans, to openly go to Mu Dade's room. She believed Mu Dade had many good things, and if she managed to ask for a few, she might get lucky.

A silk dress worth two taels of silver wasn't something everyone could afford.

"Mom, the fourth sister-in-law is so busy, let Gou Dan's mother do the cleaning and let her rest!" Mu Dazhong chimed in. Such a great opportunity wasn't something you'd find often.

Old Mrs. Mu was still hesitating, and Chen Hong also stood up.

"Mom, let me do it. Second sister-in-law is expecting, and if she does heavy work and something happens to the baby, what would we do?"

"You're talking nonsense! You're not even a daughter-in-law of the Old Mu Family!" Mrs. Lin said angrily.

"Your opinion doesn't count. It's what Da Nian says that counts!"

With that, Chen Hong quickly ran outside, ignoring Mrs. Lin's curses behind her.

"Fifth, do you really want to marry Chen Hong? Don't care what others think?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Dad, what do you mean by that? Of course I want to marry Honghong. She's good-looking, willing to work, and besides, I'm already so old, I can't stay unmarried forever, can I?"

Mu Danian was in a good mood. He had waited so long and finally, his father brought the topic up on his own.

Now Mu Danian was ready to negotiate for what Mr. Mu would offer in exchange.

"Fifth, do you really think Chen Hong is a good person? She only cares about herself during meals and doesn't do any work. Didn't her actions just now annoy you?" Mr. Mu tried reasoning with Mu Danian, attempting to persuade him.

"Dad, spare me the nonsense. I know Honghong's temper, and I like her that way. Xu Dalang married his uncle's wife, and I can't find a clean and unmarried woman like Chen Hong?"

Mu Danian turned the affair into a matter of his ultimate goal.

Having finally realized the situation, Mu Dazhong and Mr. Mu were left in shock.

Mu Dazhong really wished he could smack himself. Who knew his fifth brother was still hung up about the Xu Dalang affair, even if he went about it differently?

"Fifth, are you blind? You dare want such a dirty fox, aren't you afraid of catching a disease? I'm telling you, no matter what you do, Dalang and Miss Huang's engagement is set, and yours with Chen Hong won't happen!"

Old Mrs. Mu angrily spat at Mu Danian. She had never liked Chen Hong, and if it weren't for Mu Danian stopping her, she would have thrown that woman out long ago. How dare she act out!

"If you're going to say that, then I'm marrying Chen Hong! If faces are going to be lost, it's not just mine!"

Mu Danian knew the weak spots of Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu, and he spoke with reckless abandon.

Old Mrs. Mu's face turned beet red with anger. She rushed up and started slapping Mu Danian's face heavily.

Old Mrs. Mu was known for her temper. Mu Danian repeatedly provoked her, and if she didn't retaliate, she wouldn't be herself.

The sounds of slaps echoing crisply filled the Old Mu Family's hall.

Mu Danian had hoped to reason, but he didn't expect Old Mrs. Mu to start hitting him immediately.

Screams like those of a pig being slaughtered came out of Mu Danian's mouth—

Mu Shuangshuang paused while picking vegetables, and a cabbage snapped in two.

In the kitchen, Zhao Yun couldn't help but chuckle.

"Shuangshuang, it's really lively at your grandma's house today. First your eldest uncle returned, and everyone went to watch the fun, and now it's your fifth uncle wailing from your grandma's scolding. But in such a big matter as your parents coming home, no one came to visit, truly heartless!"

Zhao Yun felt a sense of injustice for the third branch. Over the years, the Old Mu Family had been unfair to them, even after they separated from the family.

Chapter 572: Becoming the Official's Father

Zhao Yun just couldn't understand what was so good about that Mu Dade.

He's just a useless scholar who only passed the exam at thirty, with one foot in the grave. Who knows if he can lead the Old Mu Family to a better life?

So Zhao Yun's heart was still full of resentment.

"Aunt Xiao Yun, I know you mean well, but some things can't be forced. The legs are on someone else's body; we can't forcibly make them come back.

On the contrary, aren't our days quite good now? We have food and drink, and we don't have to see others' faces!"

Zhao Yun also thought the same; if the third branch went, they'd just be bullied, better to stay here and enjoy the freedom.

"What Shuangshuang said is true, I was just too anxious. Then let's cook well together and let your parents taste our skills!"

Soon, smoke was curling up in the kitchen of the Mu Family's Third Branch.

In the kitchen, laughter and the sound of chopping vegetables alternated.

This really felt like a home.

In contrast, over at the Old Mu Family, because they had to kill two chickens, Old Mrs. Mu was personally overseeing.

She watched sharply as Mrs. Liu busily scurried around the kitchen.

With a knife in her hand, Mrs. Liu was about to cut the chicken's throat when Old Mrs. Mu shouted.

"Be careful, don't spill the chicken blood. Xiangxiang loves chicken blood!"

Mrs. Liu's hand paused, and the knife in her hand nicked the chicken's neck, causing it to struggle violently, spilling blood all over the floor.

Old Mrs. Mu's face turned a furious shade of green.

"You stinking woman, can't even kill a chicken properly, I'll kill you..." As Old Mrs. Mu spoke, she had already kicked out at Mrs. Liu's head.

Mrs. Liu fell to the ground, letting go of the chicken.

The chicken flailed desperately, splattering chicken blood all over Old Mrs. Mu's face.

Mu Dajiang, who came to help, happened to see Old Mrs. Mu beating Mrs. Liu, and rushed forward.

"Mom, why are you hitting Xiaxia's mother?" Mu Dajiang shielded Mrs. Liu behind him and questioned Old Mrs. Mu.

"Why? You ask this woman what she did, look at my face, can you still see it? I'm telling you, if this isn't clarified today, it won't end!"

Old Mrs. Mu still wanted to hit Mrs. Liu but was pushed aside by Mu Dajiang with a slap, although he didn't actually hit her, it was enough to make Old Mrs. Mu furious.

Her own son dared to raise a hand against her for his wife, Old Mrs. Mu couldn't tolerate it at all.

She shouted at Mu Dajiang, "Old Four, last time you didn't do the house chores for this woman, today you dare to hit me for this woman. Let me tell you, your fourth branch, don't even think about getting anything good from the Old Mu Family in the future!

Tonight's chicken, don't expect to eat any of it, it's all my stuff, and everything you live in, eat, and wear is my stuff. Dare to oppose me, and I'll kick you all out!"

Throwing down these harsh words, Old Mrs. Mu left the kitchen.

The reason Old Mrs. Mu dared to do this was because Mrs. Jin had returned, so there was another person to cook in the house.

If it really came to it, she could make Mrs. Lin work. That woman hadn't even shown any signs of pregnancy after all this time, as if she weren't even carrying anyone.

Old Mrs. Mu returned to the room in a huff, wiped the blood off her face, and talked to Mr. Mu about the fourth branch.

"Old man, the entire fourth branch is on a crooked path. First, Old Four and his wife won't work and threaten me, now he even beats me, the son I raised for nothing!"

"And the third branch, Yu Si Niang also led my son astray, a good son who was willing to work, now doesn't work, lazes at home every day, still doing those robbery and murder things. Men cannot find wives; once they do, they forget their mothers!"

Old Mrs. Mu criticized both the third and fourth branches and didn't forget Mu Danian either.

"Danian too, bringing in that kind of wife will surely lead to trouble!"

This was still acceptable, but once mentioned, Mr. Mu felt uncomfortable all over. Once good sons, now all turned out like this.

Not one gave any peace of mind.

"Now Old Three is in prison, who knows when he'll be released, won't the third branch collapse?"

Mr. Mu's heart was all about Mu Dade, completely unaware that the third branch had returned.

