

## Folly 581

Chapter 581: Keep an Eye on Mu Dade

"Big sis, what are you really here for today? If you're suspecting Big Brother, you better leave!"

Mu Dade's attitude wasn't pleasant.

He's already participated in the Lu Ming Banquet, how could it be fake?

Besides, the test papers and the ones he bought clearly matched exactly.

"Big Brother, I wasn't suspecting you, I just wanted to be sure, you know why not many people came to visit our family? It's because your documents didn't arrive. If they don't come, everyone's going to be just as suspicious as I am!"

Mu Xianxian smiled flatteringly, wearing an ingratiating expression.

At heart, Mu Xianxian was calculating; she had previously thought she'd waive her Big Brother's fifty taels, now it seemed she'd have to reclaim it.

Even if it meant making her parents sell land and fields, she'd have to track it down.

"Alright, you don't need to worry about this matter!"

Mu Dade didn't want to speak much to Mu Xianxian, it's just a document; it'd come eventually anyway, so why fret so?

Mu Xianxian was chased out of Mu Dade's room.

She didn't actually leave but went to Mu Xiangxiang's room instead.

Mu Xiangxiang's room was also a mess this time, not really viewable.

However, upon seeing Mu Xianxian, Mu Xiangxiang still hurriedly climbed down from the bed.

"Big Sister, why are you here?"

Mu Xiangxiang lived in Mu Xianxian's house for quite a while and felt closer to this big sister than the second sister.

So naturally, Mu Xiangxiang's attitude towards Mu Xianxian was good.

"Sweetie, tell me, are you having fun here?" Mu Xianxian asked.

"Not fun, Big Sister, take me to town, no one's serving me here, look at my room, it's still messy."

Mu Xiangxiang pointed at the corner with the chamber pot that hadn't been emptied yet.

Mu Xianxian realized that when she entered the room, that unpleasant urine smell was coming from there.

Mu Xianxian couldn't help but turn her head away in disdain.

"By the way, Xiangxiang, have you heard Big Brother say anything? About the imperial exams?"

Mu Xianxian was still uneasy.

If her Big Brother was really lying, then she'd have no status in the Cao Family's house.

If she weren't clever, the Cao Family would have arranged a concubine for her husband already.

Mu Xiangxiang spent most days sleeping, where would she know such matters.

But Mu Xiangxiang wasn't stupid, if she claimed ignorance, her big sister definitely wouldn't treat her well.

So Mu Xiangxiang deliberately put on a nervous face: "Big Sister, I really need to tell you, Big Brother is so not the man he should be, hiding the tiniest things. He only talks secretly with Big Sister-in-law; whenever I try to listen, those two girls guard against me like I'm a thief."

Mu Xiangxiang exaggerated and criticized the first branch a bit.

Mu Xianxian's heart sank instantly.

She thought of the stuff she brought over, and those shoes she brought, at this moment Mu Xianxian just wanted them back.

"Xiangxiang, listen to me, Big Brother might not have passed the exams; he's here tricking us for money!"

Mu Xianxian shared her thoughts with Mu Xiangxiang.

Mu Xiangxiang was Old Mrs. Mu's favorite daughter, what she said was more reliable than what Mu Xianxian said.

"What? Didn't pass?" Mu Xiangxiang jumped up in shock.

"Shh, lower your voice; we can't tell anyone for now. Just observe Big Brother more closely, see what he's actually up to. If something's off, you tell mom..."

Mu Xianxian handed the plan to Mu Xiangxiang, only then did she feel relieved.

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Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng placed the corn away, not yet having time to rest, Yu Si Niang came over, looking troubled as she gazed at Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang instantly knew there was a matter troubling her.

"Mom, you want to ask about Uncle? He's fine, getting along well with Aunt Xiao Hua."

Mu Shuangshuang reported good news instead of bad, even though Yu Liulang and Feng Xiaohua's expressions weren't quite right.

"Hmm, Mom knows! She just wanted to ask you if we must go there for dinner tonight?"

Now that Mu Dade has returned, people from the third branch hadn't gone to visit; suddenly going would make it seem like they want to cling to the first branch.

"It's no trouble, since my aunt sent people over repeatedly inviting us, it'd be unreasonable for us not to go!"

Before Mr. Mu came twice and didn't visit, this time, it demonstrated that the third branch isn't under anyone's control, they do as they please!

"Alright then, Mom will get ready!"

Yu Si Niang meant to go to the Old Mu Family's kitchen to help Mrs. Liu cook when she said she'd prepare.

These chores used to be hers alone, but now it's Mrs. Liu's turn.

Seeing the increasingly slim Mrs. Liu, Yu Si Niang felt uneasy.

"Mom, there's no need for you to go prepare; even without us, Fourth Aunt would still have to cook. If you get used to it, Grandma will often call you over!"

"It's fine, Fourth Aunt is pitiable, and it's not like I have time every day, just today I'm free!"

Saying that, Yu Si Niang went to the Old Mu Family's house.

Mu Shuangshuang sighed deeply and said to Lu Yuanfeng: "Why is my mom so kind-hearted; even my dad isn't soft anymore, but she's still like this, even though she has a tougher personality than my dad!"

Mu Shuangshuang was puzzled, but Lu Yuanfeng comforted her instead.

"Fourth Aunt is a wife; as a wife, she naturally respects the mother-in-law. Uncle Dashan is different; he's a man, and the responsibilities he carries are heavier than others!"

Mu Shuangshuang nodded in agreement: "That's true, but my grandma, this mother-in-law..." Mu Shuangshuang shook her head seriously.

Lu Yuanfeng couldn't help but laugh.

"Then I guess I'll have dinner with Yuanbao at home tonight; tomorrow we'll go finalize the business in the town, then I'll go dig out the canal for those three acres of rice fields!"

Those three acres from the Old Mu Family are now Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng's property. After harvest, they only need to give half of it back to the Old Mu Family.

"Great, once these tasks are done, we'll have to prepare the banquet menu for the feast!"

The feast on September 16th isn't too close, but it's not too far either!

Mu Shuangshuang sent Lu Yuanfeng off and also took a look at the chicks in the hills.

In the bamboo forest, the birds chirp cheerily this time, and the bamboo pipes laying across the forest carried water.

Lu Yuanfeng just needed to fill the pipes with water each morning, and it would suffice for the chicks' daily needs.

Then there were the feeding troughs, made of wood, filled with herbal medicines Zhang Huai Shu concocted.

These chicks have grown up eating herbs, and not a single one died; besides, Lu Yuanfeng was skilled, having sprinkled sulfur around, there wasn't even a trace of snakes.

In such a short time, the chicks had grown thick feathers, although they weren't as good as the chickens Mu Dalian stole from Tie Dao Village, Mu Shuangshuang was very satisfied!

"It's a shame it's not the season for bamboo shoots now; come spring, when bamboo shoots are all over the mountains, we'll have our work cut out for us again!" Mu Shuangshuang sighed.

"No need to wait till spring, there'll be shoots in winter; winter shoots are tastier than spring shoots!" Lu Yuanfeng commented.

With such a thought, Mu Shuangshuang looked forward even more!

"Fengzi, do you want me to make dinner for you before you go back?"

Chapter 582: The Hongmen Banquet

"No need, head back early. I can handle it myself!" Lu Yuanfeng shook his head.

He's not some golden noble; he can make do with a meal on his own.

"But it's still early, Yuanbao and Little Zhi should be playing behind the village. I heard today Yuanbao took a bunch of kids to pick winter dates!"

It was fine before mentioning this, but once mentioned, Lu Yuanfeng got a headache.

Yuanbao would try anything, from heaven to earth, except for what can't be done. Last time he took some kids to Niuwei Mountain, if not for timely intervention...

Who knows what would have happened!

"That boy is quite tough. I guess he won't stop without a setback!" Lu Yuanfeng said.

"Let him be, as long as it's not committing crimes or harming morals. If he likes to play, let him play. Anyway, the two of us are behind, and with Little Zhi, Yuanbao isn't entirely reckless!"

Hearing Shuangshuang's words, Lu Yuanfeng finally felt at ease.

"Then I'll go help with dinner. You go to our garden and get some greens. I'll wash the rice and cut sweet potatoes, and I've prepared corn. I'm thinking of making corn soup!"

When it comes to cooking, Mu Shuangshuang definitely excels.

It's just that during the past few days with Lu Yuanfeng absent, the kitchen and the house became quite a mess.

Mu Shuangshuang picked up a cloth and began wiping carefully.

Just as Lu Yuanfeng left, Gu Jiulian started shouting from outside.