"Pooh, you say that, and Old Three is back, staying with that draining woman instead of coming to us, hiding in their house like a turtle, what kind of man does that!

Back then, I don't know if I was blind or what, letting such a jinx in, makes me so mad!" Old Mrs. Mu spat thickly onto Mr. Mu's shoe.

The shoe instantly looked awful.

Mr. Mu didn't notice, his face full of surprise after hearing Old Mrs. Mu's words.

"You say Old Three is back? Who did you hear that from?"

"I still need to hear from someone? Zhao Yun is helping in Old Three's kitchen, I heard from outside the yard, and they say they're killing chickens and buying meat. Surely that wasteful woman wants to eat meat, my son's bled dry by her!"

Old Mrs. Mu cursed while stomping her feet, truly looking angry.

"I must go see Old Three!" Mr. Mu got up from the kang.

"Go for what? Your brain's fogged by lard, isn't it? He's the son; you're the father. When does the father visit the son? In my opinion, just pretend this beast doesn't exist since we split the family!" Old Mrs. Mu said.

"Alright, stop calling names and wasteful things, third branch split off, doesn't follow your treatment of the fourth family, you think you're tough, the third branch won't necessarily care about you!"

Having said that, Mr. Mu headed toward the third branch.

Old Mrs. Mu was still angry, grabbing a chicken feather duster and went to beat Mu Xiaxia in the fourth branch, Xiaxia's cries echoed far, far away—

Mr. Mu headed straight into Mu Dashan's house of the third branch.

Upon entering, he didn't knock, just pushed the door open.

Inside, Mu Dashan was weaving bamboo baskets, while Yu Si Niang was doing needlework on the kang.

Mu Shuangshuang and Zhao Yun didn't let them work, so they did money-making activities in the house to support the family!

Mr. Mu suddenly came in, catching both by surprise.

"Dad, why are you here?" Mu Dashan asked.

"Old Three, you're back, why didn't you tell us? If your mom hadn't said, I wouldn't have known!" Mr. Mu exclaimed.

"Dad, why are you here? Why aren't you there? You should be happy now that Big Brother passed the exam!"

Though initially surprised, Mu Dashan gradually calmed down.

His big brother passing had nothing to do with him!

The good life of the Old Mu Family had nothing to do with him either.

"Old Three, what are you saying, you're my son. You went to prison; as your father, I should come to see you.

Fortunately, you and Si Niang are fine. Come have dinner with us, let's give a welcome to your big brother, from now on, the Old Mu Family won't have to be barefoot farmers, come with us to the city and enjoy life!"

Mr. Mu was filled with joy thinking about the future, as if he was already the father of an official.

Chapter 573: Refusing to Enjoy Riches

"Father, I understand your good intentions, but since the third branch has separated, we can't take advantage of the Old Mu Family anymore."

"We're doing well on our own now! As you said, for farmer families, cultivating the land is fundamentally important. Our third branch will continue down this path!"

No matter how beneficial Mr. Mu's offer was, Mu Dashan wasn't interested.

Once the heart is hurt, words become useless!

"Third son, are you still upset with your father?" Mr. Mu asked.

"Father, I'm not. Now that things have come to this point, our third branch won't impose on the first branch."

To someone willing to sell his own daughter, Mu Dashan had no feelings.

He didn't seek wealth and glory, only peace and safety for his family!

"You..." Mr. Mu was at a loss for words.

Initially, he hoped to find a sense of presence within the third branch, at least letting them realize that the choice to separate was a mistake from the start.

Who knew the third son would be so stubborn?

"Ah, third son, you better think clearly. Decide whether to follow us to the county to become officials or remain a peasant your whole life. Your father awaits your answer!"

After saying this, Mr. Mu dragged his feet out, taking a distant glance at the third branch's kitchen.

In the kitchen, Zhao Yun and Mu Shuangshuang were busy, joined by the recently arrived Lu Yuanfeng. The three stood together harmoniously.

The aroma of food wafted through the air.

Mr. Mu hesitated for a moment, then followed over.

"Shuang, what are you up to?" Mr. Mu poked his head in and asked Mu Shuangshuang in the kitchen.

"Grandpa? Why are you here?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"I..." The closeness he expected didn't appear, and his granddaughter showed no intention of inviting him in.

"Shuang, your uncle has passed the exam, so the third branch can enjoy prosperity with us!" Mr. Mu paused for a long time before speaking again.

To Mu Shuangshuang, this sounded somewhat boastful.

Boasting about the first branch's capability, boasting that his decision to support the first branch was the right choice.

However, Mu Shuangshuang wasn't worried. Even if Mu Dade had passed the exam and became a high official, given his sly and deceitful nature, things might not end well for him.

If, perchance, things go wrong, and the Old Mu Family can still laugh it off, then she'll concede!

"Grandpa, we're already enjoying life in the third branch, with plenty to eat and drink. There's no need to crash the first branch's party, but convey my congratulations to my uncle!"

Mu Shuangshuang smiled.

Mr. Mu didn't receive any approval again, and a stifling feeling stuck in his chest, unable to swallow or spit it out.

It was extremely uncomfortable!

He sulked back home and lay down on the kang in discomfort.

Seeing Mr. Mu that way, Old Mrs. Mu knew he must have been snubbed by the third branch.

Unable to hold back, she cursed, "I told you so, the third family is like ungrateful wolves. Even if you try to show goodwill, they might not care!"

If you ask me, let the third branch remain poor. We'll enjoy the good life and let them eat meager meals, these ungrateful people!"

"Enough already, what are you blabbering about? If you have nothing better to do, go cook, stop lingering here!" Mr. Mu loudly scolded Old Mrs. Mu.

"Fine, I'm going, I'm going. You might as well cherish the third branch for a lifetime!"

Old Mrs. Mu stormed off, leaving a dumbfounded Mr. Mu in her wake.

In the room, Mr. Mu smoked one pipe after another, hoping to calm his heart, but after all this time, he felt even more unsettled instead.

The third branch was no longer the same as before.

Even when he showed kindness, they didn't welcome it!

Mr. Mu eagerly hoped his eldest would quickly head to the county so that the Old Mu Family could join, believing this would finally enlighten the third branch.

With this anticipation, dinnertime finally arrived.

Chen Hong came out of Mu Dade's room, her clothes loose and revealing.

After flaunting herself in front of Mu Dade, his room remained filthy. Chen Hong didn't even like tidying her own room, let alone someone else's, just wanting to take advantage!

When Chen Hong left, Mrs. Jin's face fell.

"What's with old Fifth picking someone like this? A seductive woman, stinking up even the fox's den."

As a woman, Mrs. Jin was well aware of Chen Hong's intentions.

She came well-dressed, but soon she'd even unbuttoned her bodice. If that wasn't seduction, what was it?

"Enough already, you're about to become an official's wife, don't say things that are unpleasant to hear!" Mu Dade interrupted Mrs. Jin.

Though over thirty years old, Mu Dade was in his prime, a time of vitality, and though Mrs. Jin was quite beautiful, she was far too conservative.

Chen Hong was naturally bold, a real temptation for a man starved for excitement.

After thinking, Mu Dade decided to speak in her defense.

Mrs. Jin didn't understand the subtle schemes, only confident her man wouldn't fancy Chen Hong. Chen Hong wasn't as attractive as her, with less smooth skin, nothing much to offer besides those large bosoms.

"I got it, just a bit too anxious. Let's hurry to dinner; it should be ready by now! We can deal with room arrangements later with mom's help," Mrs. Jin rambled, noticing Mu Dade's lack of response.

Annoyed by the indifference, they went to dine at the main room, the food already set out.

Mrs. Liu, busy the whole evening, had just been about to sit when Old Mrs. Mu pulled the chair from under her.

Resoundingly, Mrs. Liu hit the floor, her bottom thrashed and bruised.

Mu Dajiang's expression immediately changed, helping his wife up, he was about to reason with Old Mrs. Mu when she preempted.

"The chair is mine, and so are the two chickens, I won't let you eat them!"

"Mother, this is too much. Xiaxia's mother made all this, why can't we have a share?" Mu Dajiang shouted, red-eyed, questioning Old Mrs. Mu loudly.

At this point, Old Mrs. Mu no longer cared. With the family about to ascend socially, whether the daughters-in-law worked or dined didn't matter.

"Why? Because everything in this house is mine, if you don't like it, you can leave!"

Mu Dajiang, fuming silently, was tempted to split from the family, but with prosperity around the corner, he hesitated.

"Mother, what's going on? Your voice is audible from far away."

Mu Dade entered from outside, intentionally addressing Old Mrs. Mu.

Her face, immediately turning bright like March flowers, smiled in astonishing radiance.

"Dade is here. I've prepared something delicious for you, come have a look." Old Mrs. Mu said, adjusting two bowls of chicken on the table.

Chapter 574: The Family Discusses Mu Dade's Matter

The aroma of chicken is inherently rich, and its fragrance grew even stronger with a movement from Old Mrs. Mu.

Mu Dade gradually started feeling hungry.

However, he glanced at the fourth branch and said, "Mother, this meal was prepared by Xiaxia's mother, wasn't it? She's really been working hard."

Mu Dade's compliment warmed Mrs. Liu's heart, making her view her eldest brother in a better light.

Mu Dajiang felt the same way. He knew his mother cared most about what his elder brother said, and that his brother was helping him. It made him even more determined to follow his elder brother, even if it meant working like a horse or an ox—it was better than watching his wife get scolded by his mother.

"Humph, what's so hard for her? When I was a daughter-in-law, even in the coldest winter months, I was working. When the river froze, I still had to break the ice shards and continue doing laundry. It's neither cold nor hot right now, and she's just cooking, what's tiring about that?"

Old Mrs. Mu felt now that her son had passed the exam, it was time to boast.

Moreover, Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch was close to the third branch. She couldn't bully the third branch, but the fourth branch was no match for her!

"Mother, take my advice—it would be great if you could give the chair to Xiaxia's mother so she can have a proper meal. Consider it me pleading with you, would you?"

With Mu Dade speaking like this, Old Mrs. Mu naturally let the matter go.

"Listen, it's only because my son spoke on your behalf today that it's over. If you find trouble for me again in the future, I won't forgive you!"

Mu Dade settled in his seat with satisfaction; he didn't necessarily have to help the fourth branch.

He just felt that the fourth branch was close to the third branch. When he needed the third branch to provide some silver for him to take the exam, they refused. Now it's time to show the third branch how things stand.

After everyone was seated, Old Mrs. Mu scanned the room and suddenly spoke.

"Now that Dade has talents, your father and I can rest assured. It's time for the young people to take charge of the family's affairs."

Several savvy individuals immediately assumed Old Mrs. Mu was about to relinquish power and felt so jubilant they nearly jumped for joy.

Why has the Old Mu Family been poor all these years? It's because each household had to hand over its income.

When Mrs. Lin first got married, even the blanket she brought from her family was taken by Old Mrs. Mu for communal use, and it's still under Mu Xiangxiang's seat.

Mrs. Liu, too, had always been too timid to confront Old Mrs. Mu, but she was no fool. If Old Mrs. Mu were to step down from running the household, perhaps the fourth branch might prosper.

"Mother, what's the situation here? I think you're doing a great job managing things, overseeing us brothers, and I'm happy to hand over all my money!"

Mu Danian was the first to voice support for Old Mrs. Mu.

For no other reason than that he wasn't married yet, didn't have a father-in-law, and had nothing substantial to gain.

The second and fourth branches were different; they at least had their maternal families, and if they stopped working, wouldn't all the household chores fall to him?

The saying goes that one ox can be worked to death.

When a herd of oxen is working, some are bound to slack off.

Mu Danian's words delighted Old Mrs. Mu; she was only saying it for the sake of saying it, as she still had control over the household.

"Fifth brother, what you said isn't right. Mother is getting old and shouldn't be overworked. She needs to rest more! Look at these sisters-in-law, they're more than capable and can help her relieve some of the burden!"

Mu Dazhong shot a glance at Mu Danian. What did his brother mean by what he said? He understood.

But among the various branches, only his wife had a good brain, and when it came time to manage the household affairs, it would certainly be his wife managing them.

In these times, if you don't manage, you won't earn money.

Plus, their household contained many valuable items that were gifts; if his mother found out, they would all be seized for communal use.

"Enough, stop bickering. The old lady hasn't finished speaking!" Old Mrs. Mu cast a dismissive glance at Mu Dazhong.

"Your father and I are getting on in years. In the future, we won't handle the family's affairs. You wives will do the laundry and cook, garden, and raise pigs—all tasks cannot be neglected! As for you men, make sure to manage the farm work well!"

Those who originally hoped Old Mrs. Mu would relinquish power were instantly dejected.

"Mother, aren't we going to the city for a better life? Why are we still farming?" Mu Xiangxiang asked.

"Xiangxiang, moving to the city still depends on your uncle settling down. We don't yet know what your uncle's plans are, whether to continue taking exams or pursue a government position."

Old Mrs. Mu hoped her son would quickly find a position so she could become an official's wife.

Yet she also felt that he should continue taking exams just in case he became the Champion Scholar, bringing even more silver.

On this topic, Mu Dade spoke up: "Father, Mother, brothers, sisters-in-law, I have plans for my future path. I still intend to participate in the February Imperial Examination. It's not easy for our family to produce a scholar, and if I don't continue taking exams, our family might remain the same forever."

"If I become the Champion Scholar, I'll take you all to the Capital, where the land is bountiful and truly prosperous."

Mu Dade began weaving dreams again.

Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu naturally supported him.

"Eldest, if you want to take the exam, then take it. We'll use the rice from the second half of the year to provide you with the travel expenses!" Mr. Mu said.

But the others were not happy about it.

Though becoming the Champion Scholar was great, and the Capital was amazing, it meant waiting all this time and possibly having to farm for another season.

It's not even certain he would pass, and if it's like this scholar business which took thirty years, everyone will definitely miss out on enjoying life.

"Father, I believe it's good to have both options. While letting eldest brother seek out the official affairs, we choose a favorable place and take a minor official post, bringing in more benefits—no worse than the Capital.

Besides, a strong dragon can't suppress a local serpent. Once we've developed ourselves in the local county, we won't need to bother with the higher-ups!" Mu Danian urged going to the city; he used to want to wait for elder brother to become the Champion Scholar.

But he knew if elder brother truly became the Champion Scholar, he'd completely disregard these poor relatives, tossing aside even their parents.

The chips he held might secure a scholar status, and if elder brother became the Champion Scholar, he could potentially disown it.

Mu Danian's words made sense, and the Old Mu Family found it feasible.

"Eldest, consider what Fifth said too!" Mr. Mu advised.

Mrs. Jin and Mu Dade's face instantly fell.

Mr. Mu's fickle nature, swinging back and forth, was indeed unpleasant.

"Father, how can Dade have so many thoughts about seeking an official post? Besides, he's the only one in our family with real potential, so if not prioritizing him, whom else to prioritize?" Mrs. Jin said.

"This..." Mr. Mu hesitated.

Both being officials and pursuing prospects were important, neither path could be mistaken.

"How about this, let's wait and see. I still feel it's better for elder brother to go to the exam." Mu Dajiang, who had remained silent, opened his mouth, supporting Mu Dade.