"Lu Yuanfeng, you coward! Where's my good daughter, Guagua? You pay for my Guagua..."

"You can't marry due to lack of money but won't allow others to marry. You're shameless!"

Ever since Xia Guagua escaped from Wang Fugui's house, she hasn't returned to the Old Lu Family. Days have passed, and Gu Jiulian is long restless.

But Lu Yuanfeng's house was empty, and with someone finally there today, Gu Jiulian began cursing outside the house.

All sorts of unpleasant words were uttered.

Mu Shuangshuang found it harsh to hear, just as there was a bucket of slop left for days at her feet.

In farm households, slop is usually made up of water used for washing dishes and pots, mixed with leftover food. It's fine for a day, but over a few days, it ferments.

Mu Shuangshuang picked up the bucket and headed straight outside the yard.

Due to the blocked view by the courtyard wall, Gu Jiulian didn't see what Mu Shuangshuang was carrying.

Seeing Mu Shuangshuang, Gu Jiulian screamed at the top of her voice: "So it's you, little wretch, colluding with Lu Yuanfeng! Return my daughter, you..."

Before she could finish, Mu Shuangshuang poured the bucket of slop over Gu Jiulian's head.

A strong, sour stench emanated.

Gu Jiulian shrieked in terror, comparable to a pig being slaughtered.

Aunt Zhang came out from the house, initially curious to watch, but seeing Gu Jiulian treated this way, she quickly retreated.

Watching is minor; life is major!

"You wretched girl, I'll kill you..." Gu Jiulian shouted blindly.

At this moment, the pungent slop smell kept her eyes shut, completely unaware of Mu Shuangshuang's whereabouts.

Mu Shuangshuang didn't speak and let Gu Jiulian continue her act solo.

After a full two incense sticks' time of cursing, Lu Yuanfeng returned, making Gu Jiulian pause, still panting heavily.

Gu Jiulian was impressed by Mu Shuangshuang. She matched Old Mrs. Mu in temperament, but married too early, now being a bit older. If she were younger, she'd surely have Matchmaker Sun bother Mu Danian.

For dinner, Mu Shuangshuang prepared simple two dishes and a soup, all vegetarian. These days, Lu Yuanfeng hasn't gone to the mountains, so there's no more meat at home. Plus, with a grudge against Wang Erma, neither Lu Yuanfeng nor Mu Shuangshuang would buy meat in the village.

"Alright, let's just make do for today. When the time comes, I'll make a big meal for you and Yuanbao!"

After pouring the rice into the pot, Mu Shuangshuang said to Lu Yuanfeng.

"I'll see you home!" Seeing Mu Shuangshuang planning to leave, Lu Yuanfeng spoke up.

"No need, you've got rice cooking, someone needs to watch it. Besides, it's still daytime, no worries!"

On her way back to the third branch, Mu Shuangshuang ran into Yuanbao. The little guy was joyfully returning with pockets full of large winter dates. Seeing Shuangshuang, he handed her two handfuls before going home!

By now, everyone in the Third Branch of the Mu Family was ready, dressed in festive new clothes, clearly valuing tonight's dinner.

However, Mu Shuangshuang looked casual, without changing her clothes.

She wasn't even dirty, and Mu Dade isn't someone to make her change into new clothes.

"Dad, Mom, let's go!" Mu Shuangshuang called.

"Sis, aren't you wearing pretty clothes?" Little Zhi turned around, surprised to see Mu Shuangshuang.

"Not changing, let's go, Little Zhi. Let the Old Mu Family see how cute you look in new clothes."

Mu Shuangshuang picked up Little Zhi and spun him around, his giggles echoing far away.

Old Mrs. Mu heard laughter from the third branch and spat out thick phlegm: "Bah! This uncultured stuff, making people wait but still here causing a ruckus!"

"Grandma, why say that about Uncle's family? We're all one family, just eating, what's wrong with waiting? Besides, hasn't Uncle's family and First Aunt also not come?"

Mu Dalang couldn't stand Old Mrs. Mu cursing the third branch.

"Shut up! You crooked thing, eating my food, living in my house, and still dare to talk back!" Old Mrs. Mu cursed.

Mu Dalang remained silent.

Mu Shuangshuang could sense the tense atmosphere upon entering, though it was never right in the Old Mu Family!

"Oh, Si Niang, looks like you only just made dinner in the kitchen before changing into new clothes for Big Brother's eyes?" Mrs. Lin said.

Mu Shuangshuang's temper flared instantly.

"Aunt, you know Shuangshuang's earning money now; changing ten outfits a day for mom is no problem!"

"You..." Mrs. Lin didn't expect Mu Shuangshuang to retort so bluntly, getting furious.

"What's wrong, Aunt? Jealous? You probably can't be jealous, since not every cat or dog knows business!"

Two consecutive sentences angered Mrs. Lin, turning her face red, breathing rapidly, and looking almost mad, nearly standing up to bite Mu Shuangshuang.

"Alright, it's a joyous day today. It's rare for the third branch to visit. Second daughter-in-law, you keep quiet, no more talk!"

Mrs. Lin finally sat down but continued muttering curses.

Likely, the ancestors of the Old Mu Family were cursed again by her.

"Second, go check why your big brother and Xianxian still haven't arrived!" Mr. Mu spoke up.

"Dad, I'm not going. It's almost time to eat!" Mu Dazhong refused.

"Dad, let me go. I'm quick on my feet!" Chen Hong stood up, adjusting her attire.

Anyone with brains could tell she was seizing the chance to get close to Mu Dade!

Chapter 583: Driving Mrs. Jin Crazy

Mu Shuangshuang found Chen Hong's self-assured demeanor quite amusing.

Looking at Chen Hong, it seemed like she wanted to get closer to Mu Dade, but who knows if Mu Dade would even be interested in Chen Hong.

"Chen Hong, stay put, why is an outsider like you welcoming my son?"

Old Mrs. Mu called out to Chen Hong, who already had one foot out of the kitchen.

Chen Hong ignored her, swaying her hips as she swaggered out.

Old Mrs. Mu was so angry she almost fainted.

After a while, Mu Dade and Mu Xianxian came into the main room, followed by Mu Xiangxiang.

A large crowd surged in, making the kitchen crowded in an instant.

The same two Eight Immortals tables were set, one for the adults and one for the kids, but this time, the dishes on both tables were of the same portions.

Gou Dan occupied the central position at the children's table, presumably to make it easier to snatch food later. Mu Shuangshuang felt goosebumps watching him with a face full of snot.

"Shuangshuang, why don't you join us at the adult table?" Mu Dade suggested.

Mu Shuangshuang wouldn't mind, but after looking around, the only spot left was next to Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin, being able to raise someone like Gou Dan, was no easy character herself.

Ever since claiming she was pregnant, she hadn't washed her hair. Being anywhere near her, you'd catch a whiff of that sour smell she carried.

Mu Shuangshuang naturally wasn't willing.

"Elder Brother, I'll just sit here!" At least with Gou Dan, Mu Shuangshuang could still maintain some control!

"Shuangshuang, I'll sit with you!" Mu Dalang, who was about to sit elsewhere, stood up and moved to the children's table.

This left Mrs. Jin and Mrs. Lin seated together.

Once settled, Mrs. Lin leaned forward obsequiously.

"Elder Sister-in-law, what interesting things did you see outside, tell me about them?"

Mrs. Lin shouldn't have opened her mouth; when she did, not only did her yellowed teeth show, but a wave of bad breath nearly knocked Mrs. Jin out.

Mrs. Jin's mood soured instantly!

Out of an official's wife's courtesy, she still managed a smile at Mrs. Lin.

"Actually, it's not much different from Qingshan Town. Didn't Xiao Zao visit Qingshan Town? Qianzhou Prefecture is just like that."

Hearing this, Mrs. Lin was anxious and leaned in closer to Mrs. Jin. "Elder Sister-in-law, how can they be the same? Qianzhou Prefecture is the biggest place around here. Don't be stingy, tell us about it, broaden our horizons!"

This almost knocked Mrs. Jin unconscious with the smell, her polite face turning pale.

Her hand was already clenched into a fist, barely stopping herself from slapping Mrs. Lin.

"Dad, look at Elder Sister-in-law. She's been to so many places but won't tell us. It's a shame we scrimped and saved to support Big Brother's studies, and before he's even made it big, she's forgotten where she came from. What are we going to do in the future?"

Mrs. Lin, with that mouth of hers, loudly drew everyone's attention to herself.