Perhaps it was because Mu Dade helped the fourth branch earlier that Mu Dajiang was now willing to speak.

But none of it mattered, right now, no matter who spoke, it was useless. Mu Dade was determined to take the exam, and it was just a mere hundred and eighty taels for expenses!

Chapter 575: The Fourth House Is Not Strong Enough

"Old Four, don't just stand there talking without feeling the pain yourself; we have only so much, if we prepare the travel expenses for the exam, we'll lose our lives!" Mu Dazhong said.

If the old man sells off the rice, who will be hurt the most if not the second branch?

Da Lang still needs to get married, and Gou Dan wants to go to school, who doesn't need money?

Besides, the eldest is a scholar now, and still wants to suck the blood of these people, isn't that being a scoundrel?

Mu Dajiang's face turned red because of Mu Dazhong's words.

He usually doesn't speak in such occasions, even if he does, he's the last one; this time he's stepped in.

"Alright, it's not time to discuss this yet, let's eat! Eldest, you must be tired, eat more!"

Mr. Mu interrupted the people who were ready to argue.

This war without smoke has temporarily stopped.

But Mr. Mu didn't know, by his intervention, Mu Dade had already taken this to heart.

From the moment Mu Dade returned, the Old Mu Family was no longer peaceful.

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Mu Family's Third Branch

A table full of good dishes was served; everyone gathered around it, squeezed together, but all with smiles on their faces. Compared to the Old Mu Family, this was more harmonious, with no quarrels at all.

Spicy chicken, braised fish, stewed pork with vermicelli, and a few other small dishes.

These are the kinds of food that rural households only bring out for New Year celebrations, but this time, it all came out for the Mu Family's Third Branch.

Mu Dashan looked at the people sitting together, full of gratitude in his heart. His first cup of wine, he directly raised it to toast Lu Yuanfeng.

"Fengzi, if it weren't for your coming and going to take care of us along with your brothers these past few days, perhaps Si Niang and I would have been bullied to death."

Lu Yuanfeng was moved.

"Uncle Dashan, this is what I should do, no need to thank me."

Lu Yuanfeng raised his wine cup and drank it all in one go.

When he turned his head, he saw Shuangshuang holding a cup as well, and just as he hesitated whether to stop her, Mu Shuangshuang playfully winked at him.

At that moment, Lu Yuanfeng understood her meaning.

The glass contained water, not wine.

"Today, I, Mu Dashan, must thank everyone; without your help, Si Niang and I wouldn't have overcome this crisis so quickly. I have little skill, just one sensible daughter who supports the entire family. Today, we must have a drink!"

Everyone chuckled and raised their cups.

Just then, Mu Dalang walked in from outside.

"Third Uncle, Third Aunt, you're really back! Am... am I seeing things?"

Mu Dalang had just heard Mr. Mu mention this, he stopped eating and found an excuse to come out.

Mu Dashan and Yu Si Niang hold significant weight in Mu Dalang's heart, and he had been waiting for this couple to come out; the Old Mu Family was really in a mess, making it particularly uncomfortable to stay.

"Big Cousin, you came just in time, eat here today, Shuangshuang will get you a bowl and chopsticks."

Mu Shuangshuang stood up, gave up her seat to Mu Dalang, and fetched a bowl and chopsticks for him.

A table full of delicious food, steaming with aroma, and with an atmosphere far better than the Old Mu Family, Mu Dalang didn't refuse and sat down.

These past few days, for the Third Branch's matters, Mu Dalang had not stopped running around.

In Mu Shuangshuang's heart, Mu Dalang was the best to the Third Branch in the entire Old Mu Family.

The Fourth Branch is still observing, wondering whether it can stand up against the Old Mu Family; Mu Shuangshuang is also waiting.

In fact, Mu Shuangshuang doesn't owe anything to the Fourth Branch, but when the Third Branch was in trouble, the Fourth Branch did show care, and they hadn't harmed the Third Branch either.

In both affection and reason, the human debt must be repaid.

"Dashan, this time you've had good fortune, say whatever it is, you must pay attention in the future. When you go for a walk later, call our family along, and we can talk through anything." Zhang Yutou said.

They chatted a bit more privately, and the welcome-back banquet came to an end.

After seeing each guest off, Mu Shuangshuang tidied up the kitchen.

Everyone was tired today, even Lu Yuanfeng didn't stay to chat with Shuangshuang; it was Mu Dalang who said, after some thought, what he heard while they were eating.

Mu Shuangshuang's mouth immediately opened wide like an egg.

"You're saying the eldest uncle still wants to go to the Capital to take the exam?"

Mu Shuangshuang felt her intelligence was being insulted.

It cost a hundred and thirty taels of silver for the scholar exam, and if he wants to go to the Capital, it won't be less than two hundred taels, right?

What would the Old Mu Family use to support it?

Still sucking the blood from several branches.

With this, Mu Dalang can forget about raising sheep, marrying a wife; even the Fourth Branch, forget about making a mark for life.

"Mm, everyone is arguing now, Fifth Uncle asks the eldest uncle to find a job and see how it goes, after all, everyone has supported the eldest uncle for so many years, being tired is also normal!"

Although Mu Dalang doesn't like his parents' ways, the second branch has indeed been exploited.

Mu Dalang also feels sorry!

"Then I guess, given the eldest uncle's temperament, it might end up with him selling the Old Mu Family's lands." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Back then, when Mu Dade ran out of silver half-way, it was Mr. Mu who sold land and used up the old savings to settle it.

This time, even Old Mrs. Mu is emptied, aside from selling land, she can't think of any other way to gather money for Mu Dade unless it's selling off sons and daughters.

"Sell the land, then what will the Old Mu Family eat?" Mu Dalang asked.

"That depends on how the eldest uncle will say it. Big Cousin, I think your engagement with Miss Huang shouldn't be delayed, and be cautious of Fifth Uncle. Fifth Uncle shouldn't accept that Miss Huang proposes a marriage for you!"

Every word Mu Shuangshuang said was true, Mu Dalang admired her while also feeling worry.

"Shuangshuang, thank you, I know what to do. It's getting late, I'll head back, you rest early!" After speaking, Mu Dalang left.

Mu Shuangshuang stayed in the kitchen for a while, took a bath, and climbed onto the bed.

She lay on the bed, thinking over the events of the past few days.

Starting with Old Wang Family, they were the instigators of this matter.

Ultimately, the Third Branch was too easy to bully in everyone's eyes, the Third Branch's strength wasn't strong, everyone thought the Third Branch could be manipulated at will.

The Old Mu Family might have been the same before, but now that the Old Mu Family has someone like Mu Dade, people must weigh Mu Dade's capabilities before bullying the Old Mu Family.

Because they fear that one day Mu Dade would rise.

They think the Third Branch will be mud-legged for a lifetime, so they don't consider them.

That's really the case.

Now, the Third Branch is indeed at an awkward edge; her business is gone, she can't earn money anytime and anywhere, plus the Third Branch has split off from the Old Mu Family...

All these serve as Mu Shuangshuang's warning, the Third Branch isn't strong enough.

To not be used as a target, the Third Branch must become strong.

Perhaps, she needs to continue seeking a way out, the business that should be done must continue to be done, only in this way, when the Third Branch has accumulated enough money, with strength, everyone will treat the Third Branch with respect!

Chapter 576: Business Comes Knocking

After thinking things through, Mu Shuangshuang felt sleepy and was about to go to bed when suddenly there was a knock at the door.

"Who is it?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Shuangshuang, it's me!"

It was Fengzi's voice.

Mu Shuangshuang was surprised and got up from the bed, opened the door, and a gust of cold wind rushed in.

Lu Yuanfeng stood at the door, wearing a single coat and holding a handful of winter jujubes in his hands.

Before Mu Shuangshuang could react, the winter jujubes were already in her hands.

"Where did you get these winter jujubes?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"That winter jujube tree behind the village, I just went to pick them. I didn't have time during the day, so I thought of it and just went to pick them," Lu Yuanfeng said with a smile.

With a smile, he pulled at the scratches made by the tree branches on his face.

Although it wasn't painful enough to make a grimace, the expression on his face still changed slightly.

Mu Shuangshuang immediately noticed it, and she grabbed Lu Yuanfeng's arm, causing the winter jujubes in her hand to tumble down.

"You really don't take care of yourself, we could have picked the winter jujubes tomorrow morning!"

Mu Shuangshuang didn't care about the jujubes on the ground, instead, she looked at Lu Yuanfeng's face with concern.

"It's no big deal. It doesn't hurt at all. If you don't believe me, touch it!"

To reassure Shuangshuang, Lu Yuanfeng leaned his body slightly forward, bringing his face close for Mu Shuangshuang to touch.

Mu Shuangshuang stretched out her hand, barely touching Lu Yuanfeng's face, when she felt his body tense, his breathing becoming heavier.

Mu Shuangshuang's hand was very soft, like a gentle caress.

This was the first time she touched Lu Yuanfeng's face like this, gentle as if it were a fragile treasure, yet each touch made Lu Yuanfeng feel as if the scratches weren't painful at all.

Lu Yuanfeng was even willing to be hurt more.

The two looked at each other, neither speaking a word.

"Fengzi, let me wash some winter jujubes for you. Let's eat first," Mu Shuangshuang said.

"I don't eat this; it's all for you. At this time, a bite of winter jujube is crisp and sweet!"

Girls like to snack, but Lu Yuanfeng couldn't go to town every day, so he'd come up with a compromise, bringing snacks for Shuangshuang whenever he had free time.

Oranges, winter jujubes, and some wild fruits from the mountains. When he went to town, he'd buy some tasty treats too.

"Let's eat together. There's so much, I can't finish them all."

The two gathered the jujubes on the ground, and Mu Shuangshuang took them to the kitchen to wash them clean.

Afraid of being seen, Mu Shuangshuang closed the door and chatted with Lu Yuanfeng while eating winter jujubes.

It was already early September; the nights were cold, yet Lu Yuanfeng didn't feel it. Maybe it was because it was late, and he was with Shuangshuang in one place.

Lu Yuanfeng felt increasingly warm, sweat pouring out.

Mu Shuangshuang wiped him with a handkerchief several times, but the more she wiped, the more he sweated.

"Fengzi, don't be nervous, we're just talking!"

Mu Shuangshuang feared Lu Yuanfeng might catch a cold, so she reminded him.

And the moment she spoke, the sweat came out more.

"Alright, let me tell you my plan for the future..."

Mu Shuangshuang meant to go to town tomorrow to find a partner for cooperation.

Jiu Si Xuan couldn't be considered because of the incident last time; she didn't want to see it happen again.

However, Xue Yi's place attracted her.

Xue Yi was a bit sinister, but he was smart and had a vast network.

Before avoiding him, she thought he would deceive her.

But after several dealings, except for selling preserved eggs at a high price, he hadn't taken advantage of her.

Cooperating with him seemed reliable!

Mu Shuangshuang explained this to Lu Yuanfeng to hear his opinion.

Lu Yuanfeng thought Xue Yi could be considered but also suggested looking into other options, as ultimately, it was about the price.

As they say, the highest bidder wins!

Mu Shuangshuang agreed with this reasoning, and they decided to ask around in each tavern.

But before they could set off during the day, someone came over in the morning.

The coachman driving the carriage stopped in front of the third branch.

A businessman dressed in his forties got out from inside, seemingly familiar with Shuangshuang's house, and went straight into her room through the small door.

At that moment, Mu Shuangshuang was in the yard feeding pigs. The little black pig had gained quite a bit of fat in just a few months, and every few days, Shuangshuang would lead it outside to let it eat soil and feel freedom.

"Is this Miss Shuangshuang's house?"

The man asked Mu Shuangshuang.

"That's me, and you are?" Mu Shuangshuang didn't remember knowing this person.

"Here's the thing, I'm from the XX Tavern in town. I heard that the cold noodles and popcorn at Jiu Si Xuan were made by you? Why aren't you delivering to Jiu Si Xuan anymore? Did they deduct your pay or have poor manners?"

"I'm telling you, cooperate with us, and I guarantee you'll enjoy good food and drink, as long as you're willing to give us the recipe!"

Mu Shuangshuang frowned.

"How did you know I stopped delivering the cold noodles to Jiu Si Xuan?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"How else would I know? Wasn't it that a couple of days ago, the regular customers of Jiu Si Xuan collectively left and went to other taverns? They especially like your cold noodles and popcorn. Although it's getting colder, they can't let go of that taste!"

The man patiently explained to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang suddenly understood.

She knew her departure had an impact but didn't realize it was such a big one.

"So, have you thought it over? I can offer a high price, twice as much as Jiu Si Xuan!"

Cold noodles and popcorn are rare items.

Of course, most importantly, it's about the person making these things.

An adept housewife doesn't have just one dish. This girl might have more good things hidden.

Moreover, having cold noodles means having Jiu Si Xuan's customers.

This kind of low-investment, high-reward business is irresistibly tempting.

"Sorry! I did end my contract with Jiu Si Xuan and am considering other options, but I haven't made up my mind yet." Mu Shuangshuang isn't someone who makes decisions right away.

She doesn't fight an unprepared battle, at least she needs to understand the situation clearly.

But this morning, several waves of people came like this.

All came by carriage; others might not know the specifics, but they could tell these people were distinguished, so the news of the third branch's success spread, reaching the old Mu Family's main household.

Mu Dade listened to Mrs. Jin in his house with a furrowed brow.

He had hoped to show off in front of the third branch, but the third branch stood out.

What kind of world is this?

"Master, I think you shouldn't worry. This may not necessarily mean the third branch benefits. At least those people didn't stay long. I suspect they came to discuss business with the third branch!"

Ever since Mu Dade passed the provincial examination, Mrs. Jin privately called him "Master" to get used to it in advance.

"Talk business? What business?" Mu Dade asked curiously.

"Exactly, I heard the third branch isn't delivering cold noodles to Jiu Si Xuan anymore. Without that income, maybe those people are here for the cold noodles recipe!"

Chapter 577: The Reckless Eldest House

"Back then, that cheap girl from the third branch was stingy, she wouldn't share the cold noodles recipe. Now see, she's not partnering with anyone and is better off being poor for life!"

Mrs. Jin looked absolutely indignant.

Her hatred for the third branch surpassed even her dislike for the Mu Family's Fifth.

Mu Dade also disliked the third branch; after all, they hadn't helped him at all.

But disliking them wouldn't help; the third branch had already separated, and no matter what he said, they wouldn't necessarily listen;

Not to mention they wouldn't listen to him, even his parents, considering the cunning nature of that girl from the third branch, would definitely not hear them.

"But there's no other way. You've said it yourself, even though they've stopped cooperating with Jiu Si Xuan, people are still coming directly for the recipe. Can you really say the third branch is failing? Do you think their recipe is really that good for so many people to vie for it?"

Mu Dade had never tried cold noodles and didn't know what was so appealing about them.

It's just that with so many people wanting it, it definitely couldn't be a poor thing.

But deep down, he was dissatisfied; even when he passed the imperial exams, not so many people came, and those who did were just poor villagers with things of little value.

Even eggs, no matter how good, were only worth one coin, not to mention the winter jujubes that could be found at the village entrance.

Mrs. Jin was also thinking.