"Elder Sister-in-law, since my Second Sister-in-law mentioned it, why don't you tell us? Since we haven't seen the world, we have to hear about it from you!" Mu Xianxian chimed in.

"Exactly, Elder Sister-in-law, you are the Golden Noble, the future official's wife. You're the best to talk about this. Also, tell us when Big Brother's official document will come. We're all waiting for it so we can notify our relatives and prepare a celebration feast!"

Mu Xiangxiang was in a bad mood because her elder sister previously joked that Mu Dade might not have truly passed the exams but came back to scam money.

She didn't want to live her whole life in the countryside.

Mrs. Jin felt a hint of resentment from Mu Xiangxiang for no reason, even though she hadn't wronged her.

She had just returned...

"Elder daughter-in-law, since everyone wants to hear about Qianzhou, why don't you tell us?" Mr. Mu spoke up, so Mrs. Jin had no choice but to comply.

"Actually, there isn't much to say. Qianzhou Prefecture has jurisdiction over thirteen counties and countless small towns, so it is indeed quite beautiful there.

Of course, the number of people doing business there is endless. Women's rouge and cosmetics are ridiculously priced, yet the ladies of wealthy families buy them like crazy regardless."

During those two months in Qianzhou, Mrs. Jin truly experienced what luxury was, and her biggest wish now was to settle down there and buy whatever she desired!

Mrs. Lin looked envious as well.

She looked at Mrs. Jin's fair, tender face and bright red lips, along with those delicate hands.

Then she looked at herself, with her sallow complexion, pale lips, and even her hands were dirty, black, and unkempt. Compared to Mrs. Jin, she looked just like a servant.

Remembering their shared starting point back then, Mrs. Lin felt uncomfortable inside.

She also wanted to disparage Mrs. Jin.

"I said why does Elder Sister-in-law wear clothes worth a few taels of silver. Turns out she's worldly, but you can't squander the hard-earned money from father and mother's farming, right? Those funds were for Big Brother's education."

The Old Mu Family's Mr. Mu and Old Mrs. Mu both looked displeased.

The family had spent so much money, and they did spend it, but Mrs. Jin sharing it with others made the family feel disheartened.

"In fact, this dress was a gift from Yinyin's family. I passed the scholar exams, so they were happy..." Mu Dade tried to smooth things over.

But everyone still looked unhappy.

Their gazes towards Mrs. Jin were full of blame.

Mrs. Jin gave Mu Dade a look full of grievance.

Fortunately, Mrs. Liu finally brought a pot of rice to the table; it was time to eat.

Dinner was indeed sumptuous; Old Mu Family had slaughtered their last two hens to make dishes for Mu Dade. Moving forward, they had no more adult chickens left, only some crowing chicks which would taste nice if stir-fried with ginger.

But even that would eventually run out.

Whenever it was time to kill chickens, Old Mrs. Mu always felt heartache.

But she had no choice; her son had to eat!

This meal, with Mu Dade and Mu Xianxian there, Old Mrs. Mu didn't serve the dishes; she let everyone help themselves.

Before they sat down, Old Mrs. Mu had already warned her sons and daughters-in-law not to go overboard.

Old Mrs. Mu was watching closely!

Mr. Mu was exceedingly happy today. After such a long time, the Old Mu Family was finally complete, truly complete, with no one missing.

The main family had returned, and even Dalang, who had been an apprentice outside, had come back.

"Alright, everyone, eat your fill today. Fourth daughter-in-law, today you and Si Niang worked hard!"

This meal would not have been possible so easily without Yu Si Niang and Mrs. Liu.

Mr. Mu knew this in his heart!

"Dad, it's not a problem, this is what I should do."

Mrs. Liu was overwhelmed with excitement after being praised for the first time in all her years of cooking.

Yu Si Niang also wanted to say something, but her hand was held tight by Mu Dashan.

He said, "Dad should properly thank Si Niang and the fourth daughter-in-law. All the dishes on this big table were made by those two, including the killing and plucking of the chickens—tasks that should've been done by men—but the whole job was handled by the two women!"

Chapter 584: Can't Help but Speak

"Dad, you might think I'm talking too much, but I have to say this!"

Mu Dashan glanced around the room, his hand clenched into a fist.

"Back then, we all agreed to send Big Brother to school, and it's been more than ten years. During these years, we don't even know how much money the family made because Mom's been keeping the accounts, and we have no right to know!"

"Now that Big Brother has passed the imperial exam, we should follow him and enjoy life. That's only fair for all the things we've given him over the years!"

The sly ones in the Old Mu Family, upon hearing Mu Dashan's words, all expressed their agreement.

"What Shuangshuang's father says makes sense. Big Brother, you can't just leave us behind and enjoy a good life on your own. If we don't seek you out, even the heavens will!"

Mu Dade's face turned ashen.

He hated the Third Branch of the Mu Family at this moment. Clearly, no one had brought this up before, but now everyone had become more alert.

"Don't worry, your big brother is not someone who forgets his roots. What belongs to our Old Mu Family, he will not shortchange us on a single penny," Mr. Mu assured on behalf of Mu Dade.

Only then did everyone feel slightly relieved.

But Mu Dashan hadn't finished speaking.

"Dad, recently, the fourth branch should have been doing the most work. Initially, these tasks were done by the third branch, now transferred to the fourth, yet the fourth family hasn't really received any benefits.

Why is it that those who work the most not only gain nothing but are also criticized? Why should they keep doing so much work then, is that fair?"

Mu Dashan was standing up for the fourth branch and also expressing the grievances of the third branch.

Now that big brother had passed the exam, he might not stay in the village anymore. This was the only chance, the third branch was not looking to grab a big piece of meat, just to live peacefully as a family.

Mu Shuangshuang almost wanted to jump up and kiss Mu Dashan for saying what was on his mind.

The long-held resentment was likely one of the reasons for Mu Dashan's health issues.

Mu Dashan had always sought affirmation from the family, but after the incident in the county, he was fully awakened—when something happened to the third branch, it was the third branch alone that had to handle it.

Even when Big Brother passed the exams, no one cared enough to ask.

In other words, even if his big brother became an official, he would not protect the people of the Old Mu Family.

This was something Mu Dashan kept to himself but also served as a warning to the brothers to pay attention to this matter.

"Third brother, what you're saying is my fault!" Mr. Mu rarely lowered his head.

In his lifetime, with eight children, all his hopes were pinned on the eldest.

He himself was a mud-legged farmer with no way to change his status, so he focused on nurturing just one.

Mu Dade's success in the examination proved to him that his method was right.

Even if it meant selling off everything, he was determined to support a scholar.

But Mr. Mu neglected the personalities of his other sons and daughters.

Or as Mu Shuangshuang would say, it was because Mr. Mu was an unqualified father that the children developed wildly different characters. Some were so heartless that they could even sell their niece for gain.

As long as it benefited themselves, they wouldn't fear losing conscience or suffering divine retribution.

"The second brother is lazy; I didn't manage him. The fifth brother is opportunistic; I didn't manage him. Xiangxiang is lazy by nature; I..."

As soon as Mr. Mu mentioned Mu Xiangxiang, Old Mrs. Mu exploded.

"What's wrong with our Xiangxiang? How is she lazy? You, as her father, how can you say such things?"

Let me tell you, Xiangxiang is raised by me. If I say she doesn't have to work, she doesn't have to. Sons are raised poor, daughters are raised rich, don't you know?"

Old Mrs. Mu's eyes widened, determined to argue with Mr. Mu.

Mr. Mu was furious.

He shut his mouth and said no more.

"You all say so much, why not focus on eating! Mom and Dad, let's eat and then talk. My baby in the belly is hungry, urging me to eat quickly!" Mrs. Lin shamelessly said.

Mr. Mu also felt it was the only temporary solution and said, "Then let's hurry and eat. After eating, let bygones be bygones, and our Old Mu Family will live harmoniously from now on!"

As soon as Mr. Mu finished talking, Mrs. Lin's chopsticks reached into the bowl of big fat chicken, licking her chopsticks, stirring in the bowl, licking again, and then continuing.

"Ah, the days of eating chicken are the best, I can't wait!"

Mrs. Lin chattered on, finally picking a big chicken leg.

Mrs. Jin, watching from the side, was slack-jawed.

The way Mrs. Lin licked the chopsticks and picked food made her feel nauseated, as if she was about to vomit yesterday's meals.

The others couldn't say much either, just keeping an eye on Mrs. Lin, fearing she might pull another stunt.

"Oh my goodness, this is really delicious!"

Throwing down her chopsticks, Mrs. Lin started gnawing on the chicken leg, and after just a couple of bites, she reached out her greasy hand to grab another chicken leg from the bowl.

Mu Xiangxiang wanted to grab it too, but the chicken leg was already gone.

Mrs. Lin pushed the chicken leg into her mouth, her cheeks puffed, while asking, "Why aren't you eating? What are you looking at? Just watching won't fill you up!"

Old Mrs. Mu's gaze could kill at that moment, she wanted to skin Mrs. Lin alive.

This disrespectful woman, how dare she do such a thing.

"Mom, I want to eat a chicken leg, I want a chicken leg..."

With both chicken legs gone, Mu Xiangxiang was on the verge of tears, shifting around on her seat.

Old Mrs. Mu angrily shouted at Mrs. Lin, "Eat, eat, eat! Have you been reincarnated as a hungry ghost? Your big brother didn't eat, the eldest daughter didn't eat, even Xiangxiang didn't eat, and your hands reach so far? Your hand should really be chopped off!"

"Mom, I'm eating on behalf of my son, your eldest grandson. Isn't it great that we each have a chicken leg?"

Mrs. Lin could still laugh. If Mu Xianxian weren't there, Old Mrs. Mu would have slapped her so hard her own mother wouldn't recognize her.

"Mom, I want a chicken leg, I want to eat..." Mu Xiangxiang continued whining.

What could be done, the chicken legs were gnawed to scraps by Mrs. Lin, and it was impossible to grab it from her mouth, even if they did, Xiangxiang wouldn't eat it.

So Old Mrs. Mu turned her attention to the kids' table.

Mu Shuangshuang quickly snatched a chicken leg.

Little Black used his short arms to try to grab a leg too, but Old Mrs. Mu slapped him away.

"You unruly thing, how dare you cause a scene here, get away from me!"

A chicken leg went from the bowl to Old Mrs. Mu's chopsticks.

Little Black fell to the ground, furious.

He didn't know where he got the strength, climbed up, and head-butted Old Mrs. Mu's backside.

With a snap, the chicken leg in Old Mrs. Mu's hand flew, drawing a parabola in the air, smacking onto Mu Xiangxiang's head, then rolling to the ground.

Just then, Little Black guided Lai Mi to charge in, snatching the chicken leg and running off with it.

The Old Mu Family erupted in a furious roar—

Chapter 585: Not Bothering With You

"You dog of a thing, how dare you waste food, I'll kill you!"

Old Mrs. Mu grabbed Gou Dan's clothes, letting her hand relentlessly spank his backside.

Gou Dan let out a loud "waa," screaming in agony.

In the main room, the sound of clattering was endless, and the entire room seemed like a slaughterhouse.

People from the big house turned their heads in disdain, with no intention of helping.

Mu Xianxian was even less likely to intervene; once a daughter is married off, she's like water spilled, dead or maimed, that's still the matter of the Old Mu Family.

Only Mu Xiangxiang was the most agitated, having lost the chicken leg, she was the one who suffered; if she couldn't get back at him, she wouldn't be able to swallow her anger.

Moreover, her head was filled with the smell of chicken leg, disgusted to death.

"Mom, beat Gou Dan to death, let him rob things from me, beat him to death!"

With Mu Xiangxiang's words, Old Mrs. Mu hit even harder.

"You dead thing, you dare to snatch your aunt's chicken leg, today we'll break your hands and feet, greedy for food, keep eating, why don't you just die?"

Various unpleasant words spilled out, seven-year-old Gou Dan was beaten until his face was filled with tears and snot.

On the side, Mrs. Lin finished the last chicken leg, licked away the residue on her hand, then rushed forward to protect her child.

"Mom, what are you doing? It's just a chicken leg, Gou Dan is your eldest grandson, not an outsider!"

Mrs. Lin spoke as if it were only natural, yet she ignored how long Old Mrs. Mu had endured her.

"You rotten woman, always acting up, today I'll beat you to death!"

Old Mrs. Mu cursed, then suddenly jumped up, landing two slaps on Mrs. Lin's face.

Old Mrs. Mu's slaps were heavy, and Mrs. Lin was bleeding from her nose, feeling dizzy.

Mu Dazhong, who had been watching the commotion, stood up and supported Mrs. Lin.

"Mom, what are you doing? Gou Dan's mother is your daughter-in-law, how can you hit her like this? She's also pregnant!"

As a man, Mu Dazhong didn't step in immediately because he wanted to see if his elder brother would handle the matter, and if he did, Mu Dazhong would take the opportunity to please him.

Mu Dazhong had no idea that the big house didn't care at all.

"Don't bring up the child with me, our Old Mu Family doesn't lack a grandson like this!"

Old Mrs. Mu's words were indeed hurtful.

Not just the second branch was shocked, even the third and fourth were too.

"Enough, what are you arguing about, won't you let the eldest and Xianxian eat? This family will sooner or later be torn apart by you!" Mr. Mu shouted sternly.

The few people quieted down a bit, but Old Mrs. Mu still glared fiercely at Mrs. Lin.

Mrs. Lin became resolute, and towards the nearby wall, exclaimed: "Oh dear, I won't live anymore, nobody wants the child in my belly anyway, I might as well die, it's two deaths for one corpse..."

Mrs. Lin's cries were so miserable that Mr. Mu thought she was truly going to die.

He quickly said: "Why are you all just standing there, stop her!"

Only then did the few people rush to hold Mrs. Lin back.

Old Man Mu turned around and sternly rebuked Old Mrs. Mu: "It's all your doing, they are seeking death, aren't you ashamed, to disparage your own daughter-in-law and grandson like this!"

"Why should I be ashamed? Isn't it this woman who is greedy, ate two chicken legs herself, causing Xiangxiang not to eat, is why I said her?"

Old Mrs. Mu was dissatisfied with Mr. Mu rebuking her, and even more dissatisfied with Mr. Mu taking Mrs. Lin seriously in front of the whole family.

Inside Old Mrs. Mu's heart, a daughter-in-law is just a daughter-in-law.

It's rightful for a mother-in-law to scold her daughter-in-law, even a father-in-law doesn't have the right to intervene!

"Xiangxiang, Xiangxiang, this girl all day long, she's nothing but trouble, tomorrow have Matchmaker Sun find a family to marry her off, save her from wrecking the household!"

Mr. Mu said angrily.

Mu Xiangxiang heard the words like a slap to her face.

"Dad, this is all the second sister-in-law's trouble, what does it have to do with me? I haven't eaten anything!"

"What does it have to do with you, why don't you say, what time do you get up every day? You tell me, have you washed half a piece of cloth at home? You tell me if you know when to light the stove in the kitchen?"

"You're a girl at home, can't do anything right, can't leave anything to eat, and you don't gain weight either, who do you think is raising you?"

Speaking of Mu Xiangxiang, she really is at a champion level of appetite.

Others eat one or two bowls at a meal, she eats seven or eight, and when there's good food, it's not unheard of for her to eat ten bowls, yet she doesn't seem to gain weight; Mu Shuangshuang never knew why.

But looking at Mu Xiangxiang's big head and small body, she didn't seem like a healthy person.

It wasn't worth boasting.

Mu Xiangxiang turned red from the scolding, she slammed her legs on the ground, shouting at Mr. Mu: "Fine, I won't eat, I won't eat your food anymore!"

After speaking, Mu Xiangxiang dashed outside.

Old Mrs. Mu panicked: "Xiangxiang, Xiangxiang..."

Old Mrs. Mu chased after her, the rest of the Old Mu Family looked at each other, unsure of what to do!

"Dad, we..." Mu Danian asked.

"Eat, let's eat, second daughter-in-law, you have a child in your belly, eat more, and Gou Dan, stop crying, if they want to leave, let them leave!"

Mr. Mu's words set the tone for the situation.

In fact, everyone was secretly happy inside.

A meal, finally without Old Mrs. Mu and Mu Xiangxiang, if they didn't eat to their heart's content, they'd be letting themselves down.

Mu Shuangshuang's chicken leg was kept intact.

Now the no longer crying Gou Dan was staring at her bowl fiercely.

She glared at Gou Dan fiercely.

Gou Dan immediately shrank into a ball in fear.

"Little Zhi, you and brother Xiao Han each take a side!"

Mu Shuangshuang used chopsticks to divide the chicken leg's meat into two portions, and placed them in Little Zhi and Xiao Han's bowls.

The two little ones shook their heads desperately.

"Sister, we don't want it, you eat it yourself!"