How exactly should they handle this to make the third branch suffer a loss.

After thinking for a long while, she finally came up with an idea.

"How about we stop those people at the village entrance and claim we know the recipe too? Make them give us the silver? Then we'd have travel money, and we could still push the third branch out, and they'd be the ones in trouble!"

Even now, Mrs. Jin's mind was entirely focused on scheming against the third branch.

But this plan seemed unsuitable to Mu Dade.

"Dan Dan's mother, we can't directly get involved. If we do, everything might fall back on me, and it might negatively affect my official career; it's just not worth it!" Mu Dade said.

Mrs. Jin thought about it and agreed; whatever happens, the main branch mustn't step forward.

"Then should we ask Father and Mother to do it? They surely wouldn't mind if we didn't ask for travel money!"

"Father and Mother wouldn't work; what they do still counts on us! It's best to find the second or fourth brother, and if caught, we'd just kick them out of the Old Mu Family, and it's not our responsibility!" Mu Dade suggested.

"Then let's go with the fourth branch. Yesterday, the Fourth helped us speak, and they're honest and easy to handle. Even if they are pushed out, they won't say anything. Plus, the fourth and third branches have a good relationship. Maybe to save the fourth, this whole thing will just be settled!"

The couple calculated their plan with loud claps.

Once finished, they exchanged smiles full of scheming. Mrs. Jin stood up to visit the fourth branch to find Mu Dajiang and Mrs. Liu—

Mu Shuangshuang had just seen off the last guest, and it was time to prepare lunch.

It was her first time dealing with so many people.

Some of their conditions were indeed attractive, but none were well-known.

She ultimately trusted Xue Yi.

Beside her, Lu Yuanfeng poured a cup of tea for Shuangshuang and comforted her: "This thing can't be rushed. Let's take one step at a time. What do you think?"

Mu Shuangshuang naturally agreed with Lu Yuanfeng.

"Fengzi, isn't it strange? I was still thinking last night about how if we can't strike a deal, our income will drop significantly.

I spent a lot of silver when I went to the county a few days ago. If I don't earn it back, I'll cry to death!"

Mu Shuangshuang calculated her expenses for Lu Yuanfeng like a little steward.

Every time she talked about how much she spent, her face showed pain.

Lu Yuanfeng watched with a chuckle.

Shuangshuang is such a little money grubber!

"Don't worry. It's getting colder now, so we can walk into the mountains more. And the vegetables we planted can be sold in town!"

These are sources of income.

Sure enough, hearing these, Mu Shuangshuang's mouth widened in a smile, and the previous gloom instantly disappeared as she quickly counted this potential income in her mind.

In this era, there wasn't much entertainment, and Mu Shuangshuang found making money was one intriguing thing for her.

Besides, without these family matters, she felt life was meaningless.

"Fengzi, I'm going to make lunch. When my mother comes back, tell her not to worry!"

"I'll help you."

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Feng Xiaohua arrived when Mu Shuangshuang had just finished preparing lunch, her eyes red as if she had cried for a long time.

Even her embroidered shoes were dirty and frayed.

Mu Shuangshuang was setting the table when she saw Feng Xiaohua standing at the kitchen's door, looking at her with a face full of grievance.

"Aunt Six, what's wrong? Why are you crying? What happened?"

Mu Shuangshuang rushed over to ask, her face full of concern.

"Shuangshuang... your Uncle Six..."

As soon as she mentioned Yu Liulang, Feng Xiaohua started sobbing as if something terrible had happened.

Mu Shuangshuang panicked.

"Aunt Six, don't worry. Let's talk about it slowly."

Yu Si Niang had just returned from the vegetable plot when she heard the commotion in the kitchen. She came out to see it was Feng Xiaohua with red eyes and tears, and she asked, "Did Sixth Son bully you? Tell me, and I'll deal with him!"

When it comes to Yu Liulang, Yu Si Niang had absolute authority.

She was not above teaching Yu Liulang a lesson.

Feng Xiaohua, seeing everyone supporting her, finally began to speak.

"That... that Luo Xiu'er is back, and Sixth Son only has eyes for her now. He and I are bound to end..."

Feng Xiaohua sobbed as she recounted the whole story.

In summary, it was like this.

Luo Xiu'er had initially pursued wealth and status and married someone else before getting engaged with Yu Liulang. Even later, when the family she married into fell from grace, and life became tough, she never returned to the Old Luo Family.

But this time, she returned with a divorce paper in hand.

Luo Xiu'er was no longer the same; years of suffering had stripped her of her good looks and made her considerably older.

Even so, Feng Xiaohua felt utterly defeated.

Because as soon as Luo Xiu'er returned, Yu Liulang went to see her.

Mr. Yu and Old Mrs. Yu initially concealed this from Feng Xiaohua, but it was Mrs. Li who revealed the matter to her.

If Yu Liulang had told Feng Xiaohua himself from the start, she wouldn't have worried. But now, with the current situation, Feng Xiaohua felt deceived.

It boiled down to miscommunication!

"Aunt Six, don't worry. I think my uncle stands by you. Not telling you might have been to spare your feelings. But I suspect my Second Aunt said this on purpose!"

Li Juhua is sneaky and selfish, and this whole incident might be her doing.

"Do you really think your uncle doesn't want to get back together with Luo Xiu'er?" Feng Xiaohua asked wide-eyed, full of disbelief!

Chapter 578: Mrs. Li Biting the Hand That Feeds

"Of course, you yourself said that Luo Xiuxiu is now old and ugly. Putting aside your feelings for my uncle, just based on appearance, my uncle wouldn't possibly choose her, right?"

Mu Shuangshuang knows how miserable women tortured by their husband's family can be.

Just like Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch.

She's not very old, but the wrinkles on her face are almost catching up to Old Mrs. Mu.

Mrs. Lin is different. Although she's older than Mrs. Liu and typically messy, she has no wrinkles on her face.

Mu Shuangshuang continued, "Sixth Aunt, what kind of person is my Sixth Uncle? Others might not know, but you do. Since he's married to you, his heart chose you. No matter what happens, that won't change."

"Luo Xiuxiu coming back, Shuangshuang doesn't see it as a bad thing. Sixth Aunt, you probably still have unresolved feelings. Why don't we take this opportunity to deal with them and clear the misunderstandings in your heart?"

Mu Shuangshuang's dark eyes fixed on Feng Xiaohua.

The words she spoke weren't to excuse Yu Liulang; it's truly how she feels.

Yu Liulang is trustworthy.

Perhaps these words had an effect, and Feng Xiaohua finally stopped crying.

Yu Si Niang prepared a basin of warm water for Feng Xiaohua to wash her face.

"Xiaohua, let's not think about anything, let's eat first. After eating, I'll go with you to Yu Family Village."

The matter with her brother and sister-in-law is important; Yu Si Niang believes in dealing with it directly.

"Mom, let me go. I'll go check things out and come back tonight."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't want Yu Si Niang having to make a round trip, as Yu Family Village isn't exactly nearby, and Yu Si Niang just got out of jail, her body not yet fully recovered...

"That's good too, I'm relieved if you go!" Yu Si Niang said.

"I'll go with Shuangshuang. I don't have anything to do right now." Lu Yuanfeng offered.

The autumn harvest is around October, so it's about time to clear the channels and dry the fields, to avoid rice plants getting blown over by cold winds.

But Lu Yuanfeng can spare a day to accompany Shuangshuang.

"Alright then, let's move the remaining corn back since we haven't finalized any business deals yet."

Regarding business matters, even Yu Si Niang and Mu Dashan aren't clear; they never ask, fearing that knowing anything might lead to trouble.

But this is not a long-term solution, and Mu Shuangshuang plans to earn money together!