"Good, eat the chicken leg to grow tall, don't you want to eat more to get bigger and protect sister?" Mu Shuangshuang lied, looking serious.

The two kids tilted their heads to think, then grabbed the chicken in their bowls and took a big bite, eating continuously.

Opposite Mu Shuangshuang, Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying glared at Mu Shuangshuang, angrily saying: "Country people are just country people, even a chicken leg can cause such a fuss, bumpkin!"

"Indeed, they probably don't even realize how disdainful their behavior is, right?" Mu Yingying echoed.

Mu Dalang turned red with anger.

"Dan Dan sister, Ying Ying sister, watch what you say, isn't it because you're daughters of a scholar, your words and actions represent uncle!"

"Cousin, we're all cousins, why are you only helping this stinky girl?" Mu Dandan voiced her displeasure.

"Why am I only helping Shuangshuang? It's you who were rude first, who else is to blame?"

Mu Shuangshuang heard the three argue, but didn't step in to stop it, instead gave Mu Dalang a piece of braised pork.

"Brother Da Lang, don't bother with ignorant fools in human skin, let's eat!"

Chapter 586: The Main House Wants to Slack Off

Mu Dade shot Mu Xianxian several looks, signaling for her to make the third branch look bad, but Mu Xianxian seemed to completely ignore him.

It was as if the person who had talked to him earlier wasn't Mu Xianxian.

Mu Xianxian wasn't foolish either; the current thorn in the side of the main branch was the third branch, and if she dealt with the third branch, wouldn't that be doing the main branch a favor?

Besides, her brother's examination success was still something to be questioned.

Through the meal, everyone harbored their own thoughts; overall, the third branch didn't take a loss.

Mu Dade's plan fell through, and besides, he hardly ate anything and felt utterly dissatisfied.

"Dad, Yinyin and I are heading back!" Mu Dade announced.

Mu Shuangshuang, seeing his manner, understood he was playing the role of absentee shopkeeper, stood up and asked, "Sir, who will wash the dishes tonight?"

Mr. Mu was stunned, seemingly not understanding Mu Shuangshuang's meaning.

Mu Shuangshuang continued, "Tonight's dinner, two large tables full of dishes, were all made by Aunt Four and my mother. Sir, you were talking about fairness earlier, so if you have my mother and Aunt Four wash the dishes again, wouldn't that be unfair?"

Mu Shuangshuang feared offending no one; if something bothered her inside, she'd voice it to provoke the main branch.

"Shuangshuang is right, this evening's dishes..."

Before Mr. Mu finished, Mrs. Lin clutched her stomach and said, "Oh dear, Dad, I can't wash dishes, my stomach's acting up. If I work, I'll lose this grandchild!"

Mrs. Jin was about to speak, but Chen Hong quickly said, "Dad, Danyan and I aren't married yet, this shouldn't fall on me! I think our elder sister-in-law is most suitable; she's about to become an official's wife soon and won't do such chores anymore, so sacrificing a little is also for our family!"

Chen Hong's words were delightful and immediately gained the support of the other branches, especially Mrs. Lin.

She didn't want to do chores.

Mu Shuangshuang silently laughed inside; she knew in the Old Mu Family, there were no permanent enemies, and when it came to self-interest, Chen Hong and the family could bond well.

Mrs. Jin's mouth twisted in anger; a scholar's wife serving others, even washing dishes?

"Sir, my mother is going to be an official's wife; these servant-type chores, she can't do. Besides, washing dishes is bad for the hands..." Mu Dandan defended.

"Sister Dandan, what are you saying? Laundry and cooking have been done by my mother, Aunt Second, and Aunt Four. Are they all servants then? You say elder sister-in-law's hands are precious, are you implying theirs aren't?"

Mu Shuangshuang's every word hit home, leaving Mu Dandan no room to argue.

Especially since it involved themselves, the other wives took advantage and attacked Mu Dandan in unison.

"Dan girl, flying high and mighty now, even hand-washing and soup-making chores are being called servant work!

If you ask me, your main branch's two ladies never worked from childhood to now, especially Dan Dan. You're how old, seventeen, right? At this age, you'd be an old maid elsewhere and still unmarried?

Not to mention, you've learned nothing you should; are you really expecting your future husband's family to support you?"

Mrs. Lin's words sprayed everywhere, Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying retreated repeatedly, faces soaked full of her spit.

At this point, not only were they not her match, but even Mrs. Jin had no ground.

"Alright, today the washing will be done by Dan girl and Ying girl, make sure the kitchen is tidy, once done, you can leave!"

"Sir..."

"Dad..."

Mrs. Jin and the main branch's two girls spoke simultaneously but were interrupted by Mr. Mu.

"Enough, the other wives and children have been doing it for so long, you do it once, won't take a piece of your flesh!"

With that, Mr. Mu promptly exited the upper room.

The others who didn't have chores soon followed; Mrs. Jin originally didn't want to leave, but since her husband walked away, and with Chen Hong tagging along, she stomped her foot, glanced at her two dear daughters, and finally left.

Mu Shuangshuang wasn't in a rush to leave; she was eager to watch the ruckus.

These two girls, who never lived amongst common people, were bound to break dishes.

As she thought this, the three bowls Mu Yingying held suddenly slipped, dropped to the ground, and shattered.

"Oh my, Sister Yingying is retaliating against Sir for making her wash dishes by deliberately throwing them!" Mu Shuangshuang exclaimed.

"It wasn't, it wasn't me..." Mu Yingying hurriedly explained.

"You little brat, you're the troublemaker here." With that, Mu Yingying lunged forward, and Mu Dandan seeing her sister fight, ignored her mother's talk about noble lady etiquette.

Mu Shuangshuang wanted this exact outcome; as the two came near, she deftly darted out, creating a trumpet shape with her mouth, shouting.

"Grandma, Sister Yingying broke your bowl, and wants to kill someone..."

Old Mrs. Mu had just entered the courtyard, hearing this, her temper flared, and as Mu Dandan and Mu Yingying charged forward.

Without a word, Old Mrs. Mu slapped them.

One slap took down both, her mouth still ranting.

"Wasting family's fortune, dare break my bowl, pay me back..."

The two girls dodged and ducked, but were still slapped several times by Old Mrs. Mu.

Beside them, Mu Shuangshuang, seeing the drama was about over, dusted off and headed towards the third branch.

Today's annual drama she had enjoyed thoroughly.

The main branch bragged so much, but this was their outcome.

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The next day, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng went to town for business, and also brought fifty preserved eggs and some bean sprouts.

The preserved eggs were sold to Xue Yi, as for the bean sprouts, Mu Shuangshuang took them to sell some and gave some to Old Mrs. Xue.

In terms of cooperation, Mu Shuangshuang ventured to the Old Xue Family cautiously, with Old Mrs. Xue present, Xue Yi couldn't trick her much.

But this time, the Xue Mansion was unlike any of her previous visits.

Before, there were guards at the main entrance, now even they were gone. Knocking for a good while, no one responded.

Finally, someone answered, but it was a new face.

The servant reported for a while before Housekeeper Xue came out.

Lu Yuanfeng stepped forward and asked, "Housekeeper Xue, with Shuangshuang we're here this time, why is it so quiet?"

Previously the Xue family was lively with the old lady around.

"We came to see Mr. Xue, if inconvenient, we'll return another day!"

"No inconvenience, no inconvenience, you're old friends, come on in!"

Mu Shuangshuang followed Housekeeper Xue into the residence, and along the way, Housekeeper Xue explained the situation.

"Speaking of, this is all because of our young master. The first time he came to our Xue family, he encountered such an event, luckily you and Fengzi saved him.

Initially, when he returned, he was still okay, the young master was still his usual self, but gradually, he stopped talking to anyone, no matter what was said, he acted as if he didn't hear, ignored you, didn't respond!"

"Have you seen a doctor?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Seen one, the doctor said he couldn't treat it, and the old lady invited a fortune teller, who said it was soul loss, young master's soul left!"

Mu Shuangshuang's jaw almost dropped, such superstition could indeed lead to tragedy!

Chapter 587: The Stone in the Heart Has Fallen

"What does the old lady plan to do?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"The old lady said she'll invite some kind of master to perform a ritual and exorcise evil! But the soonest would be next month, when that master can come over."

"This Young Master Sun is indeed pitiful, at such a young age, just the age to communicate with others, and yet he stopped speaking."

Housekeeper Xue rambled on about a lot, then worried that Mu Shuangshuang might misunderstand, quickly explained, "I'm just rambling, Shuangshuang, Fengzi, don't think too much."

Mu Shuangshuang nodded, signaling Lu Yuanfeng with her eyes, wondering how he viewed it.

Lu Yuanfeng directly told her with his eyes not to believe in the soul loss condition!

Indeed, the two had a good rapport.

This matter was a family affair, and Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng couldn't say much.

When they met Old Mrs. Xue, Mu Shuangshuang clearly felt that the old lady had aged a lot.

There were many more strands of white hair at her temples, it must be because of Xue Zheng's matter.

"Old lady, Fengzi and I are here to see you." Mu Shuangshuang said.

Upon hearing Mu Shuangshuang's voice, a hope that even Mu Shuangshuang couldn't understand rose in Old Mrs. Xue's eyes.

"Girl, you came at the right time, last time you saved my Zheng'er, go and talk with him now, my Zheng'er simply ignores people."

Old Mrs. Xue was truly grasping at straws, grabbing anyone to take a look at Xue Yi.

Regardless of whether they knew medicine or not.

She just wanted some peace of mind, her eldest son was in the Capital all year round and she couldn't see him, finally, her eldest son sent her grandson over, if she couldn't take care of him well, what would she do?

Seeing Old Mrs. Xue's situation, Mu Shuangshuang figured that discussing business with Xue Yi wouldn't be settled quickly, so she might as well go see Xue Zheng.

That child was quite likable back then, if not for Xue Yi wanting to take him away, he might have stayed longer at her home.

Following Old Mrs. Xue's directions, Mu Shuangshuang went to find Xue Zheng, he was sitting alone in the courtyard, holding a small twig in his hand, breaking it into pieces repeatedly.

Occasionally, a few yellowing leaves would float down onto his head, and he wouldn't brush them off.

Xue Zheng did all this as if no one else was there, as if the entire space only had him.

No wonder people might mistake it for soul loss!

Mu Shuangshuang deliberately stomped her foot heavily on the ground, her shoes sticking to the leaves, making a rustling sound, yet Xue Zheng still had no reaction.

"Xue Zheng, you're actually here!" Mu Shuangshuang pretended to be surprised.

Sure enough, the kid had absolutely no reaction.

He still ignored Mu Shuangshuang, not even sparing a glance.

Mu Shuangshuang waved a hand in front of him, thinking Xue Zheng's symptoms were somewhat like autism she'd seen in her past life, but Xue Zheng's condition was lighter, back in Er Gui Village, he was quite alright following her around.

Who knows, maybe he felt strange at Xue Mansion.

Steeling her nerves, Mu Shuangshuang continued, "Xue Zheng, don't you remember me, we once picked mushrooms together, do you remember what kind of mushrooms I said you couldn't eat?"

As she spoke, Mu Shuangshuang observed Xue Zheng's reaction.

Originally not holding much hope, Mu Shuangshuang noticed a light flashing in Xue Zheng's eyes.

It seemed he still remembered that in his heart.

"I said I'd take you to see taller mountains, pick more mushrooms, and hunt; have you ever seen such a big roe deer? This big..."

Mu Shuangshuang spoke while gesturing.

Although Xue Zheng didn't speak, Mu Shuangshuang knew he was listening, every time she got excited, Xue Zheng would respond, more or less.

"Xue Zheng, how about you come to the countryside with me for a few days, and I'll show you the life there?"

Mu Shuangshuang asked tentatively.

Xue Zheng's gaze suddenly dimmed.

Mu Shuangshuang knew she had said something she shouldn't have.

"Alright, alright, we won't go!"

Mu Shuangshuang chatted with Xue Zheng for a bit longer, without realizing it, it was almost noon, and she was getting anxious as she hadn't done her work yet.

Just then, Lu Yuanfeng and Xue Yi entered the courtyard, Mu Shuangshuang exchanged a look with Lu Yuanfeng, knowing she could leave now.

"Xue Zheng, I'm leaving now, I'll come see you another day!" Mu Shuangshuang said.

Just as she turned, her waist was embraced, just like back in Er Gui Village,

"Xue Zheng..." Mu Shuangshuang started to speak, but was stopped by Xue Yi.

"Miss Shuangshuang, don't make a sound, let Zheng'er hug for a while."

Xue Yi himself had never seen this kind of scene, but he knew Xue Zheng trusted Mu Shuangshuang.

This sense of trust wasn't even something he and his mother had.

Xue Yi wondered if it was because Mu Shuangshuang had once saved Xue Yi that it was like this.

After holding Mu Shuangshuang for a long while, just as her body was starting to go stiff, Xue Zheng let go of her and rushed into his room.

Mu Shuangshuang was full of confusion, what exactly was going on?

"Mr. Xue, this..."

"It's alright, let's talk business first, once it's done, I'll check on Zheng'er, if not, I might trouble Miss Shuangshuang again."

Mu Shuangshuang nodded, she truly couldn't refuse this matter.

That child probably still remembered that incident when she tricked him last time.

This time, Mu Shuangshuang brought fifty century eggs, Xue Yi had to give her five hundred copper coins.

Those five hundred copper coins weren't earned easily, at least when the weather turned cold, it took one or two months for the century eggs to come out.

Duck eggs weren't easy to buy either, farmhouses had at most a few ducks, the most were just a few dozen, unlike modern times where they raise hundreds, thousands of ducks.

Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng, when they were free, had to collect duck eggs from several nearby villages.

At this point, Mu Shuangshuang admired herself and Lu Yuanfeng, if they didn't get rich, who would?

"Miss Shuangshuang, have you really decided to supply cold noodles to my restaurant in the future?"

Xue Yi was genuinely interested in cold noodles.

Plus, it had many ways to eat, not just cold, in winter it could be put in hotpot.

In winter it could keep out the cold, in summer it could only rely on these foods to beat the heat and open up the appetite.

"Right now is the cooperation phase, if there's synergy, Fengzi and I will naturally deliver to your restaurant."

Xue Yi's restaurant in town wasn't built long ago, just in the development stage, suitable for Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng to establish themselves before expanding.

Xue Yi always had a question, he asked, "Are you really not going to cooperate with Jiu Si Xuan anymore?"

The conditions Jiu Si Xuan offered to Mu Shuangshuang weren't bad, in fact, in some ways, Jiu Si Xuan was a partner for Mu Shuangshuang to make money.

Xue Yi was puzzled.

"Some things, if there's a first time, there's a second, if there's a second, there's a third, I gave the chance, when Miss Zheng Xiu used tricks the first time, Mr. Zheng was there."

Chapter 588: Harm Others and Oneself

"At that time, he could have stopped it and informed Miss Zheng Xiu of the seriousness of this matter. If he had done so, none of those things would've happened afterward."

"Although I rely on Zheng Zhi to make some money, and the cold noodles gain recognition due to him, both Fengzi and I physically labor for this."

"In such hot weather, we hurry to town before dawn, afraid that the cold noodles might lose freshness under the sun, not daring to rest even when exhausted on the road! With just these efforts alone, it's only right that Fengzi and I earn money."

Mu Shuangshuang didn't bother to say any grandiose words in front of Xue Yi.

Anyway, this person isn't easy to deal with.

Xue Yi nodded with satisfaction.

He actually liked Shuangshuang's confidence, similar to his own.

"Fine, since what you have is unique in town, we'll set up the contract the same way you did with Jiu Si Xuan, and also give you a month's vacation time."

The so-called vacation Xue Yi mentioned actually meant informing him in advance so he could personally send people to Er Gui Village to fetch it.

In the cold winter, there's no need to rush in the early morning.

These were special privileges granted by Xue Yi.

Xue Yi didn't want the popcorn. His restaurant didn't deal with theatrical performances, but he introduced Mu Shuangshuang to a theater, allowing her to negotiate the contract herself.

On this trip, Mu Shuangshuang and Lu Yuanfeng visited several places. The popcorn contract was settled, much cheaper than Jiu Si Xuan, but flexible; no need to deliver personally, villagers or townsfolk could bring it over.

The stone in Mu Shuangshuang's heart finally settled down. She calculated that with the silver she had and the newly agreed contract, hunting in winter, by next summer,

Perhaps she and Fengzi could open a restaurant in town.

Her goal was never just about these small trades; she wanted to open her own restaurant, become her own boss, only then could she earn more money.

The house of the third branch was so rundown, it would cost money to redo it.

Tuition fees for Xiao Han and Yuanbao, preparing a dowry for her own marriage.

And then there's Little Zhi...

All these things made Mu Shuangshuang realize she was still very short on money.

After strolling around town with Lu Yuanfeng and bringing back some gifts for the kids at home, Mu Shuangshuang finally headed back.