After lunch, Lu Yuanfeng got a cow from the village and drove a cart to Yu Family Village.

As soon as they reached the village entrance, they saw Yu Liulang looking eagerly in their direction.

Mu Shuangshuang said, "It seems my uncle still cares about Aunt; he must have heard Aunt wasn't there, so he's been waiting!"

"How could he care about me? Waiting is because he feels guilty!" Feng Xiaohua retorted.

But the smile at the corner of her mouth betrayed her.

Women love to say the opposite of what they feel.

Mu Shuangshuang and the cart-driving Lu Yuanfeng exchanged knowing smiles, silently watching Feng Xiaohua and Yu Liulang.

Once the bullock cart stopped, Yu Liulang came rushing over.

"I knew you went to my Fourth Sister's place. I've scolded my Second Sister-in-law. It was my fault, I apologize, please don't leave, okay?"

Yu Liulang's eyes were filled with pleading.

Seeing this, Feng Xiaohua softened.

"Fine, I won't leave!"

Joy and gratitude intertwined; Yu Liulang was so happy he was nearly jumping.

He didn't even notice Mu Shuangshuang behind him as he spun Feng Xiaohua around in place.

Women's screams and men's happy shouts mingled together.

It's evident they are quite happy.

"It's resolved so simply, Fengzi, I guess we don't have to wait till tonight to go back." Mu Shuangshuang laughed.

Lu Yuanfeng thought so too; he believed arguments were normal and resolved quickly.

But when the four of them returned together, Feng Xiaohua saw Luo Xiuxiu at her own home, and her face instantly turned pale.

The sweet words earlier felt like slaps on her face, painful and stinging.

"I have things to do, so I won't entertain guests!" She said, and without caring about anything else, Feng Xiaohua went into her room alone.

Yu Liulang was both angry and anxious.

Angry because Luo Xiuxiu came uninvited, anxious because Feng Xiaohua probably misunderstood again.

"Xiaohua, wait for me, I'll go with you..."

Yu Liulang had just spoken when Luo Xiuxiu rushed over, saying, "Brother Liu Lang, I remember what you said to me this morning. I will live my life well from now on. In the future..."

Can I trouble you to help me with some things? I had a falling out with my family, found an abandoned house in the village, and heard that the roof leaks when it rains..."

Luo Xiuxiu's gaze was sincere, but her words were somewhat unreasonable.

Yu Liulang, having married, shouldn't be helping another woman.

Especially not a woman he was once engaged to.

Yu Liulang shook his head, "I might not be able to. I'm married, so with you..."

His words were interrupted by Mrs. Li.

"Why not? You used to help her family before you married Feng Xiaohua, didn't you work on that roof?"

Mrs. Li was determined to match Yu Liulang with Luo Xiuxiu.

Not for anything else, but because Luo Xiuxiu gave her a bracelet yesterday and promised her that if she became Yu Liulang's wife, her family's tea plantation would belong to Mrs. Li.

Mrs. Li had firmly decided to cooperate with Luo Xiuxiu; she brought Luo Xiuxiu here today precisely to upset Feng Xiaohua.

"It's different!" Yu Liulang said.

"How is it different? People are people, Feng Xiaohua's father is crippled, and Xiuxiu is alone!"

Mrs. Li spat on the ground and continued, "Sixth Son, I know you're afraid others will misunderstand you and Xiuxiu, but things have passed for so many years, you yourself said to face them. Avoiding now is clearly lying, isn't it?"

Listening to this, Mu Shuangshuang realized a bit of the situation.

She guessed correctly; Mrs. Li is behind this mess.

This woman is like a troublemaker, wanting to break up her Sixth Uncle and Feng Xiaohua!

"Second Aunt, you can't say things like that. We still need to avoid suspicion in this matter. As the saying goes, don't bend over in melon fields, don't raise your head under peach trees. These are lessons from the past."

"Considering the previous relationship between my Sixth Uncle and Miss Luo, if they get too close, people will definitely misunderstand, so we should avoid suspicion. Miss Xiuxiu probably doesn't want my Sixth Uncle to be misunderstood, doesn't want my Sixth Aunt to feel hurt, right?" Mu Shuangshuang's mouth curved gently into a smile.

The smile was beautiful, but the words were forceful.

Luo Xiuxiu didn't want her uncle then, and now she thinks she can come back? Too late!

Luo Xiuxiu was stunned; she never imagined someone would speak to her like this so directly, even though she had anticipated the Yu family would be cold toward her.

This girl is powerful!

Chapter 579: Not a Man

"How could your sixth aunt not feel uncomfortable? I see she's quite comfortable. Even when there are guests at home, she doesn't even bother to greet them and just goes into her room. I think she's doing it on purpose!" Mrs. Li said.

"Second Sister-in-law, watch your words. What did Xiaohua do to provoke you, for you to speak about her like this?"

Yu Liulang always knew that this second sister-in-law didn't like him, nor did she like Feng Xiaohua. But saying such things about Xiaohua in front of outsiders, Yu Liulang couldn't stand it.

"How did I talk about her? I'm just stating the facts. She's been married into our family for so long and there's still no news from her belly. For all we know, people might think she can't have children!" Mrs. Li said, standing her ground.

"Second Sister-in-law, that's enough. This is my business, and I advise you not to meddle!" Yu Liulang said angrily.

"Alright, you all stop arguing. It's rare for Shuangshuang to visit today, and Miss Xiuxiu is also at our home. If you keep arguing, it'll make us a laughing stock." Mr. Yu interrupted Mrs. Li and Yu Liulang.

The tension between the two finally subsided.

Luo Xiu'er bit her lip and suddenly said, "Brother Liu Lang, I'm heading back now. As for what I mentioned earlier, just pretend I never said it..."

With that, Luo Xiu'er covered her mouth and left in tears.

Yu Liulang wasn't in the mood to care about Luo Xiu'er. At that moment, all he could think about was Feng Xiaohua.

She's been inside for so long, probably crying again.

"Dad, Mom, I'll go check on Xiaohua. Shuangshuang, you and Fengzi take a rest first. I'll slaughter a duck for you for lunch later."

After speaking, Yu Liulang headed to the backyard.

Old Mrs. Yu followed and started chatting with Mu Shuangshuang.

Mr. Yu invited Lu Yuanfeng outside.

It wasn't the first time everyone was here, so the conversation flowed smoothly.

Mu Shuangshuang was also assured seeing Lu Yuanfeng with Mr. Yu.

Knowing that Mu Shuangshuang came because of Yu Liulang, Old Mrs. Yu quickly shared her thoughts.

"Shuangshuang, don't think I'm being too much. I really don't like that girl from the Luo Family. You have no idea how she tormented my good son back then into that state!"

"Also, when she came back, she didn't find her parents. She just came looking for our Liulang. What kind of behavior is that? Back when Liulang was pleading with her, she was so ruthless!"

People have feelings. Even someone like Old Mrs. Yu, who usually stays out of trouble and doesn't gossip, couldn't help but criticize Luo Xiu'er because of the suffering her son endured.

It shows just how excessive Luo Xiu'er had been.

"Shuangshuang believes that Grandma is speaking the truth. Any proper lady knows that since my sixth uncle is already married, she should keep her distance. Even if there's really nothing, it can easily be misunderstood!"

Mu Shuangshuang's words gave Old Mrs. Yu a deep sense of affirmation.

This matter, she definitely had to intervene.

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Luo Family

Luo Xiu'er returned home, and Old Sir Luo and Old Mrs. Luo rushed up to her, full of anxiety.

"How is it? What do the Yu Family members mean, is Yu Liulang going to marry you?"