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The door of Old Mu Family's kitchen

Old Mrs. Mu sneakily picked up the clay pot Chen Hong usually used for boiling water and secretly added some croton powder inside.

She randomly cursed Chen Hong.

She's never seen such a shameless woman growing up.

Neither by a parent's order nor a matchmaker's word, she just showed up at their house, eating their food, living under their roof.

Old Mrs. Mu had several times wanted to tear Chen Hong's mouth apart, always stopped by Mu Danian.

Her anger simmering inside for a long time, Old Mrs. Mu already held a grudge against Chen Hong and Mu Danian.

This time, she sprinkled some croton powder to make these two filthy dogs suffer.

At this moment, the kitchen was empty, and no one saw what Old Mrs. Mu was doing.

Afraid Chen Hong wouldn't get diarrhea, Old Mrs. Mu added a whole packet of croton powder.

As soon as she left, Chen Hong entered the kitchen, took out the clay pot from the stove.

Opening the lid, Chen Hong noticed some tiny residues inside.

Without much thought, she drank it daily and had no issues.

But she was slightly cautious today; as the water was cold anyways and not suitable for drinking in this weather.

She simply poured the water from the pot into the large bucket, refilled the pot with fresh water, waiting for Mrs. Liu from the fourth branch to cook and heat her water later.

After doing all this without mentioning it to anyone, Mrs. Liu cooked at night unaware, using that bucket of water for rice, cooking, and even washing vegetables with it.

Right after nightfall, the whole Old Mu Family was like a battlefield, lining up one after another to use the toilet.

Even the eldest branch Mu Dade wasn't an exception.

A chorus of farting sounds filled the air, Old Mrs. Mu moved like her butt was on fire, cutting the line and rushing ahead.

"Who's in there? Why aren't they coming out?"

Old Mrs. Mu shouted loudly.

"Mom, it's me, Xiangxiang..."

Mu Xiangxiang's voice was already hoarse and weak.

Among the Old Mu Family, she ate the most, eight bowls, it's strange if she didn't have diarrhea.

"Mom, my stomach hurts, don't come in..."

Hearing it was her daughter, Old Mrs. Mu didn't rush anymore but drove the people from other branches away instead.

"Go go go, all of you leave, Xiangxiang occupies the toilet."

Saying this, she farted twice more, her pants nearly torn.

The rest of the Old Mu Family couldn't hold it, Mu Dazhong found a spot and started a torrent.

Mrs. Lin was no exception; she took advantage of no one watching.

It was only the fourth branch that's embarrassed, not willing to resolve it just anywhere.

"Xiaxia's mother, Xiaxia, let's go to the third branch's, Shuangshuang built a toilet for themselves."

Since Mu Shuangshuang made a public toilet in the village, she made another near their house, fenced with planks. If they didn't use the public toilet, they could borrow this one.

"Alright..." Mrs. Liu said weakly.

People from the fourth branch hurried to the third branch.

Old Mrs. Mu heard this and followed along.

After all, Old Jiang, even when following them, Old Mrs. Mu was one step ahead of the fourth branch and entered the toilet.

"Mom, hurry up and get out, we can't hold it anymore." Mu Dajiang yelled.

Old Mrs. Mu wouldn't respond, occupying the toilet alone and refusing to come out.

Until Mu Shuangshuang came over to pour away vegetable washing water and saw a crowd surrounding their toilet.

"What's going on?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Shuangshuang, we have diarrhea..." Mu Dajiang spoke while clutching his backside.

Looking very painful.

Mu Shuangshuang noticed several people in this state, her brow furrowing.

"What did you eat? Could it be food poisoning, how could the whole family be like this?"

Inside the toilet, Old Mrs. Mu heard this and recalled the croton powder she gave Chen Hong earlier, is it possible that woman poisoned the whole family?

No time to think, another wave surged in her stomach.

Mu Shuangshuang gave each of the fourth branch members a cup of hot water, went to Zhang Huai Shu's place for medicine, let them take it, and only then did they feel some relief.

But even for Old Mrs. Mu and Mu Dade's branch, the toilet board was all broken.

"Uncle Four, Aunt Four, what exactly did you eat? Why is it so serious?"

Mrs. Liu hesitated for a long time before speaking: "This afternoon I saw Mom sneaking into the kitchen, later coming out, she was still looking around."

This thing kept weighing on Mrs. Liu's mind.

Now that she felt slightly better, she brought it up.

"She also threw this on the ground." Mrs. Liu handed the oil paper that Old Mrs. Mu dropped to Mu Shuangshuang.

Mu Shuangshuang opened it and saw some powder inside, she didn't know what it was, just when she was about to take it to Zhang Huai Shu, Mu Dashan's voice sounded at the kitchen door.

"That's croton powder!"

Chapter 589: You Don't Know, I'll Teach You

"Dad, what do you think this is?"

Mu Shuangshuang suspected she heard wrong. Isn't this stuff meant to cause diarrhea?

How could Old Mrs. Mu be foolish enough to give everyone this kind of thing?

If among these people there's Mu Dade, Old Mrs. Mu is even less likely to do this.

"That's right, I've seen it. Croton seeds ground into powder look like this," Mu Dashan said firmly.

With that, Mu Shuangshuang was even more confused.

"Could it be that my grandma intended to target someone specific but accidentally harmed the whole family?"

"It's possible. Your grandma would never harm your big brother and Xiangxiang."

Before Mu Dashan came in, he overheard some people talking outside the kitchen and roughly understood the situation.

"That must be it then. Uncle Four, Aunt Four, you should pretend you don't know about this! So that Grandma won't blame you for this later on. Over the next few days, try to eat light and rest well."

By the time Mu Shuangshuang went to Zhang Huai Shu's house to get medicine, it was already dark. After this long conversation, it was even darker, so dark you couldn't see your fingers.

The people of the fourth branch knew it was time to go back, and hurriedly said goodbye to the third branch, then left!

Mu Shuangshuang cleaned the cups they had used, seeing Mu Dashan still there, looking as if he was waiting for her.

Mu Shuangshuang's expression softened.

"Dad, do you have something to say?"

Mu Dashan gently nodded.

"I just had a dream, dreamed your big uncle didn't pass the exam, took the family's money and ran away, and I also dreamed the Old Mu Family ended up badly..."

Mu Dashan spoke with some lingering fear.

"Dad, dreams are the opposite of reality. My big uncle, in matters like whether he passed the exam or not, wouldn't lie."

On this point, Mu Shuangshuang was absolutely certain, regardless of whether Mu Dade's document had arrived!

Because Mu Shuangshuang felt it would be pointless for Mu Dade to tell such a huge lie; even if he didn't pass, Mr. Mu would still arrange for him to take the exam again in three years.

As for the Old Mu Family's terrible end, that seemed a likely reality.

Mu Dade's nature, sooner or later, would lead to ruin. If he spent his life like this taking exams, he might just spend some money, but if he entered officialdom, he might lose his life.

However, considering Old Mrs. Mu and Mr. Mu are Mu Dashan's parents, Mu Shuangshuang couldn't speak too harshly.

"Dad, Grandpa and Grandma are old now, it's time for them to enjoy life with Big Uncle; nothing will happen, don't scare yourself."

Only then did Mu Dashan smile.

This man, although strong now, still had a good heart and didn't wish for the Old Mu Family to decline.

"Dad, it's late, go rest, keep warm at night!"

Mu Shuangshuang gave a bunch of reminders and then returned to her room.

The Old Mu Family fussed throughout the night.

By the next morning, everyone was exhausted, and finally got some rest.

As dawn broke, Mu Shuangshuang got up to prepare breakfast; today was the day to dig irrigation channels in the fields, it couldn't be done carelessly.

In the morning, Mu Shuangshuang made a pot of noodles, cooked three eggs, and prepared a dish of pickled cucumbers, and breakfast was ready.

After eating breakfast, she took a bamboo basket and, carrying a hoe, went to find Lu Yuanfeng.

Upon reaching his house, she found out Lu Yuanfeng had already gone to the fields. Yuanbao was still sleepy, looking like he hadn't fully woken up. Mu Shuangshuang told Yuanbao to come to her house later for breakfast, and quickly carrying the hoe went to find Lu Yuanfeng.

Lu Yuanfeng had already dug a moat for an acre and started the second one.

It wasn't clear when he arrived, but they were pretty early; not a single soul was working on the field banks yet.

The two looked at each other, feeling they had both gotten up too early.

"Did you skip breakfast again and come straight to work?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

Lu Yuanfeng's face reddened, silent for a while.

Then he explained, "I planned to just come and take a look, then did some work. I thought of going back after that."

"By the time you've finished work, you could have dinner. Why don't you care for your health? Skipping breakfast is harmful, get up here, I've brought you breakfast."

Mu Shuangshuang knew Lu Yuanfeng too well; once he gets busy, he forgets about meals.

With the army camp, meals were supplied regularly. Now, without reminders, it's often feast or famine.

Lu Yuanfeng put down the hoe and climbed up the ridge.

After washing his hands, Mu Shuangshuang took out a large bowl of noodles from the bamboo basket.

Noodles fill you up in cold weather, but if left too long they tend to clump together.

When Mu Shuangshuang brought out the noodles, they were already clumped, causing her frustration.

"I should have made you dry noodles. Soupy noodles don't last long!"

Lu Yuanfeng smiled and took the noodles.

"No, as long as Shuangshuang makes it, it's delicious. Did you eat, Shuangshuang?"

Before eating, Lu Yuanfeng remembered to care for Mu Shuangshuang.

"Of course, unlike some fools who don't even care for their own stomach!"

Mu Shuangshuang rolled her eyes exaggeratedly, blaming Lu Yuanfeng for neglecting his health.

Lu Yuanfeng laughed, "Anyway, Shuangshuang cares!"

"Wishful thinking, I won't care for you!" Mu Shuangshuang turned her head, stubbornly replied.

"Really not caring?" Lu Yuanfeng asked.

"Of course not..." Mu Shuangshuang pretended to be stern, seeing his disappointed look, she changed her tone, "Fool! If I didn't care, would I come here to bring you food?"

Chapter 590: The Document from Uncle Finally Arrived

When the two parted, their faces were as red as monkey bottoms.

Especially Lu Yuanfeng, his face was flushed entirely, so embarrassed he couldn't even speak.

As for Mu Shuangshuang, she had completely become a female rogue.

After a long while, Lu Yuanfeng finally spoke, "Shuangshuang, next time I also want to..."

"..."

Mu Shuangshuang felt a deep sense of guilt in her heart, feeling like she had led a good young man astray.

But it was better than having her lips bitten.

"Alright, Fengzi, hurry up and eat your breakfast, you're going to starve otherwise!" Mu Shuangshuang reminded aloud.

Only then did Lu Yuanfeng pick up the bowl of noodles that had long since gone cold from the ground.

A bowl of noodles that seemed simple, yet to Lu Yuanfeng, it was the greatest happiness in the world.

From time to time, Lu Yuanfeng looked up at Shuangshuang in front of him. She was sitting on the grass, supporting her chin with one hand, her eyes blinking as she looked at him.

Lu Yuanfeng felt that this was the most beautiful sight he wanted to see in this lifetime.

After eating, Lu Yuanfeng continued digging the channel. He wouldn't let Mu Shuangshuang go into the field, so Mu Shuangshuang searched for something edible nearby.

Snail soup was essential, and fortunately, at this time, few people understood such food. Mu Shuangshuang went to the river to search and found quite a bit.

Approaching noon, Lu Yuanfeng walked out from the ridge.

A whole morning's work had dug up the outer channel of three acres of land.

Mu Shuangshuang also picked a whole basket of snails.

Since the tasks were almost done, they naturally had to go back.

As soon as Mu Shuangshuang got home, she heard the Old Mu Family creating a fuss.

This had happened several times before, and Mu Shuangshuang didn't pay much attention.

Until Yu Si Niang came over and exclaimed, "Shuangshuang, your uncle's document has arrived..."

"What? My uncle's document has arrived?"

Mu Shuangshuang found it amusing. On the very day Mu Xianxian arrived and left, presuming Mu Dade was deceiving people, but unexpectedly, as soon as she left, the document arrived.

"Mom, why did you go over there?" Mu Shuangshuang asked.

"Not just me, the whole village went over, your grandpa said we should all go to greet the government officer!"

Passing the scholar examination in the Da Ning Dynasty was no small feat, mainly because a scholar already had one foot in the government.

Plus, with the triennial imperial exam, not many scholars were admitted.

This was indeed worth celebrating for the whole village.

"Mom, why greet? Didn't you say they were coming?"

Mu Shuangshuang still didn't understand the reasoning behind it.

Isn't greeting meant for someone who hasn't arrived yet?

"It's like this, today one of our villagers went to town and happened to see a government officer delivering documents to scholars in town, so he cleverly asked about it.

It turns out, the heavy rain in recent days washed away roads and bridges, and several scholars' documents weren't delivered. The road and bridge were repaired last night, so your uncle's document will be delivered after the others are sent!

He hurried back to inform us, and your grandpa has been kneeling with your aunts and uncles all morning."

"Pfft..." Mu Shuangshuang couldn't help it and burst out laughing.

The old Mr. Mu was indeed interesting. Upon hearing the document would arrive today, he had them kneel all morning.

Didn't they exhaust themselves just last night?

Does this count as dying for glory?

"You child, why are you laughing for no reason? Your grandpa is waiting for you to kneel in the front yard!" Yu Si Niang said.

"Mom, don't be silly, the document is the matter of the first branch, what does it have to do with us? We're not going to kneel, if they want to kneel, let them kneel, it's not our benefit!"

Mu Shuangshuang spoke boldly, and not only that, she also asked Yu Si Niang to call Xiao Han back.

Little Zhi went out early to play with Yuanbao, and didn't get involved in this matter at all.

Not to mention Mu Dashan, he didn't go either.

"This..." Yu Si Niang hesitated.

In the front yard, everyone was kneeling, even an outsider, Chen Hong. Was it really okay for the third branch not to go?

"Mom, listen to me, call Xiao Han back. If we really need to greet the officer, we'll go when the firecrackers go off, okay?"

"Alright then, I'll go call Xiao Han!"

In the front yard, Old Mu's whole family was still kneeling on the ground, but their faces were not pleasant, all looking pale!

Their bodies were swaying from side to side while kneeling.

"Dad, how much longer do we have to kneel? My legs are going to break, and if the officer doesn't come soon, I'll die." Mu Dazhong kept complaining.

Having not slept all night, and kneeling here all morning, no one could stand it.

The others saw Mu Dazhong complaining and started to complain too.

"Dad, we're really going to die, our stomachs are empty, and we have no strength. If we don't rest soon, the whole family will die here." Mrs. Lin shouted from the side.

Mr. Mu's face immediately turned unpleasant.

"Second son's wife, what nonsense are you saying? It's a joyous day today, the officer is coming soon. If you leave, and when the officer comes, no one greets them, who will the Old Mu Family blame?"

Mr. Mu was wholeheartedly thinking of waiting for the officer to come.

Once they come, the stone in his heart can finally drop.

In recent days, he clearly felt the change in the villagers' attitudes. At first, they were polite, calling him 'master' whenever they saw him.

In recent days, nobody cared when he went out. People not giving gifts was one thing, but asking in his presence if the document from the eldest son was an Old Mu Family trick to deceive the villagers' money was another.

"Dad, your son is also a bit tired. I don't think the officer will come this morning!" Mu Dade said, caressing his knee.

Mr. Mu's attitude immediately changed, no longer keeping a stern face.

"Alright, since your big brother is also tired, have some people go back. Fourth son's wife, you always make lunch, you go back!"

"The eldest son's family can go back, your mother is old and not suitable for kneeling, the rest, keep kneeling!"

The first branch people all stood up. The second branch was left staring dumbfounded.

This unfairness surely existed, but wasn't it a bit too blatant?

The first branch was human, but the other branches weren't?

"Dad, I'm with child, not suitable for kneeling!" Mrs. Lin said.

Mr. Mu thought for a moment and said, "Then second son's wife can go cook, fourth son's wife, you keep kneeling!"

"Yes!" Mrs. Liu knelt back down.

The fourth branch was the luckiest last night, having taken Shuangshuang's medicine, they were alright, just uncomfortable with some knee pain from kneeling.

It's better than being too weak from diarrhea and having to kneel.

"Dad, my son can't stand the smell of cooking, let Si Niang cook, her dishes are delicious!"

Mrs. Lin thought Mr. Mu felt sympathetic towards her since he let her stand up, so she didn't want to cook either.

"Enough, you lazy woman, unwilling to do anything, go clean the latrine, it's full from last night!" Old Mrs. Mu couldn't stand Mrs. Lin's attitude and scolded loudly.

Mrs. Lin wanted to retort in grievance, but at that moment, firecrackers sounded at the village entrance, the officer had finally arrived...