In this era, polygamy was commonplace. Although it was rare for peasant families to take concubines, Yu Liulang was no longer the man he once was, and no one else was willing to marry Luo Xiu'er.

It would be better to just settle for Yu Liulang. At least he was familiar, and wouldn't hit or scold Luo Xiu'er.

"It's just like that, Yu Liulang has changed. Now his heart is all about Feng Xiaohua. Why didn't you call me back when he was getting married?"

Luo Xiu'er felt discontented.

Initially thinking that a businessman had more potential than Yu Liulang, who would have thought the tables would turn, leading to this kind of outcome.

"Xiuxiu, back then, weren't you still causing a scene at the Zhang Family? We didn't dare to tell you..." Old Sir Luo said, full of grievance.

He had also hoped his daughter would bring them prosperity, but now, not only was nothing achieved, but she had become the laughing stock of the entire village.

"Enough, don't mention this anymore! I'll handle the matter between Yu Liulang and me myself, you just keep badmouthing me outside, especially in front of Yu Liulang."

This battle, Luo Xiu'er would definitely not let herself lose. The position of Yu Liulang's wife was still hers.

Chapter 580: Eldest Uncle Wants to Become an Official

In the Old Yu Family's backyard, Mrs. Li sneakily buried some things under a peach tree.

This stuff was meant to make a man's vigor disappear.

Ever since Feng Xiaohua came into the family, Mrs. Li increasingly felt that her days were unbearable.

They wouldn't even wait for her to eat a meal.

Even when it came to killing chickens, she never had a share.

The old lady favored Feng Xiaohua, giving her all the good things.

Especially after Mrs. Li heard that if Feng Xiaohua bore a child, she would be put in charge of the tea garden. Mrs. Li was, of course, unhappy.

The family fortune she painstakingly built shouldn't be managed by outsiders. No way would she let Feng Xiaohua have a child.

"Mom, what are you burying?"

Suddenly, a voice rang out from behind, startling Mrs. Li enough to drop her hoe. Turning, she saw her son Yu Tiancai and slapped him.

"You fool, dare to sneak up on your mother like that! Get lost and go find your dead father!"

Being scolded like this, Yu Tiancai left crying.

Mrs. Li took a last look at the mound under the peach tree and walked away reassured.

In the front yard, Mu Shuangshuang was helping her aunt with cooking. The two were chatting and laughing, much easier to get along with than Mrs. Li.

However, the only odd thing was that Yu Liulang, who said he would come out to slaughter the duck, hadn't shown up.

Mu Shuangshuang understood Yu Liulang's character; he's someone who follows through on his word. This time, something must be up with Yu Liulang.

When lunch was served, Yu Liulang came out listlessly, and Feng Xiaohua also seemed out of sorts, prompting Mu Shuangshuang to inquire about the situation.

Feng Xiaohua and Yu Liulang naturally kept it secret. If such matters were told to others, they'd never be able to live peacefully again.

The pair strongly denied, saying there was nothing wrong.

But the more they denied, the more Mu Shuangshuang felt something was amiss!

Just after lunch, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng were urged home by Yu Liulang. This was unheard of. Mu Shuangshuang, suspicious, discreetly told Old Mrs. Yu about it.

Then she and Lu Yuanfeng carried a few hundred pounds of corn back to Er Gui Village.

Unexpectedly, the Old Mu Family was setting off firecrackers. At first, Mu Shuangshuang thought it was for Mu Dade's official letter and didn't pay much attention.

It wasn't until someone from the Old Mu Family came to call everyone for dinner that Mu Shuangshuang realized Mu Xianxian had come from town to visit Mu Dade.

Now that Mu Dade was a scholar, the pomp was not lacking in any way.

Mu Xianxian even set off firecrackers at the visit, and brought out-of-season shoes, one pair per person.

In fact, Mu Xianxian came to show Mu Dade the right path.

After all, Mu Xianxian, like the rest of the Old Mu Family, didn't want Mu Dade to continue his exams. Once a scholar, being eligible to become an official, that's what he truly should pursue.

After ten bitter years of study, it's all for becoming an official, whether it's a low-level or high-ranking position, as long as it's respectable.

The Old Mu Family's first branch—

Mu Xianxian was wholeheartedly persuading Mu Dade, nearly exhausting herself.

"Brother, I'm not just saying this for fun. Before you think about going to the Capital for the exams, we need to talk. Exams are unpredictable; who knows if you will pass!

Every year, many talents fail at the Capital. They leave optimistic but return like beaten dogs."

Mu Xianxian had seen the world; one must be cautious about this.

Mu Dade felt particularly uneasy hearing Mu Xianxian's words.

"Brother, remember Ruan Xiao Jiao? She's now a small wife to the County Magistrate. I saw her parents in town the other day; she's doing well. If you want to be an official, seek her out; she might help you become a County Magistrate or secretary.

Once you're an official, our family will prosper, and our parents can stop farming in the village."

Mu Xianxian seemed to be speaking for Mu Dade, but it was actually for herself.

The positions of County Magistrate and secretary might be low-level, but even the strongest dragon cannot defeat a local snake. There, one can gather some gains, and later even buy a County position. Mu Dade could have enough for a lifetime.

And she could stand proudly in her husband's family, making the old lady who belittles her from home see her differently.

At this moment, Mu Dade was wavering.

If Mrs. Jin hadn't seduced him, he would have married Ruan Xiao Jiao.

Recalling the girl from his memories with two braided pigtailed and a shy smile, Mu Dade suddenly felt his long-dormant heart stir.

Someone he hasn't forgotten over the years, a person he eagerly wanted to see now.

"Little sister, let me think about it!" Mu Dade didn't agree right away.

His little sister was too shrewd; every time she spent money on him, she found ways to recoup it.

If he simply agreed this time, she might have more demands of him in the future.

Mu Dade didn't have other thoughts now, only not letting his family reap benefits at his expense. Why should they live well when he's the one who worked hard for the exams, and they did nothing?

"Brother, think it through! We're all waiting for you to become an official. Our Old Mu Family will finally hold our heads high!"

"Alright, alright, I got it!" Mu Dade nodded, then added, "I heard you invited the third branch. You don't like them, do you?"

Initially, Mu Dade and Mu Xianxian collaborated; Mu Xianxian wanted the recipe, and Mu Dade wanted money. Unfortunately, in the end, it didn't succeed. Mu Shuangshuang was too clever, not caving to their persuasion.

"Disliking them is one thing, inviting them is another. That brat taunted me before, today she'll pay me back."

The evening meal was a trap, and Mu Xianxian's declaration of sovereignty; she wanted the third branch to know that whoever mistreated her in the past wouldn't end well.

Upon hearing this, Mu Dade rejoiced, believing his sister had a plan. He said, "You thought of a way to deal with the third branch? Tell me!"

"This can't be spoken, you'll find out later!"

Mu Xianxian withheld her secret; she had suffered much from that brat in town before, and this time she wouldn't let her off easily.

Mu Dade suddenly felt uninterested, his attitude towards his sister soured.

"By the way, brother, how come your official letter hasn't arrived?"

Mu Xianxian found this particularly odd; others had received theirs, but there was no notice here.

Logically, there should be three notifications: from Qianzhou Prefecture, the county, and the town. Why hasn't even one arrived?

At this point, Mu Xianxian started to feel scared, fearing her brother might have deceived her.

Could he have not passed at all?

Cold sweat formed on Mu Xianxian's forehead as she shivered, suddenly feeling like she had entered an icehouse.

If her brother hadn't passed, her fifty taels for travel expenses were gone, twenty taels of congratulatory money were gone, and even today's firecracker money wouldn't be recovered.

"Brother, tell your sister the truth. Did you really pass? Why have others received their letters and you haven't?"

Mu Dade's face turned the color of pig liver—